

The Virtue Of Kindness

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Ephesians 4:25-5:2

CHILDREN'S TIME

Do you like to play games? I like to play games. This morning we are going to play a game. It is called the "Things That Go Together" game. I have several things in this bag. When I pull one out, you tell me what goes with it.

The first thing in my bag is a nail. What goes with a nail? That's right a hammer. How about a pencil. What goes with a pencil? An eraser or paper, very good! A screw? Yes, a screwdriver! How about a comb? That's right, hair. You all are pretty good at this game. It is actually pretty easy, some things just naturally go together, don't they?

When we love Jesus, the Bible tells us that there is something that just naturally goes with it. Do you know what it is? The Bible says that if we love Jesus, we will show it by the way we live, by the things that we do. Those two things go together just like a comb and hair, or like a hammer and nail.

If we love Jesus, and then lie to our parents, those don't go together, do they? If we love Jesus, and then steal something that doesn't belong to us, do those two things go together? No, of course not. If we love Jesus and then say something mean about someone, do those go together? No, God wants us to love Jesus and do things that fit together with loving Jesus.

SERMON

READ EPHESIANS 4:25-5:2

If we didn't know this picture of a beautiful community of faith was painted by the Apostle Paul, we might think of it as too simple or idealistic considering the challenges of daily life that we face that include heartache, conflict, pain, and injustice.

But Paul is familiar with pain and hardship and knows what he is writing and it isn't shallow. He has a depth of understanding of the human condition, and the difficult challenges of daily life — in fact, this understanding is most certainly the backdrop for his words to the Ephesians. He knows how important this message is because of what people deal with in life.

Another important dimension of the backdrop for Paul is the grace of God, something in which he is also well versed.

What Paul wrote is a pretty good sketch of what it looks like when we say yes to God. When we claim our identity in Christ, we know ourselves as members of a larger community.

This passage is chock full of different topics we could address in many sermons. We could talk about stealing, honesty, anger, sharing with the needy. We could talk about choosing the words that we speak that they might help build up the body of Christ. We could talk about allowing God to transform our lives so that they would be in sync with the Holy Spirit. We could talk about forgiveness, love, sacrifice, and making a pleasing sacrifice to God.

All of these are found in this passage.

But let's step back and see the bigger picture. Paul was addressing what holds a community together with purpose and integrity. He probably observed that the Ephesians were fighting amongst themselves and he was wanting to give them a picture of a higher calling, a bigger context in which to live.

Paul was painting a picture for them, creating a vision for a new way to be a community of people.

As part of God's family, Paul would ask, how can we be at war with one another, either outwardly or underneath the surface or behind each other's back? If we truly belong to one another, as God has declared us, why would we hurt each other with angry words and actions?

The reality is that when we act out of anger, we hurt not only other people, but we hurt ourselves. This is true in two different ways.

It hurts us because we are part of the other person and when they hurt we hurt along with them.

Secondly, acting out in anger hurts us because when we harbor anger inside us it takes its toll on us.

Paul said that all of this does not fit in God's Kingdom. When we see the bigger picture of what God is doing among us, and what God has called us to be and do in the world, acting out in anger works starkly against the purposes of God.

Instead, Paul would have the community of the faithful focus their attention differently — on

kindness, and tender-heartedness, and forgiveness.

While anger takes life away for both the giver and receiver, kindness is life giving for both, and this is a marker of virtue for God's community.

The Greek word that Paul uses here for kindness is *chrestos*. The word, as well as its meaning, reminds us of Christ. So does the word "tender-hearted." When we embody these virtues we are embodying Christ, imitating Christ.

When we consider kindness, we are reminded of the compassion Jesus showed for the sick man crying out for help at the pool outside the Temple in Jerusalem. We also might think of the kindness Jesus showed the crowd of thousands when he provided food at a point when they were hungry late in the evening.

Or we might think of the bravery Jesus exhibited when he showed kindness to the woman who was drug out in the street to be stoned to death by a group of scribes and Pharisees. Jesus stood up for her when nobody else would, even though she was caught in sin.

This captures the essence of kindness which is **doing something selflessly, without**

expecting anything in return. The act is done out of respect for the other and without conditions.

I recently saw a t-shirt, maybe you have seen it too. It said "In a world where you can be anything, be kind." I like that because kindness is a choice — but it is much more than a choice.

Kindness is a virtue and a lifestyle patterned after God's heart, and it creates something good in the world. Don't we need more of that?

Kindness is one of the purest forms of imitation of God. The world indeed can pivot on kindness. Kindness makes relationships work, makes families strong, makes communities thrive. Kindness is central to making space for people to be safe and belong. Kindness is a necessary ingredient in hospitality. In fact, hospitality, in its basic form, could be described as showing kindness to strangers.

A man named Rev. John Watson in the mid to late 1800s was often quoted to say that it is important to

"be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle."

The Dalai Lama once said, “Be kind whenever possible. It is always possible to be kind.”

Together these two quotes make a powerful statement. We don’t always know what the struggles of another person might be (people hide them well) but if we approach the spirit of kindness as a lifestyle continually acting it out, without even knowing it, we will certainly touch the lives of struggling people.

Some of you have probably been touched by the kindness of a stranger at some point in your lifetime and these stories linger inside us. Here’s one story of mine.

Just after I graduated from college, I drove by myself from Howell out to Battle Creek to visit a friend for the weekend. I was on my way home on Sunday afternoon, driving through a small town unfamiliar to me, when my car broke down.

Thankfully, I was able to coast into the parking lot of an auto parts store. So, I went in, described what was happening with my car, and asked if they knew anywhere I could find someone to look at my car, but all of the auto repair shops were closed.

Another man, who was standing there listening, said that he might be able to help.

This guy told me exactly what part was needed on my car, which the store did not have. But he advised me to buy a different and very inexpensive part from the store. (To this day, I don’t remember what it was.) He took a part off my car, disassembled it, used this thing I had just bought and put it together with the part he took off my car and then reinstalled it. My car started right up and seemed to run fine.

I thanked him profusely and he just smiled. I got back in my car and drove all the way home without another problem.

I’m sure that you have a story of how your life was touched by the kindness of a stranger. Let’s hear one or two.

SHARING

Kindness as a lifestyle is God’s plan for humanity. May we commit to live this way. Amen!