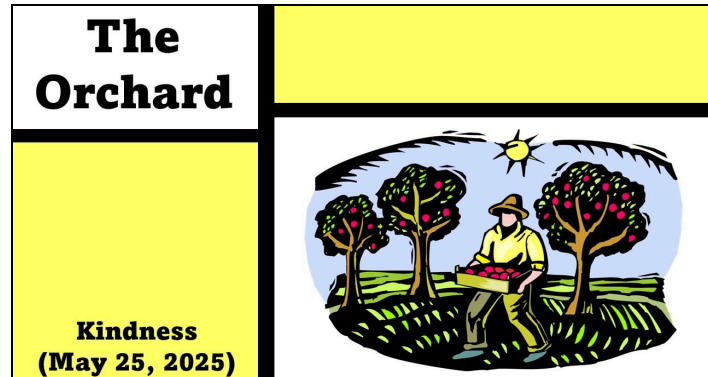


The Orchard (Week 4) - Kindness
Yesterday's Sermon Summary

1) In our exploration of character and virtue that God's Spirit is trying to bring about in each of us (dubbed "the fruit of the Spirit" in [Galatians 5.22-23](#)), this week we put our attention on kindness. In the New Testament, that word means a tender goodness, a term with soft edges (different from a tougher goodness like patience and faithfulness, discussed on 5/11). Moreover, this kindness is useful, good for the one who is kind and the one to whom they are kind.



2) In the Old Testament, two terms tend to get translated into English as "kindness." The first is the Hebrew word "tov," which connotes a beautiful, harmonious, upright goodness, or, if you like, "a kindly goodness." When God declares all creation "good" in Genesis 1, the term used is "tov"; likewise, when we are told to "love kindness" in [Micah 6.8](#), we are to love "tov." The second term is "hesed," which is a committed lovingkindness, unbreakable and sure, most often used about God's relationship with God's people.

3. Dr. Jamil Zaki, a neuropsychologist at Stanford who specializes in the study of empathy and kindness, wrote in a recent book, "If you wanted to design a system to break human kindness, you could scarcely do better than the society we've created...Being a scientist studying kindness today is like being a climatologist studying polar ice - each year we discover more about how valuable it is as it recedes all around us." The pace of our world, the heightened rhetoric online, our polarization, our increasing isolation, and so on conspire to steer us away from basic compassion and kindness.

4. But in that is a terrible irony. In his book, "The Survival of the Friendliest" (a subtle play on Darwin's 'survival of the fittest'), evolutionary anthropologist Brian Hare concludes that human beings are the kindest species on the planet, and that the rise of homo sapiens is in large part due to our capacity to cooperate and be kind. Some of our distinctive traits reveal this - e.g., our faces are more expressive and the whites of our eyes are bigger than other animals precisely so we can convey emotion to one another. It's not mere conjecture to conclude that the more kind you are, the more human you are, and the less kind you are, the more you lose your humanity.

5. Along those lines, the famous 20th-century anthropologist Margaret Mead was once asked by a student what she thought was the earliest sign of human civilization. To the student's surprise, Mead replied, "A healed human femur." (The femur is the longest bone in our bodies that connects the hip to the knee.) She continued - In societies without the benefits of modern medicine, it took about six weeks of rest for a fractured femur to heal. A healed femur shows that someone cared for the injured person, did their hunting and gathering for them, stayed with them, and offered physical protection and human companionship until the injury could mend. By

contrast, wounded animals in the wild would be hunted and eaten before their broken bones could heal. Mead concluded, "Helping someone else through difficulty is where civilization starts."

6. As with so many of the other "fruit" of the Spirit, we are to be kind as God is kind and because God is kind. That begs the question - how is God kind exactly? We can offer a few exemplary verses in reply to that question. First, God's kindness is universal and impartial, completely undeserved, and no one is outside of it, so says Jesus ([Luke 6.35](#)). Second, God's kindness is abundant and overflowing, not stingy or scarce, and it's God's kindness, not wrath, that leads us heart and life change ([Romans 2.4](#)). As the late Mother Teresa of Calcutta put it, "God is even kinder than you think." Last, and not surprisingly, if you want to see what God's kindness is like, look to Jesus, who is the "appearing" of God's kindness in the flesh ([Titus 3.4-5](#)).

7. So how can we lean into what the Spirit is trying to do in our lives and become kinder? First, like peace, we need to understand kindness as a set of concentric circles. The center circle is God's kindness - to us and to all. From there we can move to the next circle which is being kind to ourselves. Only once we have in place a firm grasp of God's kind disposition and thereby a commitment to being kind to ourselves can we be kind to others with any consistency.

8. Second, we also need to hold onto the belief that it is kindness that leads us to "the good life," that is, life as God intended it to be ([Proverbs 21.21](#)). And the kinder we are, the more we discover that kindness is its own reward, and that we, not just others, are its benefactors ([Proverbs 11.17](#)).

9. Third, here's a list of concrete emphases or behaviors that will help us become more kind, all culled from the work of Christian and nonChristian psychologists: a) think small and specific about kindness (that is, contextualize it in every setting and toward every distinct person), b) be kind in places or times when kindness is unexpected, c) work on expanding your ability to empathize (feel what others are feeling and the reasons why they are), d) verbalize gratitude and appreciation, and e) don't expect reciprocity for your kindness.

10. In her book on the fruit of the Spirit, retired PCUSA minister Eugenia Anne Gamble summarizes biblical kindness as follows: "We know the kindness prompted by God's Spirit by its transforming results in our lives and world. It flourishes in compassion. It ripens in holy silence. It sees and cherishes all creatures. It fiercely moves with graciousness and forgiveness. It reframes a haunting, negative narrative into one of hope and growth. It is redemptive and endlessly powerful. It is also easily strangled out by fear, discomfort, faulty assumptions, and judgement of self and others. Still, it cannot be eradicated, even if it is sometimes buried or dormant. Kindness is the core of the human experience because it is at the heart of the very nature of God."

Kindness - By Naomi Shihab Nye

This is the poem we read at the end of the service on Sunday (specifically, stanzas 1 and 3 of this poem that became pretty famous during the CoVid)...

"Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.
What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be between the regions of kindness.

"Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.
Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to gaze at bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
'It is I you have been looking for,'
and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow or a friend."

A Week of Kindness

Here are some ways to spend a week leaning into the Spirit's effort to make you kinder:

- Begin everyday reminding yourself in prayer that God is kind through and through, is kind toward you, and is kind toward everyone you'll meet throughout the day.
- From point 9 in the sermon summary above, pick 1-2 concrete action items that you want to focus on all week long. If you want to read some more on practical ways to be kind, try this - [How to Be Kind | Psychology Today](#). And here's a big long list of ideas - [50 Ways to Be Kind](#).
- Get a sense of your own current capacity for kindness by taking one of these assessments - [Are You a Kind Person?](#) and [Hostility vs. Kindness Test](#)
- Want to read a little more about the psychology of kindness? Try these short, accessible articles - [The Positive Psychology of Kindness | Psychology Today](#) and [Random Acts of Kindness | Psychology Today](#) and [The Importance of Kindness | Psychology Today](#)
- Want to help your kids or grandkids be kinder? Try these - [A Call for Kindness | Psychology Today](#) and [Kind Kids | Psychology Today](#)