

“Putting Forth the Effort: Brotherly Kindness”

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness-through our knowledge of Him Who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does NOT have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

The late Erma Bombeck once wrote about a time when she says she was absolutely tired of listening. She explained by saying this started when she listened to her son go on and on in minute detail about a movie he had just seen, punctuated by at least 1,000 “you know’s” and “okays.” Next, she received several telephone calls filled with mindless chatter. She rushed off to the airport for a trip to Chicago. She got into a taxi—expecting a quiet ride—but the cab driver, thrilled to have Erma Bombeck in his cab, talked all the way to the airport. She got checked in and realized she had thirty minutes where she didn’t have to listen to anybody. She could just sit there and read her book and not be bothered at

all. But no sooner had she opened her book than an elderly woman came and sat down next to me and said, ‘I bet it’s cold in Chicago.’

“I suppose...” Erma replied without looking up from her book. “I haven’t been to Chicago for three years.” the woman continued. “That’s nice” Erma replied again without making eye contact. “My son lives there.” the woman said. “Oh.” Erma replied, keeping her nose stuck in her book in hopes that the woman would take the hint, but she went on talking and said something that finally got Erma’s attention. She said, “My husband’s body is on this plane. We were married 53 years. I don’t drive and the funeral director was so nice. He drove me to the airport today.” Erma recalls, “The woman droned on and it hit me that here was a person who didn’t want money or counsel. All she wanted was for someone to be kind enough to listen. And in desperation, she had turned to a total stranger with her sad story. She continued to talk to her until they announced boarding. They walked onto the plane and Erma saw her sit down in another section. As she hung up her coat Erma heard her say to the person next to her, ‘I bet it’s cold in Chicago.’”

There are people like this woman all around us—bearing the burden of grief or fear or just plain loneliness—people whose greatest need is for believers like you and me to put on this next garment in the dress code of a Christian...the garment of kindness. And unfortunately, these days our world needs this garment more than ever before because in essence it has become resistant to kindness. This is a side effect of our busy, “me-first culture.” With our hectic schedules we have created a hostile environment in which

kindness tends to shrivel up and die. Like those animals on the endangered species list, kindness is having a hard time surviving these days. It's becoming increasingly rare.

I think one of the factors when it comes to the approaching "extinction" of kindness is the fact that our world is becoming more and more impersonal. Think of it. We go to a gas station and don't even have to talk to anyone. We just put our card in the slot, pump the gas, and drive away without ever looking at another human being. Remember the days when you used to actually talk to the man who pumped gas for you, wiped your windshield, offered to check the oil, and asked you about your day? It's the same way at the bank where instead of relating to living, breathing people, we "communicate" with those electronic tellers and even at the grocery store where we see more and more automated checkout lines that require little or no human interaction.

And—when it comes to calling a utility company or a store—or even a lot of churches for that matter—more and more often we "If you want information about this push #1," etc. Can you imagine what would happen if they did this to the 911 system? "If your emergency is a murder, push '1.' If it is a burglary, push '2.' If the burglar is still in the house, push '3.' If he has a gun, push '4' This morning I want us to learn how to do our part to save kindness from extinction by studying this much-needed garment of grace. We start with our definition du jour. Rick Warren says, "Kindness is love in action." And, I like that because kindness is much more than a feeling...it's doing something tangible. The Greek word for "kindness" is "crestos" — and here's something interesting "Crestos" is one letter different from the Greek word, "Cristos" which is the word for "Christ." In fact,

when the early church began in the days of the Roman Empire, non-Christians often confused “crestos” with “cristos” and assumed that the early Christians who made up this new “religion” were simply people who believed in kindness. Well, that’s not too far from the truth—because anyone who follows Jesus Christ must learn to put on kindness. If you doubt that I would remind you of Jesus’ description of Judgment Day in Matthew 25. He said that on that day we will be publicly recognized as to how well we fulfilled this calling. We’ll be congratulated for the times we gave the thirsty something to drink—times we gave clothes to the naked, food to the hungry—times we visited the imprisoned. And—we’ll be rebuked for the times we failed to be kind, failed to show our love in these tangible ways. So we’re not talking about a minor issue here—far from it! Love in action—kindness—is the heart of Christianity. It’s an essential part of the process of becoming Godly. It’s a non-negotiable when it comes to being more and more like Jesus.

The Apostle Paul speaks of this character trait of our Lord frequently. In Ephesians 2:7 he says that, the incomparable riches of God’s grace were, “...expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” In Titus 3:4 he says, “When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy.” Colossians 3:17 say that if we are to be known as God’s children—if we are to be recognized as Christians—we must learn to, “...clothe ourselves with kindness.”

Last week I shared with you that the necessary starting place for Godliness is having an inner attitude that desires to be like God. Well, there are several levels we move toward Christ-like kindness. Lets put that at the top. Now lets go all the way to the basement of the kindness quotient. When it comes to our kindness quotient, some of us start with a

DEFICIT. And you know the kind of person I'm talking about. Don't look around—but there may be some of them in the room right now...because a lot of people haven't even thought about putting on this particular garment of grace. So, they are indeed in deficit territory. These people, are harsh and quick to judge or criticize. They lay out verbal "landmines" wherever they go: home, school, work, grocery store check-out lanes...wherever. I don't know exactly why they are this way—maybe they take 12-hour time release nasty pills when they wake up every morning to make sure they can stay UN-kind all day long. Maybe their bed has two wrong sides to get up on—but these are the people you want to steer clear of when they face traffic jams, computer problems, or bad hair days. An interesting thing I have noted over the years is that if these people are married for any length of time, they usually have very patient, loving, especially kind spouses. Now—no finger pointing or elbow jabbing—but do you know anyone like that? C. S. Lewis has something very interesting to say about these people **in** his classic book, *Mere Christianity*, he says, "For those of us who are a little better at kindness in our lives, it's easy for us to look critically at people below the line who have this unkindness streak in them. It's pretty easy for us to feel superior...to look down our noses at them." But, then Lewis goes on to challenge us to stop and wonder, "What made this person so un-kind? What made them this way?" Well, I think this is great advice because as the old saying goes, "Hurt people—hurt people." Don't get me wrong. I'm not justifying their unkind actions or words—but we must understand that there is always a reason for people to act the way they do.

When you encounter UN-kind people don't start by judging them...start by trying to understand them.

- They might have had alcoholic parents who raged at them when they were little children.
- They may have been physically abused.
- They may have some physical ailment—some “thorn in their side,” some constant source of physical pain that pushes them toward negative 10 on the “niceness meter.”
- Maybe they didn’t have the loving parents you did.

You don’t know—you don’t know where they started their journey! The fact is understanding and kindness go hand-in-hand because the more you understand a person, the kinder you tend to be toward them. This is why it is easy for us to be unkind to strangers. This is why our first impulse is to lay on the horn when some slow-poke gets distracted and won’t move when the light turns green. We don’t know that person...so it’s okay to attempt to honk them into movement.

I read this story many years ago and even used it in a message I gave at several revivals and crusades. It’s a story from the days of the old west—a story about a train that was filled with very tired passengers. At one end of the passenger car a man was holding a tiny baby and as night came on the baby became restless and cried more and more. Unable to take it any longer—frustrated with this inconsiderate father, a big brawny man spoke for the rest of the group and said, “Why don’t you take that baby to its mother?” There was a moment’s pause and then the man said, “I’m sorry. I’m doin’ my best. You see, my wife, the baby’s mother—well, she’s in her casket in the baggage car ahead.” After an awkward

silence, the big man who had asked the cruel question got out of his seat and moved toward the man with the motherless child. He apologized for his impatience and unkind remark. He took the tiny baby in his own arms and told the tired father to get some sleep. Then in loving patience he cared for the little child all through the night. Listen—if you have someone in your life who is kindness-challenged, ask God to help you understand them...and their situation...and with that understanding learn to be kind to them. Once we leave the deficit area, the first level we come to in calculating your kindness quotient, is what we are going to call “K - 1.”

This is kindness in very BASIC terms—it is when we are able to lower and even renounce all together our nastiness tendency. It’s when it dawns on us that it is wrong to think that if we have a bad day and bad circumstances, then we have the right to say and do unkind things. This is when we become mature enough to understand that when we get bad dumped on us in life it’s not a free pass to act mean to everyone in our path. It’s the realization that grumpiness...unkindness...well it’s never justifiable. To put it plainly, it’s when we learn that it’s never right to be a jerk. We understand that nastiness is not a spiritual gift—that there is no right way to do a wrong thing! There is never a time when it is okay for us to be grouchy or harsh or talk coarsely or use dirty hand gestures or intimidating body language. That is going the wrong way. As Ephesians 4:32 says we are to always be, “...kind and gentle, tender-hearted toward one another.” In fact, let’s all say it together, “Be kind and gentle, tender-hearted toward one another.” Now, just so we don’t forget it when you get up in the morning and start your work week, let’s say it again.....Tuesday’s coming so let’s say it again.

Now, believe it or not this verse works—all verses do! When you lose your cool—even in those times you really feel justified in doing so—you don't feel better. You would think that venting your frustration would get it out of your system but it doesn't work that way. In fact it seems to work the opposite. It makes you feel more upset...like stoking the coals of a fire. Plus—when you vent your “righteous anger” you feel foolish and drained and even kind of wounded. So—trust me—all those of you who are approaching the K1 level—keep maturing in this way because it is indeed best to renounce your right to be nasty with the nasty people of the world. It is best to do as God's Word says, “Be kind and gentle, tender-hearted toward one another.”

When you realize this—then you have reached the second level—what we might call “K-2. K-2 is when you grow up enough to go from simply making the decision to renounce unkindness—to embracing the Spirit-inspired realization that it really is the better way to live. You understand that kindness pays off. You see that, as we said last week, Godliness really does indeed have value in all things. I'm reminded of the story of a woman in Louisville, Kentucky who was standing at a bus stop. She had just cashed her tax refund check, so she was carrying more money than usual. She glanced around and noticed a shabbily dressed man standing nearby. And as she watched, a man walked up to him and handed him some money, and whispered something in his ear. She was so touched by the act of kindness that she decided to do the same. In a burst of generosity she reached into her purse, took out \$10, handed it to the man and said, “Never despair. Never despair.” The next day when she came to the bus stop, the same man was there again. But this time he walked up to her and handed her \$100. Dumbfounded, she asked, “What's

this?” He said, “You won, lady. ‘Never Despair’ paid 10 to 1 at Churchill Downs yesterday.”

The truth is kindness won't necessarily increase your bank account—but it does indeed have value in all of life. In fact, it can bring benefits you would never think of. Here's a true story to illustrate my point. In the early 20th century, a poor Scottish farmer by the name of Fleming was working in his field one day when he heard a cry coming from a nearby bog. Immediately he dropped his tools and rushed toward the sound of the cries. When he got to the bog, he saw a terrified young boy trying to fight his way out of the thick black muck, with very little success so farmer Fleming waded into the bog, grabbed the young boy, and saved him from what would have been a slow and painful death. The next day, a fancy carriage pulled up to the Fleming's small, rundown farmhouse. An elegantly dressed nobleman stepped out and introduced himself as the father of the boy Farmer Fleming had saved. “I want to repay you,” said the nobleman. “You saved my son's life.” But Fleming said, “No, I can't accept payment for what I did.” At that moment, a young boy came to the door of the farmhouse and the nobleman asked, “Is that your son?” “Yes,” replied the farmer. “Then, I have a proposition for you,” the nobleman continued. “Let me take your son with me and give him a good education. If the lad is anything like his father, he will grow up to be a man you can be proud of.” Knowing what an expensive education could mean for his son, Farmer Fleming accepted the offer. In time his son graduated from St. Mary's Hospital Medical School in London and became known throughout the world as Sir Alexander Fleming, the discoverer of penicillin. But that's not the end of the story. You see, years later, the nobleman's son was stricken with

pneumonia and his life was saved by...penicillin. The nobleman's name was Lord Randolph Churchill. His son's name was Winston. Yes, that Winston Churchill.

Kindness works. We reap what we sow. Kindness is an incredibly powerful thing. Christ-like kindness can even lead someone to faith in Jesus. As Romans 2:4 says, "God's kindness leads toward repentance." Frederick Faber hit the nail on the head when he said, "Kindness has converted more sinners than zeal, eloquence, or learning."

Where are you on this chart? Where do you want to be? I mean, find where you are on this kindness quotient continuum and imagine how it would effect your marriage if you moved up a level or two. How would it effect your relationship with your children? Your neighbors? Your co-workers? Your church family?