

## INTRODUCTION

This world could use a little more kindness and love. Judson College in Alabama is a Baptist college for women. A few years ago, the chaplain from Judson told about the time he was leading in prayer in the all-female chapel service. He prayed, "Lord give us kind hearts, Lord give us loving hearts. Lord give us sweet hearts!" And all the woman said, "Ah-men!"

We do need kind hearts. There's a conspiracy of kindness happening in the Body of Christ these days. It's an underground movement gaining momentum throughout America. The title of this message is taken from the book written by Steve Sjogren. Years ago, Steve started a congregation outside Cincinnati, Ohio with only a handful of people. They started something called "Servant Evangelism" in which they continually performed acts of kindness to people in their community. They never took any money for these good deeds. Today, over 4,000 people attend the church that started this conspiracy of kindness.

One year ago, we launched our first LYN Week. LYN stands for Love Your Neighbor. It was a designated time for you to go out into the community and perform acts of kindness for strangers. We're doing the same thing again this year and we're calling it LYN Week II. Our LYN Week strategy is simple: Every GABC member performing intentional acts of kindness in Jesus' name to show the love of God to others. We had some amazing results from last year's LYN Week.

The timing of last year's LYN Week was a God-thing. We planned LYN week for months. One of our plans was to show our appreciation to teachers, firefighters, policemen, and EMS workers. Then right in the middle of LYN Week last year, the terrorists attacked America. It was as if God knew our community would be hurting and needing kindness that week. Green Acres members were already mobilized to show God's love to a shaken community. We received dozens of letters from LYN last year; I want to share one of them with you that speaks to the amazing timing.

"During our week of horrific tragedies in the U.S., a group of ladies from Green Acres brought a chocolate cake to Griffin Elementary. I cannot express the gratitude I felt for this gesture of kindness. It made us feel so appreciated. It was indeed an act of compassion."

On that Friday morning the reality of what had happened to our country had finally settled within me. I was depressed and I felt as though no one really cared about the teachers. That morning I awoke with the questions, "What about us? We're having a hard time with this too."

I just wanted to thank you for encouraging us that day. The timing was perfect. I and many others needed that."

*Deborah Hilburn, Griffin Elementary School*

I have a folder full of letters like that. The great thing about LYN week is that kids can get involved in performing acts of kindness. After LYN week last year, some of our Sunday School classes had the kids report on their LYN activities. Here are a few of their reports:

“My friend did not have any money and she always watches me buy candy. One day I took her to the candy machine and said you could have any candy you want that costs 60 cents. She got some Skittles, and it made me and her feel good.”

*Candace, third grade*

“One day I saw my bathroom was a mess. So what I did was clean it up out of Kindness. My Mom got home and I said, ‘Mom, before you do anything else, go upstairs and see the bathroom.’ It was sparkling clean.”

*Justin, fourth grade*

“I watched my brother when my dad mowed the lawn. I watched the dishes when my mom took a shower. I played with my brother. I felt good because I helped my mom and dad.”

*Katie, second grade*

So, kids, teenagers, and adults. Come on, let’s LYN again, like we did last autumn. Yeah, let’s LYN again! Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love God with all your being. The second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. When God is describing the attributes of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4 He says, “Love is patient, love is kind...” Kindness is just love with its work clothes on.

Now you shouldn’t just love your neighbor one week per year, but LYN week gives us a special time to demonstrate God’s love to others by performing acts of kindness. When a person enters into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, God changes that person’s spiritual DNA. A real follower of Jesus doesn’t act like the rest of the world; we don’t act naturally, we act supernaturally. In Ephesians 4:29, the Apostle Paul describes a Christian’s DNA . God’s Word tells us first how a believer *doesn’t* act, and then we see how we are to live. “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” The natural people of this world use profanity frequently and often use their words to hurt others. A Christian’s DNA is different. We use words to encourage one another. Our deacon chairman, Bob Roseman, made that verse the theme of our Green Acres Deacons this year. “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” When a Christian acts contrary to the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, He is grieved. Did you know sin in your life causes God to grieve? “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.” Now, that verse tells us how a Believer *doesn’t* behave, now let’s see how we *are* to act. “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you.” I want to share four things about being kind and compassionate to others.

## **1. KINDNESS IS OUR RESPONSE TO THE GRACE GOD HAS SHOWN US**

Why should we show kindness to others? There are at least two good reasons. First it is the command of God. You read it for yourself—"be kind and compassionate to one another." Jesus commands us to love our neighbors. Love for others is not an emotion or a feeling, it is a choice. We choose to love others because God tells us to.

Another reason to show kindness is the character of God. God tells us to show kindness to others because that is part of His wonderful character. He is full of loving kindness toward us. God has forgiven us not because we deserved it—He forgives us for Jesus' sake.

God didn't just tell us He loves us, He proved it. Romans 5:8 says, "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." It's not enough for us to say we love others; we must show it. That's what LYN week is all about. You don't perform acts of kindness to earn God's mercy and forgiveness; you perform good deeds *because* you have been forgiven.

When God saved you, He began to change you. You no longer want to live like those people who don't know God. When you show kindness to a stranger, they are surprised. Why? Because that's not normal behavior. Out there, it is every man for himself. It's a dog-eat-dog world. It's a hard-knock life. But for those of us who know Jesus, we live by a higher standard. We show kindness and compassion to others.

The world tends to give people what they deserve. But God is full of grace and mercy. Grace is God blessing you with that which you do not deserve. Mercy is God withholding the punishment you *do* deserve. The more you understand and appreciate God's grace and mercy, the more you will want to show kindness to others.

I received a cute email a while back about a first grader named Timmy who walked to school with his friends every day. His mother wanted to keep an eye on him as he walked to school, but she didn't want to embarrass him. She asked her neighbor Mrs. Shirley Goodnest if she would mind walking behind Timmy and keeping an eye on him. Shirley was happy to do it because every morning she would load Marcy, her toddler into a stroller and they would get some exercise.

For several mornings, Mrs. Goodnest could be seen pushing her stroller a behind Timmy and his friends. After several mornings, one of his friends asked Timmy if he knew who that was who kept following them. Timmy said, "Sure, that's our neighbor, Mrs. Goodnest, her first name is Shirley. And that's her little daughter Marcy in the stroller." His friend said, "Doesn't it bother you that they are following us?" Timmy said, "Not really. It's in the Bible. Every night my mom reads the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm to me and it says, 'Shirley Goodnest and Marcy shall follow me all the days of my life.' So I guess I'll just have to get used to it!"

God's goodness and mercy *does* follow us all the days of our lives—and that's why we should show kindness to others!

## **2. DIRECT YOUR KINDNESS TOWARD STRANGERS WHO CANNOT REPAY YOU**

Many of us show kindness to our friends and family—and we should. But one of the reasons we are kind to them is because we want them to be kind to us. It's like giving Christmas gifts. Sometimes we give Christmas gifts to others because they give Christmas gifts to us. It's called reciprocal giving. There's nothing wrong with showing kindness to others because they are kind to you, but Jesus speaks about a kind of love that goes further than that. When He gave the command to "love your neighbor as yourself," a man asked Him, "Who is my neighbor?" To answer that question, Jesus told the famous story we call the Good Samaritan. A man was mugged on an isolated road. The robbers left him alive but naked and bleeding in the road. A priest passed by and saw the man, but he crossed to the other side of the road. A Levite, who was like a cultured, educated law expert also saw the wounded man, but he didn't help. Then a Samaritan, who wasn't even a full-blooded Jew walked by. This hated, half-breed stopped and cleaned the wounds of the stranger and then put him on his donkey and took him to an inn and paid for his food and lodging until he was well. The wounded man was a total stranger. Jesus said that real love isn't directed just to those who are just like us or who can love in return—it's directed toward anyone who needs love—even if they are total strangers. "Jesus said, 'If all you do is love those who love you, do you expect a bonus? Anybody can do that! If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal? Any run-of-the-mill sinner does that!'" (Matthew 5: 46-47 The Message)

So as you go out this week and perform your acts of kindness; it's okay to do them to family, friends, and fellow church members, but *really* focus your kindness on total strangers. They can't pay you back. And like that movie, "Pay it Forward", maybe they'll pass your kindness on to someone else who will pass it on to someone else. This conspiracy of kindness thing could really catch on!

### **3. PERFORM YOUR KINDNESS IN JESUS' NAME—DON'T STEAL HIS GLORY!**

There's a secular movement in America called Random Acts of Kindness. There's even a Random Acts of Kindness week. That's wonderful, we can never have too much kindness, but there needs to be purpose behind your acts of kindness. You need to make a statement when you perform your acts of kindness. That's why I call these *intentional* acts of kindness.

I heard a funny story about 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 walk up to him and handed him some money, and whispered something in his ear. She was so touched by the act of kindness 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 whispered to him, "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!" (You see, there was a horse, named never despair...)

The whole point of LYN week is to give glory and honor to Jesus Christ, and not to take any

credit or honor ourselves. If you perform an act of kindness to someone and don't make some kind of statement about *why* you did it, they are going to give you the credit. They are going to say something like, "You are a such a kind, loving person!" The point of our good deeds is to point people to the love of God, to allow Him to get the glory.

Jesus said, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16) People will see your good works, but *how* will they know to praise our Heavenly Father instead of praising you? You must let them know you have done this act in the name of Jesus and you are showing them God's love. Your reward is not their response, your reward is in heaven.

Jesus said, "Anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name will certainly not lose his reward." (Mark 9:41). Now, if you simply perform an act of kindness with no explanation, you are doing it in your own name. But when you do it in Jesus' name, it changes the entire equation. Jesus said if you do your good deeds for the applause of man, that's all the reward you will receive. But if you do your good deeds in His name simply because you want to obey your Father, He will reward you on a different level!

Now there are several ways you can give the glory to God when you do your LYN activities. You can simply say to the person, "I'm doing this in the name of Jesus, because He has shown His kindness to me." Or you could even say, "This week our church is performing acts of kindness in the community because we are trying to show people the Love of God."

But the easiest thing to do is to give them a LYN card. The LYN card says it all. On one side, it explains why you performed the act of kindness and on the other side gives them information about our church, in case they have a spiritual need.

We only have about 25,000 of these cards, so that means we only have enough for you to take about five or six of the ones we've printed. Don't let a shortage of LYN cards stop you: make your own. Take one card and copy the information on as many cards as you need!

#### **4. KINDNESS IS PLANTING SEEDS OF THE GOSPEL**

Everyone who knows the Bible would agree evangelism is the church's main purpose. The word "evangelism" means "sharing the message of good news." But when we think of evangelism, we think of Billy Graham, but evangelism is the job of every Christian—not just the evangelists and the pastors. On Monday nights, we offer FAITH evangelism training where we teach people how to share the gospel in a simple, non-confrontational way. These people are doing direct evangelism, and we will everyone who wishes to learn. But many of you are intimidated by the thought of actually sharing the gospel plan with someone you know—much less a stranger! So LYN gives you a great way to participate in the evangelism process. By performing your act of kindness in Jesus name, you are showing people the love of God, planting seeds.

Steve Sjogren who wrote *Conspiracy of Kindness* said, "For most Christians, doing evangelism is a lot like going to the dentist; no one really enjoys doing it, but it must done once in a while. But anyone can do simple acts of kindness...People don't necessarily remember what they are

TOLD of God's love, but they never forget what they have EXPERIENCED of God's love."  
(*Conspiracy of Kindness*, pp. 26,30)

Evangelism is a team effort. By showing folks the love of God, you create an interest in them so that they want to know more about the God who moves you to act with kindness. Every LYN act this week is like planting a seed—you just plant the seed, and God will make it grow.

Paul writes in I Corinthians 3:5-6, "After all, who is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only SERVANTS, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow."

Here are a few LYN activities you can do, or you can come up with your own.

(1) One of the easiest things to do is to go to a parking lot and wash windshields. You'll need a roll of paper towels, some window cleaner, and a trash bag to put your paper towels in. After you've finished, take your LYN card and write, "Your windshield was dirty, so I was glad to clean it for you." And put the LYN card on the rubber strip above the door handle on the driver's side. It's best not to put it under a windshield wiper, because the person may not see it until they are already in the car, then they have to get out and retrieve it.

(2) You can get a roll of quarters and go to a Laundromat. People usually have time to talk in Laundromats since they are waiting on their clothes to finish washing or drying. Just say, "This week, our church is doing acts of kindness in the community. May I please offer you the next quarter to go in your washer/dryer?" Then smile and give them a card. If they want to talk, go ahead and just be friendly with them.

(3) One of the things I did last year was to take a shoe shine kit and go to the doctor's waiting rooms at Trinity Clinic. When you see someone who needs a shoe shine, explain that your church is doing acts of kindness, so you'd like to shine their shoes for free. Even if they offer you money for it or any other LYN activity, *don't take it*. Whether you are cleaning windshields or shining shoes, do the very best job you can. Sloppy work is not a good reflection for the Lord. Be sure to give them a LYN card.

(4) Grab your ice chest and fill it with little bottles of water or soft drinks. Station yourself near where people park for the jogging trails. When they finish their walk or jog, offer them a free bottle of water. Most people are a little reluctant to accept something free, so again, explain that this is part of something your church is doing this week. Or take your water out to places where parents are sitting in lawn chairs watching their kids play football or soccer. Give them a bottle of cold water in Jesus' name. Give them a LYN card.

(5) Go to the store and buy several packs of light bulbs. People ALWAYS need light bulbs. Find a neighborhood and simply walk down the street and if you see people outside, offer them a free pack of light bulbs. Tell them your church is performing acts of kindness to strangers this week, and you want to help bring a little "light" into their world. Or you may knock on doors and offer free light bulbs, too. Remember to leave a LYN card—and remember to smile!

(6) Here's a neat one. When you are in the drive-through lane for a fast food place, offer to pay the bill for the person in the car behind you. Give the cashier a LYN card and tell them to give it to the person when they drive up to the window and find out their order is paid for. You might not want to do this if the vehicle behind you is a van full of college guys—they have big appetites!

That's just a few ideas, now you go out and come up with your own ideas. Let's show East Texas the love of God this week.

## CONCLUSION

There is a great deal of talk these days in America about what the true God is really like. People think all the gods of all the religions are the same. We need to SHOW them the God of the Bible is a God of love, a God of mercy, and a God of kindness. He is a God who loves people so much that He sent His one and only Son into this world to suffer and die in agony on the cross so our sins could be forgiven. That's the kind of loving God we need to show this world.

Last fall, Cindy and I were driving back from Destin, and it was during the height of the battles in Afghanistan. We stopped at a Waffle House near Eglin Air Force Base for breakfast. It was packed, so we sat at the counter. A soldier came in and sat in the only available seat, a stool next to Cindy. Cindy likes to talk, so she struck up a conversation with this guy. It was obvious he was in no mood to talk—he seemed angry and sullen. We were able to learn he had been up all night working on the base and it had been a rough night. When he finished wolfing down his breakfast, I took his ticket and said, "I'm going to buy your breakfast, just to show you how much we appreciate what you are doing to keep our nation free." At first, he refused. But I said, "I'm doing this in the name of Jesus, so please don't deny me this blessing." In that moment, he changed. He said, "Nobody has ever done that for me before." We could see he was touched, and that big soldier was on the verge of tears as he walked out. I don't know anything about his spiritual condition, but I know he learned something about Jesus that morning. Jesus makes people act differently.

So, team, let's get off our seats and into the streets and let's give 'em KINDNESS!

## OUTLINE

### 1. KINDNESS IS OUR RESPONSE TO THE GRACE GOD HAS SHOWN US

"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." *Romans 5:8*

### 2. DIRECT YOUR KINDNESS TOWARD STRANGERS WHO CANNOT REPAY YOU

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*Matthew 5: 46-47 The Message*

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"After all, who is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only SERVANTS, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow." *1 Corinthians 3:5-6*



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes