

INTRODUCTION

Two weeks ago, I started this message about kindness. I shared with you that I would bring twin messages on this text because I didn't have time to cover everything. It reminds me of the funny story I heard about two twin boys who had totally opposite dispositions. One twin was always pessimistic, and the other was unfailingly optimistic. The father consulted a psychologist about how to “balance” these attitudes. The psychologist suggested the father give the pessimistic twin a wonderful Christmas present to raise the twin's self-esteem. He suggested the father give the optimistic twin a terrible present to bring the boy back down to reality. So the father bought a beautiful bicycle for his pessimist and he went down to the local stable and obtained some old horse manure to give to his optimist. On Christmas morning, both twins found huge presents under the tree. The little pessimist slowly unwrapped his and found the shiny bicycle. Without enthusiasm, he moaned, “Oh no, a bicycle. I don't even know how to ride. And if I did, I would probably break my arm.” Meanwhile, the little optimistic twin tore into his present, only to find horse manure. He paused for just a second. Then with a huge smile on his face, he started digging into the manure, shouting, “Oh boy! I just know there's a pony in here somewhere!”

I like positive people! Jesus uses His sermon on the Plain to share some positive principles for living.

Two weeks ago I gave you the homework assignment of showing kindness to people you didn't especially like or who didn't like you. I asked you to send cards or to give gifts to these people (you could camouflage your kindness during this holiday season). I have heard lots of great stories. In fact, I have gotten more cards and gifts this Christmas than ever before!

Some of you weren't here two weeks ago, and for the rest of us, a little review is helpful. So after we read our text again, I will quickly review what I shared two weeks ago (minus the funny stories), and then finish this passage.

Luke 6:27-36. “But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ lend to ‘sinners’ expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

Remember, I told you that these words produce a lot of frustration. They are some of the most misunderstood and misapplied words of Jesus. Here are the four

IMPORTANT FRUSTRATION-BUSTERS

1. These are personal directives—not corporate or national

This is not a business plan for a bank. How long could you stay in business if you loaned money and never required it be paid back? Two weeks ago, a banker in our church told me, “So that’s what happened to all those S&Ls in the 1980s! They were just trying to obey Jesus.” A national defense system cannot be built on the premise of turning the other cheek when we are attacked. These are personal guidelines.

2. Don’t follow these directions to *earn* salvation, but to *demonstrate* salvation

Some people think you can get into heaven by obeying the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount. Wrong. These principles describe how a person acts and reacts when they have already been redeemed.

3. It’s impossible to obey these directions without the *power* of the Holy Spirit

Loving your enemies and turning the other cheek are *not* natural human reactions. You can only do this when you are surrendered to the power of the Holy Spirit.

4. These practices reflect the Character of God

If you want to know what God is like, read these characteristics. Our lives fit the definition of “Holiness” and “Godliness” when we respond to people the same way.

The major principle: Holy Spirit-shaped kindness is when you treat others the way you would wish to be treated

In what some call the Golden Rule, Jesus taught that kindness is proactive. Christian kindness always takes the first step. This week, a lady told me she saw some Tyler policemen directing traffic because the traffic lights were without power after the ice storm. Her first thought was, “Man, I’m glad I’m not out there in this freezing weather!” Then she said she immediately thought of Luke 6:31. So she decided to go get some hot coffee and share it with the officers. Now that’s kindness. I told her that she gets an A+ on her homework!

HOW TO PRACTICE SPIRIT-SHAPED KINDNESS:

I. DEMONSTRATE LOVE TO YOUR ENEMIES—HOW?

Have you been

1. INJURED? DON’T RETALIATE (your cheek)

Jesus wasn’t forbidding you to defend or protect yourself or your family. “Turning the other cheek” referred to special challenge a Jewish man initiated by backhanding his adversary on the

right cheek. Jesus was warning us about the danger of retaliation. You can apply this most often when someone delivers a verbal slap—don’t hit back. Refuse to be drawn into a fight. Have you been

2. INSULTED? DON’T RESENT (your cloak)

Jesus wasn’t saying you ought to let people take advantage of you and steal you blind. Again, he was referring to the Jewish practice of using a cloak as collateral or surety for a financial loan. It was a terrible insult to require a man’s shirt as well but Jesus is teaching that we should be willing to deflect insults that come our way. Now we move into the last two points of how we can practice kindness and this is new material.

II. LEND TO OTHERS WITHOUT EXPECTING A RETURN—WHY?

Like the others, these verses have been greatly misinterpreted. In verse 34 Jesus asks, “And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit (grace) is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ lend to ‘sinners’ expecting to be repaid in full.” Then in verse 35 He repeats how to show kindness, “But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back.” Does that mean when your neighbor borrows your tools you shouldn’t ever try to get them back? Does it mean you should lend money to people and never ask them to repay you? Actually, the word for “lend” is the legal word meaning “to lend for interest in a business transaction.” (Greek word *danizo*). The key to understanding this directive is found in the word “expecting.” It’s a strong word meaning to “be in despair.” We could substitute the word “worry.” To paraphrase Jesus, He was saying, “when you lend something to someone, don’t sit around pulling your hair out until you are repaid; don’t despair about whether or it is repaid.” It’s dangerous to be so materialistically minded that you lose sleep over every thin dime that is owed to you.

Take a moment and look at the other side of the coin. The Bible teaches we are to repay our debts to others. God judges His children sternly if they refuse to pay back what they owe. Remember, these principles are for Believers only. You shouldn’t be in the habit of loaning to non-believers, that’s being unequally yoked in a business arrangement. So if you are the believer and have loaned something to another believer, and if you are both acting in the spirit of Christ, you don’t have to worry—you’ll be repaid. But even if they don’t—don’t sweat it. If they don’t repay you, God will deal with them and He will reward your attitude of kindness. Look at the last part of verse 35. Jesus said, “Then (when?) your reward will be great and you will be sons of the most High.”

Let’s answer the question: *Why* should we do this? Our U.S. tax code is written so you can write off a portion of “bad debts,” but Jesus said there is another benefit: God will reward your unselfish, un-greedy attitude. Now, here is your choice: Would you rather worry and despair about being paid back every penny you lend or would you rather receive God’s reward? Let me show you two reasons why God’s reward is to be preferred.

1. Because God’s reward is greater than any earthly payback

Let’s say someone owes you \$50. You have told them repeatedly you want that money back. You have warned them if they don’t pay it back by Friday you are going to send Big Lou to rearrange their face or fit them for a pair of concrete shoes. Isn’t that the spirit of kindness? That’s the way the mob works. (Jesus said, “Even sinners lend to sinners expecting to be repaid.”). So maybe you’ll get your \$50 back—and your pound of flesh. That’s your earthly payback.

But if you follow these directions God has greater reward for you. It’s found in verse 35. When you show kindness you’ll be called a Child of God. You demonstrate you are one of God’s children because you are acting Godly, reflecting His character. Can you put a price tag on that?

I once read about a little boy who was selling pencils on a busy sidewalk in downtown Chicago. It was the height of the Christmas rush and he had a piece of cardboard placed on the sidewalk with a can of pencils placed on it with a sign reading, “Pencils - 25 cents.” Most people were ignoring him and one businessman rushed by talking on his cell phone. He unknowingly kicked the can of pencils, which sent them rolling onto the sidewalk. People were walking on them and kicking them farther from the little boy. He was on his hands and knees trying to collect them, crying because they were being ruined. Suddenly he saw a well-dressed businessman on his knees helping him collect them. They finally rescued the pencils, but most of them were broken or damaged. The businessman asked the boy how many pencils he had before they were damaged. Sniffing, the little boy said, “Forty, sir.” The businessman told the boy he wanted to buy all 40 pencils. “But they are no good anymore!” The little boy sobbed. With a smile, the businessman fished two \$20 bills from his pocket and gave them to the little boy saying, “Son, I think they are a little under priced. Merry Christmas.” The man grabbed the pencils and left the little boy standing there staring at the two twenties. He shouted after the businessman, “Hey, Mister! Are you God?” Smiling, the man replied, “No, son, I’m just one of His children.”

Has anyone called you that lately? That’s our reward. 1 John 3:1 says, “Behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us that we should be called the sons of God.”

2. Because God’s reward lasts longer than any material reward

Any earthly payback you receive is only temporary, because *everything* in this world is temporary, except for two things. The only eternal components we deal with are the Word of God and the souls of people. Any money, tools, possessions, or property you loan to others will one day pass away. As I’ve said many times before, you and I really don’t own anything in this world. If you think you own some property just because you hold the deed to it, try to come back in 10,000 years and claim it. God owns it all. We really don’t own anything so we really can’t get too uptight when we don’t get paid back for something we really didn’t own in the first place!

However, our heavenly reward is eternal. Once you become a Child of God, you will be a Child of God forever; you will never be disowned, displaced, or disappointed! After the old sun has sputtered its last flame, after the stars have all been snuffed out, after this old world has long since vanished, we will still be children of our heavenly Father. The reason we demonstrate kindness is because we love our Father and we wish to reflect His character.

Now, let me simplify this point. What do you call it when you lend something to someone and don't expect to be repaid? It's called giving. That's the nature of our Heavenly Father. He is a good God and every good and perfect gift in our life has come from Him. When you have a Christ-like attitude, you go through life trying to see how much you can give, not how much you can collect from those to whom you have lent something.

If you only give a gift to someone expecting something in return, it's not really a gift—it's a loan. We call that reciprocity. The term “reciprocal gift” is one of those oxymorons, you know, two words that cancel each other out. Like, “legal ethics” or “military intelligence” or “humble Texan” or “rap music” or “football scholarship.” The idea of a reciprocal gift destroys the true meaning of a gift.

I want to pay a public compliment to my wife Cindy. She gave me the best illustration of this point just this past week. We had a Christmas date, so I took her to see a movie. We were sitting in the theatre before the movie started and this girl next to her leaned over and said, “I know this sounds weird, but I don't have any cash, and my friend and I want something from the concession stand. Could I write you a check for \$10 and ask you to cash it for me now?” Neither of us had ever seen this girl before—she was a total stranger. I've heard about all kinds of scams that people pull on us senior adults, so I started to say, “Okay, but let me see three forms of identification: your blood type, your voter registration card, and the vehicle identification number of your car.” But before I could say anything, Cindy reached in her purse and said, “Sure, here's \$10, is that all you need?” The girl wrote the check. It was dark. You couldn't see if she signed it, or put any amount in it. Cindy just stuffed it in her purse. I was still slightly skeptical. Then the girl leaned over and said to me, “Aren't you the pastor at Green Acres?” I said, “Yes, I am...are you sure \$10 is enough? I've got some more cash if you need it.”

Later this week, I asked Cindy if she ever cashed that check. She said, “Actually, I got her name and address off the check, wrote ‘void’ across the check and sent it back to her in a Christmas card.” Man, it's tough when she uses my own preaching against me! But that's exactly what Jesus was talking about here. The best way to lend without expecting a return is to just have a generous spirit of giving! Notice the third way to practice Spirit-shaped kindness:

III. SHOW MERCY TO THOSE WHO DON'T DESERVE IT -WHAT?

Look again at the last part of verse 35. Jesus says categorically we should show kindness “because He (the Father) is kind to (notice the two groups) the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful just as your Father is merciful.” Do you know about whom Jesus is referring when He mentions the “ungrateful” and the “wicked?” Did you imagine some terrible reprobate? Actually, He is speaking about you and me. In our lost condition we were ungrateful and wicked; we desperately need the mercy of God. Let's answer the question, in this context, *what* is mercy?

1. Real mercy is being kind to those who never say “Thanks” to you, or even ignore you!

Just as God is merciful to the ungrateful, so should we be. Again, it’s easy to show mercy to those who have loved you and treated you with kindness but anybody can do that. It takes the power of the Holy Spirit to show mercy to those who never appreciate us.

There are wives and moms in this room who have worked tirelessly through the years doing all the things wives and moms do—and many of you have had to work outside the home as well. You brought home the bacon and you fried it up in the pan. And perhaps there have been times when you slowed down for a few moments and wondered, “Does anybody appreciate what I do?” No. Your kids seldom say, “Thanks.” Your husband is happy as long as his socks are washed and put in the drawers but he seldom says, “Thank you.”

There are husbands and dads here who have worked hard to provide for your family. You have found the expenses of raising a family are like one of those black holes in space—it just keeps sucking in the money. So you keep on working hard day after day. But does anybody say, “Thanks?” Dream on.

Some of you work in a job where your boss hardly ever says, “Thank you, you are doing a good job.” I could go on. Most of us have had times when we felt we weren’t appreciated.

If we aren’t careful we can sink into self-pity and become bitter and angry with people who are ungrateful. I remember once when I was in college I picked up a young couple beside the road whose car had broken down. I turned around and went in the opposite direction to take them to a place where they could hire a wrecker. I probably went 30 or 40 miles out of my way. When the couple got out of my car at the service station I was shocked. Neither one of them even said, “Thank you for the ride.” They just got out of the car. I started to roll down the window and say, “Hey! At least you can say ‘Thanks.’” But I didn’t. Instead, as I was driving off, bitterness started creeping into my heart. I was thinking, “Those are the most ungrateful people I’ve ever been around. I can’t believe it!” About that time, the Lord spoke to my heart and said, “Now you know how I feel because you hardly ever say ‘Thank you’ to me for all the blessings I’ve given you.” Ouch. He was exactly right. We’ve made Thanksgiving an annual holiday instead of a lifestyle.

2. Real mercy is forgiving those who have hurt you—even if they don’t ask for it!

Part of God’s mercy is that He has forgiven the wicked. Mercy is when God withholds punishment we deserve. That involves forgiveness. Next week, we will have a lot more to say about forgiveness when we look at verse 37 where Jesus said, “Forgive and you will be forgiven.” There are plenty of wicked people out there. I’m sorry to report that last week, somebody broke into one of our offices and stole 54 of the Angel Tree gifts you have given. Instead of rejoicing over the 1,300 Angel Tree gifts Green Acres folks gave, I got bent out of shape over those 54 that were stolen. Lest you think I always have kind and gentle thoughts, my first reaction was “If I could get my hands on the person who would stoop so low to do that, they wouldn’t have any teeth left to eat Christmas dinner.” I wanted to get one of those aluminum bats and rearrange their nose. Sorry, but I do have those thoughts sometimes.

But doggone it, then I went back and had to and study this passage again and God really worked me over in my attitude. He asked me if I was willing to show mercy to those thieves. Ouch, again. Those people will have to stand before God and give account for what they did, they don't have to stand before me. We have a criminal justice system, and if the law catches them, they will have to stand in front of a judge, too. But I'm not a judge and the last time I checked, there wasn't a vacancy in the Trinity. But I've decided to personally forgive them. Oh, if they get caught, we'll still press charges—that doesn't have anything to do with personal forgiveness. Forgiveness occurs when I no longer want to personally punish someone. It doesn't mean simply forgetting it; it means I personally release the feelings of anger and animosity toward them. We'll learn a lot more about forgiveness next week but it's important for you to know if you are waiting for someone to come crawling to you to beg your forgiveness, you are confused about nature of Biblical forgiveness.

One of the greatest examples of mercy and forgiveness in all the Bible comes from an obscure story in the Old Testament. Remember, King Saul's hatred for David? Saul was jealous of David and hunted him down relentlessly. On several occasions, Saul hurled spears at David trying to turn him into a shish kabob. David became a fugitive, running and hiding from King Saul. David was hiding in a dark cave with his men when King Saul slipped in to take a potty break. Saul never knew David was behind him with a sword in his hand. David could have used his sword and with one slash literally “gotten a head” of Saul. Don't think David didn't have the stomach for violence. He sliced Goliath's head off like cutting a watermelon off the vine. David had been fighting for Israel then—but this was personal. David was a “man after God's own heart.” That means he acted “Godly.” He crept up silently and just sliced off a corner of Saul's robe.

When Saul left the cave, David felt badly about ruining Saul's robe. As Saul was leaving, David ran out with the piece of cloth. He knelt before Saul and said, “I will not lift my hand against the Lord's anointed.” He said, “I could have killed you, but I didn't.” Saul's reply is amazing. He said, “You are more righteous than I,” he said. “You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly...May the Lord reward you well for the way you treated me today.” (I Samuel 24:17) But Saul stayed after David trying to kill him. Later David had another experience when Saul was sleeping. David crept right up to Saul and again, he showed him mercy. He just took Saul's spear and water jug. Later, David showed Saul his spear and told him the story. This time, Saul got the idea and left David alone. Some of you are good at showing mercy once, but when it isn't returned, you give up. God's mercy is everlasting.

CONCLUSION

When we allow the Holy Spirit to empower us, we really *can* show kindness to others by demonstrating love to our enemies; by lending without worrying about the return; by showing mercy to those Jesus tells us in several places that when we practice kindness to others we are actually showing kindness to Him.

One Christmas Day, a widow named Ruth found a strange letter on her front porch. It simply said, “Dear Ruth, I am going to be in your neighborhood today, and I'd like to visit you. Love Always, Jesus.”

Ruth was thrilled because she loved the Lord but she panicked because she thought of her empty cabinets. There was nothing to serve the Lord. She grabbed her purse and counted out all the money she had: exactly \$5.65. She thought, "At least I can get some cold cuts and bread for Jesus." After buying some milk, bread and sandwich meat she had a grand total of 12 cents left. Walking home, she failed to notice a couple huddled in the alley until they said, "Hey lady, can you help us? I ain't got no job and my wife and me are pretty hungry. If you could spare some food, we'd really appreciate it." She said, "You don't understand, I'm a poor person, too. All I've got are a few cold cuts and milk to serve to an important guest who is coming today." The man shuffled away and said, "That's okay. We understand." As they started back down the alley, Ruth said, "Wait! Why don't you take this food? I'll find something else for my guest." He said, "Thank you very much ma'am." As his wife said, "Oh, thank you ma'am," Ruth noticed the woman was shivering. Ruth said, "You look cold. I've got another coat at home, too. Why don't you take this one?" Ruth headed back home empty-handed. She was shivering from the cold when she reached her doorway. As her frozen fingers fumbled with her key, she noticed another letter leaning against her door. She thought, "That's strange, I didn't notice this when I left." Shaking with cold and excitement, she opened it and read these words. "Dear Ruth, It was so good to see you again. Thanks for the lovely meal and thank you, too for the beautiful coat. Love always, Jesus" The air was still cold, but even without her coat, Ruth no longer felt the chill.

OUTLINE

REVIEW—IMPORTANT FRUSTRATION BUSTERS:

1. These are personal directives—not corporate or national
2. Don’t follow these directions to earn salvation—but to demonstrate salvation
3. It’s impossible to obey these directions without the power of the Holy Spirit
4. These practices reflect the character of God

The major principle: Holy Spirit-shaped kindness is when you treat others the way you would wish to be treated. (Luke 6:13)

How to practice Spirit-shaped kindness:

I. DEMONSTRATE LOVE TO YOUR ENEMIES—HOW?

1. Injured? Don’t retaliate (your cheek)
2. Insulted? Don’t resent (your cloak)

II. GIVE TO OTHERS WITHOUT EXPECTING A RETURN—WHY?

Because God’s reward:

1. Is greater than any earthly payback
2. Lasts longer than any material reward

III. SHOW MERCY TO THOSE WHO DON’T DESERVE IT—WHAT?

Real mercy is:

1. Being kind to those who never say “thanks” to you—or even ignore you
2. Forgiving those who have hurt you—even if they don’t ask for it!



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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