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Title: Fruit of the Spirit Series – 6. Kindness: Try A Little Kindness

Text: Luke 6:35

The Fruit of the Spirit is a trio of threes or a trinity within a trinity. The first trio being love, joy & peace which relate to our relationship with God. When our relationship is right with God, we experience the ultimate love, the ultimate joy & the ultimate peace. The second trio – patience, kindness, and goodness – concerns our relationships with other people. Last week I talked about a quality that is often in short supply: Patience. Today, as we move to the next item on the list, we'll look at a quality that might be rarer still. I'm talking about Kindness. Kindness has become, it seems, the forgotten virtue. Now, I want to make something clear. There is much more to our message than merely "Let's be kind." The gospel message is MORE than that, but it is NEVER LESS. IF you are living in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, you will take seriously the call to kindness. I said at the beginning of the series that none of these qualities are optional – and if any quality is treated as optional, it might be this quality. There are those who will say, "If you disagree with me, or if you disagree with the majority, if you do something that we consider wrong, THAT makes YOU a BAD person, and we don't have to be nice about it." We see this on display in the online world, in the political arena, and in discussions about social issues, naturally. But, it doesn't end there. Try having a sports-related discussion OR a fitness-related discussion OR a Bible-related discussion. You say the wrong thing and the conversation goes south and the comments suddenly get personal. If this kind of thing happened only in the online environment, the solution would be simple: Don't go online! But, it happens everywhere: in the neighborhood, at work, in the church, and at home. We fail at the quality of kindness perhaps more than any other. And yet, we live today only because of the kindness of our Heavenly Father. And I can assure you that His kindness to you and me – the kindness He has already lavished upon our lives – will forever outweigh any feeble attempt that we will be asked to make for the benefit of others.

Today, in the first part of this message, we'll look at WHAT KINDNESS IS. Then, we'll consider a few questions that you can ask yourself in order to cultivate the quality of kindness on a case-by-case basis.

1. The Character of Kindness. Kindness is summarized in what we have come to call The Golden Rule: *"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"* (Luke 6:31). Kindness is rooted deeply in the character of God. We know what kindness is because we have seen it demonstrated through the goodness of God. I want to call your attention to a Hebrew word that summarizes this attitude. The word is *hesed*. Sometimes in the Old Testament it is translated "love," and sometimes it is translated "faithful love." Its original meaning is close to "mercy" and "compassion." The best translation for *hesed* is "LOVINGKINDNESS," as in Psalm 63:3-4 (NKJV), *"Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips shall praise You. Thus I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name."* A great illustration of kindness is given by Jesus in His telling the parable of "The Good Samaritan." It could just as well be called "The KIND Samaritan." Remember the story? As a man is traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho, he is beaten nearly to death by robbers and left beside the road. Two religious Jewish men, a Levite and a priest, see him and pass by. They continue on their way WITHOUT offering any assistance at all. No kindness here. What happens next? Luke 10:33 (NIV) – *"But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took PITY on him."* The word translated PITY means "compassion" or "sympathy." Compassion is the motivation behind KINDNESS. The Good Samaritan is KIND. He bandages the injured man's wounds. He puts him on his donkey and takes him to the nearest inn. He leaves two silver coins or "two pence," which was the equivalent of a couple days work, for the man's care. Then he tells the innkeeper, "I will check back in a few days and reimburse you for any additional expenses occurred in caring for this man." Then Jesus asks the question in Luke 10:36-37 (NIV) – *"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"* OR which acted out of kindness and compassion. *"The expert in the law replied, 'The one who had mercy on him.'" Who was that? The Samaritan. "Then Jesus told him, 'Go and do likewise.'" When I talk about kindness, I'm NOT just talking about politeness. I'm talking about a quality that is representative of love, mercy, tenderness, and compassion. This is exactly how God relates to us. When David wrote, *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life..."* (Psalm 23:6), the word that is translated "mercy" here is *hesed* – the same word that is translated "lovingkindness" elsewhere. David is saying: Surely goodness and LOVINGKINDNESS shall follow me all the days of my life. God treats us with this same kind of loving, merciful, compassionate, faithful kindness – EVEN WHEN WE DON'T DESERVE IT! Jesus said something in the gospel of Luke that you may have missed. In what is called the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus said, *"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 children of the Most High...". That part we've probably all heard; that part we're familiar with. AND THEN HE SAID... *"...because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked"* (Luke 6:35). Jesus is not merely saying that God is kind to THOSE BAD PEOPLE OVER THERE. He would want us to understand that sometimes WE fall into this same category. Ungrateful and wicked is a label that we've all worn. And yet, God shows us His kindness in spite of it. The MESSAGE puts it this way, *"I tell you, love your enemies. Help and give without expecting a return. You'll never – I promise – regret it. Live out this God-created identity the way our Father lives toward us, generously and graciously, even when we're at our worst. Our Father is kind; you be kind"* (Luke 6:35-36). The Apostle Paul said, *"But God demonstrates his own love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8). We can easily forget that we were all – every one of us – in the same boat as everyone else on the planet. We ALL were sinners separated from God. Our fate was the same as the worst of the worst, but GOD showed us KINDNESS. Though we did nothing to merit His mercy, He sent His only Son into the world to die on the cross for our sins, that through Him we might be saved. Through Jesus we have received God's mercy, grace and forgiveness. And the fact that we have accepted His gift of salvation does not make us better than anyone else, because... *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast"* (Ephesians 2:8-9). God is kind to the ungrateful and wicked – and that includes you and me. I am not diminishing the judgment of God, or the fact that we must all own up to the consequences of our actions, or that the choices we make will ultimately determine our eternal destiny. The Word of God is clear on this. It is also clear that God is kind, even to sinners. God LOVES you. And He also loves the people YOU don't like. And He also loves the people that others hate. And He treats us ALL with the SAME measure of lovingkindness. Kindness is deeply rooted in the character of God. When you are living a Spirit-filled, Spirit-controlled life, the same kindness that God has shown you, you will be showing others. So what does the absence of kindness in a professing Christian indicate? They might not be as Spirit-filled or Spirit-controlled as they profess.

2. Cultivating Kindness. In this section, we'll consider three questions you can ask that will help you cultivate the quality of kindness. **A. How would Jesus treat THIS person in THIS situation?** You remember the WWJD bracelets everyone used to wear 20 some years ago? The initials stand for What Would Jesus Do? The idea is that in any situation we would do well to ask – before we act – how would Christ respond in this same set of circumstances. I find that this isn't always the easiest question to answer, because in the gospels I often find Jesus to be unpredictable at times. The easier question for me to answer is: **B. What Would Jesus NOT Do?** I KNOW that He wouldn't be hateful. I KNOW that He wouldn't be condescending. I KNOW that He wouldn't ridicule others. I KNOW that He wouldn't celebrate anyone's tragedy or misfortune. I KNOW that even when He had to speak the cold, hard truth, He would speak in a spirit of mercy, compassion, and kindness. When everyone else claimed to have grounds for putting the adulterous woman to death, Jesus said: *"I do not condemn you. Go and leave your life of sin"* (John 8:11). Do you think it's possible that Jesus would speak those same words to those whom we are so quick to judge? How might Jesus respond if He were in this situation, this same set of circumstances. I heard of a preacher who went to lunch with a celebrity pastor – a man he had admired – and he was taken aback at how rude this pastor was to the waitress, going so far as to make a snide remark about her appearance, IN HER PRESENCE. (She was wearing too much makeup.) Can you imagine Jesus ridiculing a waitress for her appearance or because she didn't get his ice tea filled on time? Can you imagine Him berating an employee for losing a sale or missing a deadline? Can you imagine Him trading insult for insult when someone disagrees with Him? If you know Him and if you've read the gospels, you can't imagine such. How would Jesus respond in this situation? When you take time to ask this question, I can assure you that the answer will always move you in the direction of *hesed*: loving, merciful, compassionate kindness. If this question trips you up, here's another question you can ask: **C. How would I treat this person if he or she was Jesus?** It's hard to imagine Jesus as a convicted criminal, or a lazy person who refuses to work and wants to spend their life taking handouts from others, or a man who won't properly feed and clothe his family. It's hard to imagine Jesus being sick or unkempt. No, Jesus is nothing like that. Jesus is perfect in every way – the ultimate example of integrity. And yet, He said when we look at those who "good society" would consider to be social rejects, we are to respond to them with the same attitude that we would respond to Him. Matthew 25:40 (KJV) – *"And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the LEAST of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."* It's hard to imagine that Jesus would be that annoying neighbor, or that rude customer, or that arrogant, overly-opinionated political know-it-all, or that relative that keeps hitting you up for a loan, or that boss who expects far too much, or that employee who wants to do too little. It's hard to imagine, because He is NOTHING like that person, and YET, HE SAID that we are to treat them as WE WOULD TREAT HIM! There's an old story about a woman in England – a commoner – who had just sat down to eat on a dark and stormy night when there was a knock at the door. A tall woman in a large overcoat and hat stood in the doorway, asking a simple favor. She said, "It has begun to rain. I was wondering if I could borrow an umbrella? I promise I'll return it." The woman said, "Sure, let me get it." Actually, she had TWO

umbrellas. She had an OLD raggedy umbrella she had carried for years. It had a few leaks in it. And she had a brand NEW umbrella that she'd hardly had a chance to use. So, the woman weighed her options and decided to give her guest the older umbrella, since she'd probably never see it again anyway. The visitor thanked the woman and went on her way. A few days later, the palace royal guard visited this woman's home to return the umbrella she had loaned to her guest. It turns out, the guest knocking on her door was the queen of England, but she didn't recognize her. The woman was a little embarrassed and said to the palace guard, "If I had known it was the queen, I would have given her my good umbrella." As far as I know that story never actually happened, but it makes a good point, because many of us have had occasion to say the same thing: If I had known that panhandler was Jesus, I wouldn't have brushed him off. If I had known that waitress was Jesus, I wouldn't have been rude. If I had known that person in need was Jesus, I would have done all that I could. If I had known it was Jesus standing in the rain, I would have given Him the GOOD umbrella. To which Jesus would respond: Now you know. In each and every situation, in each and every social encounter, we need to take time to ask: If this person were Christ Jesus Himself, how would I respond? I can guarantee you that the answer will always take you in the direction of kindness.

Conclusion: As I conclude this message, I will list five areas where we need to get in the habit of practicing kindness every day. Now, if you give it some thought, you can probably come up with five or ten more – but these are five areas that often lack kindness: **1. Conversations with friends and family.** You don't have to be mean just because you're related. It's okay to be kind – ESPECIALLY to family! **2. In EVERY online post and comment.** Everything you write online has the potential to be read by hundreds – maybe thousands of people, so seek to say something kind, OR say nothing at all. **3. In traffic.** Some people become hostile the minute they get behind the wheel of a car. You don't have to be that way. When people don't drive as perfectly as you, extend a little mercy and show a little kindness. **4. When doing business.** When dealing with a customer, or dealing with a customer service representative, even if they're not doing it exactly right, you can practice kindness. **5. To those who need your help.** You can't solve the whole world's problems, and there will be times when people come to you for help and you have to say "no," because you don't have the resources to say "yes" or you don't want to enable them for their bad choices or laziness. But, whether your response is "yes" or "no," you can respond with kindness, not condescension; with mercy, not judgment. These five areas are a good place to start cultivating the habit of kindness. We live in a world where kindness is in short supply. It has become a forgotten virtue. For MOST, kindness is not the first response. But, YOU can make it be YOUR first response. Being kind is NOT the sign of a wishy-washy, weak-kneed religion. For the believer, it's an evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in your life. Paul summed all of this up when he said... *"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you"* (Ephesians 4:32). Kindness is rooted in the character of God, and He expects us to take the kindness we have received from Him and share it with everyone we know.