



Leading in Kindness

The fifth in a series of nine leadership devotionals based on the fruit of the Spirit

Susan Gibbons

Scripture Passages

“The Lord is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings.” (Psalm 145:17)

“But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” (Luke 6:35-36)

“Do you not realize that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4)

Theme: **Pay it Forward: Sharing God’s love through intentional acts of kindness**

No doubt you’ve heard the old adage, “You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar” but have you wondered why you’d want to catch them in the first place? Flies are ugly, nasty pests that carry disease and represent disgusting things like death, decay, and filth. They are man’s enemy in his fight for health. Apparently, the reason for catching them is to kill them before they can spread disease. But of course, the adage isn’t really concerned with pest control. The moral of the maxim is that it’s easier to “catch” our human enemies with kindness (honey) than with repellents (vinegar) like anger, harsh words, or indifference in order to win them over to our point of view. For the Christian, however, kindness is much more than a socially acceptable way of killing the enemy or of getting our way; kindness is “love’s activity.”¹

¹ George Morgan, “The Fruit of the Spirit,” ed. Warren Wiersbe, Classic Sermons on the Fruit of the Spirit (Grand Rapids: Kregel 2002) 15.

In Psalm 145 David proclaims and rejoices in God's sovereignty by "provide(ing) concrete illustrations of the divine activity which reveals God's grace, compassion, and love"² displayed through His kindness toward man "in all His ways" (v 17b). And in his choice of the Hebrew adjective *hasiyd* for God's kindness, David illuminates the activity of love as the "essential idea of the faithful kindness and piety that springs from mercy."³ This word is also applied to "those who manifest the goodness or mercy of God in their conduct (see 2 Samuel 22:26, Psalm 12:1-2, Micah 7:2),"⁴ and we see that kindness truly is the activity of love, with an emphasis on the gentleness of character that produces pure motives for the actions it will take. In God's case, His motive is His goodness (v 9) and is demonstrated through such kindnesses as championing the weak or threatened (v 14a), raising up the oppressed (v 14b), and providing for the needs and desires of all living things (v 16). Because God's *agape* love compels Him to act kindly, "His regal power is mobilized to care for the otherwise uncared for,"⁵ - each one of us!

Just as God's activity reveals His character⁶ Jesus taught that our activities reveal ours (see Matt 12:24, 33, 35, 15:19). If we are being transformed into the image of Christ, His character sweetens ours (like honey) and His kindness becomes *our* activities of love carried out in the mundane and seemingly trivial events of our lives (see Matthew 25:35-36), if we are courageous enough "to reach out with no expectations at all."⁷ Look closely at what Jesus said; Loving people, particularly our enemies, is not transactional (Luke 6:35). (And in case you're tempted to say, "I don't have any enemies" I encourage you to think about those people in your life who frustrate you, disappoint, annoy, or just don't "get" you. And then there are those who aspire after the same things that you do. If you're honest with yourself, when you think about "enemies" this way, you will probably identify at least a few "enemies" of your emotional programs for happiness.) No, we do not "do good" to others expecting *anything* in return - not a thank you, acceptance, a payback, or anything else! There is nothing being transacted here, nothing bartered or exchanged, no "pound of flesh" bought or sold, no IOU's owing or owed. We just respond to them in a way that reflects God's love because we love Him and are learning to love others His way; kindness allows us to "decide to be the one friend to the friendless, the one person reaching out when everyone has shut down, the one who will care enough to be innocent again."⁸ According to Jesus, being kind, or *chrestotes* in Greek, is a disposition characterized by easy graciousness and goodness toward our enemies as well as our friends. "It is the grace which pervades the whole nature, mellowing all that would have been harsh and austere. Thus, wine is mellowed with age (Like 5:39). The word is descriptive of one's disposition and does not necessarily entail acts."⁹ But since it is difficult to "see" a

² New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. 4, (Nashville: Abingdon 1996) 1260.

³ Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter eds., The Complete Word Study Dictionary, Old Testament. (Nashville: AMG 2003) 2624.

⁴ Baker and Carpenter 2624.

⁵ Walter Brueggemann, The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary. (Minneapolis: Augsburg 1984) 30.

⁶ New Interpreter's Bible 1260.

⁷ John Izzo, Second Innocence: Rediscovering Joy and Wonder, A Guide to Renewal in Work, Relationships, and daily life. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler 2004) 88.

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ Spiros Zodhiates, ed, The Complete WordStudy Dictionary New Testament. (Chattanooga: AMG 1993) 1482.

disposition except by its outward appearance, we will consider kindness in terms of some of its more visible signs. It is essential to remember that because it is God's own grace abiding in us, it is His disposition that will be expressed through our merciful, compassionate actions toward others, actions that are not means to any end (see Luke 6:35b-36), and that have no regard for the disposition and behavior of kindness' object.

Now Jesus was deliberate in His teaching on this subject and wanted us to understand that kindness toward friends and family is really no big deal because, "Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return" (Luke 6:32-36). Or, as the Paradoxical Commandments exhort, "If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish interior motives. Do good anyway" and, "The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway."¹⁰

Have you wondered why people sometimes respond to kindness with cynicism? Why is it so hard to just accept someone's courtesy toward us, to simply take their gesture at face value? I believe the answer can be stated in two words: "Social Darwinism."¹¹ Somewhere along the line, we bought into the lies that it's a "dog-eat-dog" world where "nice guys finish last" and "no good deed goes unpunished" and have systematically become skeptical of and resistant to kindness. We tell ourselves that the person being "nice" is weak, or must want something, must be playing some kind of angle, must be doing this nice thing to benefit herself if not to actually harm me (or catch me, the unsuspecting fly, with "honey") so I am unable to receive kindness graciously. And because I want to protect myself from people thinking the same thing about me, I'll not be kind toward others, either!

In a dog fight, you can always tell which dog will win - the one that's been fed.¹² Sadly, the world seems to have been feeding the wrong dog! We've rewarded and glorified the rabid dog, the senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless (see Romans 1:29-31), the rude, greedy, self-preserving, "I don't have time," the "it's all about me" dog ("dawg") that lurks in all of us. Although the New Testament writer Paul says that the key to maintaining God's peace is keeping our minds filled with, "whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report" (Philippians 4:8 NKJV), 34 million Americans a night¹³ watch Simon Cowell receive \$36 million a year¹⁴ for showcasing his "top attributes," rudeness and meanness. Meanwhile, rivalry in homes is intentionally created when wives are swapped, "desperate" housewives lie and cheat, 25 single women eagerly fight each other for

¹⁰ Kent Keith, *Jesus Did it Anyway: The Paradoxical Commandments for Christians*, (New York: Berkley 205) 177, 180.

¹¹ Linda Kaplan Thaler and Robin Koval, *The Power of Nice: How to Conquer the Business World with Kindness*. (New York: Doubleday 2006) 3.

¹² A common saying of Evangelist Greg Laurie of Harvest Christian Fellowship, Riverside, California.

¹³ <http://www.usatoday.com/life/television/nielsen.htm>

¹⁴ <http://www.forbes.com/lists/2006/53/P3QW.html>

one man using any means necessary to “win” him, talk show hosts interrupt their guests and guests talk over each other so that no one listens or is heard, and every week several groups of “professionals” (doctors, nurses, and attorneys) gratify their personal needs at work. But that, we’re told, is entertainment.

Meanwhile, the subtle message plays in the background; by inference the kinder, gentler dog, the one who plays by the rules is weak and undesirable, neglected, starved, and eventually killed off or discarded. But with them peace, patience, and kindness die as well and all that remains is a pack of wild, diseased, maniacal dogs. A poll conducted by ICR for the ABC News 20/20 program in 2006 quantifies some of the more obvious effects of this phenomenon and indicates that, “a vast majority of Americans, 75% of those surveyed, experience a range of rude behaviors in their *daily* lives...”¹⁵ including cursing, disrespectful behavior, inconsiderate and inappropriate use of cell phones and text messaging. And we are left wondering *who* let the dogs out?

But then we remember what Jesus said about not being afraid of those (dogs) who kill the body but only of He who, “after killing the body has power to throw you into hell” (Luke 12:4-5). We lift our eyes up to Him and rejoice because we know that God chooses “the weak things of the world to shame the strong” (1 Corinthians 1:27b), that it is in our weakness that He is shown strong (2 Corinthians 12:10), and that He has chosen us to be the lights that shine in the midst of unkindness (Matthew 5:14). And we find the courage to reach out to others in loving kindness and mercy, because *He* is kind and merciful toward us! (Luke 6:36)

In Romans 2:4, Paul underscores this causality between God’s kindness toward us and ours toward others as he cautions us not to “show contempt” for God’s disposition of kindness, tolerance, and patience toward us. Paul asserts that the same kindness and patience that led us to repentance now continue their transforming work in us but, by acting harshly and hastily with others, we insult God’s graciousness if we refuse to impart it to others. Now we can clearly see *how* patience is displayed when we elect “to participate in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world”¹⁶ – by *agape* love expressed as acts of kindness.

Fortunately, people in our organizations want to be treated kindly, according to Kriger and Seng,¹⁷ so we don’t have to look far to find folk in need of kindness’ healing balm. They live in the same self-serving, egocentric culture we do. They may even have picked up some unattractive habits along the way. But they want to experience kindness and we just happen to have hearts full of God’s kindness. How glorious is that? We can choose to reach out to them, to relieve their suffering if only for a moment through acts of kindness just as God reaches out to us. Sometimes the acts will be simple, like being fully present to just listen to someone, to smile and actually look at people as you pass by them in the hall, making a trip to the mailroom so your

¹⁵ http://www.icrsurvey.com/Study.aspx?f=ABC_Rudeness%20in%20America.html

¹⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison. (New York: Macmillan 1962) 220 quoted in, “No time to wait: The disappointing effects of impatience,” Leading in the Spirit: A Devotional Guide on the Leadership Values of the Fruit of the Spirit.

¹⁷ Mark Kriger and Yvonne Seng, “Leadership with inner meaning: A contingency theory of leadership based on the worldviews of five religions.” Leadership Quarterly: An International Journal of Political, Social, and Behavioral Science 16.5 (2005): 771-806.

assistant has a few extra minutes for her break or donating some of your time off to someone who needs it. Kindness can also be shown through sensitivity to what other people might be feeling. It's fine to be happy about your promotion, but if you know that someone else in your office really wanted that job, be kind enough to spare them the "end zone celebration." Sometimes kindness will be more risky like speaking up in defense of someone or being invested in people enough to try to rehabilitate poor performers instead of just tossing them aside. And if you do have to let them go, it can and should be done kindly and mercifully, not like "reality" television shows that showcase rude and humiliating dismissals.

Outside of our organizations, there are more opportunities to practice kindness if we get intentional about honoring God this way. From helping someone struggling to open a door to thanking the clerk who asks to see your ID before accepting your credit card instead of rolling your eyes at them, to doing a happy little dance I call "The Supermarket Shuffle," quietly stepping aside and letting the person behind you go ahead at the supermarket, the possibilities for showing God how much you appreciate His many kindnesses to you by paying them forward to others are endless. (If you haven't already, I encourage you to try "the supermarket shuffle." I think you'll love it because people with small, fussy children or busy, impatient adults act like you've just handed them a million dollars instead of just your place in line! It's guaranteed to make you smile inside as you watch them bask in the warmth of God's love for them in that moment. And somehow, even though I'm in hurry myself, God *always* multiplies the time I gave away.)

In his epistle to the Ephesians, Ignatius (AD 30-107) emphasized the duty incumbent on the Christian to model God's love to "other men" so that they might be led to repentance, instructed along the way by our actions. Isn't it amazing that God gives us so many opportunities to join Him in such important work, and isn't it a little frightening to think that our kindnesses toward others are among the tools He asks us to use?

Leadership and Organizational Development Concept

Self-sacrificial leadership

Humility in leadership

Wisdom of the Ages

"And pray ye without ceasing in behalf of other men. For there is in them hope of repentance that they may attain to God. See, then, that they be instructed by your works, if in no other way. Be ye meek in response to their wrath, humble in opposition to their boasting: to their blasphemies return your prayers; in contrast to their error, be ye steadfast in the faith; and for their cruelty, manifest your gentleness. While we take care not to imitate their conduct, let us be found their brethren in all true kindness..."

Ignatius, "Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians" Chapter 10.

Example of the Devotional

It was nearly 5:00 p.m. on Friday evening when Sally got the call from her boss. The deadline for the proposal certain members of her department had been working on had been moved up from Wednesday to Monday. He didn't care what she had to do, that proposal had better be on his desk first thing Monday morning, "Or else!" Sally realized that there was still research to be completed before the proposal could be formalized and knew that this new deadline would mean working through the weekend. She looked at her watch, then at her day timer. She had plans for this evening and wasn't about to work late. "Besides," she rationalized, "I'm the boss, not the worker bee. This is their job they just need to do it."

Sally marched out into her department and summoned everyone to "listen up." She proceeded to implement a mandatory working weekend and informed the staff that she would consider those who wouldn't work "B team" players. And, of course, "the B team players are the most expendable." Sally asked if there were any questions, which of course, there weren't, and went back to her office. A few minutes later, Sally emerged, coat and briefcase in hand, and informed her secretary that she would be unavailable for the remainder of the evening. She would come in the next morning, however, to "check on things" but made it clear that she did not expect there to be any problems.

The next morning, Sally phoned the office to ask about the proposal. The work was progressing but it was slow and tedious and many of the staff members were not cooperating with each other. Sally was furious and told her secretary that she was not about to return to work in order to supervise a "bunch of babies" and that they had better get their act together and do a good job.

On Monday, Sally took the proposal to her boss and commented on how it took all weekend to complete. He was grateful for her efforts and seemed pleased with the results. That afternoon, some of Sally's staff overheard her complaining about them to the manager of another department. For many, this was the last straw. They went to see her boss and informed him about the episode, along with several others. They refused to work for her any longer and demanded he take action.

Application of the Devotional

It's not difficult to imagine the positive impact the smallest kindness would have had in this situation, but Sally's rude and inconsiderate behavior set the tone, instead. From her initial rationalization of dumping the problem on her staff, to her abrupt demand for others to work, to her name-calling and temper tantrum on Saturday morning and not keeping her commitment to come back into the office, right on through to taking credit for the work and complaining to another manager about the staff on Monday, Sally's character was fully revealed. In each of those moments, she had the chance to deal kindly with people, to enter into their situation with

them, to be useful. Any act of kindness, done out of genuine concern, would have spoken volumes to her staff about their value, but Sally's cold, demanding, selfish demeanor told them quite a different story.

Practical Exercises

Since the basis for kindness is God's love toward us, take time to reflect on how He has shown that love to you personally. What are some of His kindnesses toward you? Next, think about how you have passed that kindness along to others. What are some of the opportunities you've missed in the past week? Do you show kindness to some people, but not others? Oh yes, and who are your enemies? You will probably want to start practicing kindness on them.

Like the four characteristics of the Holy Spirit's fruit that precede it, kindness is a matter of the heart that requires intentionality and purposeful cultivation. The spiritual discipline of simplicity might be a great place to focus. Since kindness is so often derailed because of our preoccupation with all of the things we fight so hard to possess, our time, our wealth, our jobs, and even our own lives, the practice of simplicity may help refocus our attention on what matters in God's economy - using things for His glory and loving people instead of using people and loving things, freeing us to put His love into action in the lives of everyone He sends our way.

Lastly, if you read any of the additional books I've listed below, please do so prayerfully. While many great practical, proven ideas for incorporating kindness into work are presented, it sometimes seems as though achieving success is the authors' true motivation, not the biblical motive of putting God's *agape* love into action. In other cases, there is a decidedly humanistic flavor to kindness, as though it is something that can be produced or conjured from a human heart. Please ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you consider these methods as well as your motives for implementing them.

Suggested Further Reading

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About the Author

Dr. Susan Gibbons is a graduate of the School of Global Leadership & Entrepreneurship at Regent University where she earned a Doctor of Strategic Leadership degree. She is an affiliate faculty member at several Christian universities and also provides consulting services to business owners, corporations, and churches. Susan brings 20 years of experience to her teaching and consulting work in her areas of expertise: strategic leadership, human resources management, and healthcare administration. Email: susan@smgassociates.org