

9 Flavors 1 Fruit Kindness

It was the end of a long and stressful day at work. She shuffled into the convenience store to buy a bag of microwave popcorn. Her plan was nothing more than to collapse on her couch and eat her comforting snack.

A rough looking man nearly three times her size stood in front of her in line. He turned toward her. "You look tired," he said.

She smiled, growing more alert as a young woman does when a strange man starts talking to her after dark. He turned toward the cashier and said that he was paying for her snack too.

She politely declined, pulling out her own wallet, but he handed the cashier a couple of extra dollars to cover her popcorn. On his way out, he smiled and said he hoped her night got better. He left the store and she never saw him again.

That one expression of kindness lifted a weight off her rather exhausted shoulders. With one gesture, there was now a little more hope in the world.

We're at week number 5 in 9 Flavors, 1 Fruit as we are taking a week to savor each one of the character qualities Paul lists as the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. Let's read our verses together from Galatians 5:22-23:

2 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

(Next Slide) The fruit of the Spirit is kindness. What does it mean to be kind? Is it just being nice? Is it that perfunctory politeness that we use to grease our daily interactions and get what we want out of life? No. Paul says the Holy Spirit is trying to grow in us something more than just good manners, or a polite society. Kindness goes much deeper.

The Greek word Paul uses here for kindness originally referred to something useful, good for its intended purpose. The perfect tool that does a perfect job. In classical Greek, it carried the idea of excellence. Over time, this word came to mean to act in a way that is excellent and beneficial towards someone else.

True kindness is other-focused. It is a sweetness of temper which puts others at ease. It's treating other people in a way they want to be treated. Kindness doesn't act out of obligation or a sense of social expectation. It doesn't do something in hopes of getting something in return. It's to have a tender concern for the other person. It's simply doing something that's good for the other person. In a world where everyone is on a journey of self-discovery, kindness is to embark on an adventure of other-discovery.

I. World Without Kindness

Doesn't it seem like kindness is something that is seriously lacking in our world? Even the most well-intentioned among us fall prey to selfishness and apathy. We live in a parched world thirsting for just a drink of kindness.

Steven Stifel wrote an article entitled, *The World's Getting Meaner Every Day*. He writes "You could invent the cure for cancer tomorrow and some jerk would still step up to a virtual podium to announce that your choice of shoes is just tacky." Every day, I encounter examples of selfishness and rudeness, where selfless acts of kindness seem to be the growing exception. There's a crisis of kindness. We live in a world where thirty thousand kids starve each day while we obsess over our calorie count.

This isn't just our imagination. For nearly 20 years, Gallup has released an annual Global Emotions Report where they survey people in 122 countries about their experiences with both positive and negative emotions. Negative levels reached a new low in 2022. Things started improving again last year, but it still feels like we are living in a mean world.

A. The Barrage of Bad News

There are several reasons for this. The first is the constant barrage of bad news. Since the 80s we have lived in a twenty-four hour news cycle where if-it-bleeds-it-leads headlines rotate around the clock. Our phones put the bad news right in our pocket, where negative news can pop up in our notifications at any minute of the day.

just last week, within a period about thirty seconds, I received three different notifications on my phone and a text from a friend that someone had someone had shot former president Trump. I turn on the TV and they are in full-on crisis mode, and repeating the same little bits of information over and over again, hour after hour.

You don't even have to specify bad news, because most of the news that grabs headlines and catches our attention or goes viral is bad news. Trump shot, bridge collapses, prices rise, tornadoes strike. I see 500 videos when someone messes up the national anthem, but the dozens of times it gets sung beautifully every day barely gets mentioned.

Have you heard of Mean World Syndrome? It is a theory of cognitive bias that says our perception of the world is worse the more media we consume. We witness so many murders and violent crimes in the shows we watch. We hear so many negative stories in the news. We are exposed to so much anger online, that we see the world worse than it is.

And the more negativity we consume in media, the more negative we see things. Perception becomes our reality. We look at the world through a lens that filters out kindness. As a result, it puts us more on edge. It makes us less likely to be kind, to be thoughtful, to be merciful.

B. Anti-Social Media

This constant barrage of bad news only gets exacerbated by social media, or maybe I should call it anti-social media, because all of these apps that are supposed to connect us, what they really do is disconnect and divide us.

As I figured out I wasn't learning anything new watching the news, I go online to get the latest updates, because these days news always breaks first on social media. The problem is for every byte of news you get on social media, you get a gigabyte or rumors and rampant speculation.

Twitter, Reddit, Tik-Tok, Facebook were all blowing up with baseless conspiracy theories from the left and right, spouted by people just as ignorant as I. Then I have friends and loved ones who start piling on with their own unjustified conjectures.

We say things behind our keyboards and screens we never used to say face to face. It's called the disinhibition effect. Our apparent anonymity makes us feel free to call names, launch personal attacks, and make baseless accusations. Random speculation that used to be confined to the office break room, or over the backyard fence, are now broadcast to audiences of hundreds even thousands.

Plus we know that online pot-stirrers, flammers and trolls attract more eyeballs and engagement than does being kind

. Social media apps are designed to put those comments front and center, because they generate more traffic and thus more advertising revenue. Controversy sells.

We also tend to think of our online interactions as a game, and not as real life interaction. We don't think the regular rules apply. Since more and more of our lives are online and connected, this negativity is creeping into more and more places in our lives.

C. Increased polarization

Another ingredient of this meanness recipe is increased polarization. We are taking up sides on everything. It seems that we will argue about anything. The middle is either getting smaller or the extremes are getting louder.

D. Kindness as Weakness

Another factor in our growing cultural nastiness is that many view kindness as weakness. To show kindness is to be vulnerable. We live in a give-no-quarter, take-no-prisoners, shark eat shark, survival of the fittest kind of the world. It seems much more useful to be tough and ruthless. The world seems to reward the competitive, not the kind.

II. Turning it Around

How do we turn this around? How can we make kindness more highly prized? Can we pry loose, finger by finger, the clutching monkey-grip of selfishness and give our hearts a little breathing room?

A. The Kindness of God

It begins with focusing on who God is. Kindness begins with Him, because kindness is an essential part of who God is. Kindness did not begin with Ellen. It's been around since before the beginning of Time. It's an attribute of God Himself. God is the kindest person you will ever know. If you have a hard time seeing God that way, you need to get to know Him better. The prophet Isaiah declares in Isaiah 63:7,

*I will tell of the kindnesses of the Lord,
the deeds for which he is to be praised,
according to all the Lord has done for us—
yes, the many good things
he has done for Israel,
according to his compassion and many kindnesses.*

The apostle Paul reminds us in Romans 2:4 that it is the riches of God's kindness that woo us to salvation. Jesus tells us in Matthew 5 that God showers his love on even his enemies, "*He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*"

All of creation testifies to the kindness of our Creator. Andy Lee writes, "Fingernail moons accented by the bright evening star, burnt horizons blazing at sunset, and impatient daffodils pushing through frozen earth in early spring silently proclaim a good God. A kind God."

B. The Kindness of Jesus

God is kind and Jesus is the perfect representation of the Father. Jesus showed perfect kindness throughout his time on earth. His presence was sought in equal measure by men, women and children. A huge part of what attracted such large crowds to Jesus was his innate kindness. He was good to people.

The poor and outcast enjoyed his company as much as the rich and powerful. Jesus would stop what he was doing to show kindness to a poor woman who had been sick for decades. He put an entire crowd on pause to tend to a grieving widow on her way to bury her only son. Jesus put the important on hold to welcome the little children. He didn't hesitate to touch the untouchable, to love the unlovely, and to listen to those easily ignored. He shared the table with nobodies and somebodies alike. That's the kindness of our Savior.

The kindness of the Father and of the Son meet in the cross showing us the ultimate mercy that forgives our sins, changes our hearts and opens the heart of God to us.

C. The Kindness of the Church

It only follows then that those who claim to be the people of God, those who have been called out of the world, and have devoted their lives to following Jesus should therefore display the

very kindness of the lover of their souls. Micah 6:8 says, *“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”*

Kindness is not weakness. The kindness of God through his people has changed the world. The world that Jesus walked in had very few institutions of mercy that bestowed kindness on people. Schools intended for the education of the masses were unheard of. There were few hospitals, few shelters for the poor, few homes for the orphans, few protections for the defenseless. But wherever followers of Jesus have gone, such institutions have flourished and kindness has thrived.

A lot of what we do as a church is to show the kindness of our God and Savior to a world that desperately needs kindness. Later today, we have a group of kids traveling to Iowa to show God’s kindness to those hit by a tornado. Last winter we gave away a bunch of heaters and this summer we’ve given away a bunch of fans, because we believe we have a kind and loving God. The same goes for the suitcases we’ve gathered for kids caught in a system that far too often treats them as disposable. We’ve got ladies who are making quilts to give to those in nursing homes. We’ve got people who serve at the food pantry. We give away money every month as an expression of God’s kindness. Every year, we do a Serve Sunday as a way of putting action to our words.

We are to be champions of kindness in an unkind world.

III. Growing in Kindness

How do we do that? Well, let me give you some ways to become more kind. These are practical and biblical ways to be good to other people.

A. Listen to Someone

First, you can show kindness by listening to someone. In a world where everyone wants to shout their opinions we should be kind enough to listen. James 1:19 says, *“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.”* One of the kindest things you can do for someone is not just hear their words, but listen to their hearts. Invest a cup of coffee and an hour of your time to listen to someone.

B. Encourage Someone

When we do open our mouths and say something, make sure it’s encouraging words. We show kindness when we encourage someone. If you had a home on the range, then seldom would be heard a discouraging word, but in these parts, discouraging words are all over the place. But 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says, *“Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up.”* Do your words beat up, or do they build up? . (Brag on Teresa for encouraging the other girl in the car accident.) Encouraging someone is one of the simplest acts of kindness you can do.

C. Smile at Someone

One of the simplest ways to show kindness is simply to smile at someone. This is something that pairs nicely with encouraging words.

Let me share a couple of Proverbs with you. Proverbs 15:13 says, *“A happy heart makes the face cheerful,”* and Proverbs 11:22 declares, *“A cheerful heart is good medicine.”* I’ve always thought these verses were about the power of cheerfulness on ourselves, but they could just as easily describe the benefit our cheerfulness bestows on someone else. Our cheerful heart brings cheer to our face which is a soothing balm to someone else.

This is a scientific fact. The anterior cingulate cortex is the part of your brain that deals with emotional processing. This part of your brain has what’s called a mirroring response. When you see someone else smile, it prompts a sympathetic reaction in your brain which triggers movement in your own facial muscles, causing you to smile in turn. Smiles are literally contagious, and they give a measurable emotional boost to those who receive them.

Smiles are easy, free, and good for you. Poet William Arthur Ward says, *“A warm smile is a universal language of kindness.”*

D. Forgive Someone

The most God-like way to be kind to someone is to forgive them, because this is the ultimate way God shows His kindness to us – by forgiving us. Paul ties our kindness directly to forgiveness in Ephesians 4:32, *“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”*

Whatever they said, whatever they did, quit holding it against them. Let it go. Don’t bring it up again. Don’t use it as leverage. Don’t guilt trip them. Forgive them.

E. Put Someone Before You

Let me leave you with a general biblical principle for showing kindness that applies to all kinds of situation, and that is to put someone before you. The essence of kindness is being good to others, and a sure and certain way of doing that is to put yourself second. Put others first. It is to keep our thoughts from revolving in geosynchronous orbit around Planet Numero Uno?

Romans 12:10 urges, *“Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.”* Philippians 2:3-4 likewise calls us to, *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”*

Putting other first isn’t about self-denial. Rather it’s the path to true self-discovery. Kindness often returns when least expected and most needed. It has been said that kindness is like a boomerang; it always comes back to you.

It's the biblical principle of sowing and reaping. You will reap what you sew. If you plant seeds of kindness, you will harvest a crop of kindness. It is this principle that lay behind Jesus' words in Luke 6:38, *"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."*

It's only when we put others first that the curtain rises on real life. Jesus said it is more blessed to give than to receive. He wasn't lying. This is more than a pithy quote; it is the prescription for authentic joy.

When Herbert Hoover, the 31st president of the United States was a young man, he along with some other students were responsible for scheduling entertainment for Stanford University. In 1896, they scheduled a world renown Polish pianist Ignacy Jan Paderewski for a recital. What these young men didn't realize, however, is that they scheduled the performance during Easter break. Attendance was so sparse that ticket sales were far below the minimum promised to Paderewski.

Hoover presented the paltry amount to the pianist with an IOU to pay the rest later with his apologies. The great pianist seeing the unfortunate situation the young man was in told him to take out whatever expenses they had in putting on the show, and then he would take the rest as full payment. It was a selfless act of kindness.

Fast forward to the post-war years following World War I. Ignacy Jan Paderewski is appointed the prime minister of a Poland that has been devastated by war. The United States, under the leadership of Herbert Hoover as the administrator of the American Relief Administration provided tons of food and rations to the starving citizens of Poland. Millions of lives were saved.

In 1929 Hoover became the president of the United States, and Paderewski travelled to Paris to thank him personally on behalf of his country for the much needed aid that had saved his beloved Poland. According to one account, President Hoover replied, "That's all right, Mr. Paderewski, I knew the need was great. Besides, you don't remember it, but you helped me once, when I was a student at college, and I was in a hole."