

Our Part In The Sanctification Process (Part Six): Cultivating Kindness

Cultivating the Fruit of Kindness

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We will turn to several related scriptures upon which I intend to weave a theme for this message. Most scriptural references will be taken either from the Lockman Foundation's *Amplified Bible* or the Lockman Foundation's *New American Standard Bible* or the *New American Standard Bible E-Prime*. All three of these versions are available in electronic format on the Church of the Great God website.

Proverbs 14:10 (AMP) The heart knows its own bitterness, and no stranger shares its joy.

This aphorism appears to be a self-evident appraisal of the sense of isolation one human being feels from everyone else, especially when enduring a bitter trial. But on another level, it could also be interpreted as a stinging indictment to the whole human race for refusing to love our neighbors as we do ourselves (referencing Mark 12:31). Let us go back to another reference to strangers in Exodus 22.

Exodus 22:21 (AMP) "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

Exodus 23:9 (NASB) "You shall not oppress a stranger, since you yourselves know the feelings of a stranger, for you also were strangers in the land of Egypt."

God instructed Moses to gently remind our ancient forbears of the priceless value of their 430 years of suffering in slavery, a horrendous experience to be sure, but one giving them a unique insight into the universal insatiable need for kindness and compassion.

As one old Yiddish Proverb proclaims, “There is nothing so whole as a broken heart,” or alternately “The only whole heart is a broken heart.” Trials and suffering, when properly processed, kindle intense compassion and kindness. We, as constituents of the Israel of God (referencing Galatians 6: 16), at the time prior to our calling, were also, from our perspective, total strangers—strangers to Almighty God, strangers to ourselves, and strangers to the commonwealth of spiritual Israel. As metaphorical appendages or organs of Christ’s Body, we are commanded to replace the feelings of isolation, self-centeredness, self-pity, or bitterness with kindness or compassion for one another and paradoxically to ourselves as well, remembering that our Savior taught us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Consider the apostle Paul’s use of the body analogy to admonish the Corinthians to practice kindness and compassion.

I Corinthians 12:26 (AMP) And if one member suffers, all the parts [share] the suffering; if one member is honored, all the members [share in] the enjoyment of it.

Galatians 6:1-3 (AMP) Brethren, if any person is overtaken in misconduct or sin of any sort, you who are spiritual [who are responsive to and controlled by the Spirit] should set him right and restore and reinstate him, without any sense of superiority and with all gentleness, keeping an attentive eye on yourself, lest you should be tempted also. [We all know of compassionate caregivers who have nearly burned out and crashed because they have not taken care of themselves. I know of several in my own immediate family.] Bear (endure, carry) one another’s burdens and troublesome moral faults, and in this way fulfill and observe perfectly the law of Christ (the Messiah) and complete what is lacking [in your obedience to it]. For if any person thinks himself to be somebody [too important to condescend to shoulder another’s load] when he is nobody [of superiority except in his own estimation], he deceives and deludes and cheats himself.

Now Satan, of course, would encourage us to go to the opposite extreme by considering ourselves not only to be inferior to everyone else, but unworthy of forgiveness or any compassion from God Almighty or anyone else. In my

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previous sermon on cultivating the spirit of love, I warned that Satan has cleverly foisted the damnable heresy that self-love is equivalent to self-centeredness or selfishness, and that to love or to esteem others means to loathe, denigrate, or put down ourselves.

Likewise, Satan would like to convince us that in order to be kind to others, we must wallow and suffer in our loathsome unworthiness. This behavior does not equate one iota to humility. It is impossible, without a high degree of hypocrisy and insincerity to show kindness to anyone else, whether sibling, friend, stranger, or gasp! even an enemy if we hate or loathe ourselves.

On the night He was betrayed, at His last Passover in the flesh, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ prayed to our heavenly Father that those the Father brought to Him (including us, brothers and sisters) would not remain strangers, but acquire and develop a loving sibling relationship.

John 17:9-11 (AMP) I am praying for them. I am not praying (requesting) for the world, but for those You have given Me, for they belong to You. All [things that are] Mine are Yours, and all [things that are] Yours belong to Me; and I am glorified in (through) them. [They have done Me honor; in them My glory is achieved.] And [now] I am no more in the world, but these are [still] in the world, and I am coming to You. Holy Father keep in Your Name [in the knowledge of Yourself] those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We [are one] Family members [not strangers anymore!].

John 17:20-21 (AMP) Neither for these alone do I pray [it is not for their sake only that I make this request], but also, for all those who will ever come to believe in (trust in, cling to, rely on) Me through their word and teaching [He is referring to us, brothers and sisters.], that they all may be one, [just] as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be one in Us, so that the world may believe and be convinced that You have sent Me.

This miraculous transformation from stranger to beloved sibling did not take place without an overwhelming cost—involving intense suffering, hideous

torture, bloodshed, and the agonizing death of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 2:17-18 (NASB) Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

One of the reasons we are able count it all joy (referencing James 1:2) when we enter fiery trials is that we learn sympathy, empathy, and compassion for those going through similar circumstances as we are, enabling us to offer comfort and encouragement. The word “compassion” derives from the Latin root *com*—meaning “together” and *pati*—meaning “suffer,” and when combined signify “to suffer with,” or empathizing with another’s pain, implying a basic mutuality in the experience of suffering.

Hebrews 5:8 (AMP) Although He was a Son, He learned [active, special] obedience through what He suffered.

Jesus learned the kind of compassion and empathy through agonizing suffering to qualify as our High Priest. As God’s called-out ones, we are similarly qualifying to become priests and mediators in His Kingdom. Perhaps the temptations and trials that we have struggled mightily to overcome our entire lives may provide inspiration for those going through similar trials at some time in the future or perhaps provide comfort for a brother or sister in Christ right now.

In his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul cautions that God the Father and our loving Elder Brother Jesus Christ require that we exercise kindness and compassion as kind of quid pro quo (a word we have heard a lot in the despicable sham impeachment trial with which we have been tortured the past three months) a genuine quid pro quo for what They (God the Father and our Savior Jesus Christ) have already done for us.

Ephesians 4:32 (AMP) And become useful and helpful and kind to one another, tenderhearted (compassionate, understanding, loving-hearted), forgiving one another [readily and freely], as God in Christ forgave you.

We, of course, are mindful of this reciprocal condition as Jesus taught the disciples to pray in Matthew 6:12, 14: (AMP) “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven (left, remitted, and let go of the debts, and have given up resentment against) our debtors. . . . For if you forgive people their trespasses [their reckless and willful sins, leaving them, letting them go, and giving up resentment], your heavenly Father will also forgive you.” But if we harbor a resentment against our spiritual siblings, we run the grave risk of not only turning them into strangers, but also becoming a stranger or adversary to Almighty God, as Christ warned in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:22-24 (NASB) “But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.”

As we exercise forgiveness and let go of resentment, our capacity for kindness and compassion increases exponentially. Jesus’ half-brother James cautioned that kindness and compassion are not merely reified abstractions, but must be demonstrated by concrete behaviors.

James 2:15-16 (AMP) If a brother or sister is poorly clad and lacks food for each day, And one of you says to him, Good-bye! Keep [yourself] warm and well fed, without giving him the necessities for the body, what good does that do?

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James reminds us that while kindness may begin as a warm fuzzy feeling or thought impulse, it does not mature as a spiritual fruit until it becomes a motor behavior, a concrete act or deed like visiting and providing for the widows and the fatherless (referencing James 1:27). Let us look in Mark 12 where Jesus identifies the two greatest commandments encapsulating the essence of the Decalogue.

Mark 12:30-31 (NASB) “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Our Elder Brother reminds us as a bare minimum we have an obligation to love and cherish our spiritual siblings as well as all our fellow human beings, reciprocating and passing forward the same lovingkindness God has shown us—a spiritual *quid pro quo*. But our Savior has set the bar much, much, much higher, inviting us to love our enemies and pray for those who have persecuted us.

Matthew 5:43-48 (AMP) You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy; but I tell you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, to show that you are the children of your Father Who is in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the wicked and on the good, and makes the rain fall upon the upright and the wrongdoers [alike]. For if you love those who love you, what reward can you have? Do not even the tax collectors do that? And if you greet only your brethren [some have not even learned to do that], what more than others are you doing? Do not even the Gentiles (the heathen) do that? You, therefore, must be perfect [growing into complete maturity of godliness in mind and character, having reached the proper height of virtue and integrity], as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Over the past three years, the ‘progressive’ drive-by media (especially CNN, MSNBC, as well as the mainstream media) have been spewing out a steady stream of slander and vile putrid hatred, thoroughly poisoning the minds of a large segment of unwary, gullible citizens among Jacob’s offspring, dividing

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families, friends, and neighbors—successfully turning millions of people not only into strangers, but into mortal enemies as well.

Kindness and compassion (warm-heartedness, tender-heartedness, and goodwill) is an endangered resource in modern Israel. Many pundits are grimly predicting an impending violent civil war if the verbal tirades continue to escalate. And it looks as though they will.

We dare not allow the spiritual fruit of kindness to wither and die on the vine. My specific purpose today will be to provide some biblical strategies to cultivate the fruit of kindness, including showing daily gratitude to our heavenly Father for His steady stream of blessings, for the sacrifice of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, reciprocating the kindness He has shown to us, by showing self-compassion to ourselves, enabling us to show kindness to our spiritual siblings, our neighbors, and eventually our enemies, whom we need to regard as potential future siblings.

While the rest of the world around us disintegrates into warring factions, we must stop being strangers to God the Father, strangers to our Savior, Redeemer, and High Priest Jesus Christ, strangers to ourselves, strangers to our spiritual siblings, and strangers to our fellow human beings, including our current enemies, all potential offspring of Almighty God.

Paradoxically, we should express gratitude for the trials and pain with which we have endured in order to develop the sympathy and empathy to demonstrate kindness and compassion to our spiritual siblings. Like our Lord and Savior, the more we have shared trials, temptation, and even excruciating pain, the more kindness we can express to others because we have similarly suffered and can sincerely feel their pain. Our lead-off scripture, Proverbs 14:10 stated: “The heart knows its own bitterness, and no stranger shares its joy.” But when we become transformed from stranger to spiritual sibling, we can and should demonstrate genuine compassion (that is, the ability to suffer with), and the capacity to share genuine happiness and joy with members of God’s Family.

The process of love, kindness, and compassion was initiated by Almighty God. The apostle John assures us that we love Him, because He first loved us (referencing I John 4:19). When we consider our unmerited pardon

through His grace, we should be profoundly motivated to return thanks and lovingkindness, as well as pass it forward to our fellow humans.

In her book, *Fresh Fruit: Meditations on the Fruit of the Holy Spirit*, Jennifer Chamberlain points out that the word ‘kindness’ is translated as ‘*charis*’ more frequently than any other translation. *Charis* is defined as (a) grace, as a gift or blessing brought to man by Jesus Christ, (b) favor, (c) gratitude, thanks, (d) a favor, kindness. Notice how gratitude and kindness is intertwined in the overarching definition of grace. God’s gift or blessing, His loving-kindness has been freely given to us to motivate us to reciprocate by walking in good works He has prepared for us to do including showing the same kindness and compassion to others as He has lavished upon us through our priceless calling.

We remember Paul’s counsel to the Ephesians and to us in Ephesians 2:8-10: (NASB) “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

As we are called by Almighty God, placed upon the pottery wheel, and eventually into the fiery kiln as steps in the sanctifying process, we demonstrate that we love our Creator and our fellow human beings by keeping His holy law—reciprocally showing our love to Him and to our neighbors the same love as God expects us to demonstrate to ourselves. As the apostle Peter has explained, God is longsuffering (extraordinarily patient) toward us, not desiring that any of us should perish, but that all should turn to repentance (referencing II Peter 3:9).

Psalm 103:13-14 (AMP) As a father loves and pities his children, so the Lord loves and pities those who fear Him [with reverence, worship, and awe]. For He knows our frame, He [earnestly] remembers and imprints [on His heart] that we are dust.

Psalm 103:17-18 (AMP) But the mercy and loving-kindness of the Lord are from everlasting to everlasting upon those who reverently and worshipfully fear Him, and His righteousness is to children’s

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children—to such as keep His covenant [hearing, receiving, loving, and obeying it] and to those who [earnestly] remember His commandments to do them [imprinting them on their hearts].

In his article “Two New Studies Show the Power of Gratitude and Kindness,” Michael Murray writes, “I believe there is no greater emotional need than appreciation. The funny thing is that the things we really want in life are usually best obtained by giving more. In other words, if you want to feel more appreciation in your life, begin with expressing more appreciation.”

Don Hooser in his sermon/article “The Fruit of the Spirit—Kindness: From the Heart to the Helping Hand, cited a 2003 study involving 16,000 subjects from 37 cultures around the world who were asked about their most desired trait in a mate. For both sexes, the first preference was *kindness*!

Donna Cameron in her article, “Gratitude Is a Companion to Kindness,” insists that gratitude neutralizes negative emotions, claiming “I’ve found that it’s difficult to be angry or fearful when one experiences gratitude. If my heart is grateful, I feel no need to summon ire if I am cut off in traffic or spoken to harshly. I’m less likely to be frightened by a new or daunting situation. Perhaps there’s simply no space for these emotions when I am filled with gratitude, or maybe gratitude has a way of neutralizing the effects of these negative emotions.”

We might want to re-tool the acronym GIGO, originally signifying “Garbage In Garbage Out,” replacing it with “Gratitude In Gratitude Out,” that is, after experiencing sincere gratitude for God’s grace or unmerited pardon that we pass the kindness or compassion abounding in ourselves to our spiritual siblings and our neighbors.

John Ritenbaugh in his July 1998 *Forerunner* Personal: “The Fruit of the Spirit: Kindness,” maintains that the best basis for kindly service to man is experiencing God's mercy. Indeed, we can say that long before a person can be truly merciful, God has been merciful to him. Religion is not pure and undefiled unless it manifests itself in this quality of kindly given service (referencing [James 1:27](#)). John continues, “Perhaps from this example, we can draw the conclusion that we have not shown our brother all the kindness we owe him unless we have shown him the ‘kindness of God.’”

Kindness and compassion for others is related to recognizing our common shared fragile condition we share with every other human being.

Psychologist Kristin Neff in her book *Self- Compassion* contends that compassion involves the recognition and clear seeing of suffering. It also involves feelings of kindness for people who are suffering, so that the desire to help—to ameliorate suffering—emerges. Finally, compassion involves recognizing our shared human condition, flawed and fragile as it is.

The apostle Paul reminds us that the same temptations and trials we endure are common to the whole human race (referencing I Corinthians 10:13), while the apostle Peter cautions us that we should not regard fiery trials, pain, and suffering as strange, unusual, or alien to us (referencing I Peter 4: 12). We can harvest these painful afflictions into our experience repertoire in order not to be a stranger to someone else's need for kindness and compassion.

In several of my previous sermons and articles, I referred to an old popular Lakota Proverb, “Never criticize a man until you have walked a mile in his moccasins,” a metaphorical aphorism stressing the vital importance of empathy and shared experience in all human relationships. Dr. Kristin Neff, in her book, *Self Compassion*, enlarges on this concept of kindness and empathy, insisting that “Although compassion involves feelings of care and concern for others, it also involves taking the perspective of those who are suffering—walking a mile in their shoes, so to speak.”

Theologian Charles Seet, in his article/sermon “II Peter 1:7 Cultivating Brotherly Kindness,” asserts that “One who has suffered loss can better understand the pain of others who are suffering loss. One who has gone through failure can understand better the disappointment of others who are going through failure. One who has been sick can better understand the predicament of others who are sick. One who has been stressed with tremendous work pressures can better understand the feelings of others who were similarly stressed. When the words of comfort are given by a fellow-sufferer, they can mean so much more and are treasured much more than words given by anyone else.”

When I lost my precious son Michael to a premature death, my turbulent, grief-saturated emotions were buoyed up by e-mails and letters from sympathetic brethren, including one from the late Alan Aldrich, who described in some detail the feelings he experienced when his son died prematurely.

Those who feel shortchanged on spiritual gifts might want to look at their treasure troves of life experiences, bad, good, and other, potentially providing valuable resources for comforting and encouraging others. No stranger may share our grief, but a spiritual sibling who has successfully processed a similar painful or sorrowful experience may provide encouragement and comfort for bereaved brethren, preventing them from falling into a downward spiral of bitterness or abject depression. As Kristin Neff, in her book *Self-Compassion*, suggests, “Rather than condemning yourself for your mistakes and failures, you need to look upon these experiences as resources, using these valuable painful memories to soften your heart, thereby inspiring compassion and kindness to others.”

John Ritenbaugh, in his July 1998 *Forerunner* Personal, “The Fruit of the Spirit: Kindness” asserted that Jesus Christ thoroughly walked in our shoes, writing that “God has not merely pitied us from a distance, but He has entered into our life, on our level. The Creator stooped from His high and pure abode as glorious God, and veiled His divinity for an abode of animated clay. He assumed our nature, was tempted in all things like us, took our sicknesses, and bore our infirmities for the express purpose of being a merciful and faithful High Priest. He did not enter our world and yet maintain a status superior to us. He truly walked in our shoes and still went about doing good.”

“Christ,” Paul adds in Galatians 1:4 “gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.” John concludes, “Who knows how many individual acts of kindness—from the conception of the plan to its fulfillment—are contained within this simple statement?”

Last weekend, Julie and I had the distinct privilege and pleasure to attend two family reunions back to back in Arizona—one with our spiritual siblings

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on the Sabbath in Phoenix and the next day with two of my first cousins in Sun City, with whom I had not seen in over a decade. Friday evening, we pulled into the Stites Ranch, north of Phoenix, amidst the saguaro, ocotillo (and mesquite where the coyotes and Javelina's roam freely), a perfect Zane Gray setting. I had never been there before, but as a perpetual cowboy at heart, I instantaneously felt very much at home—especially when Julie and I were greeted with such a warm welcome by Rick and Linda Stites.

The next day we were joined by a group of affectionate, compassionate, and kind people, some, whose names I had read previously on our prayer list but had never met in person before. Within minutes it seemed that we were no longer strangers, but we had become full-fledged, spiritual siblings, sharing our previous experiences in the church, our burdens, and joys—it was kind of like the same phenomenon we experience annually at the Feast of Tabernacles. Several times Rick Stites remarked, “Is this the Feast of Tabernacles?”

One of my mentors, the late Bob Hoops, would say continually, “the weekly Sabbath is actually a miniature Feast of Tabernacles as the Feast of Tabernacles is a miniature of the Millennium, when the entire population will live under the benevolent rule of Christ in the Wonderful World Tomorrow.

Back in 1973, the members of the Rapid City congregation, pastored by Bob Hoops, would regularly host brethren in their homes from several hundred miles away, from Billings, Montana, Gillette, Wyoming, and from the state capitol, Pierre, South Dakota 172 miles to the east. We would have regular church services, a Bible Study, a potluck, and a Spokesmen's Club after the Sabbath. This practice of hosting remote families in our homes Friday evenings led to a high degree of bonding among brethren who were, in many ways, just as geographically scattered as we are today. The Rapid City congregation in 1973, having barely 70 members, exuded a remarkable quantity of first love (the kind the church at Ephesus sorely needed) taking care of one another as family.

When Herbert W. Armstrong turned over the reins of our previous fellowship to Joseph Tkach, he implored him to “emphasize the family.” Certainly, Joseph Tkach gave it plenty of lip service, frequently proclaiming

in Spanish, “Nosotros Somos Familia” and occasionally playing a clip of the 1979 popular song “We are Family” by Sister Sledge. But when he embraced the extreme Antinomian, anti-law position, rejecting God’s Sabbath, he openly declared war on God and God’s Family. As Jesus warned in the Olivet prophecy, “Because lawlessness is increased, most peoples love will grow cold” (referencing Matthew 24:12). Paradoxically, while Joseph Tkach failed miserably to “emphasize the family,” God Almighty, by scattering the church into thousands of tiny flocks, also appointed responsible, loving shepherds throughout the hopelessly scattered greater church of God, who rescued the scattered flock from spiritual oblivion.

Richard Ritenbaugh in his August 1997 sermon, “The Parable of the Mustard Seed” contends that first four parables of Matthew 13 (Sower, Wheat and Tares, Mustard Seed, and Leaven) all describe Satan’s plan to destroy the church: (1) attacking at early stages of growth, (2) infiltrating through secret agents, (3) influencing unchecked natural growth beyond God’s ordained limits, inviting worldly and demonic influence, and (4) influencing yielding to sin and false doctrine.

In the Parable of the Mustard Seed, when it reaches maturity, it is greater than the herbs, and becomes a tree. What is going on here? How did a mustard *plant* become a *tree*? That is the point! Jesus, the Creator, knew His botany! He knew because He had put it there. A mustard plant stays a mustard plant throughout its entire life! It can never become a tree. *That is the point!* Something went wrong!

Those of us who were called during the Radio Church of God era generally met in relatively small venues, like the Laidlaw Legion Hall on Lake Street in Minneapolis. When the congregation started to grow, and we had to assemble in the Minneapolis Labor Temple, we began to lose the feeling of being family, and cliques emerged to maintain some degree of cohesiveness. When I left the 70-member Rapid City Congregation in 1974 (having gotten to know everyone in this fellowship) moving to the Big Sandy PM Congregation (having over 1300 people), the intimacy of family structure again disappeared.

When I moved to Pasadena in 1977, I chose to fellowship with a smaller congregation in Glendale to seek more of a family atmosphere. As

headquarters began to burgeon like an out-of-control mustard tree, the concept of God's government began to devolve from a family structure, to a hierarchical structure not unlike the Roman Catholic Church, a military structure, with the man at the helm taking on the title of Pastor General, to a cold impersonal corporate structure, measuring results by physical growth—numbers of magazines distributed, numbers of new contacts, or the numbers of television stations added.

God Almighty, by chopping down this mutant mustard tree, just like the massive tree in Nebuchadnezzar's nightmare (referencing Daniel 4), gave a second chance to all who sincerely desired to seek the message of God's truth to rekindle their first love by finding smaller, more intimate family sized groups (such as Colton, Phoenix, Amarillo, and Round Rock), served by shepherds rather than hirelings, carrying out the forgotten mandate given to our previous fellowship of "emphasizing the family."

The small loving family structure provides the only venue where one can freely share both sorrow and joy with no sense of awkwardness or timidity and the best venue to provide spiritual maturity.

Consider our calling, brothers and sisters, as it says in

I Corinthians 1:26-27 (AMP) For [simply] consider your own call brethren; not many [of you were considered to be] wise according to human estimates and standards, not many influential and powerful, not many of high and noble birth. [No] for God selected (deliberately chose) what in the world is foolish to put the wise to shame, and what the world calls weak to put the strong to shame.

Since my baptism on April 4, 1966, I have never met anyone in God's church who has led a charmed life. In one way or another, we are all severely damaged goods, having endured afflictions such as divorce, untimely death of a spouse or offspring, car accidents, legal problems, illness, maladies such as diabetes, cancer, heart disease, being unjustly accused by a hopelessly corrupt legal system, vexation from an unconverted mate, being unjustly fired, being lied about, making foolish financial decisions.

It reminds me of a dialogue in the movie *Rio Bravo*, where an impatient rancher asks the sheriff (played by John Wayne), “All you got is a gimpy old man and a drunk to help you? To which the sheriff replied, “That’s what I’ve got.” When God called us, He could similarly proclaim to the worldly-wise “That’s what I’ve got,” but just as the sheriff used a gimp and a recovering drunk, against tremendous odds, to take care of the bad guys, God Almighty can and will make spiritual heroes of us, eventually confounding the pomposity of the worldly leaders who have been botching things up for nearly 6,000 years.

Ephesians 1:4 (AMP) Even as [in His love] He chose us [actually picked us out for Himself as His own] in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy (consecrated and set apart for Him) and blameless in sight, even above reproach, before Him in love.

God knew our proclivities to sin and make foolish mistakes well before He called us. I regret to say that my biggest blunders and colossal mistakes occurred after my calling rather than before, sorely grieving God’s Holy Spirit, with which I had been sealed (referencing Ephesians 4:30).

Physician and author Lissa Rankin in her article on the “Virtue of Compassion,” claims that “Most of us have harsh inner critics who judge us, put us down, and punish us when we make mistakes. As long as we have an inner general beating us up for our inevitable imperfections, we’ll find it difficult to be compassionate with others when they reveal their humanness.” A 10th century Jewish Scholar, Hasdai Ibn Shapru once wrote, “If one is cruel to himself, how can we expect him to be compassionate to others?”

In Proverbs 11:17, we learn that: (AMP) “The merciful, kind, and generous man benefits himself [for his deeds return to bless him], but he who is cruel and callous [to the wants of others] brings on himself retribution.” When we feel God’s kindness to us, our gratitude motivates us to show kindness to others, which creates a reciprocal blessing to us.

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John Ritenbaugh describes the ripple effects of kindness, asserting that the consequences of kindness are incalculable for such a spirit can ripple out to touch the lives of those far removed from the original act. Kindness sows the seeds that can only bear good fruit.

Psychologist Juliana Breines, in her article “Three Researched-Based Ways to Cultivate Kindness in Your Life,” reported that generous people live longer, writing that “One of the best ways to increase our own happiness is to do things that make other people happy. In countless studies, kindness and generosity have been linked to greater life satisfaction, stronger relationships, and better mental and physical health—generous people even live longer.”

Greg Ebie, in his article on the “Fruit of the Spirit, Part 7: Kindness” describes kindness as “love in action.” Kindness is not an attitude we develop in our heart; it is not a new way of thinking about the situations we encounter. Kindness has to get out; kindness held in us not kindness at all.

Gary Petty, in the same vein, in his sermon/article “Fruits of the Spirit: Kindness,” quoting Ephesians 5:1, “Therefore, be imitators of God as dear children.” He does not say “Be passive.” It is not the Theological Seminar of the Apostles. Right? These books are about how we live this.

Chris Benjamin, in his book, *Life on the Vine: Cultivating Kindness*, says that “we practice paying attention to others, insisting that we should start listening to others. If kindness is love directed to others to others for their sake, then we need to start paying attention to others. Genuine kindness doesn’t simply give someone something they don’t really need just so the giver feels better about himself or herself. For kindness to really blossom among us we need to listen carefully to one another. Just giving our time and attention to others for their sake is kindness.”

Amplifying this concept, Lissa Rankin adds, “Try being fully present with everyone you encounter. Avoid looking at your phone, multitasking, glancing at the TV behind your lunch date, or paying attention to anyone other than the one you’re with. Make eye contact. Notice body language. See if you can really feel what the other might be thinking beneath the words.

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When you are truly present, your presence tends to be experienced as compassion.” Don Hooser, in his sermon/article “The Fruit of the Spirit” suggests that action includes words, writing, “of course, the emphasis on deeds over mere words does not mean words are unnecessary. Action *includes words*. Encouraging words of comfort, courtesy, compliments and even correction can be heartwarming acts of kindness.”

Consider Proverbs 12:25: “Anxiety in a man’s heart weighs it down. But a kind or encouraging word makes it glad.” Back in 1983, when I was going through a rather intense personal trial, my former boss, John Beaver, walked up to me , putting his hand on my shoulder, saying, “Dave, I didn’t know you were such a tough old bird.” This one sentence gave me great reservoirs of strength in a time when I most needed it.

In his 1998 Forerunner Personal, “The Fruit of the Spirit: Kindness,” John Ritenbaugh asserted that concrete deeds of kindness do not have to be expensive, asking, “How much is required to cultivate smiling rather than frowning? To pay a visit? To say a word of encouragement or comfort? To show friendliness by warmly and sincerely shaking hands?” I might add, how about a bear hug? A man back in the Big Sandy congregation wore a sweater with the embossed inscription “Hugs not drugs.”

In his parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10, He focused in on specific motor behaviors in verses 34-35:

Luke 10:34-35 (AMP) And went to him and dressed his wounds, pouring on [them] oil and wine. Then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii[two day’s wages] and gave [them] to the innkeeper saying, Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I [myself] will repay you when I return.

The Good Samaritan demonstrated total mastery of the second great commandment—You shall love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:31) and the Golden Rule: So then, whatever you desire that others would do to and for you, even so do also to and for them, for this (sums up) the Law and the Prophets (referencing Matthew 7:12) and in Luke 6:31, “And as you would like and desire that men would do to you, do exactly so to them.”

Our Part in the Sanctification Process (Part Six): Cultivating Kindness by
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To summarize this message:

(1) God has (before the foundation of the world) called us (the weak and the foolish) into His Family in order that we may cease to be strangers to Him but His Family, to develop compassion for ourselves, in order that we may pass along this compassion to our spiritual siblings and the rest of the human race, including our enemies, all potential offspring of God.

(2) In order to develop compassion, we must welcome our tests and trials, which are carefully designed to soften our previously calloused hearts making them sympathetic, empathetic, and compassionate.

(3) The scattering of our previous fellowship into tiny intimate flocks appears to be God's plan for rekindling our first love and emphasizing the family.

(4) Because kindness is love and action, thoughts must be galvanized into concrete motor behaviors, including encouraging words and deeds, alleviating one another's suffering, and becoming helpers of their joy (II Corinthians 1:24).

To wrap this message up, please turn to Isaiah 54, a passage I like to ponder as I hike the boulders, mesas, and canyons of Corriganville.

Isaiah 54:10 (AMP) For though the mountains shall depart, and the hills be shaken or removed, yet My love and kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace and completeness be removed, says the Lord, Who has compassion on you.