



## ***GROWING IN CHRIST: Daily Devotions***

### **This week: *The Power of Kindness***

#### **MONDAY, 08/12/24 – Kindness begins with God – Psalm 18:46-50**

Today's action suggestion: Stand up for someone today

As with many other positive qualities, the Bible did not say kindness springs automatically out of the human heart's generous impulses. Psalm 18 praised God's kindness to David, using the multi-layered Hebrew word *hesed*. Modern English versions often use a phrase like "faithful love" to render *hesed* when it speaks of God, while often choosing "kindness" to express *hesed's* meaning when it's about how people act (as in Micah 6:8). As in today's text, in Psalm 90:14-17 kindness begins with God.

- We often discuss our "legacy," sometimes making it sound (and thinking) as if the legacy is solely the result of our own work. The psalmists, on the other hand, always sought to give God the praise, whether for a victory in battle or in reflecting on the results of a long life. "With God's help, there is the possibility of something enduring amid the reality of the shortness of human life." (J. Clinton McCann, Jr, note on Psalm 90:17, *The CEB Study Bible*, 2013). Have you ever asked God's divine kindness to be a major force shaping your legacy? Will you?
- God showed David "faithful love" or "kindness" (Hebrew *hesed*)—but not just David. Galatians 3:26 said we are "all God's children through faith in Christ Jesus." God offers that same loving kindness to everyone who chooses to be God's child. What does it mean to your faith to know God values you as much as the writer of Psalm 18? In what ways has God "rescued" you over the course of your life, from both outer and inner "enemies"?

**Prayer:** Lord God, it's easy for me to forget that often quietly and unobtrusively, you are always with me. Enable me to remember and value your kind presence shaping and guiding me. Amen.

#### **TUESDAY, 08/13/24 – God's kindness reflected by David – 2 Samuel 4:4, 9:1-13**

Today's action suggestion: Choose kindness over being "right"

Israel's King David was close friends with Jonathan, son of King Saul. Jonathan said, "The two of us made a solemn pledge in the LORD's name when we said, 'The LORD is witness between us and between our descendants forever'" (1 Sam 20:42). Those were not just nice words. David, secure as king (after a struggle with Saul's "house"), asked, "Is there anyone from Saul's family still alive that I could show faithful love for Jonathan's sake?" In fact, there was.

- A new ruler or boss (then or now) often aims to get rid of anyone loyal to a former leader.

Mephibosheth, King Saul's grandson, with limited mobility due to a childhood accident, likely lived in hiding. David used the Hebrew word *hesed* (that keyword that expressed God's deep covenant love and kindness) three times for what he wanted to show Jonathan's remaining son. What does seeing how David kept his promise to Jonathan tell you about the value he attached to kindness?

- Don't you wonder what went through Mephibosheth's mind when he got the news that King David had summoned him to appear? Many preachers have observed that David's act in extending *hesed* to Jonathan's son is an early image of what God gave all of us in Jesus. What feelings does the prospect of facing God after your earthly life ends trigger in you? God offers divine kindness to all of us; only you can choose to refuse it. Please don't!

**Prayer:** Ruler of the cosmos, I see a dim reflection of you in the loving kindness your servant David showed. Teach me how to trust your *hesed* toward me, and to extend it to others as David did. Amen.

### **WEDNESDAY, 8/14/24 – Wisdom and prophecy call for kindness – Proverbs 21:21, Zechariah 7:9-10**

Today's action suggestion: Help someone carry groceries

We can think kindness means relatively "small" actions like baking a few extra cookies to take to a neighbor's house. Well, yes, but it takes in much more. The sages of Hebrew wisdom grouped kindness with "big" ideas like life, righteousness, and honor. The prophet Zechariah, in a passage that addressed the question of whether Israel should resume certain rituals after their return from exile, instead linked kindness to the justice issues that our study focused on last week.

- Zechariah reminded Israel that "devout faith is demonstrated, not in rote ritual, but in rendering 'true judgments, ...kindness and mercy (verse 9). We are to act on behalf of the powerless in our world, taking particular care not to do harm to widows, orphans, aliens, and the poor" (Rebekah Close LeMon, note on Zech 7:3-10, *The Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible*, 2005). How does your heart respond to Zechariah's prophetic call to extend "kindness" beyond the easiest people to reach to those who may need it the most?
- Proverbs 21:21 used the sweeping Hebrew word *hesed* in its sense of kindness toward others. "The two qualities **righteousness and kindness** sum up a good life." "Those who pursue' means anyone who 'shows or tries to show the two qualities referred to'" (William D. Reayburn and Euan McG. Fry, *A Handbook on Proverbs*, p. 453). How does Proverbs' wisdom here match up with your list of what makes for a "good life"? How intentionally do you "pursue" righteousness and kindness?

**Prayer:** Creator God, I'm often busy figuring out "the good life" for myself, with only my own pleasure as the major guideline. Show me, day by day, how to live in ways that pursue righteousness and kindness. Amen.

### **THURSDAY, 8/15.24 – Jesus on how we should treat others – Luke 6:27-36**

Today's action suggestion: Give someone a compliment or affirmation

Jesus taught his followers how to live with his peace and joy. Yet he realized that not all would be willing to accept what he taught: “I say to you who are willing to hear.” The types of behavior Jesus described are not natural to any of us. We only move toward Jesus' kind of open, fear-free life as we allow the Holy Spirit to reshape our natural impulses to grow the fruit of kindness in our lives. (cf. also Matthew 5:44-45)

- Jesus gave specific examples, not to set up new, onerous rules for us, but to show in practice the spirit in which he called us to live. As *The Message* put Luke 6:30, “If someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously.” When has someone touched your life for the better by living kindly and generously? When have you found the joy of extending kindness to someone else?
- Luke linked the Golden Rule (“Treat people in the same way that you want them to treat you”—verse 31) to Jesus' words about how to treat enemies. In what relationships do you find it hardest for you to treat others as you'd wish them to treat you? How can Jesus' teaching help you discern how to live out the Golden Rule in ways that bless others while you maintain healthy boundaries and self-care?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, pray for those who mistreat me? Love my enemies? You did it, but you were—well, you. I'm willing to listen to your teaching and learn your ways. Amen.

#### **FRIDAY, 8/16/24 – Paul's grateful amazement at God's kindness – 1 Tim 1:12-16, 2 Tim 2:23-25**

Today's action suggestion: Find a cause and donate money/resources/time

The apostle Paul looked back on the days when, as an angry young Pharisee named Saul, he proudly persecuted and killed Christians (Acts 7:57-8:1, 9:1-2). Despite that, he said, Christ's favor, love and faithfulness had “poured all over me.” He maintained a lifelong sense of wonder and gratitude for the way God's kindness had reshaped his life focus at a time when he was fighting against God. And one way he expressed that was by urging everyone he worked with to show kindness.

- The letters to Timothy echoed Jesus' teaching in Luke 6:27-28, which we read yesterday: “Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you.” Acting like that is not natural to any of us. In what ways can you allow the Holy Spirit to reshape your natural impulses to grow the fruit of kindness toward all people in your life?
- Jesus asked, “If you love only those who love you, what reward do you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing? Don't even the Gentiles do the same?” (Matthew 5:46-47). Kindness to people who are kind to you is just good manners. But “kind toward all people”? That only grows, over time, as the Holy Spirit's godly presence shapes you. In what ways has Jesus made you kinder than you used to be?

**Prayer:** Come, Holy Spirit! Grow kindness in me, not as wimpy emotionalism to please those I like, but as hard-edged, practical determination to live a life that reflects my Lord Jesus' way of treating people even as he worked to defeat evil with good. Amen.

**SATURDAY, 8/17/24 – The kindness “family” of qualities” – Colossians 3:12-13**

Today's action suggestion: Surprise neighbors with a treat

Nowhere in Scripture will you find, “Treat your neighbors with kindness, unless their beliefs differ from yours.” Implicit in Paul's instructions was the understanding that we are to treat all people with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. We are, in fact, to love all people. Yes, this becomes more complicated when people's fundamental beliefs are different from yours, especially if they do not treat you in these ways. Rather than looking at this as a problem and trying to “fix” them, Paul said (cf. especially Romans 14:1-15:7) that gives us a way to love extravagantly, working to find unity in unexpected places. In today's world, we have the chance to do that in digital spaces as well as in the more personal settings Paul no doubt had in mind.

- Paul wrote in Romans 14:19, “So let's strive for the things that bring peace and the things that build each other up.” Why is this harder when people's beliefs are different than yours? What is one concrete thing you can do this week that builds up another person, especially a person with whom you differ? What principles can guide you in deciding when loving your neighbor is more valuable than winning an argument?
- John Wesley, Methodism's founder, said in a sermon titled “A Catholic Spirit,” “Even though a difference in opinions or modes of worship may prevent an entire external union, yet need it to prevent our union in affection? Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without doubt, we may.” How did Paul's teachings in today's passages shape Wesley's theology? Is there someone in your life with whom you do not think alike, yet you need to love alike?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, give me clarity about my daily need for your forgiving, empowering grace to nurture and grow me. And grow me into a person who makes kindness and forgiveness central to my rhythm of life. Amen.

***Join us for the next part of “Do Unto Others” on Sunday, August 18  
with the message “Finding Common Ground.”  
And invite a friend, relative, associate, or neighbor to share it with you.***