

## Sharing the Light: The Light of Kindness

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2 Samuel 9:1-7

*David asked, "Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul to whom I may show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" Now there was a servant of the house of Saul whose name was Ziba, and he was summoned to David. The king said to him, "Are you Ziba?" And he said, "At your service!" The king said, "Is there anyone remaining of the house of Saul to whom I may show the kindness of God?" Ziba said to the king, "There remains a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in his feet." The king said to him, "Where is he?" Ziba said to the king, "He is in the house of Machir son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar." Then King David sent and brought him from the house of Machir son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar. Mephibosheth son of Jonathan son of Saul came to David, and fell on his face and did obeisance. David said, "Mephibosheth!" He answered, "I am your servant." David said to him, "Do not be afraid, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan; I will restore to you all the land of your grandfather Saul, and you yourself shall eat at my table always." 2 Samuel 9:1-7 (NRSV)*

We've been talking about the life of David and looking at ways that David's life can show us how we can share the light of Christ with others. We're using it as a sort of structure, a model for us to look at. And we talked first about David and Saul and how David shared with him the light of service. And then we looked at the light of faith as David was able to trust in God as he faced Goliath. Then last week, we looked at the light of friendship as Jonathan shared with David the light of friendship. And today we're going to be talking about the light of kindness.

Let's pray together. *Gracious God open us up. Open our eyes that we might see, and our ears that we might hear, open our hearts that we might feel. And then, O Lord, open our hands that we might serve. Amen*

So school has started, and as kids either go off to in-person school or they get online with their new class, when that new day's over, they come back again, and Mom or Dad or grandparents say to them, "So how was it? Did you make any new friends? Did you meet anyone new? Did you do anything fun?"

Then there's this question which may be the most important one, and that's "Do you like your teacher?" And I've got to tell you that's it's a pretty straight forward one criterion for a child. They might say, "We love Mrs. Smith. She's so nice." Or "We don't like Mr. Smith because he's so mean." That's it - are they nice or are they mean?

We're going to be talking today about the Biblical concept of kindness. And kindness is far more than just being nice in Scripture. We'll unpack that as time goes on. But let me begin with the thesis for today. And that thesis is really simple - it's that the most telling fruit, most telling sign of the Holy Spirit at work in your life or mine is whether we're kind to others. And second, perhaps the most basic entry-level straightforward and simple tool that we have for sharing the light of Christ with others is to be kind to them.

Our story today is about David and Mephibosheth. Let me give you the story, if you remember that Jonathan was Saul's son and David and Jonathan became best friends. Their "souls were knit together," the Scripture says. Then David escaped from the house of Saul, and Jonathan had a son named Mephibosheth. When Mephibosheth was five years old, his father, Jonathan, and his grandfather Saul were killed in battle at Mount Gilboa. And when the nanny, the nurse, heard that Saul and Jonathan had been killed, she picked up five-year-old Mephibosheth and began to flee the armies of David that were coming to the camp. And while she was running, she dropped Mephibosheth, and his legs were broken, so he was never able to walk again.

As the years go by and David becomes king, he looks for Mephibosheth. He finds him and he invites him into his house. He restores to him all of the land that would have been his father's, he invites him to sit at his table, and he treats him as a part of the family. The Scripture says, "He showed kindness to Mephibosheth on account of Jonathan."

What can we learn from this story about how we show kindness? There are just two verses that are so powerful. The first is verse one: "Is there anyone left of the house of Saul to whom I may show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" Then in verse three, it says, "Are there remaining of the house of Saul to whom I may show the kindness of God?"

There are three things I want you to see here and this is the first one. David showed kindness to Mephibosheth in order to pay it forward. Listen to the Scripture: “Is there anyone left in the house of Saul to whom I may show kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” (2 Samuel 9:1)

It was because Jonathan had interceded for David three times with his father, had saved his life three times. He couldn’t pay it back because Jonathan was dead. So, he had to look for some way to pay it forward.

I have really enjoyed this concept of paying it forward and looking around at what its origin was. Some say it began with the Robert Heinlein novel, where he talks about that phrase. Some say it began with a novel in 1916 by a woman named Lily Hammond. Some say it goes much further back to an ancient Greek comedy. I like that some say it’s a legal concept. I’m not an attorney, but we have so many attorneys at St. Luke’s I thought that would be appropriate for me to share. It’s like what’s called “third party beneficiary contracts.” So that if I enter into a contract with someone to lend you money, the third-party beneficiary contract says that you can then pay that money to somebody else instead of back to me. Or lend it to somebody else instead of paying it back to me. So, the money keeps moving forward through the economy to make a difference. We continue to want to pay it forward to someone other than the one who has given it to us.

Laura Zimmerman was in Portugal maybe 25 years ago, and she was traveling there with her husband. They decided on the last day of their trip; they were to leave the next day to fly back to New York to go to a national park there and go hiking. They’d been warned that there were pickpockets in the area, so they took all their valuables, their plane tickets, their passports, a bottle of wine, all of their money, and they put it all in an Eddie Bauer bag and put that in the trunk of their rental car. And off they went on their hike.

Well, when they came back, their car had been broken into, and their Eddie Bauer bag was gone with everything missing. In those days, you had to have a paper ticket, and they didn’t have their passports. So, they called the embassy, and it was a holiday, so the embassy was closed, and they didn’t know what to do.

The next morning, they just got up and they drove to the airport, and they went to the airline desk. They said, “We’re just going to plead our case and see if we can talk our way on. To see if there’s anything they can do.”

So, they get there and they're talking to the agent. And the agent said, "Wait, I think we have your tickets." She called the security guard, and the security guard comes walking down the terminal with this Eddie Bauer bag. It turns out that some woman was hunting mushrooms in the park, and she ran across the bag. The money was gone, and the wine was gone, but the passports were there, and the tickets were there. She didn't know what to do, so she looked at the tickets and saw that they were for New York City the very next day. That night she drove the three hours to the airport to turn in this bag so that maybe, just maybe, the people would come and be able to fly home.

Laura Zimmerman said she cried all the way home on the plane back to New York. They tried to find the woman and ultimately, they found her, and they tried to speak on the phone, but she didn't speak English, and the Zimmerman's didn't speak Portuguese, so they never really communicated well.

But here's the point I'm trying to make. Laura Zimmerman said that from that day forward, she always looked to find if there was someone that she could go out of her way and do more than was easy to pay that kindness forward. What a great story!

We don't share with others, so we'll get something back - we share with others because someone has been kind to us.

Tracy Warshal was in Smyrna, Georgia, and she saw a man in front of her who had forgotten his wallet when they were at the Aldi Supermarket. He said, "I'll have to go home and get my wallet. I'm sorry." But she said, "No, no, I'll just pay for your stuff." So, she paid seven dollars for this guy's stuff. She had a T-shirt on that said Piedmont Cancer Center, and he asked her name. She gave him her first name, and he thanked her and off he went. She said that two months later, the people from Piedmont Cancer Center Foundation came to her and said that some man had just made a \$10,000 gift to Piedmont Cancer Center in her name because she was kind to him.

Friends, we pay it forward and pray that it continues to spread. David put it this way: "Is there anyone to whom I may show kindness for Jonathan's sake?"

Here's the second thing. David showed Mephibosheth kindness even though maybe because he was a rival. Now listen, maybe sometimes you miss this point. He said, "Is there anyone left from the House of Saul to whom I can show kindness?" (2 Samuel 9:1). The House of David and the House of Saul are political parties, for lack of a better word. They are people who are loyal to

Saul, and there are people who are loyal to David. And as the battles went on the House of Saul fell, and the House of David was raised. David ultimately becomes king. But recognize if in fact, people turn against David, the new king from the House of Saul would be whom? Mephibosheth. He was next in line. Saul and Jonathan were dead, Mephibosheth could be king. So, David shows kindness to someone who is a rival.

Let me be straightforward about this. If you are a staunch Republican, is there any committed Democrat to whom you can show kindness? Just because of the rivalry? If you are a committed Democrat, are there any Republicans to whom you can show kindness? If you are an Astros fan, is there anyone who cheers for the Dodgers to whom you can show kindness? If you're a Houstonian, is there anyone from Dallas to whom you can show kindness? If you are an Aggie, is there anyone from the University of Texas...? I don't know - whatever the rivals are!

Let me go deeper. If you are an American, is there anyone from another country to whom you can show kindness? The picture is that it's easy for us to be kind to people who are "on our side" or who are "on our team." But how do we show kindness to people who are not on our team? Who are not followers of Jesus? How can we be especially kind to those folks?

The Good Samaritan is a marvelous story, and the Samaritans and Jews hated each other. But when the Jew is trapped and broken down on the side of the road and had been mugged by robbers, the other Jews just passed him by. But not the Samaritan. He showed kindness to him despite the differences. We can go a long way to showing kindness.

I know it might be hard for you to believe, but in the world of Methodism, there are different parties and rivals and that sort of thing. My grandfather was a United Methodist pastor and before that he was a Methodist pastor. His name was Lawrence Landrum, and he was sort of one of the right hands of Bishop A. Frank Smith for many years.

Now there was another pastor who was a leader in the conference as well, and his name was John Wesley Hardt. He was much younger and sort of an upstart, kind of a firebrand kind of guy. And they were on the opposite side of many, many different issues. They ran against each other in elections and that sort of thing.

Well, ultimately, my grandfather retired, and John Wesley Hardt was elected to be a bishop. And when my grandfather was older, and his Parkinson's had begun to take him over, he was retired to live in Palestine, Texas. The person who visited him there more than anybody else was

Bishop John Wesley Hardt. Every single time he came to Texas, he'd go see my grandfather, and they'd visit and play dominoes. He was kind to him, and I'll always be grateful for that.

So, David showed kindness to Mephibosheth, maybe because he was a rival.

Here's the third thing, and it's probably the most important. What David showed Mephibosheth was not his own kindness particularly, but the kindness of God. He said, "Is there anyone remaining of the house of Saul to whom I may show the kindness of God?" (2 Samuel 9:3)

Now look, this is perhaps the most important word - that word that's translated *kindness* there in the Old Testament. Two hundred and fifty times it's used. It's almost always used as a characteristic of God. The word is *hesed*, and it is translated *lovingkindness*, it's sometimes translated *steadfast love*, and it's so much deeper than just being nice. It includes, for example, "speaking the truth in love." We're going to deal with that next week when we talk about the prophet Nathan and David. But it is the basic character of God.

Michael Card is a great musician, a Christian artist, and he's written maybe 33 albums and 22 books. He's a great theologian in many ways. For those of you who know contemporary Christian music, he wrote "El Shaddai" and "Emmanuel." These are sort of staples of contemporary Christian music. He wrote a book called *Inexpressible: Hesed and the Mystery of God's Lovingkindness*, and it's all about this word *hesed* and what it means and where you see it in Scripture. Let me read to you what he writes because I think he says it so well. Here's what he says, "The lovingkindness of God is what makes the Hebrew/Christian God distinctive. What set the God of Israel apart then, what made him completely unique to the point that the other gods were no gods at all, is what still sets him apart today. He is the God who delights in being kind, in loving his creation, in offering forgiveness and salvation to those who have no right to expect anything from him. The great surprise of the Hebrew Bible is not that God is awesome or holy. These characteristics we would expect from God. The great surprise is that he is kind, that he is a God of *hesed*. This is what fundamentally makes him unlike any other god then or now."

This kindness is who God is.

Moses is on the mountain, and they've had the Golden Calf debacle down at the bottom of the mountain, and the tablets of stone have been broken. Then Moses goes back up on the mountain to receive the second set of tablets, and when he's up there, God passes in front of him. And God himself declares the character of God. Here's what he says, "The Lord, a God merciful

and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love (*hesed*) and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love (*hesed*) for the thousandth generation.” (Exodus 34:6-7a) My goodness! This picture of God’s kindness - we are kind because God is kind. And Jesus then is the embodiment of that *hesed*. And he says that this *hesed* which God extended to Israel is now through Christ open to everyone. Everyone is to experience that incredible kindness, that steadfast love, that covenant love of God. That’s who Jesus was, to extend that *hesed*. We sing the children’s song, “Jesus’ Hands Were Kind Hands.” We seek to live and love like Jesus, that means we are to be kind to others.

Now sometimes people will say, “So if I’m really going to share the light of Christ through kindness don’t I need to tell them that it’s because I’m a Christian that it’s because I love Jesus? And don’t I need to tell them that I’m passing on the kindness of God? Doesn’t that have to be my witness?”

Well, I would say that it’s a wonderful thing if you have the appropriate opportunity to share with people that God has been so kind to you and that God has *hesed* for them, too. That’s so important. But recognize that the point here is not that we’re sharing this kindness so that they’ll necessarily come into a relationship with Christ. We’ll let God take care of that part. We’re sharing this kindness because of .... Because God has shared with us, we are compelled to share it with others. To pass it on, to pay it forward. Then we’ll let God worry about that.

We share not our own kindness. One of my favorite passages is in Matthew 9, where Jesus sees the crowds, and it says, “He had compassion on them...” So, he sends the disciples out. It wasn’t their compassion that drove them out, it was Jesus’ compassion that drove them out. We take the *hesed* of God, and we share it with others.

Let me close by getting a little personal here for just a minute. I have found that in these times, I have grown more irritable. I don’t know if others of you share my confession. But I’ve found myself more irritable, and I’ve found myself less kind to others. A friend, someone I respect and appreciate so much, wrote me an email that included sort of “joshing” or teasing, about an issue around which we disagree. And it just punched my button. I responded with a very terse and curt email in return. Then I thought, “That was not good or kind.” Then he responded with an apology, and I apologized to him. So, we’re good now, and that’s the nature of our friendship. But I look at myself on those zoom pictures on the computer screen, and I think, “That’s a frowning face! I’m not carrying out my personal mission statement to carry the

light of Christ to my family, my church, and to every place where I go." And I realize that I'm sure not doing that at some of these moments.

You know, we just get irritated. We're irritated at the coronavirus; we're irritated at how some people respond to the coronavirus. We're irritated at politics; we're irritated at the person in front of us at the red light when the light turns green, and they're still looking at their phone. We're irritated at people who drive too fast or too slowly. What do we do with all that grumpy irritation inside us that doesn't promote kindness?

There is a mollusk that is known as the saver-lipped pearl oyster and it has produced a pearl that was valued at \$1.5 million. Do you know how it does that? It starts with an irritant, a piece of sand that gets in, and the oyster wants to handle that irritation. It secretes something called nacre, and it begins to coat the sand in very thin layers. Then it keeps coating it, and year after year it'll coat the irritating grain of sand and what it ultimately produces is this beautiful pearl.

What if we took those people, those things, those situations that are such irritants and coated them with kindness? Coated them with kindness...coated them with kindness. Shared the light of kindness. Then I suspect that's how the Pearl of Great Price comes to pass - the Kingdom of God. That we just continue to share the light of kindness - the *hesed* of God with everyone we meet.

Remember our thesis. The most obvious and telling sign of the Holy Spirit at work in your life; the fruit of the Spirit is kindness to others. And the most basic and entry-level tool for sharing the light of Christ into someone's life is kindness. To be kind to them.

Here's the phrase, "Is there anyone to whom I may show kindness?" Walk down the street, look in your life. Is there anyone in there to whom you can show kindness? Give it a try!

*Gracious God, we confess to you that we're not always kind. But when we open ourselves up to experience your amazing kindness, your amazing steadfast love for us, we realize that we can pass that on to others that we can share the light of kindness to those with whom we agree or to those with whom we disagree. With those we know and with those we don't. We can pass that on so that they, too, would know what an amazing kind God you are. In the name of Christ, we pray.*  
*Amen*

*Go, bear witness to the love of God in this world, so that those to whom love is a stranger will find in you generous friends. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you now and forever.*

*Amen*