

## THE POWER OF KINDNESS

One of the nine fruits of the spirit described in **Galatians 5** is the fruit of kindness. Kindness is basically acts of doing good to other people. Kindness is wonderful gift of God's spirit and has many great benefits. In this article I'd like to look at one of the great benefits of kindness and that is the power of kindness to build and to heal wounded relationships.

When we have been hurt by others the natural human reaction is to respond the same way and return hurt for hurt yet we, as christians, have been called to act in a higher, more benevolent way. God's recipe for healing wounded relationships is found in the Sermon on the Mount. In **Matthew 5:43-45** Jesus Christ contrasted God's way – His recipe for healing wounded relationships – with the natural, human way with the following words:

“You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”

In his book “The Secret of Loving” Josh McDowell makes the following comments on the subject of healing wounded relationships:

“There is a phrase I want you to remember. It is simply this: It is more rewarding to resolve a conflict than dissolve a relationship. Of course, it is much easier just to walk away than to put forth the effort to resolve a conflict. But the reward of staying is that every time you resolve a conflict you come out a better person - better able to deal with the inevitable conflicts the future will bring.

“Sometimes we forget that relationships are part of God's initial grand design. God said in **Genesis 2:18**, 'It is not good for man to be alone'...To experience the blessing that God intended for us to have in relationships we must go against the false wisdom of our day and resolve our conflicts.

“Today you are encouraged to demand your rights and have it your way...The elevation of self above others has created an 'I'm number one' philosophy which does not teach us to build lasting relationships and to resolve conflict. If winning is everything for you, you may reach a few personal goals but you will sacrifice relationships along the way. Relationships are built by yielding not winning. We must therefore rise above our culture if we want to experience intimate, fulfilled relationships...

“Have you ever felt good after resolving a conflict? If so, you will agree that there are positive benefits from conflict...I have become more sensitive to the hurts and feelings of other people as a result of conflict” (p. 102-104)

A wonderful example in the Bible of someone using kindness to heal a broken relationship is found in **1 Samuel 24**. It's the story of David's kindness and mercy to his father-in-law Saul who was trying to kill David out of jealousy.

“And David said to Saul: 'Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Indeed David seeks your harm'? Look, this day your eyes have seen that the Lord delivered you today into my hand in the cave, and *someone* urged *me* to kill you. But *my eye* spared you, and I said, 'I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he *is* the Lord's anointed.' Moreover, my father, see! Yes, see the corner of your robe in my hand! For in that I cut off the corner of

your robe, and did not kill you, know and see that *there is* neither evil nor rebellion in my hand, and I have not sinned against you. Yet you hunt my life to take it. Let the Lord judge between you and me, and let the Lord avenge me on you. But my hand shall not be against you. As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Wickedness proceeds from the wicked.' But my hand shall not be against you. After whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom do you pursue? A dead dog? A flea? Therefore let the Lord be judge, and judge between you and me, and see and plead my case, and deliver me out of your hand.'

"So it was, when David had finished speaking these words to Saul, that Saul said, 'Is this your voice, my son David?' And Saul lifted up his voice and wept [It appears here that Saul was genuine in his sorrow. He might have said these words but there was no need for him to weep as well]. Then he said to David: 'You *are* more righteous than I; for you have rewarded me with good, whereas I have rewarded you with evil. And you have shown this day how you have dealt well with me; for when the Lord delivered me into your hand, you did not kill me. For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him get away safely? Therefore may the Lord reward you with good for what you have done to me this day'" (**verses 9-19**).

Notice the humility of David here. He didn't seek the praise of men but was willing to lower himself, even calling himself a dead dog and a flea, because being reconciled to Saul meant so very much more to him than his pride and avenging himself. Just as pride comes before a fall, so too, does humility need to come before a restoration of any relationship.

David used the power of kindness to win back Saul's favour and friendship. Sadly, it was only temporary and ultimately Saul's insecurity got the better of him and he again went after David. Just because we may not win back the friendship of the other party does that let us off from applying Jesus' words of doing good to those who do us harm? Well, as far as I can tell, there is no loophole. The command to do good to those who hurt us is still in the Book and most of us have far less to upset about in our relationships with others than David had in this circumstance.

Cecil Osborne in his book "The Art of Understanding Your Mate" has this wonderful story that illustrates the great power of kindness to heal wounded relationships. He writes:

"There is on record the case of a woman who said to a marriage counselor, 'I hate my husband! I not only want to divorce him but I want to make life as tough for him as I possibly can.'

"The counselor told her, 'I'll tell you how to proceed. Start showering him with compliments. Indulge every whim. Then just when he knows how much he needs you – start divorce proceedings. You'll fracture him.'

"The wife decided to accept the advice. Six months later the counselor met her at a social function and asked, 'How did things turn out? Did you divorce your husband?'

"'Oh, no!' I followed your advice and we've never been happier. I love him with all my heart.'

"I related this at a retreat and one rather hostile wife who was considering divorce proceedings said something testily, "You sound as if it was the wife's sole responsibility! The husband has some responsibility for the marriage, too!"

"'Yes,' I said, 'he has equal responsibility; but just as someone has to take the initiative in starting divorce proceedings, one person must seize the initiative in instituting love and patience and goodwill'" (p.221).

This story illustrates how practising kindness, even when we don't feel like it at the start, can soften our own hearts to someone we might be having a hard time with.

Acts of kindness from compliments, extending forgiveness, expressing our apologies for any hurt we have caused along with extending hospitality to those we may be having difficulties with will go a long way to helping heal wounded relationships.

In his book "The Friendship Factor" Alan Loy McGuinnis makes these interesting comments about the connection between kindness and peace in our relationships. He writes:

"I talked to a man whose marriage had gone bad after 18 years. 'How did you know that it was over?' I asked.

"When she stopped putting toothpaste on my brush in the mornings,' he replied. 'When we were first married whoever got up first would roll toothpaste on the other's brush and leave it lying on the sink. Somewhere along the line we stopped doing that for each other and the marriage went downhill from there.'

"That, of course, is an oversimplification of why a marriage went wrong, but the little courtesies do count.

"The best relationships are built up, like a fine lacquer finish, with the accumulated layers of many acts of kindness" (p. 52-53).

I remember one personal occasion that God used His own recipe on me. I was stubbornly pursuing my own way on a matter and thought that God wouldn't possibly give me any blessing until I turned from my selfish pursuit. I really deserved any punishment that God was willing to dish out to me but instead of doing so He did something completely unexpected. He went over and above in being kind to me and dropped into my life a major blessing as well as a series of other minor blessings. It's hard to remain hard headed when God does amazing acts of kindness to you. You can't help but soften your heart in the wake of such kindness.

The whole Bible is the story of God acting in just such a way. Even while we were sinners He sent His son Jesus Christ to save us from our sins and He has commanded us to be like Him in every way but He has also given us free moral agency. He dearly wants us to live this way but it's still our choice.

Now there are times we succeed and other times where we fail at applying this lesson. When we fail to apply it why don't we use God's recipe of doing good to those we are having a hard time with?

In the vast majority of times it's just simple selfishness and pride. The first question we could ask ourselves is "Do I actually want to friendship back?" If we say, "After what he or she has done to me who needs them?" and we start looking down at them that might be a red flag that there is some pride we need to deal with.

In our pride and our selfishness we may selectively forget about the good qualities the other person has and the good things that have been there in the friendship in the past.

Maintaining that we are right and having our own way, if we really are honest when we do so, mean more to us than the relationship. David's humility and desire to reconcile with Saul provide a great lesson for us to learn from in just these situations.

In **Romans 12:21** Paul says that we are to overcome evil with good. We have three choices when someone hurts us – a) We can return the hurt b) We can avoid returning the hurt and nothing else or c) We can avoid returning the hurt AND actively do good to those who hurt us.

Paul tells us to do option c – do good so we don't become overcome with evil and bitterness. Many times, though, we live in option b, not option c. We might not return hurt for hurt but we do nothing positive either.

Paul also writes in **Galatians 6:10**: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."

I would like you to notice the word "all" in this verse. That word means everyone, no exceptions. No exceptions in the church and even those in the world.

In conclusion, kindness is a beautiful and wonderful thing and God's recipe for healing wounded relationships includes using this wonderful gift of His Holy Spirit. As we grow as a church, hopefully we should be known more and more as a church that lives by the famous saying – "Practice random acts of kindness and senseless acts of beauty." As the song says, "Try a little kindness."