

Instructions for Christian Living

Ephesians 4: 17 - 32

¹⁷ So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹ Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

²⁰ That, however, is not the way of life you learned ²¹ when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²² You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

²⁵ Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶ “In your anger do not sin”^[d]: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸ Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Kindness

The quote "In a world where you can be anything, be kind" is a message that promotes kindness and empathy first written by Jennifer Dukes Lee. She states she is a wife of an Iowan farmer, mom to two girls, a book author and once upon a time didn't believe in Jesus and now he is her CEO.,

It originated to celebrate the kindness of people in our society and gives us a gentle reminder to take part in our own acts of kindness. Every generous and selfless act, no matter how big or small, can have a profound impact on someone's life. Now more than ever, the world needs our kindness.

As followers of Christ, we are called to embody His character and demonstrate His love to others. One essential aspect of Christ's character is kindness, which encompasses a gentle spirit, compassion, and selflessness. Found in Ephesians 4:29-32, where the apostle Paul provides guidance on encouraging kindness and its effect on our relationships and interactions it reads: Do not let any unpleasant talk come out of your mouths but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage

and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Our words can shape lives, mend broken hearts, and inspire hope. As followers of Christ, we must guard our words with kindness, it can brighten someone's day, lift their spirits, and instill a sense of worth and value. On the contrary, harsh and hurtful words can leave lasting scars, causing pain and division. Therefore, it is crucial that we intentionally choose kindness in our words allowing them to be a source of blessing to those around us.

We must be mindful of our chosen words and their effect on others. Let us try to speak words of affirmation, love, and encouragement. Let us actively listen to others, seeking to understand their needs and responding with empathy. And let us humbly apologize and seek forgiveness when our words have caused harm. By guarding our words with kindness, we can reflect Christ's gentle and compassionate heart in our interactions with others. I expect that many of you have heard if you can't say something nice, it is better to say nothing at all.

Kindness is not limited to words alone; it should also be evident in our actions toward others. Our compassionate actions provide real

expressions of Christ's love and care in a world desperately needing kindness.

Compassionate actions reflect Christ's character by demonstrating His selflessness and sacrificial love. When we extend a helping hand to someone in need, we become the hands and feet of Jesus, bringing His compassion to a hurting world. The transformative impact of kindness and compassion has the power to inspire, heal, and restore both the giver and the receiver.

We should seek opportunities to demonstrate compassionate actions daily. It could be as simple as offering a listening ear to someone struggling, volunteering our time to serve the vulnerable, or extending forgiveness to those who have wronged us. Each act, no matter how small, can make a significant difference in the lives of others and perhaps transform the lives of those we touch.

As we seek to reflect Christ's character through kindness, it is vital to recognize that God's kindness towards us serves as the foundation for our actions. We can draw inspiration from the depth of His love and the boundless kindness He has shown us. The kindness of God is demonstrated in His willingness to extend mercy and grace to undeserving sinners, offering us redemption and reconciliation.

When we truly grasp the magnitude of God's kindness towards us, it compels us to reflect that same kindness to others. We become networks of His love, forgiving as we have been forgiven, extending grace to those who may not deserve it, and showing kindness to friends and foes.

Fostering a grateful heart and a willingness to forgive is essential to reflecting God's kindness. As we internalize the depth of God's love and forgiveness, we are empowered to extend that same kindness to those around us. Let us not withhold forgiveness or allow bitterness to take root in our hearts, but instead, let us embrace the transformative power of God's kindness and extend it to others.

An unknown author tells this story: I was at the corner grocery store buying some early potatoes. I noticed a small boy, delicate of bone and feature, ragged but clean, hungrily looking at a basket of freshly picked green peas. I paid for my potatoes but was also drawn to the display of fresh green peas. I am a pushover for creamed peas and new potatoes. Pondering the peas, I couldn't help overhearing the conversation between Mr. Miller (the store owner) and the ragged boy next to me.

“Hello Barry, how are you today?” “Hello, Mr. Miller. Fine, thank you. Just admiring them peas. They sure look good.” “They are good, Barry. How’s your Ma?”

“Fine. Getting’ stronger all the time.” “Good. Anything I can help you with?”

“No, Sir. Jus’ admiring’ them peas.”

“Would you like to take some home?” asked Mr. Miller. “No, Sir. Got nothing to pay for ’em with.” “Well, what have you to trade me for some of those peas?” “All I got is my prize marble here.” “Is that right? Let me see it” said Miller. “Here ’tis. She’s a dandy.” “I can see that. Hmmmmm, only thing is this one is blue and I sort of go for red. Do you have a red one like this at home?” the storeowner asked. “Not exactly but almost.” “Tell you what. Take this sack of peas home with you and next trip this way let me look at that red marble”. Mr. Miller told the boy. “Sure will. Thanks Mr. Miller.”

Mrs. Miller, who had been standing nearby, came over to help me. With a smile she said, “There are two other boys like him in our community, all three are in very poor circumstances. Jim just loves to bargain with them for peas, apples, tomatoes, or whatever. When they come back with their red marbles, and they always do, he decides he doesn’t like red after all and he sends them home with a

bag of produce for a green marble or an orange one, when they come on their next trip to the store.”

I left the store smiling to myself, impressed with this man. A short time later, I moved to Colorado, but I never forgot the story of this man, the boys, and their bartering for marbles.

Several years went by, each more rapid than the previous one. Just recently I had occasion to visit some old friends in that Idaho community and while I was there learned that Mr. Miller had died. They were having his visitation that evening and knowing my friends wanted to go, I agreed to accompany them. Upon arrival at the mortuary, we fell into line to meet the relatives of the deceased and to offer whatever words of comfort we could.

Ahead of us in line were three young men. One was in an army uniform and the other two wore nice haircuts, dark suits and white shirts, all very professional looking. They approached Mrs. Miller, standing composed and smiling by her husband's casket. Each of the young men hugged her, kissed her on the cheek, spoke briefly with her and moved on to the casket. Her misty light blue eyes followed them as, one by one; each young man stopped briefly and placed his own warm hand over the cold pale hand in the casket. Each left the mortuary awkwardly, wiping his eyes. Our turn came to meet Mrs.

Miller. I told her who I was and reminded her of the story from those many years ago and what she had told me about her husband's bartering for marbles. With her eyes glistening, she took my hand and led me to the casket.

"Those three young men who just left were the boys I told you about. They just told me how they appreciated the things, Jim "traded" them. Now, at last, when Jim could not change his mind about color or size they came to pay their debt." "We've never had a great deal of the wealth of this world," she confided, "but right now, Jim would consider himself the richest man in Idaho ." With loving gentleness, she lifted the lifeless fingers of her deceased husband. Resting underneath were three exquisitely shined red marbles.

We will not be remembered by our words, but by our kind deeds. Life is not measured by the breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath.

Kindness in both the Old Testament and the New Testament is always portrayed in a positive light. The book of Proverbs in the old testament makes it clear that this is "desired in a man" (Proverbs 19:22).

The New Testament is in agreement. Kindness is a vital trait for Christians. Paul included kindness in the list of the fruit of the Spirit. It is a trait that true Christians, filled with God's Spirit, will grow in and

display. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." (Galatians 5:22-23)

At times, kindness takes courage. At times, it takes sacrifice. Kindness is not an accident of circumstances, but a deliberate act of the will to treat others with compassion, mercy and love.

It's not surprising that Paul describes love itself this way: "Love suffers long and is kind" (1 Corinthians 13:4).

Three stories in the Bible that we are all familiar with that portray kindness are:

- 1. The Good Samaritan:** This story is about a man who was beaten and left on the side of the road. Many people passed by without helping him. Then, a Samaritan came and helped the man, even though they were from different backgrounds. This story teaches us that kindness should be given to everyone, no matter who they are.
- 2. Ruth and Naomi:** Ruth showed great kindness to her mother-in-law, Naomi, by staying with her and helping her after they both lost their husbands. Ruth's kindness brought them closer and showed Naomi she was not alone.
- 3. Jesus Heals the Leper:** There was a man with leprosy who

came to Jesus for help. Jesus showed kindness by healing him, even though others avoided people with leprosy. This act showed the man that he was valued and loved.

The Bible stories of kindness teach us many valuable lessons. One key lesson is that true kindness comes from the heart. The Good Samaritan didn't seek reward or recognition; he simply acted out of compassion. This shows us that our acts of kindness should be genuine and selfless.

Another lesson is the importance of helping others in need, regardless of their background. In the story of Ruth and Naomi, Ruth showed great loyalty and kindness to Naomi. This teaches us that kindness can strengthen relationships and provide support during tough times. We learn that kindness knows no boundaries and should be extended to everyone, even those who are different from us.

Finally, the way Jesus healed the leper teaches us about the impact of kindness. Jesus didn't just heal the man's disease; he also treated him with dignity and love. This shows us that our kind actions have the power to make others feel valued and loved, which can be life-changing.

Kindness is not a passive virtue; it requires effort and a desire to emulate Christ's love. Let us take to heart the call to pursue kindness in our interactions with others actively. May our words be a source

of encouragement and our actions reflect Christ's compassionate heart, and our forgiveness a testament to God's boundless grace.

Today, let us reflect on God's kindness in our lives by creating a grateful heart and a willingness to forgive as we have been forgiven. By doing so, we follow the character of Christ and become beacons of His kindness and love in a world longing for compassion and grace.

Kindness is a type of love that makes room for others to live their God-given purpose without our attempting to influence them. Kindness is a love action that eliminates selfish ambition and ego. When we are motivated by kindness, we use our positions to build people instead of using people to build our positions. Kindness is a love that lives in truth. Kindness speaks truth in our relationships with God, ourselves, our friends, co-workers, family. Kindness leads to everyone being honored and valued equitably.

In conclusion we must reflect on the truth that kindness is not merely a desirable attribute but an integral part of reflecting Christ's character. In Ephesians 4:29-32, we are reminded of the significance of guarding our words with kindness, demonstrating compassionate actions, and reflecting on God's kindness in our lives.

How about you? Will you make your life story one of kindness?