

The Low Cost of Kindness
Series: Believe: Kindness/Goodness
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Recently in my house I went on a little “Rudeness Reconnaissance Mission”

Here’s what I found:

A milk jug with about one swallow left in it. Of course, because to finish it off would mean rinsing out the jug and a trip to the recycle bin!

A gnarled twisted tube of toothpaste without the lid! Can’t we all just get along and squeeze from the bottom? And please wipe off the top and put the lid back on when you’re through. But don’t use toilet paper! It will get stuck to the paste!

Oh silly me! To think you’d find enough paper on the roll to wipe anything!

This is a common problem in the Stringer household – in many houses I imagine. Nobody wants to be the one to seize the day, to do the job through to completion, to do the right thing. It’s the ole pass the buck, leave it for the next guy, not my problem mentality. Because maybe...just maybe if we wait long enough, pretend not to see and look the other way then somebody else will do it. It’s a type of thoughtlessness that I will boil down to a simple two word phrase – bad manners.

What’s the big deal? I mean bad manners can be annoying to others and distracting – but they aren’t dangerous...or are they?

Actually research now shows that bad manners can kill.

In a 2015 study entitled: The Impact of Rudeness on Medical Team Performance, it was found when doctors spoke rudely to their staff, both accuracy and performance suffered. The medical teams exposed to bad behavior and nasty comments demonstrated poorer diagnostic and procedural performance than those who were not exposed to incivility.

In short they found: Rudeness and lack of kindness undermine people's ability to think clearly and make good decisions. It steals confidence and weakens motivation.

Dr. Samantha Boardman, "Can Bad Manners Kill?" Positive Prescription blog

We continue our Believe series today with chapter 27 covering Kindness/Goodness. Our key question is “What does it mean to do the right thing? How do I know?”

Our key idea is “I chose to be kind and good in my relationships with others.”

These past few weeks we’ve explored Joy, Peace, Self-Control, Hope and Patience. So far, these fruits of the Spirit mostly happen within you. Now we are looking at a manifestation or the behavior of all those attributes in the form of kindness and goodness.

So what does it mean to be kind? Maybe what might be more interesting to explore the opposite of kindness – rudeness. I think there is an epidemic of inconsiderateness that is pervasive in our community and country. And sadly, I think, for the most part we tolerate it until it is brought to our attention and then it makes us uncomfortable. Here’s why I think that. A few months ago I delivered a message on how to have compassion for your neighbor based on the parable of the Good Samaritan. And as an illustration I went on a little rant about shopping cart etiquette – or specifically - the lack there of. Of all the messages I have given to date – that topic touched a nerve that none have before. Why? I think it’s because something we recognize as being thoughtless but we have become accustomed to. Until someone says – it is kind of a big deal and calls our attention to it and challenges us to be held accountable for it.

That’s what the prophets did. The prophets felt fiercely what God felt and saw. Prophets were given the heavy burden of looking at the world and seeing what God sees and speaking on God’s behalf – in most cases – to express his displeasure. And they were vocal about it – they consistently went on rants to call attention to the bad behavior of the Israelites.

Micah certainly did. Micah is a contemporary of the prophet Isaiah who preached at the same time and he addressed many of the same things Isaiah did. However, where Isaiah worked mostly in Jerusalem among the elite of society, Micah worked in the country addressing the social and moral issues of the common people. To put it in today’s terms, Micah was in the parking lot...watching the cart ditchers. He took notice of those of us who use Grandma’s handicap sticker to get a better parking spot even though we just took Grandma bingo.

Micah was watching as we dropped the door on the person coming behind us. Micah was on the soccer field or at the baseball diamond hearing the parents harass the referee of our kids’ matches and games.

Micah was on a rudeness reconnaissance mission. He saw people with the “not my problem” mentality, self-serving, trying to get richer, and rudely looking the other way while poor people suffered. And he thought it was a big deal.

Unfortunately the world isn’t really in a better place today. Small and large acts of injustice and unkindness go on every day. It’s uncomfortable for us to think about what’s

going on in the world. It's overwhelming. We can't do enough to affect change. And maybe...just maybe... if we wait long enough, pretend not to see and look the other way then somebody else will do it. I hear people say they don't like to watch the news because it's mostly bad news. We're tired of bad news. Maybe it's because we don't want to know the truth about what sin is doing to this world.

Or maybe it's because we've become accustomed to it. I cracked the top off of my front bottom tooth and when I first did it couldn't stop running my tongue over it...it felt so foreign and uncomfortable to me. I called the dentist immediately but because it wasn't an emergency the appointment was scheduled for several weeks out. But you know what? That spot doesn't even bother me anymore. I know it's not the way it should be but I'm comfortable with it now. It's my new normal.

So we kind of shrug our shoulders and say what am I supposed to do? God, what are we supposed to do? We ask our key question is "What does it mean to do the right thing? How do I know?"

Micah sums up for us the response God is looking for:

"With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

How can I stand up before God and show proper respect to the high God?

Pay attention to how the text escalates.

A burnt offering is an easy thing – a standard offering if you will. Anybody could give that.

A calf that is a year old would cost a little more.

A thousand rams and ten thousand rivers of oil were big ticket items

And then the greatest sacrifice of all...a child? But God says "No" to all of this. God doesn't want any of these things.

Micah continues:

He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:6-8)

In simpler terms Micah says God has already made it plain how to live, what to do, what God is looking for in men and women. Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal in your love and love God.

Micah starts with the equivalent of a burnt offering sacrifice in that it's something everyone can do. "Justice" God wants us to do justice. That's different than getting justice. This Justice is not revenge. It's not about getting your fair share or getting even or getting paid back.

To "do justice" means we don't leave it for the next guy, don't pretend not to see or look the other way. Friends, Jesus never shied away from difficult circumstances. He purposely went through Samaria, enemy territory for Jews, and engaged with the enemy. He went into the Leper colonies to heal and even into a tomb where Lazarus had been rotting for days. He went into the Temple and drove the moneychangers out. That is what the Lord also requires of us – that large or small – we do the right thing.

Kennedy Odede knows something about justice. When he was a child living on the streets of a Kenyan slum, the kindness of strangers saved his life.

"Being a street boy you feel unwanted. I survived eating garbage. And I saw two things: How people could be kind and sometimes can be mean.

I stole one mango — it was food for, like, two days. But I was beaten by a group of people. It was a mob justice. And I thought I was going to die. But one kind person who was walking by said, "Why are you beating this kid?" And they said, "He's a thief." The person paid for the mango. Without that person, I'm sure I could have been dead."

The mob wanted justice – payback for a stolen mango. The stranger gave payment on Kennedy's behalf even though he knew Kennedy couldn't pay him back. That's the justice God wants.

Second, Micah challenges us to love kindness.

Kindness is sometimes used interchangeably with the word "nice". But being nice has a reputation for being weak. Micah is not talking about being nice. He's talking about an expression of love for others that comes from understanding we are loved by God. Kindness is an attribute of God and therefore should be an attribute of his followers. God created us to live in community – we are by nature social people. Communities also have a lot of moving parts which over time as they bump up against each other can cause friction. We are after all, human. Just as rudeness is like second-hand smoke, which can permeate and contaminate the cleanest air, kindness is like the oil that keeps all parts of an engine lubricated and running smoothly.

And as an added benefit – kindness is good for your health.

Researchers found whenever a simple act of kindness is extended by a human being towards another, it results in a significant improvement in the functioning of the immune system in both the recipient of the kindness as well as in the person extending the kindness.

What's even more amazing is that persons observing the act of kindness also experience a similar strengthening of the immune system. Kindness is a win-win-win scenario which produces beneficial effects in the giver, the recipient and the observer."

<http://undergroundhealthreporter.com/act-of-kindness/>

Kindness is gracious and kindness is contagious. Kindness doesn't look the other way. There are many ways to show kindness that aren't complicated and don't cost a lot. Yet it doesn't mean it's without risk. The person that stepped in to help Kennedy Odede took a risk.

And the impact on Kennedy was profound: "Every time I do something good for kids or for anybody, I think of that moment. Kindness is when you don't expect this person you helped to give back in any way. I promise you the kindness you are doing has an impact on that person, and that person will continue spreading kindness."

Third, Micah says, we are to walk humbly with our God. Because we are human, we have a tendency to measure our self-worth by our good deeds. There is a danger of becoming self-righteous, to boast about the good we are doing and like I did – go on reconnaissance mission to call out those who are not. That is not humility. To be humble is to quietly go about thinking what can I do to show kindness? What can I do for someone and expect nothing in return? Eugene Peterson says it like this: Don't take yourself too seriously— take God seriously. That requires humility.

Another act of kindness eventually got Kennedy off the streets. He says:

"I was helped by another kind person, who was a Catholic priest. I really missed school, I was teaching myself how to read and write. And this preacher passed by and he showed me some kind of kindness. He used to smile and that made me really happy.

And he helped me to go to a local school. So in my life I have suffered a lot but at the same time have seen kindness."

Kennedy says:

"Doing good doesn't mean you're going to get good things. You're going to get some negative things. But along the way being kind is better than being unkind. It is a win-win situation. Just be kind."

What can we do to be kind? The welcome team is going to pass out some post it notes now. I'd like you take a moment and consider how you can show kindness to someone

– someone you know or someone who is a stranger. Think about what you can do. It doesn't have to cost a lot – it doesn't have to cost anything.

You could:

Send someone a thank you note.

Make a meal for someone.

Bring food donations to a food pantry.

Volunteer for Woodside's habitat work day.

Volunteer to tutor kids at Urban Promise Trenton.

Or wheel someone else's shopping cart back to the cart corral.

Write down what you are going to do for someone and place it on our Believe banner in the lobby. And then go on a kindness reconnaissance mission.

Look around you and see someone you can be kind to. You never know how you might change someone's life with a simple act of kindness.

Kennedy Odede didn't pretend not to see, he didn't wait around for someone else to do something. He left the Kenyan slum where he grew up but then came back and looked around:

"I saw many young girls become victims of sexual violence and become infected with HIV - effectively having their childhood and futures stolen from them. I knew that things would never change if our view on women didn't. I knew that education was the only way to end the cycle of poverty and show how valuable our girls really are."

His foundation Shining Hope for Communities, combats gender inequality and extreme poverty in urban slums by linking tuition free schools for girls to holistic social services for all.

Kennedy Odede is saving lives. All because his life was saved...for the price of a mango.

A stranger saved Kennedy's life. His life was changed. And now Kennedy is changing the lives of others. That's a win-win-win situation.