

Kindness Matters
Presented by Lisa Bishop
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Day One

How are you investing your time?

There are so many things that clamor for your time and attention these days and the question to ask yourself is this, "Is what I am investing my time in producing a profitable return?"

If you were to take an assessment of the past week or even the past 24-48 hours, how have you spent those precious moments?

I was on a girls' getaway weekend not too long ago and we were confessing the time we spent on social media. An intended 20 minutes can easily turn into a mindless two hours, with very little return. And dare I say rather than making fruitful deposits, much of our media intake actually makes significant withdrawals; mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. The reality is every minute of every day that passes is irretrievably gone. And whether you are wasting your time on Instagram reels or worrying about the future, it's time you cannot get back. That's why time is the most valuable commodity of all, even more precious than money. Is where you are investing your time yielding a high return?

God promises a great return when you study his ways and his thoughts and invest time in his Word.

In Isaiah 55:8-11 we read,

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

It is impossible to spend time reading the Bible and not benefit. God's Word is living and active (Hebrews 4:12) and will nourish you, grow you, make your life flourish, and be fruitful.

So, wherever you are in life and whatever challenges you may be facing, God promises that the time you invest in immersing yourself in his Word is worth it.

Day Two

How do you respond to correction?

Think about a time when someone called you out for ungodly behavior. An impatient or reactive response, fudging something at work, wavering in your faithfulness in your marriage, or telling a white lie. Whether in the workplace, at home, or in your small group, what was your reaction when your behavior was confronted?

We all experience times when we speak, act, and live in ways that are not in alignment with how we are called to be as a follower of Jesus. Ways that are harmful to ourselves, to our relationships, and to our witness. The key is, are you open to correction, or do you respond with defensiveness, denial, or deflection when someone points out a shortcoming?

In Psalm 141:5, King David prays,

“Let a righteous man strike me—that is a kindness; let him rebuke me—that is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it.”

David, a king, **asked for** correction and called it kindness. And when he says it is oil on his head he is saying that being confronted with the truth and having his flaws exposed is soothing medicine! What an attitude of humility. How often do we see people protecting themselves from correction, yet King David intentionally invites trustworthy men to shine a light on anything in his life that was not pleasing to God.

Do you invite that type of correction in your life?

To grow in your role as a co-worker, leader, friend, parent, or spouse; to progress and mature spiritually, you need a few faithful friends who are willing to point out when your life does not reflect who you are in Jesus.

When your words or actions do not align with those of a spirit-filled follower of Christ, rebukes from the righteous, offered in love, are one of the keys to holiness and living a faithful and fruitful life. Now this is not license for reckless criticism. As a mentor of mine once said, “We call out with the intention of calling someone up.” The attitude of heart is one of deep desire for a person to live from their true identity in Jesus. Who are the two to three trustworthy, spiritually mature (not perfect), men and women in your life you can invite to shine a light and help you continue to grow into the image you bear in Christ?

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you be open, eager, and grateful to accept, acknowledge, and learn from their correction.

Day Three

Have you ever had an unkind word spoken to you? What feeling did it evoke? Harsh words uttered toward me have left me with a feeling of shame, embarrassment, fear, and self-doubt. How about you?

On the flipside, when have you spoken an unkind word or made an unkind gesture? To a friend, a spouse, a co-worker; or even a stranger? I say when because the reality is we all have less than shining moments when impatience, anger, frustration, or arrogance has gotten the best of us and lured us into behaviors unbecoming of a follower of Jesus. We know we are called to be kind, and yet insensitive, thoughtless, and inconsiderate words and actions can seep out of us. In a fast-paced world where stress and division can be prevalent, how do we cultivate kindness in our lives?

Ephesians 4:30-32 beautifully captures the essence of kindness:

“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.”

These verses remind us of our calling as followers of Jesus and how we are to live set apart, pointing people to Jesus by pursuing kindness, compassion, and forgiveness. Kindness is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and can be a simple yet profound act of treating others with empathy and respect. And we can grieve the Holy Spirit when we act in unkind ways. The Greek word translated as “grieve” means “to cause to feel sorrow, pain, unhappiness, or distress.” The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. He is a person, not an it. He is God. He has a personality and the ability to feel emotions and we grieve

the Holy Spirit when we hold grudges or withhold forgiveness. When we speak careless words to one another, instead of uplifting and encouraging words.

On my flight home from Utah a few days ago I caught a glimpse of a woman's t-shirt. It said, "I'm doing the best I can." Now I don't know her story, but those words reminded me that we never know what people are dealing with. Behind smiles at the office and selfies on social media there is often a lot of pain and heartache. Let's remember to be tenderhearted, kind, and loving toward others.

Day Four

When you are treated unkindly, how do you respond?

Think about it, when was the last time you were mistreated, or hurtful words were flung at you? A co-worker throws you under the bus, a family member shuns you because of your faith, or a friend cancels you because of your political views. Do you maintain your composure or lash back with your words or actions? It can be tempting to fight fire with fire. In a world where people seem to be more stressed out and on edge than ever before it doesn't take much to set people off and in turn react in retaliation with even the slightest of offense.

In the gospel of Luke, we see Jesus being called out and condemned by the Pharisees and teachers of the religious law. They were "filled with fury" because Jesus was healing on the Sabbath and they "discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus" (Luke 6:11). They were plotting his demise and devising ways to destroy him. It's a pretty intense situation. Jesus knows the thoughts and intentions of those who were against him and yet this is what he says to his followers.

Luke 6:27-28

"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."

Luke 6:31-36

Do to others as you would have them do to you. "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that..... But love your enemies, do good to them..... Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the most high because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

Now you and I most likely do not have enemies that are trying to take us down like Jesus experienced. But we are called to follow his example and take on his demeanor when we are faced with mistreatment. God shows love towards his enemies and is kind to those who are evil. That is a tall order and only possible through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit at work in you. Treating others the way we would want to be treated is a divine characteristic. The next time you are wronged, don't retaliate. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you respond with kindness and mercy.

Day Five

This week we have been exploring the importance of kindness and today I want to throw down a kindness challenge.

Before I do let's take a look at what Titus 3:4-5 tells us about kindness:

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

I want to take a look at those verses because they point out something very important when it comes to the kindness you and I are given by God. The kindness and love that Jesus demonstrates toward us is not something we deserved. His kindness is not based on our merit but on his mercy. In other words, you and I did not earn God's kindness, it was freely given, not based on conditions.

How often do you extend kindness to someone only if they "deserve it." When a coworker is off-putting or a person is annoying, in our flesh we are not bent toward kindness. Our tendency is avoidance, irritation, or the cold shoulder. Some form of withholding patience and gentleness. I know that can be my tendency when someone is not acting the way I think that they should. But Jesus demonstrates a higher way, and he loves and extends kindness without strings attached. Jesus' kindness is not based on your behavior, it's based on his favor for you, the generous and charitable heart of God. And you and I are to reflect his generosity to others.

So here are a few ideas to get you started exercising your kindness muscles.

- Write words of encouragement to a co-worker or friend.
- When someone has an opposing opinion, listen respectfully.
- Buy a co-worker lunch and if you're working remotely, have their favorite meal delivered.
- Send a thank you note to someone who has made an impact on your life.
- Hold your tongue when someone frustrates you and instead of reacting harshly, be patient and loving.
- Let that car merge in front of you (I know. This one will take extra kindness).

Consider intentionally practicing kindness each day for the next 30 days. Kindness is no small thing. When practiced, it yields fruit both in your life and the lives of those around you.