

Kindness is a way of life, not just random acts

Message for Sunday, July 24, 2016
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Matthew 7:12, Matthew 22:37-39,
1 John 4:19

The Greatest Sermon in History is the message given by Jesus Christ as recorded in Matthew 5-7. This series aims to apply Jesus' timeless truths to the situations that people face today.

PART 1 “Do unto others—what a difference!”

Bob Greene wrote a newspaper column for many years. In one column, he passed on a story from one of his colleagues. It's about a newspaper reporter in a small town and the phone call he got one day. Reporters are used to getting bad news calls, but this call was from the local school, and he braced himself for the worst.

A teacher wanted to tell him about something that had happened to a child on the playground at the local school. During a lunch break, most of the 8th graders were gathered in groups, talking and playing. There was one boy—a student who suffered from severe physical disabilities and was new to the school—was off by himself as usual. He was painfully shy.

The teacher noticed another boy—one of the most popular guys in the school, a great athlete—leave a group of the “in crowd” boys and walk over to this lone student. Fearing that the lone boy was going to get picked on, she edged a bit closer so she could hear what was said.

The athlete ask the other boy if he'd like to play catch. The new boy said no one liked to play with him, and that he was afraid he would mess up and the others would laugh at him. With his impaired vision and his thick glasses, he could barely even see the ball.

But the athlete assured him, “Hey, it's OK to mess up. We all do.” So they began to play catch. When some of the other students saw that Mr. Athlete had included the other boy, they came over to join in and play. They made sure he could catch their passes; they made him part of the group all during the lunch break. The teacher said, “It was the

kindest thing I've witnessed in 28 years as a school teacher.”

The reporter was puzzled. This was a nice story, but certainly nothing that would make a headline or go on the front page. He wondered why she was calling to tell him this.

Then she said, “That athlete was your son.” In an instant, his puzzlement turned to pride. He choked back tears, unable to speak. He knew that, whatever happened in his life, even winning the Pulitzer Prize, nothing would ever top this.

What that athlete started that day continued through the rest of the year at school. The other boy had never enjoyed school, because he was either ignored or bullied. But he had one of the best years of his life. And it all started with one boy offering to play with another boy.

Jesus said, “Do to others what you would have them do to you.” Do you see what a difference this makes when we do this? Even small things are important.

PART 2: Is “Thank-you” enough?

Let's suppose that you lost a ring that is very special to you. It's worth probably \$100, but to you it's much more valuable than that. You know approximately where you lost it: you remember running your finger over it when you getting out of your vehicle at the Foodland Store. But when you got to the checkout, you noticed it was missing. Frantic, you retraced your steps all through the store, looking under shelves, and walking head down through the parking lot. No luck.

You let Rhonda, the owner of Foodland know about this, and leave your phone number with her. The next day she calls to tell you she has the ring. A young girl saw something shiny in a crack in the pavement, and was thrilled at the “treasure” she found. She excitedly told the checkout clerk in the store about her good fortune, and was dismayed to learn it belonged to someone else. Knowing it was the right thing to do, she passed it over to the clerk. The clerk knows the girl, and told Rhonda the whole story.

When you come and pick up the ring, you get the girl's name and phone number, to call her and say “Thank-you.”

QUESTION: Is it enough to simply say “Thank-you”? Do you give the girl a reward? If so, what does that teach her? What do you think? *Talk for a couple of minutes in table groups.*

PART 3: Kindness is our way of life, not just random acts¹

1) The Golden Rule, as given by Jesus

That question about “Is thank-you enough?” got me thinking about what Jesus said about helping other people.

Matthew 7:12, New International Version:

“In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

What if Jesus had instead ended that sentence with, “... for this is the key to success and wealth”? “This is how you manipulate people and get ahead.” But he didn’t say that. Jesus tells us to do this simply because it’s the right thing to do. This single sentence, Jesus says, summarizes the teaching of the Bible.

No other religious leader before Jesus ever said this. That may surprise you. You’ve probably heard this referred to as “The Golden Rule,” and you’ve probably heard that you can find The Golden Rule in all religions. That’s not quite accurate. All the others before Jesus, and even most religions after Jesus, phrase the Golden Rule in the *negative*. For example:

- Seven hundred years before Jesus, Hinduism taught: “This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you.”
- Five hundred years before Jesus was born, someone asked Confucius, “Is there one word that may serve as a rule for all one’s life?” Confucius replied, “Is not *reciprocity* such a word? What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.”
- About two decades before Jesus was born, the great Jewish Rabbi Hillel said, “What is hateful

to yourself, do to no other; that is the whole Law, and the rest is commentary.”

Someone once explained the difference this way: if you own a car, the negative Golden Rule would tell you, “Don’t run over anyone. Don’t drink and drive.” That is, don’t do to others what you don’t want them to do to you. But Jesus’ command goes much, much further than that: “If the widow down your street needs a ride to get groceries, offer to drive. If you see someone broke down on the side of the road, pull over to see how you can help. Look out for ways that you can help other people, just as you would like them to help you.”

There’s something about the way Jesus phrased that sentence which captures the imagination. Just think what would happen if everyone obeyed Jesus’ teaching. No war, mugging, murder, rape, robbery. You could walk down any street at night and feel perfectly safe. You could make a business deal with a simple handshake. Politicians would keep their promises. We would not have millions of people starving, while others live in affluence. People would treat one another with respect, compassion, and good will. Our world would be a wonderful place to live!

2) The Golden Rule is not enough

If human history is any indicator, though, this is not going to happen. That’s because human history is the story of people attempting to build great things without a solid foundation. When it comes to loving other people, knowing God and God’s love is that solid foundation.

Here’s a story to show what I mean. There was a man who worked for the Post Office, whose job it was to process all the mail where the address was illegible or otherwise undeliverable. One day, a letter came to his desk addressed to God. He thought he should open it to see what it was about. He opened it and read:

Dear God,
I am an 93-year-old widow, living on a very small pension. Yesterday someone stole my

¹ The inspiration for, and some of the content of this message come from Lee Strobel, in a chapter in his book *God’s Outrageous Claims*.

purse. It had \$100 in it, which was all the money I had until my next pension check. Next Sunday is Christmas, and I had invited two of my friends over for dinner. Without that money, I have nothing to buy food with. I have no family to turn to, and you are my only hope. Can you please help me?

Sincerely, Edna

The postal worker was touched. He showed the letter to his fellow workers. Each of them dug into their wallets and came up with a few dollars. By the time he made the rounds, he had collected \$96, which they put into an envelope and sent to the woman. The rest of the day, all of the workers felt a warm glow for the kind thing they had done.

Christmas came and went. A few days later another letter came from the old lady to God. All of the workers gathered around while the letter was opened. It read:

Dear God,
How can I ever thank you enough for what you did for me? Because of your gift of love, I was able to fix a glorious dinner for my friends. We had a very nice day and I told my friends of your wonderful gift. By the way, there was \$4 missing. I think it must have been those thieves at the Post Office.

Sincerely, Edna

Maybe you've had that experience: you go out of your way, you sacrifice, you really make an effort to help someone, and you don't get any thanks; maybe you even get an insult for your good deed. That only needs to happen a couple of times before your idealism fades to cynicism.

What is the key to following the example and the teaching of Jesus? How can we maintain a consistent habit of serving and loving those around us? The key is having that solid foundation.

3) God's love is the solid foundation

Someone once asked Jesus what is the greatest commandment.

Matthew 22:37-39, Today's English Version:
Jesus answered, " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and the most important

commandment. The second most important commandment is like it: 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself.' "

Do you see why the order of these two commandments is important? When we place God first in our lives, our natural self-centeredness begins to shrink. Loving other people begins with loving God.

The apostle John put it this way:

1 John 4:19, Today's English Version:
We love because God first loved us.

Trying to live the Golden Rule without God's love and God's power is like trying to draw power from a battery. It works for a while, but sooner or later if it's not recharged from an outside source, it will be empty. That's what we are like without God's power: empty.

But that all changes when you are operating under God's power in your life. Mother Teresa, who was famous for her unending love and patience, explained it this way: "The wire is you and me; the current is God. We have the power to let the current pass through us, use us, and produce the light of the world—Jesus Christ." That's why Mother Teresa taught her workers to spend time every morning connecting with God in prayer, meditating on his sacrifice for them, drinking in his love from the Bible. Then for the rest of the day, they let that love flow out like a river.

Here's one more example.

A student nurse was assigned to a hospital as part of her training. She wrote about her experience in *Campus Life*, a magazine for Christians in college and university. She was also excited about the opportunity to see how her faith connected with her profession.

One of her first patients was a woman named Eileen. Eileen was totally helpless. An aneurysm in her brain had left her with no control over her body. As near as the doctors could tell Eileen was totally unconscious, unable to feel pain and unaware of anything going on around her. It was the job of the hospital staff to turn her every hour to prevent bedsores and to feed her twice a day, what looked

like a thin mush through a stomach tube. Looking after Eileen was a job with no thanks, no smiles, no reward.

Another nurse told her, “When it’s this bad, you have to detach yourself emotionally from the whole situation.” As a result, the staff treated Eileen more and more as a thing, a vegetable.

But the young student nurse decided that she could not treat Eileen like that. She was a human being, someone God loved, and so she decided to love her, too. She talked to her, sang to her, encouraged her and even brought her little gifts.

One day when things were especially difficult and it would have been easy for the young nurse to take out her frustrations on the patient, she was especially kind. It was Thanksgiving Day and the nurse said to Eileen, “I was in a cruddy mood this morning, Eileen, because it was supposed to be my day off. But now that I’m here, I’m glad. I wouldn’t have wanted to miss seeing you on Thanksgiving. Do you know this is Thanksgiving?”

Just then the telephone rang, and as the nurse turned to answer it, she looked back at the patient. “Suddenly,” she writes, “Eileen was looking at me—crying. Big damp circles stained her pillow, and she was shaking all over.”

That was the only emotion that Eileen ever showed any of them, but it was enough to change the attitude of the entire hospital staff toward her. Not long afterward, Eileen died.

The young nurse closes her story, saying, “I keep thinking about her. It occurred to me that I owe her an awful lot. Except for Eileen, I might never have known what it’s like to give myself to someone who can’t give back.”

Next Steps:

- Immerse yourself in God’s love. Let him fill you with love.
- Watch for opportunities to show kindness to others: a helping hand, writing a note, going for a visit, etc.
- Do it. Experience the joy of love! *

Theme for today: “Kindness is a language that the deaf can hear and the blind can read.”

- Mark Twain

* It occurred to me as I wrote that sentence, “Maybe that’s part of why God loves people. Maybe God just gets a big kick out of it!” That’s probably wrong, but it’s an interesting thought.