

**There's an App for That:
Reflections on the Most Important Christian Qualities**

Kindness

2 Samuel 9:1-13; Colossians 3:12-17

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My family has just received a great blessing. This is so important to us that I want to take just a moment to tell you about it and the young woman who made it happen. Our middle daughter, Hannah, who has significant medical issues, turned twenty-one in June. She has aged out of the public school system and now qualifies for "community services." In order for her to receive community services, she has to have a Medicaid waiver. This waiver pays for her care during the daytime while Kelly and I work. She has been on the waiting list for a waiver for about two and a half years. We were told to expect to wait six to eight years.

As most of you know, my wife Kelly is a schoolteacher. Her school starts back the first week in August, and we've known for years that if Hannah didn't have the waiver by the time school starts back this fall that we would have to privately pay for her care. We interviewed a sitter three weeks ago whose fee is \$120 per day. For most families with a young adult with a disability, including my family, this is just not a long-term option. When this momentous moment comes for families like mine, usually one of the parents quits his or her job. You can guess who normally has to stay home. Normally the mom quits her job to care for the child. Kelly and I have been considering all our options.

On July 6 at about 2:15 P.M., I received a phone call from Hannah's caseworker. She was more excited than I had ever heard her. She shouted into the phone, "Hannah got her Medicaid waiver!" I'm not sure who was more excited, her or me, but I suspect it may have been me. In fact, if you had been around O'Jay Drive on July 6 at about that time, you might have seen your pastor and his wife dancing in the front yard! Don't broadcast that!

Now I want to tell you how this happened. Hannah's caseworker, a young woman named Kristy Montgomery, took Hannah's and our needs

personally. She became involved with our concerns and wouldn't turn them loose. She doggedly pursued this Medicaid waiver, not taking no for an answer, until finally it was approved. Kristy got this Medicaid waiver for Hannah, something for which Kelly and I are deeply grateful. We met Kristy for the first time last week, and I asked if I could hug her neck. Kelly was in line right behind me to do the same.

From my study of the Apostle Paul, I've concluded that is the definition of the word "kindness." It is the fifth fruit of the Spirit, one of those nine important qualities that Paul says that we should cultivate in our lives. Love, joy, peace, patience, and then kindness. So today I want us to investigate what it means to be kind. But isn't that obvious? Everybody knows what it means to be kind. Kind, nice: they're synonyms, right? Not in the Bible, they're not. So if it's not being nice, what is kindness, and why is it so important?

Here's the app for kindness, Colossians 3. In this text, Paul describes kindness as a piece of clothing one puts on. Picture a person clothed with kindness. "As God's chosen ones," Paul said, "holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with...kindness..." Notice from our text that Paul lists several qualities with which we should be clothed: compassion, humility, meekness, and patience. These words have some common characteristics, so I tried to determine what is unique about kindness. How does it differ from these other qualities? And specifically I tried to determine how kindness differs from "niceness."

The Greek word for kindness comes from a word that means "serviceable" or "useful." (Kittle, *TDNT*, vol. 9) While kindness and niceness share some similarities, they are not synonyms. Kindness is more than simply being nice. Kindness goes the next step and is serviceable or useful. Kindness becomes involved in the concerns of another person.

Here's the distinction. Say someone visits our church for the first time. It's a young family with a small child. Mom's carrying the baby and dad's got the diaper bag and all the other stuff. Here is a nice response to that family: "Good morning! Welcome to Weatherly! I'm glad you are here and hope you have a meaningful worship experience." That's nice. Say it with a smile and really mean it. That is nice, and there is nothing wrong with it.

But notice the difference. Here is a kind response: “Good morning! Welcome to Weatherly. I am glad you are here and hope you have a meaningful worship experience. Here, let me take the diaper bag and show you where the nursery is.”

See the difference. One response was nice, and there is nothing wrong with it. But the other response went a step further. It was serviceable, useful to the family. It became involved. That is kindness. Paul said that the fruit of the Spirit is kindness, not niceness.

Hannah’s caseworker, Kristy, was nice, but she was more than nice to us. She became involved in our needs. She was serviceable. What she did was useful for us. Kristy was kind.

This makes me think of a teaching from the little book of James, which some think was written by the brother of Jesus. Apparently James listened to what his brother said. Here’s what he wrote:

If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what good is that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

I’ve always enjoyed reading the Presbyterian minister and writer Fredrick Buechner. He once told this story of the writer Henry James in a sermon. James was saying goodbye to his young nephew Billy, and he told Billy that there are three things that are important in life. The first is to be kind. The second is to be kind. And the third is to be kind.

Buechner went on to comment on kindness. He wrote,

Be kind because although kindness is not by a long shot the same thing as holiness, kindness is one of the doors that holiness enters the world through, enters us through — not just gently kind but sometimes fiercely kind.

Be kind enough to others to listen, beneath all the words they speak, for that usually unspoken hunger for holiness that I believe is part of even the unlikeliest of us because by listening to it and cherishing it maybe we can help bring it to birth both

in them and in ourselves. (Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermons)

I love the kindness King David showed in our text from 2 Samuel. The text says that he wanted to show “the kindness of God” to someone in Saul’s family. Saul was the first king of Israel. Many modern scholars think Saul may have suffered from mental illness. His behavior was often bizarre, and he even tried to kill David. Nevertheless, David and Saul’s son Jonathan were best of friends. So King David wanted to show kindness to someone in Saul’s family for Jonathan’s sake.

Jonathan had a crippled son named Mephibosheth. King David called for Mephibosheth to be brought in. Mephibosheth came in fear, not knowing what the king’s intentions were. Would he be imprisoned, killed? He didn’t know. King David’s intentions were good. He gave Mephibosheth the land that once belonged to his grandfather, Saul. He moved Mephibosheth to Jerusalem, where he ate at the king’s table daily. He wasn’t being nice to Mephibosheth. He showed him the kindness of God.

Love first. Then joy, peace, and patience. And then the fifth fruit of the Spirit is kindness. It’s more than being nice. It means to be serviceable to others, useful. It requires that we become involved in their concerns. Paul said that we should clothe ourselves with kindness. If we will, kindness can be the doorway through which holiness enters our lives and in our world. So let us cultivate kindness in this church and in our lives this summer.

Closing Prayer

Lord, kindness has been shown to us. May we now be clothed with kindness. Amen.