The Christian Personality

What Is Christian Behavior?

Before I went off to a Christian college, I met an older woman at a church event. She was a part of a different congregation than me, but we ended up talking for a while. She had heard the Lord called me into vocational ministry and she wanted to know what my plans were. I told her that in a couple weeks I would be flying to Missouri to go to school there and that although I knew the Lord wanted me to do Christian work, I wasn't sure what that was. A few months later, Betty Rickman sent me a book of Bible promises and a check for fifty dollars. That was a lot of money for me as I was a very poor student and I was overjoyed. A couple more times she sent me money over the course of the next two years. Kindness is not restricted to Christians though. A man of any religious belief can help someone stranded on the road. The other day my car battery died, and a fellow stopped and helped me jumpstart my car. I have no idea what he believed about God. A woman of any faith can send a meal over to a sick neighbor. Children do not have to be Christian to comfort classmates on the playground. Even Stalin was kind to his dog. A drunken patron at a bar can be kind to someone crying on a barstool. Kindness is not limited to Christian believers, but it is expected that all Christians are to be kind. In fact, with Christ living in you, His kindness is given to you to transform your personality. Our big idea for today is an important one if you want to have God's favor. Kindness is the best policy.

Kindness is one of the great characteristics of a Christian personality and examples of it as a way of life for God's people are sprinkled throughout the Bible. Before He was crucified, Jesus did something inexplicable. He washed the feet of the disciples. Hebrew law prevented Jews from forcing other Jews to have to wash their feet. Jewish masters were prohibited from demanding their Jewish slaves wash their feet. In fact, it was a great insult to even show the bottom of your foot to someone else. It would be absurd for a Jewish teacher or leader to wash the feet of his students, employees or followers but that is exactly what Jesus did. **Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.** (John 13: 3-5 NIV) Peter protested. He was not going to let His Lord embarrass Himself by washing his feet but Jesus insisted and so Peter acquiesced. After He finished, Jesus explained what they should take from the experience. **Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.** (John 13: 14-17 NIV)

Across the centuries, Christian teachers have tried to hyper-spiritualize this account and make it into something it is not. It is not a command for God's people to go around literally washing each other's feet although there are groups who insist it is and claim you are not Christian if you don't practice foot washing. Nowhere in the Bible is foot washing viewed as a normal practice of God's people, and it does not seem to have been a part of regular ancient church life. Many have made it a teaching on humility which may have been the case, but no mention of humility is made in the text. Jesus simply told the disciples that they were to follow His example. Above all else, the foot washing was an act of kindness. To clean the filthy, road weary feet of His beloved disciples was first and foremost something kind to do for them. My wife offered to give me a foot massage the other day because my foot was sore and in pain and if I had taken her up on it at the time, I would not have viewed it as an act of humility but although that may have been there in it but it would have been more than anything something kind to do for me.

The Bible has much to say about kindness. **Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.** (Ephesians 4: 32 NIV) And that is the first pillar of kindness, forgiving others. We don't typically think of forgiveness as an act of kindness but clearly it is. When you forgive, you strip off the burden of guilt the other person feels for being wrong. You take away the fear they might have that you will in the future try to get back at them. You also make it clear in forgiveness that you have not stopped loving the person you have forgiven, and they have not lost the goodness your relationship brings. When Joseph forgave his brothers for selling him into slavery, he took away from them the shame and self-loathing their guilt brought. They no longer had to look at their brother and wonder if he hated them or would one day seek revenge. You can be cruel or angry or bitter and hold onto what has hurt you or you can like Jesus forgive and be kind. Kindness is the best policy.

Kindness is a counterintuitive way of living. It does not seem right to just let someone get away with treating you badly but there is a new law Christians live by rather than the law of an eye for an eye, it is the rule of kindness. **Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.** (1 Thessalonians 5: 15 NIV) This is the second pillar of kindness. Kindness is grace practiced in real time. When Jesus was being arrested, a disciple of His lashed out with his sword and cut off the ear of one of the members of the mob who came to take Him. Jesus told him to put away the sword and then healed the wounded man on the spot. Joseph, when he could have taken revenge on his brothers for how cruelly they treated him, did not. His brothers feared for their lives, knowing how much power Joseph wielded, but rather than giving them what they deserved, he took the route of kindness. **But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.** (Genesis 50: 19-21NIV) Joseph believed kindness was the best policy even when it probably did not seem fair. Oswald Chambers put it this way. "Never look for justice in this world. But never cease to give it." You cannot be too kind to others even if they are not kind to you.

The Bible is speaking to us all when it tells us about how we are to interact with others. **And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.** (2 Timothy 2: 24 NIV) It is easy when we get perturbed by what someone says; to snap back at them. We may feel the need to correct them and even to educate them. Quarrels require two people to keep it going. One person feels offended or smarter than the other person, thinks they have been wronged and needs to set things right. But that is not the way of kindness. Here is the third pillar of kindness. Use your words to build up and encourage others even when you feel like you have been wronged. Paul learned directly from Jesus, and this is what he said he practiced when he was even cursed. **When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly.** (1 Corinthians 4: 12b-13a NIV) We don't even need cursing to set us off and make an angry reply. Just being told we are wrong can antagonize us. I mentioned a previous week that sometimes Mary Jo corrects my driving. But I am embarrassed to admit that there have been times when I told her off and responded angrily to her. That has never been the way of kindness, and I have been wrong every time I did that. I love the way Jonathan handled the potential rivalry he could have had with his best friend David. Rather than being upset that David was more popular than him and that many Israelites thought David would be a better king of Israel than Jonathan would, Jonathan used his words to build up David when David was in a tough place. **And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God. "Don't be afraid," he said. "My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this."** (1 Samuel 23:16-17 NIV) Some people use their words to argue or prove their point or tear others down. But the Christian way of life is to use your words to build others up and show them kindness. Kindness is the best policy.

Kindness is not an alternate approach to interacting with others; it is the way of the life for the one whose personality is completely aligned with Jesus Christ within. I recently received a note from a friend who watched one of my sermons. She told me the sermon was great. I don't know if the sermon was great, but I know her kindness to tell me that was great. This week try not to pass up an opportunity to show kindness to someone. You don't have to be extravagant. You don't have to even spend any money. What you do need to do is let Jesus have authority over your life because as you do, His kindness will seep out of you like a stream of living water. Remember those inspiring words of Jesus who after listing off a number of kind deeds done, deeds the men and women had long forgotten about, He told them that anything kind they did for anyone was the same as doing it for Him. What a wonderful thought that one day Christ will thank us for every kind deed we have done for others. Our big idea for today is easy to remember. Kindness is the best policy.