

There are many fruits of the Spirit yet the one that is perhaps the most familiar is kindness. You would not be wrong by thinking of kindness as simply another side of that gorgeous fruit called love. The latter is like a many faceted jewel. When God shines his light on it or better, when he fills it with his colorful Spirit it just glows!

Kindness in the bible is very often associated with mercy for it is really impossible to be kind without being merciful. There's a very important Old Testament word called "*chesed*" that is used to describe the loving kindness of God. It is through God's loving kindness, His *chesed* that he changes, restores and rescues broken people and a broken world.

In the Book of Psalms that word is used no less than twenty-three times.¹ As well, prophets like Micah rejoice and sing, "*Who is a God like you, a God who delights in mercy, (that is, chesed) - Micah 7:18.*

God doesn't stop revealing his kindness with the close of the Old Testament. Far, far from it, for God's kindness is a wonderful promise that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ! It's a promise that is aimed right at you and me and all who need God's kindness and mercy in the forgiveness of our sins.

The apostle Paul, was that godly messenger used by the Holy Spirit to write so many of the letters of the New Testament . In his message to the Ephesians, ch. 2: 4-7 he says,

.... Because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved.

¹ See such Psalms as: 23:6; 51: 1; 100: 5; 118:1; 145:8;

This kindness of God far surpasses any kindness or care that you and I are capable of showing. For we may say kindness is the very *essence* of God. He is kind in the depth of his being. The psalmist David praises God and in Psalm 148 doesn't only speak of the power of God's awesome works and very great deeds but says,

The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. vv 8 and 9

It has been said that a truly kind person doesn't flinch at the cost of extending kindness. That surely is the quality of kindness that characterizes God our Father as well as his Son and Holy Spirit. For God so loved the world that he sent his one and Only Son to us, to die in our place. And that Son, in His kindness, (as well as his obedience to the Father) suffered the humiliation and the agony of the cross. He was pushed into outer darkness suffering God's curse that should have fallen on you and me.

What mercy, what amazing kindness is this that he the spotless Lamb of God should die for me? Surely as the psalmist says in that shortest of all psalms, 117:2, "*Great is his love towards us,*" and "*the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.*" God's kindness is not just of a ,"*weekend now and then*" variety. It is constant, unmovable, it can be counted on in the most difficult circumstances of life. It is there for you and me, But it must be embraced, believed and yes, *put into practice.*

For people can eulogize God's kindness (and must do so!) to the hilt, but it must be *lived*, must be *seen*. For we are to love God, (its the first and greatest commandment) and our neighbor as ourselves!

God's kindness is really a most powerful magnet that draws us towards him. When we respond to his call to come to him he doesn't turn us away. He never says, "*Not now for I'm way too busy*". No, as a Christian author wrote, "*His generous compassion and intimate care are refreshing and enriching every new day.*"²

We need that kindness and mercy, that *chesed* for we live in a broken world. A world where many people have an enormous amount of ill will towards others. You don't have to go to places torn by terrorism and war in order to be reminded of that. How many family quarrels, how many assaults even in this beautiful Canada of ours. The list of cases for trial in our courtrooms are filled with the names of those charged with doing harm to others. Schools are constantly busy with implementing rules to deal with bullying.

What about you and me? What about our own lives, our attitudes, our thoughts, words and deeds regarding God and our fellow human beings? In our days there are not a few who don't want to acknowledge or receive the kindness of God. They appear not to need the instruction that comes right from God's throne, his royal, infallible Word. Do they think they don't need him and that they're self-made individuals?

Yet God who has been called "The Divine Gardener"³ would have the ground of our lives, tilled, toiled over by that amazing Person called His Spirit. He is able to change a barren and wasted life into a fruitful field.

O sure, it is so that even non-Christians, can and do often show kindness to others. Yet there is one significant difference. While they may show kindness to those who love them, and return the compliments of those who

² Philip Keller *A Gardener Looks at the Fruits of the Spirit* p. 128

³ Keller, *ibid*, p. 129

would do the same to them, Christians, by the grace of God can and often do love *even their enemies*. That's because the thrust and motivation for a Christian's kindness comes from above. Those who are joined to God by a living faith will want to do what is pleasing to Him.

What did Jesus say in Matthew 5, part of what is often called The Sermon on the Mount,

You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.

(vv 43-45)

So then, may our hearts be open wide, learning from God to do what is right and pleasant in his sight. Kindness sows seeds that bear good fruit. Kindness, mercy is contagious. It starts in our own lives, our homes, our relationships with others. When others see a better way than selfishness, bitterness, arrogance and pride it may be that they will start having a good close look at themselves. And by God's grace it may lead to an amazing turnaround also for them.

We mustn't fail to realize that kindness should be of such a nature that it embraces all of life. It should include your budgie and your pet cat, the animals in your field and barn, those flowers you plan to plant in your garden this spring, as well as the forests, lakes, rivers, wildlife and other resources we are used to call our own. For we are called to be *stewards* of all these riches, and not robbers. Why is it that many animals and plants today are endangered species and varieties? Why are forests indiscriminately laid bare? Yes, why are babies still being aborted in this country at the rate of more than a hundred thousand a year?

Surely it isn't because of an abundance of kindness, goodness and mercy.

No not that kindness, love and compassion are no more than soft, sentimental indulgences. Parents who refuse to correct their children in a judicious and straightforward manner are not doing their children any favor. Festering sores that need right and proper treatment are not healed with no more than a bandaid.

Being called to kindness and mercy often involves courage, integrity and selflessness. It may make you subject to ridicule. Yet it can often have wonderful results. You never need to be sorry for loving that neighbor as yourself. God has said he will bless you for doing so and his promise is not a hollow, idle word.

Jesus Christ has shown us the right way, His way to live. His way of love. He's alive and still reaches out to you and to me, that we may learn "*of him*". His instruction is clear and compassionate:

Therefore dear listeners, " Be kind, one to one another,
tenderhearted, forgiving each other as God as in Christ has
forgiven you" . (Ephesians 4:32).

Amen, and thanks once again for listening.

