

Kindness

And be kind to one another... Ephesians 4:32a

How the Study Got Started

Reflecting on the kindness of others – in an entry in my Scripture Notebook for April 9, 2020 – was the start of this compilation in consideration of Bible passages on the topic. How rich an experience it became.

It was a Thursday, just before Easter, and I had been reading almost daily in a Lenten booklet which of course had a number of stories about human caring and compassion, and acts of charity and generosity toward strangers. Also in this booklet a minister's reflection offered context: "*The time to look inward and upward, to discover more of who we are in the light of God's love and be drawn closer to God through this time.*" Meanwhile, separately my reading of two passages from the First Letter of John seems to have prepared me to pursue this study. Finally, it seemed to me that my "kindness gene" was lacking, and here was an opportunity for some maintenance, discovery and improvement!

Looking back over the experience I find myself being more attuned and observant of acts of kindness, appreciating what other people do for others and indeed for creation, and trying to be more sensitive in my own perceptions and hopefully outreach. The Bible passages below certainly present situations, instructions and proclamations to guide a way forward. Read. Listen. Reflect. Appreciate. Consider. Extend.

Approach and Arrangements

Beginning in April 2020 and ending in June I recorded 27 passages from Scripture containing the word "kindness." Actually this was done in two rounds, first as brief daily readings to get acquainted with the passages and then a second time with more in-depth reflection and making notes about them individually. In the second round I labeled each passage according to three categories that seemed useful as a way to get the most out of the study. Indeed, I have read many of these verses multiple times.

Thus, 10 passages described "episodes" in the Holy Bible wherein there were some sort of transactions between people, involving kindness (or lack thereof), as will be explained below; another nine passages presented "teachings" with straightforward guidance to the reader; and eight other passages seemed to be "declarations" about kindness in human and divine situations.

To compile these pages I reread my notes for each passage and inserted comments below, finding or creating some artwork to help tell the story. Inasmuch as the relatively small concordance in my Bible has zero references to the words "kind" and "kindness," I searched my go-to online version of the Revised Standard Version where I found the

passages recorded below. (Note that each Scripture passage is followed by a code number in parentheses, which simply indicates the location in my notebook.)

Definition, Terms

From the dictionary I learned that kindness is “the quality or state of being kind.” A nice concise definition, but...

The word “kind” refers to “of a friendly nature; generous or hospitable; warmhearted; good; charitable, helpful, showing empathy or understanding.” These are explicit attributes that show a way forward along the path of kindness. As a handy checklist I list these attributes for reference while reading the Scripture passages below:

- friendly
- generous
- hospitable
- warmhearted
- good
- charitable
- helpful
- empathetic
- understanding



For a different kind of definition... Consider: What is the color of kindness?

Episodes: Kinds of Kindness

Here we are dealing with actions and attitudes that may either extend, request, acknowledge, or remember kindness (or not). All but one of the passages are from the Old Testament, and involve some generally better known situations and personages, even in secular circles. I ask myself, which kindnesses in my own experience do I acknowledge and remember? Also, when and where and how have I extended a kindness?

As I reviewed the “kinds of kindness” that I had been reading about it occurred to me that it would be useful to treat them in clusters. In other words, in some instances kindness has been extended genuinely and received in the same spirit, while in other cases a request for kindness may not have been honored or made with sincerity. Then there are the cases of refusing to extend kindness. In some episodes it is not certain if a kindness was acknowledged. Let’s begin!

Kindness acknowledged

“Behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life; but I cannot flee to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me, and I die.”

Genesis 19:19. (E.1)

In an example of natural resource management (a setting that would occur to me as a biologist!) Abram and Lot agree to move their herds to different areas, Abram to Canaan after Lot (with first choice) selects Jordan Valley (well-watered). After a time, Abraham becomes aware of the grave sin of Sodom, in the area where Lot and family live. Two angels come to advise Lot to flee before Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed, and he acknowledges their kindness (see passage above) and ultimately leaves for the city of Zoar. The angels had stayed with Lot at his invitation. How are we attuned to the possible presence of angels?

And Na'omi said to her daughter-in-law, "Blessed be he by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!" Na'omi also said to her, "The man is a relative of ours, one of our nearest kin." Ruth 2:20. (E.5.1)

And he said, "May you be blessed by the LORD, my daughter; you have made this last kindness greater than the first, in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich." Ruth 3:10. (E.5.2)



Here, Ruth took initiative to go to a grain field and glean, and a man named Boaz gave her access to his own field as well as food and drink. Her mother-in-law, Naomi, to whom she is very loyal, gave thanks to God.

Boaz further recognized Ruth’s own acts of kindness, praying God’s recompense and reward. Ruth expressed appreciation to Boaz. She says to him, “For you have comforted me and spoken kindly” (chapter 2:13b). Ruth and Boaz impress me as being very honorable. My observation is that Ruth and Naomi seem to be quite a team, with clever ideas.

“Ruth and Naomi, Her Mother-in-law,” (1876-77). Thomas Matthews Rooke.

The question I ask myself is, “Who can glean in my field?” Who will say to me, “You have spoken kindly?”

And the natives showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all, because it had begun to rain and was cold. Acts 28:2. (E.10/9)



The apostle Paul and companions are shipwrecked and land at Malta. It is raining. It is cold. A fire is kindled. They are shown “unusual kindness” by the natives. Paul survives the bite of a viper, then heals many people. After three months there he and the others depart, well provisioned. The hospitality of the Maltese was “repaid” by Paul’s healing ministry.

“Miracle of Paul on Malta,” (1620–23). David the Elder Teniers.

What would be an unusual kindness to share? On further reflection, I thought about people who had welcomed me as a stranger by showing kindnesses. For example the college professor who hosted a group of newly arrived freshmen for a meal at his home, or church members who extended a handshake of welcome to visitors, or the distinguished scientist warmly greeting his new graduate student. I also wondered if I had ever been “shipwrecked” in any sense of the word, such as physically, or situationally, or emotionally. Thanksgivings to You, O Lord, for kindnesses. Amen.

A heart to show kindness

And Saul said to the Ken'ites, "Go, depart, go down from among the Amal'ekites, lest I destroy you with them; for you showed kindness to all the people of Israel when they came up out of Egypt." So the Ken'ites departed from among the Amal'ekites. 1 Samuel 15:6. (E.6)

Samuel has just told Saul that he has been sent by the Lord to anoint him king over Israel, and further that God is about to “punish what Amalek did to Israel.” The verse above indicates that Saul spared the Kenites. (A line in Judges states that a Kenite was father-in-law to Moses.) Parallel to the words of Saul, above, can we show kindness to all the people who came out of Africa? Or for that matter, who come out of anywhere else? Can we say that Saul had a heart for kindness?

And David said, "Is there still any one left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" ...And the king said, "Is there not still some one of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God to him?" Ziba said to the king, "There is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in his feet." ...And David said to him, "Do not fear; for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan, and I will restore to you all the land of Saul your father; and you shall eat at my table always." So Mephib'osheth dwelt in Jerusalem; for he ate always at the king's table. Now he was lame in both his feet. 2 Samuel 9:1, 3, 7. (E.7)

The context for this episode is given just before these passages, first ... “So David reigned over all Israel; and David administered justice and equity to all his people,” and then... “David said, ‘Is there still any one left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?’” This seems a simple and straightforward example of showing mercy. Can we say that David had a heart to show a kindness? Do I?



Two different requests for kindness

“But remember me, when it is well with you, and do me the kindness, I pray you, to make mention of me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this house.”

Genesis 40:14. (E.3)

Joseph was falsely accused and put into prison. He interprets a chief butler’s dream and asks for a kindness, but the butler forgets after his own release from the prison.



“Joseph Interpreting the Dreams of the Butler and the Baker,” (1804). School of Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825).

Is someone asking me for a kindness? Has someone asked and I have forgotten? Is there a “Joseph” somewhere? To me this seems to be a sincere request. The motive seems to be one of correcting an injustice, of righting a wrong suffered by Joseph.

“When God caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, ‘This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, He is my brother.’” Genesis 20:13. (E.2.)

In this episode it seems that Abraham has told Sarah to refer to him as her brother out of what I wonder may be some sort of fear, worry, or concern that harm will come to him/them if he is discovered to be her husband. To me this seems to be a request for a kindness that will perpetuate a deception. What are the motives behind this request? What “little white lie” might any of us tell? I’d wish that all kindnesses derived from good intent. Let, O Lord, our motives for kindness be grounded in Your goodness and inspiration. Amen.

Absence of kindness

And they did not show kindness to the family of Jerubba'al (that is, Gideon) in return for all the good that he had done to Israel. Judges 8:35. (E.4)

Here is a situation where kindness is not shown.

Gideon, it seems, had 70 sons. He died “in a good old age,” and thereafter the people of Israel turned to another god. Son Abimelech becomes ruler and things get grizzly. The people forget God and His rescue, nor do they show kindness to the family of the deceased Gideon in the good he did. What’s the word for this? Ungrateful? Whom do I need to thank? And who has done good that needs to be recognized?



Thus Jo'ash the king did not remember the kindness which Jehoi'ada, Zechari'ah's father, had shown him, but killed his son. And when he was dying, he said, "May the LORD see and avenge!" 2 Chronicles 24:22. (E.8)

Here is a situation where kindness is not remembered.

Jehoiada was a priest who served Joash who reigned for 40 years in Jerusalem after being installed at age 7. He “did right” (verse 2) “in the eyes of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada,” but after Jehoiada died (age 130) the “princes of Judah” and Joash “forsook the house of the Lord” (verse 18). Zechariah, son of Jehoiada, challenges the people about their transgressions, and by command of the king the people stone him and he dies. Subsequently the army of the Syrians conquers Judah and Jerusalem. Joash is wounded and is killed by his servants, who remember Zechariah (son of Jehoiada).

What are the kindnesses I need to remember? Is it ever too late to acknowledge a kindness? Or, to offer one? Or, even if it is done in secret, to repent of not having shown a kindness when the opportunity presented itself?

Teaching: What Kind of Company Does Kindness Keep?

In this section we read instructions and guidance concerning kindness, from nine writings of the ancient prophets and the early Christian disciples. The order of these passages is chronological, but with two pronouncements of God’s expectations from Micah and Jeremiah moved up to the beginning for emphasis. The verses speak for themselves, clearly. In reflection I ask: What are they saying about the character and expectations of God? What do they teach about the “kind of company” that kindness keeps? The list of words, below, drawn from the nine kindness passages, offers insight.



Engraving of the “Prophet Micah.” Gustave Doré (1832-1883).

He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:8. (T.3)

"Thus says the LORD of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy each to his brother." Zechariah 7:9. (T.4)

"He who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty." Job 6:14. (T.9)

He who pursues righteousness and kindness will find life and honor. Proverbs 21:21. (T.1)

She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. Proverbs 31:26. (T.2)

Or do you presume upon the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? Romans 2:4. (T.5)

We put no obstacle in any one's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: ... By purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love... 2 Corinthians 6:3-4a, 6. (T.6)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. Galatians 5:22-23. (T.7)

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience. Colossians 3:12. (T.8)

Collectively the messages instruct and encourage us to seek after a life in which kindness and other virtues are our guiding principles. Pursue, show, and love kindness, do not withhold it... As perhaps an indicator of keeping company, as to where and when we are to show kindness, the saying, "Bloom where you are planted," comes to mind. The 31 words associated with kindness in these teaching passages speak to the company we might keep:

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|-----------------|---------------|----------------|
| • The Almighty | • riches | • peace |
| • friend | • forbearance | • faithfulness |
| • righteousness | • patience | • gentleness |
| • life | • repentance | • self-control |
| • honor | • ministry | • holy |
| • wisdom | • servant | • beloved |
| • goodness | • purity | • compassion |
| • justice | • knowledge | • lowliness |
| • humble | • love | • meekness |
| • true | • joy | • Holy Spirit |
| • mercy | | |



Declaration: Kindness Extended, Shown, Tasted, Appearing (and Sometimes Not)

Here are versus all over the map in portraying kindnesses shown, or not shown. Some may be better understood if context is provided, which is done as concisely as possible in just a sentence after certain Scripture passages below.

Let there be none to extend kindness to him, nor any to pity his fatherless children!... For he did not remember to show kindness, but pursued the poor and needy and the brokenhearted to their death. Psalm 109:12, 16. (D. 1) (Oppression and cry for retribution.)

Let a good man strike or rebuke me in kindness, but let the oil of the wicked never anoint my head; for my prayer is continually against their wicked deeds. Psalm 141:5. (D. 2)
(Commentator James Mays refers to this Psalm as a “prayer composed for those who take refuge in the Lord.”)

Hear the word of the LORD, O people of Israel; for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or kindness, and no knowledge of God in the land. Hosea 4:1. (D. 3)

“But, to detain you no further, I beg you in your kindness to hear us briefly.” Acts 24:4. (D. 4)
(The prosecutor, Tertulus, at Paul’s trial is fawning before the governor. Read his address.)

Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you too will be cut off. Romans 11:22. (D. 5)

That in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:7. (D. 6) (The passages just before and after are really packed, rich and dense. Paul has just declared to his readers that they have been raised up and made to “*sit with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages He might show... For by grace you have been saved through faith.*” Paul rounds out the message by declaring the readers have been, “Created in Christ Jesus for good works” (verse 10).

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared. Titus 3:4. (D. 7)
Paul writes with guidance for teaching “what befits sound doctrine” and tells of past foolishness and disobedience in his own life, and that now he and others have known God’s mercy and the “*washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit*” to become “*heirs in the hope of eternal life.*” Again the message is rounded out with Paul’s statement that the “*people learn to apply themselves to good deeds.*”

For you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. 1 Peter 2:3. (D. 8)

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Thank You, O Lord, for Your kindness in word, in deed, in Scripture, in life.
May I be thankful and grateful for it, seek to show it to others and return it to You,
and use it as a guide for going forward. In Jesus’ name, amen.

(A late note and reminder for going forward: Empathy as a basis...)

Sources: “Ruth and Naomi,” Tate Gallery, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/rooke-naomi-and-ruth-a00841>;
“Miracle of Paul on Malta,” <https://www.biblestudy.org/apostle-paul/life-epistles-of-apostle-paul/miracles-on-malta.html>;
“Joseph Interpreting the Dreams of the Butler and the Baker,” Church History Museum, <https://civathemoa.byu.edu/joseph-interpreting-the-dreams-of-the-butler-and-the-baker/>;
“The Prophet Micah,” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Micah_\(prophet\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Micah_(prophet))