

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH
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SCRIPTURE: *Galatians 5:16-23a*

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SERMON: *“Some Kindness, More Kindness, Much Kindness”*

Good morning everyone! You know, the longer you live, I think the wiser you get, and one thing I've learned is not to put too much stock in what a few people say. If a few people say, “Bill, I really like illustrations you use in your sermons...I like it when you talk about your dog...I like it when you talk about the sports teams you follow...” I need to keep in mind that those few people may not speak for the masses, and that not everybody may like to hear about my dog or about my teams.

Having said that, I don't think a Sunday has gone by in the past month or two here at the church, without a number of people coming up to me and asking how my raspberries are coming along. That's because I've used my raspberries in previous sermons to help illustrate a point. And a few of you have expressed how that's been somewhat helpful.

So... assuming that the few of you who are asking *are* speaking for the masses...let me tell how things are going.

This picture up on the screen, I just planted this one about 2 months ago, it was a tiny thing when I put it in the ground. It's grown some since then, but because it's just getting started...**No Fruit** this year.

This next one here, I planted a year ago, and it's come a long way, and while it's still got some growing to do I actually got **Some Fruit** off of it a week or so ago. As it continues to grow and mature, next year I anticipate it will produce even **More Fruit**.

And then I have quite a few bushes like **these**, bushes that are fully mature and for the past two weeks you know what they've produced? Not some fruit, not more fruit, but _____ (**Much Fruit**).

So sure, I like talking about my raspberries, but there's more to it than that. It all ties in with a sermon series that Pastor Ray and I are doing here in 2023, it's called **Some Fruit, More Fruit, Much Fruit**.

And we're not talking raspberries, we're talking the Fruit of the Spirit...**nine characteristics (list)**, nine character traits that should be and will be evident in our lives in increasing measure – some, then more, then much – as we grow and mature as a community of Jesus followers.

Here's the direction we're headed this morning. First we're going to **Look At the Passage** where the Fruit of the Spirit is found. Then we'll narrow our focus and talk specifically **About Kindness**, the fifth character trait of the nine. Then I'll ask you to consider **Your Next Step**...whatever God is looking for you to do in response to what He teaches you today.

Okay, let's...

1. LOOK AT THE PASSAGE

...where we're given these nine character traits. It's been 3 months since our last sermon in this series, so let's make sure we understand what's taking place here.

The passage is found in a letter that Paul wrote to a number of churches in a region called Galatia, and he's encouraging them to live every day guided by God's Spirit. He writes...

Galatians 5:16-17 ...live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit,

and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

For those of us who are followers of Jesus...if there was ever a passage written that speaks to the reality of our experience, this would be it, right? Even though we *want* to follow Jesus, there's a part of us that continues to want to embrace certain attitudes and behaviors that in the end, are not helpful to us or to others.

Paul gives some examples of where we will feel the pull: to take the beauty and the gift of sex and turn it into something it was never meant to be. He lists drunkenness, but this can be applied to any substance that has control over us, harmful to us and to others.

He says we'll feel the pull of envy which comes about when we start comparing our lives to other people's lives. Paul says don't give in to those desires...instead, as we look to be led by God's Spirit, this is the behavior and these are the attitudes that will become increasingly evident in our lives..

Galatians 5:22-23a ...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

So far this year Ray and I have taken turns looking at the first four...this morning we I'd like to us to talk...

2. ABOUT KINDNESS

A very common word, how would you define it? It's more than just an attitude, it's something we actually do. Seems like there's always an element of **goodness** to it...there is also usually an element of **gentleness** – somehow gentleness and kindness are closely related.

It can come in the form of kind words...when I come in to the church throughout the week, there are days where I dress very casual – a t-shirt - because there is going

to be some physical labor involved that day. There are days where I'll dress moderately casual, a polo shirt for instance...and then there are days when I have some important meetings scheduled and I'll put on a nice button down dress shirt.

On those days when I'm dressed up, I know that when Olivia sees me first thing in the morning she will say almost every time, "You look nice today Dad!" Kind words that I've come to look forward to and appreciate.

Sometimes kindness comes in the form of actions...kind gestures. A few years back we did a sermon series on Ruth, which is loaded with examples of kindness. ON the part of Ruth, on the part of Naomi, on the part of Boaz. And back then we defined kindness as...

"...the way God intended for human beings to live together from the beginning...an active, selfless, sacrificial caring for one another that goes against the grain of our fallen natures."

So this morning, let's invite God to teach us and guide us so that words and acts of kindness become increasingly evident in our lives.

Let's start with Some Fruit, that is, **Some Kindness**...not more, not much, just some.

A couple of years ago there was this "catch-phrase" that I kept hearing; it was about practicing "Random Acts of Kindness." Remember that? It was good, it was a call for us to do just what it says; randomly – on occasion – just do something kind for someone.

And listen, followers of Jesus aren't the only ones who do random acts of kindness. I did kind things, you did kind things before we ever started following Him.

But now that we *do* follow Him, it's different. There are times when we are guided, prompted by God's Spirit to say something, do something that we wouldn't have thought to do on our own. And as we mature we see evidence of not just some fruit, but more fruit, that is, **More Kindness**.

It's not yet become our default response, but it's becoming more consistent. I would venture to say that for most of you, God's Spirit has already produced in you and through you the fruit of kindness already this morning.

Maybe back home you said to someone, "*Hey, you look nice today. Hey, let me do that for you.*" Entering into the church or out in the foyer you may said or done something that was selfless and caring...kind. And it's fairly easy to be kind to family, friends, fellow-church goers, right?

How do we get to the point where God's Spirit is producing Much Fruit, **Much Kindness** in us and through us? Where we are extending kindness not just to those who are easy to be kind to, but also to those who probably rarely receive it, to those who many might say don't deserve it?

Well, let's make sure we know exactly what we're talking about so we can be bearers of Much Fruit. I realize that 2000 years ago there was no English language, thus the word "kindness" did not even exist. And so what was the word back then, and what does it mean?

Well, the word was **Chrestotes**, (k-ray-sto-tase), and it meant **moral goodness, gentleness, patience**. The thing is, *Chrestotes* does not appear all that often in the Bible, but when it does, it often refers to the kindness of God. So let's start with...

A. The Kindness God Shows To Us

So do me a favor; I'm going to ask you to use your imagination. If you've made a decision to follow Jesus, I'm going to ask you to leave this time period and this

place, and join me in a city called **Ephesus** 2000 years ago. It's totally different than Waynesboro or any other town here in Franklin County.

We're living in a huge city, and don't think of it as ancient...you would consider yourself living in very modern times. Well, a few years ago a man from across the Mediterranean named Paul came into our city and shared about Jesus...we came to be convinced that what Paul said about Him was true, and we all made the decision to become a Jesus follower. A church was formed there in the city. After 2 years Paul leaves to go start other churches, and a some years later, writes a letter to our church that continues to meet in Ephesus.

When Paul's letter arrives, it's met with great interest on our part because Paul played such an important role in our lives and it's been years since we last heard from him. What does he have to say?

Paul begins by giving praise to God the Father for bringing everyone in our church together, people from all kinds of different backgrounds and ethnicities, many Jews, but many non-Jews like ourselves. All of us are committed to Jesus...and then he writes about how remarkable all this is, reminding all of us what our lives were like not that long ago. He wrote...

Ephesians 2:1b-2a,3a ...you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world...all of us lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.

That word "cravings" is an emotion we know all too well, right? To crave something, to crave someone in a way that runs along the grain of our fallen nature. Paul says that though we were all physically alive, we were, in fact, spiritually dead when we used to live that way.

But Paul reminded us of this not to shame us, but to remind us of the fact that God did not hold any of that against us, offering Jesus to us, to live for us the life we couldn't live. And this offer is...

Ephesians 2:7b ...expressed in his kindness (*Chrestotes*) to us in Christ Jesus.

God is many things, and one of them is kind...He offered us a way out of the deceptive and at times destructive lives we lived, and into a life of purpose and meaning. From spiritually dead to spiritually alive. He did this for those in the church in Ephesus. And He's done it for many of us as well, hasn't He?

Okay, now I'm going to ask you to join me at another location...again going back 2000 years, but this time, we're living on an island in the Mediterranean. And you say, "*Yes, please! Where's the beach!*"

The thing is, this is not a vacation spot, this island is called **Crete**. The cities on the island are known to be unsafe, plagued by violence and sexual sin. Nevertheless, in the midst that culture, we've made the decision to follow Jesus, and one of our church leaders is a man named Titus.

One day Titus gets a letter from Paul who tells him to remind us of who we were... Paul writes:

Titus 3:3-5a At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness (*Crestotes*) and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.

Recognize the common themes of these two passages? Whether living in the city of Ephesus or on the island of Crete, there are two things these passages have in common.

First is the awareness, **the admission of who we were and how we lived**...following the ways of this world, going with the grain of our fallen nature, deceived and enslaved.

The second theme is **God's response to our destructive behavior and attitudes**. He responds not with anger, but as Paul points out, with kindness...**Crestotes**. True back then, still true today.

It's something we almost seem to take for granted...but we should be in awe and incredibly grateful for the *kindness* He shows...so much a part of His character that it moves Him to extend mercy and forgiveness to me whenever I mess up, and boy, do I mess up.

The conflict between our fallen nature and our Spirit led nature is real, it exists. I don't always look to God's Spirit to guide me. I end up not living as I want, or as God wants. And this is why I am so grateful for God's kindness towards me.

In fact, in spite of my failures, I find that God will sometimes step into my life and do something that I find to be exceedingly kind.

One example...there's this one song written and sung by Kris Kristofferson, it's called "Why Me, Lord?" It's been around a while, and whenever I hear it, it moves me because I can relate to the words so well.

It's about this individual who has lived a broken, self-destructive life, but he comes to this point where he recognizes the kindness that God has shown him, and he's fully aware that he deserves none of it.

It's probably been years since I heard it, until a couple of weeks ago, I was searching for something on the car radio and I came across it playing on some AM station. About a week after that, I attended a funeral service where the granddaughter of the man who had passed away, she sang this, because it was what he had requested. 2 or 3 days later, it's evening and I'm out in my garden picking raspberries, and there's this neighbor who plays music on his deck that can be heard throughout the neighborhood, and wouldn't you know, there I am picking my berries and suddenly I hear - floating through the air - Kris Kristofferson singing "Why Me, Lord", coming from my neighbors deck.

And so what I'm going to do is ask a friend of mine, Doug Holden, to come at this time, do this song for us, and I invite you to reflect on the words...and see if you can relate.

SONG

So I heard this song three times over the course of maybe two weeks...in my car, while at a funeral, while in my garden.

How unlikely, but how kind of God. To remind me - bring before me - a song that has always moved me, and speaks of His kindness just as I'm putting together this message. How kind of Him.

When those passages from Ephesians and Titus become real to us...when the words of that song become real to us...when we understand what God has done for us, the kindness He's shown us, we are maturing and prepared to put into practice...

B. The Kindness We Show to One Another

So remember I said earlier that the word for **kindness** here in Galatians – **Chrestotes** – does not appear often in the Bible, and when it does, it usually speaks

of God's kindness? While that is true, the word for **kind** is closely related, it's **Chrestos** and is found more frequently, and one definition for *Chrestos* is "**useful**."

Certainly useful to the person on the receiving end of our words and actions, but also useful to God and His purposes. I'm constantly reminding myself that God is looking to partner with me, and is looking for me to partner with Him, and if I can speak kind words and exhibit kind behavior, I hope to be useful to Him...a good partner you might say. So let's dig in and see how God is calling us to live so we can be useful to Him.

Let's go back 2000 years once again, living in the city once again, this time the city of **Corinth**. Another huge city, and just like in Ephesus, we're part of a church that Paul started there.

Now Paul has since moved on, but has written a number of letters to our church because of various issues and challenges we've all been dealing with. In his latest letter he's describing how he has tried to carry himself through some challenging times of his own, listing these traits:

II Corinthian 6:6 ...in purity, understanding, patience and kindness (*Chrestos*); in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love.

In this section of his letter where these words are found, Paul is writing about the life and death of Jesus...how Jesus' life and death reveals not only the way of salvation, but reveals Jesus character, this sacrificial, self-giving love...and Paul is saying, if this is how Jesus carried Himself, even in the face of my own personal hardships, I want to imitate Him in order to be useful to Him. This is how I want to carry myself: *pure, understanding, patient, kind*.

And as part of the church in Corinth, we have faced many hardships in our church and most likely even in our personal lives. But reading about Paul's commitment helps us resolve to keep our commitment and carry ourselves as Jesus did.

One more example, this time we're going to go back to where we started, the city of **Ephesus**. In that same letter where Paul talked about the kindness of God, bringing all of us from death to life, he also taught that as followers of Jesus, we should...

Ephesians 4:32-5:2a Be kind (*Chrestos*) and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children...

Here's another theme to pick up on...the fact that we are to be imitators of God, that is, to be imitators of Jesus...living as He lived, a life of self-giving love, shown in His kindness to everyone, including those that many would say don't deserve it.

For example, living there in Ephesus are those that Paul describes this way:

Ephesians 4:18-19 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity...

But rather than rant about them and their behavior, if we're going to imitate Jesus, we're going to treat anyone and everyone throughout Ephesus with kindness. Why in the world would we do that? Because we recognize the kindness that Jesus has shown to us. And we want to imitate Him.

Okay, time to leave Ephesus and come back to the present. 2000 years have passed since Paul wrote all of these words we've been looking at, but nothing has changed, has it? And so it's time for each of us consider what we're to do with all of this. That is, what do you see as...

3. YOUR NEXT STEP

...in light of what God has revealed to you this morning?

Now throughout the morning, it's clear that I've been talking to those of you in here and watching out there who are followers of Jesus.

Let me just speak to those in here and out there who are not, and let me begin by thanking you for the words and acts of kindness that are evident in your life. There are some of you who probably put some of us Jesus-followers to shame, as you consistently encourage and make sacrifices in order to show kindness to others. Thank you for the kind things that you do.

Still, I would like to encourage you to take a bold step and **Become a follower of Jesus,**

Because for all of the kind things that you may say and do, you're still "**separated from the life of God**" (Ephesians 4)...and what I mean by that is, He has so much more for you to experience.

Maybe you can see yourself in some of these passages we've looked at...you know what it feels like to be **enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures** (Titus 3). Maybe that's not your experience, maybe life is good and you feel as if you're on top of things. The thing is, God is offering you more, He's offering you life...and then partnering with you, using your gifts and abilities in ways that make the world in which you run a better place.

Please reach out to me because I'd welcome the opportunity to walk these first steps with you.

Now...back to the church, those who have been following Jesus or have just now decided to follow Jesus...what step or steps is God calling you to take?

First, I encourage you to be intentional and take steps that will give you a chance to **Lock in on the kindness (Crestotes) that God has shown to you.**

I know how hard it is to take time each day to reflect on the nature of God...the mercy He shows us, the patience He has with us, the kindness He shows us.

I sometimes find myself going through seasons where I take these things – God’s kindness for example - for granted...almost like I’m entitled to these things because this is who God is and this is what God does.

When I have found myself in a season of feeling entitled, I’ve found myself going to bed feeling empty...knowing I’m missing out on something more, something better.

When I’ve not only talked with Jesus, but walked that day closely following Jesus, I’ve gone to bed knowing I’ve lived as He called me to live, and that’s a good way to call it a day. So let’s not take God’s kindness for granted.

The second thing I’d like to encourage you to consider for your next step: **Imitate Jesus**. Look at the life of Jesus, a life of kindness, of self-giving love and we say, “If this is how Jesus carried Himself, this is how I want to carry myself.”

All we need to do is come back to **our list**, the nine character traits that God is looking to produce in us. This is Jesus, this is how He lived, and as imitators of Jesus, this is how we should want to live as well. Understand your dependence on God’s Spirit to help you with all nine of these, including the one we’ve looked at today: Kindness.

And if we’re truly going to imitate Jesus, we’ll go out of our way to extend kindness to those who rarely receive it, and to those who some would say don’t deserve it. Just remember, you and I didn’t either.

My prayer for you is that you will be so dependent on God, that kindness becomes your default response in any and all situations...it will become a part of your reputation. I want people to look at me, and I want people to look at you and say, “You know, you never hear an unkind word come out of his mouth...come out of her

mouth.” And they would see this not just in our words, but in our actions, our behavior.

And if this is the case, we’ll be partnering with God, and be most useful to Him in whatever it is He is calling us to say or do.