

# Fruit of the Spirit

## Week 5: Kindness

Ephesians 4:32 – 5:2

Dr. Kevin Maurice ---- July 9, 2023

Good morning, Grace! What would you guess is the world's most popular flavor of Laffy Taffy candy? If you said "banana," you would be correct—which is absurd to me, as a fan of cherry or strawberry or green apple, or really any flavor except for banana. But it's true. The company that makes Laffy Taffy says it's their fan favorite flavor. They even sell bags of only banana. And we have some in the lobby. You can take one home with you today.

I don't get it. I don't understand any banana-flavored candy because they never actually taste like banana. Except they do ... it's bananas themselves that don't taste like banana. I know, it's a crazy conspiracy. It sounds made up. But I promise you it's true. Because if you ate a banana in the early part of the twentieth century, before 1950, it was likely that you were enjoying a smaller variety of the fruit called the Gros Michel. This banana was the most exported in the entire world because of its incredible flavor. It even had seeds, but nobody cared because it tasted so good. And this is the flavor that banana candy is based on.

But then along came a fungus that infected entire groves of trees. It decimated crops. And within ten years it effectively wiped the Gros Michel off the face of the planet.

By the 1960s the disease destroyed the delicious bananas, and so a less flavorful variety emerged—what we now know as the Cavendish banana. It doesn't have seeds. It's resistant to fungus. It's larger. But to those who have tasted the real thing, the Cavendish pales in comparison.

And so, this is why our bananas don't taste like the candy. We've got these counterfeit bananas today, and they're shadows of their former selves.

This summer we've been talking about fruit. And not just bananas—we've been studying the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of the Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches us that when you become a Christian you receive the Holy Spirit within you. The Holy Spirit—not a force or a power or a presence, but a person of the Trinity now resides within you. And because this Holy Spirit lives in you, you're connected to His power in your life.

And if you abide in Him, His power will produce fruit in your life. The fruit of the Spirit are the characteristics of God that are cultivated in us through the Holy Spirit as we become more like Christ in all of life. And today we're studying the fifth fruit of the Spirit: kindness.

Kindness—it seems like kindness is everywhere today, right? I see t-shirts and bumper stickers proclaiming the virtue. There's a granola bar brand based on kindness. Yard signs declare that kindness is everything. And even when I was a kid I was told to "Be kind, rewind."

But for all of this talk about kindness, doesn't it feel like our world is getting meaner? Why are people more divided and more at odds with one another? Why are our social media tools that are designed to bring people together (a noble goal) tearing people apart? If kindness is so popular, why does our world feel so unkind?

Perhaps what the world calls kindness is just an imitation. Maybe what our culture thinks of as kindness is really just about "being nice." And just like our counterfeit bananas, maybe we've been fed and we're stuck consuming this counterfeit kindness. So, I believe our world is starving for the real thing.

So, let's open up God's Word and let's study what true kindness really looks like. If you would, please open up your Bibles and join me in the Book of Ephesians. We're going to be in Ephesians chapter 4, verse 32, this morning. And we'll continue into chapter 5. If you're able, would you please stand with me as I read from God's Word?

"Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Please be seated.

The Bible says, "Be kind." "Be kind to one another." And in this passage kindness is defined in four ways. It is marked by compassion; it is tied to forgiveness; it's rooted in love; and it's expressed through sacrifice. And each of these is demonstrated to us through Jesus.

Counterfeit kindness is just about getting along. It's about being agreeable to those around us. It's this comfortable state of equilibrium where no one disagrees with each other, and it costs very little.

True biblical kindness is marked by compassion. It's tied to forgiveness. It's rooted in love. And it's expressed through sacrifice. And we are told--we're called, we're commanded—be kind. Imitate Christ.

And when we look at His kindness in the Scriptures, we see that true kindness crosses boundaries. **Kindness crosses boundaries.** And we know this because God himself does this for us. Jesus crossed the cosmic boundary to reach us. He stepped down into His own creation. He came to us to love us, to die for us, to forgive us.

True kindness is rooted in this steadfast, self-sacrificing lovingkindness of God. Lovingkindness is this wonderful, kind of old school, English translation of a Hebrew word that's really challenging to define. The lovingkindness in the Old Testament is the word *chesed*. *Chesed*. Everybody say that with me. *Chesed*. It's kind of fun to say, right? I know we're Texans, but it's not *chesed* [said with a Texas accent]; it's *chesed* [said with a guttural H sound at the beginning].

The word is used 255 times in the Old Testament, almost always to describe God's love and His actions toward people. And it revolves around His unmerited mercy, His undeserved grace, His abounding compassion, His covenantal love. And each of those gets really close to the meaning. But my favorite translation remains "lovingkindness." The steadfast, self-sacrificing love of God, who refuses to abandon people who are disobedient and sinful.

The Book of Nehemiah describes it this way: "They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles You performed among them. They became stiff-necked and in their rebellion they appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery. But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in *chesed*." Lovingkindness. "Therefore, You did not desert them."

Nehemiah describes God's people in the Old Testament. But this also describes us—refusing to listen, failing to remember what God has done for us, returning again and again and again and again to these sins that enslave us. And yet, God chooses to show lovingkindness. And He doesn't desert us. And in Christ, He crosses every boundary to bring us back to himself.

In the New Testament Jesus tells a story that is one of the most famous examples of lovingkindness that we have in the Bible. In Luke chapter 10, Jesus tells a parable about a man on a journey from Jerusalem to Jericho on this twisted road through a high-crime area. And along the way he is attacked and robbed and beaten and left for dead.

But Jesus says a priest just so happens to walk by. I'm sure the people are thinking, *Okay, great. Here comes help. It's a priest, the professional good guy. Story over.* But the priest puts his head down and he keeps walking.

That's strange. Jesus doesn't tell us why, but before anyone can ask, He says that along came a Levite. The Levites were from the tribe of Levi. They helped the priest in the temple. This is an expert helper. But when he sees the man he retreats to the other side of the road.

And then, finally, a third person comes along. And we don't know much about him. But we know that he's a Samaritan. Okay, I was hoping you would gasp there with me. Why didn't you? Because we know how the story ends, right? And "good Samaritan" is a phrase that most people know, because it's the Samaritan who stops to help.

But Jesus is telling this story to a Jewish audience. And while those first two men are respected, this guy, a Samaritan, is the last person you expect to be the hero. Jews and Samaritans didn't get along. There are racial issues, there are cultural barriers, there is this religious friction. But it's the Samaritan who crosses those boundaries to help this man in need.

It's really hard to describe or contemporize what this would be like in a way that does it justice. So just consider this: who is that person that you would least like to be trapped on an elevator with? Who is that person that within two minutes, you just start butting heads with and disagreeing about everything, and you just don't want to be around them?

Maybe on your neighborhood walk you cross to the other side of the street so that you don't even have to pass by their house. Guess what? That's your Samaritan. Or if you see yourself in the hero role and you're ready to save the day, then that's your bleeding man lying on the ground.

Jesus shares this story of boundary-crossing lovingkindness to demonstrate the type of kindness He shows to us. And Jesus shares this story of boundary-crossing lovingkindness to challenge us to the type of kindness we're meant to show others. Be kind. Imitate Christ.

In the 1970s, psychologists at Princeton University wanted to learn and understand why some people are kind while others aren't. So, they set up this study with a group of people who should have no trouble showing kindness: seminary students, future pastors.

And so, the researchers individually assigned these students to deliver a sermon on the parable of the Good Samaritan. And they hadn't been given any time to prepare, the location was across campus, the audience was going to critique their talk, and whoever gave the best sermon would receive an A in their preaching class.

Now what the students didn't know was that the psychologist had also hired an actor to play the part of a victim. And he was going to be coughing and asking for help. And he was going to be sitting right along their path to the classroom. It was all a setup.

So, what do you think happened? Ninety percent of the students ignored the suffering person. When the study was published, it said, "On several occasions, a seminary student going to give his talk on the parable of the Good Samaritan literally stepped over the victim as he hurried on his way!"

Now before we judge those students, ask yourself: Would you have stopped? Even if you were in a hurry? Would I? Or are there certain boundaries that hinder our kindness? Who is that person that between you exists this boundary?

Perhaps it is the homeless man or woman who you are going to drive by on your way home today. There's a socioeconomic boundary at least. Would you cross it? Today could you go to HEB and grab some bottles of water and just keep them in your car? And when you see that human being standing in the sun and she looks like she could use a drink of water, could you cross that boundary to be kind?

Now, I know ... is the sign that she's holding up legitimate? Is he standing there for the right reasons? Are they out there maybe because of their own mistakes? When it comes to lovingkindness, does it really matter? Maybe a first step of boundary-crossing could be as simple as a bottle of water and a smile on a 100-degree day.

Or maybe the boundary for you is one of hurt. You are hurt by someone, maybe even here at this church. And when you see them, you gently ignore them. Or you put on your fake smile and you say, "Hey, how are y'all? We're doing just fine. Bless your heart."

And there's a lot of "nice" there. But there's this enormous gulf, this emotional chasm between the two of you. What if you were the one to initiate the conversation or a cup of coffee? Cross that boundary to be kind.

If God can show kindness to me of all people, that should affect how I treat others. He was willing to cross the boundary to save me, not because of me, but because of His lovingkindness. What prevents me from going and doing likewise?

Kindness crosses boundaries. And to do that, true kindness costs something. **Kindness costs something.** Turn with me again to Ephesians 5. We're told "Be kind, imitate Christ. And

walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.” He loved us and He gave himself up for us.

God shows us kindness. It’s a gift, it’s grace. But there is always a cost. And God’s lovingkindness to us comes at the expense of His Son. Grace costs us nothing because it cost Him everything.

True kindness costs something. We see an example of this in the Book of Ruth. Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi are two women in a desperate situation. They’re both widows. There’s this famine in the land. They are without basic safety and security.

So, Naomi decides that she’s going to go back to her hometown. And she gives Ruth an easy out. She says, “I’m going back to my home. You just go back to yours.” And at this point there is nothing in this relationship for Ruth. There is nothing in this for her. Going with Naomi is going to cost her. She’s walking face first into hardship. She’d be leaving her home and her family and her people to be a stranger in a strange land with no upside. And she goes with Naomi.

She shows her lovingkindness—*chesed*. And for everything that she gains in the end, there is still so much she had to sacrifice. Kindness cost her something.

Think back to our parable. Here’s this beaten and bloody man lying in the street. And here comes this unexpected savior, the Samaritan. He comes to the rescue, he stops, he cares for the stranger, he bandages him, he puts him in his own vehicle and he takes him to help. And then he stays with him. He stays with him overnight. And then he pays for rent. And then he pays for additional health care. The Samaritan’s kindness costs him time and energy and money. But he’s committed to lovingkindness, and so he sacrifices for this man.

This is what Jesus does for us. This is what Jesus calls us to do for others. Be kind. Imitate Christ.

When I was in college, there was this huge initiative called “Save Darfur.” At the time, there were ethnic killings and kidnappings and terrible atrocities taking place in this region of the Sudan. And a documentary came out and it screened on campuses across the U. S. to raise awareness and fund, financial support, for the people in Darfur.

This was one of the first major social media movements. There were hash tags and stickers and t-shirt. It was a big deal. Millions of people liked the page and pledged their support.

A few years ago, a researcher from the University of North Carolina set out to learn if these big, public social media campaigns actually helped organizations choose their goals. And a study found that only .02 percent of people who liked the “Save Darfur” page ever donated a dime; 99.8 percent of people did nothing. And I was one of them. The researcher’s conclusion was this: he said that supporting things on social media makes you look good and kind to other people. But it doesn’t cost you anything. And so, very few people actually do anything.

What will it cost you to be kind? It might cost you time. It takes time to go out of your way for somebody else. It could cost you energy. You have to give of yourself. It can cost money and resources, or even your reputation. Biblical kindness will cost something.

In my life, the times when I am most unkind is when I’m busy. I pride myself on being efficient. And when I’m in a time-crunch, I can become selfish and self-centered, like one of those Princeton seminary students running across campus. If I’m in a hurry, kindness tends to evaporate ... even with the people I love most, even with my own family. If I’m busy, I need to get them in the car, I rush them along, I start speaking to them, but nowhere nearly as kind as I should, not in a way that imitates Christ.

Would it really cost me that much to speak kindlier with my wife and my kids when we’re in a hurry? It’ll cost something. We might be five to ten minutes late. But that’s a small price to pay for kindness. This is an area where I’m praying for the Holy Spirit to work in my life. *God, help me to be more kind, even at the cost of my efficiency.*

Another price of kindness that I’m wrestling with right now is the cost of forgiveness. It is striking that in Ephesians 4:32 being kind is directly linked to forgiving other people. Because forgiveness comes at a cost—a high cost, sometimes. Because to forgive is sometimes at the cost of being right. Other times it’s at the cost of overlooking that injury or insult. Forgiveness costs something because it releases another person from their debt to you. So, while I’m being honest about my own struggles, I’ll just tell you that I’ve been convicted this week as I’ve been studying lovingkindness. I’ve been holding onto a lot of judgment, particularly against my own parents, for these ways that I feel that I’ve been wronged.

Some of it is recent, within the past three years, things said and done at a time when the world got a little crazy. Other things are from my childhood, the way I was raised or the way I wish I had been raised. And God’s been prodding me this week with some of those things. It’s just time to let go. To be kind, to imitate Christ, I need to forgive. I need to forgive.

In His lovingkindness, God forgave me, and at infinite cost to himself. True kindness causes us to forgive others, to cross that divide, even at a cost to yourself; to rebuild a bridge with people in your life.

Kindness crosses boundaries. It costs something. Because true kindness reflects the Gospel. Kindness reflects the Gospel.

Remember, kindness is marked by compassion. It's tied to forgiveness. It's rooted in love. And it's expressed through sacrifice.

And this true kindness is perfectly lived out in Jesus himself. And so, when we show lovingkindness to other people, we're showing Jesus to them. When we're kind, when we give of ourselves for the sake of somebody else, we display Jesus to a world in desperate need of Him. This fruit of the Spirit is not about kindness for kindness' sake. This isn't just about being more cordial. This is a real, tangible call. Be kind. Imitate Christ.

Now that's all well and good for the people that we already feel compassion toward. It's a whole lot easier to be kind and follow Jesus' example when it comes to the people who we like. Because they "deserve" our kindness. But true kindness reflects the Gospel. So, we're called to be kind to people who we don't like. We're even called to show kindness to the people who we don't feel deserve it.

Think back to your Samaritan ... Who's that person or that group of people who you just have a hard time being kind with? Maybe in your neighborhood there's that neighbor with that political sign in their yard. Or at work there's that co-worker who says and does things that offend you. Or maybe you have these online interactions with people from your past, high school or college, and they are acquaintances at best, but all you do is argue online.

And there's this feeling that we have, and we don't talk about it. We keep it hidden. But we feel like they are what's wrong with the world. They're the problem. How do you muster the strength to not just ignore them or be nice to that person, but to show them lovingkindness? How can we be kind and imitate Christ with somebody like that?

You remember the Gospel. You remember the Gospel so you can reflect the Gospel. We remember the Gospel so we can reflect the Gospel.

The Book of Titus tells us this: "We ourselves were once foolish and disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and lovingkindness of God our Savior



appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy.”

Everything Jesus did to save us the Bible summarizes as the lovingkindness of God. Jesus’ death on the cross is the source of true kindness.

So, “deserves” has got nothing to do with it. The Gospel should humble us profoundly, that we are so lost that Jesus had to die for us. And the Gospel should also assure us profoundly, that we are so loved that He chose to die for us.

And so, because we know that we’re sinners, we’re completely saved by grace, not because of anything good in ourselves, we can have the humility and the boldness to be kind, even to people we don’t agree with; even with people we don’t like; even with people we don’t feel like deserve it. Because nobody deserves it. But God shows lovingkindness to us. So, be kind and imitate Christ.

In her book about her journey from being a committed lesbian to being a committed Christ-follower, a woman named Rosaria Butterfield writes that as a non-Christian, her view of believers was very low. She said that by and large she felt that Christians were not intelligent, judgmental, scornful, hateful, arrogant and afraid of diversity.

She even published an article in her local newspaper criticizing a Christian organization. And wouldn’t you know it, she received plenty of polarized responses. She got so many letters she put two boxes on each corner of her desk: one for hate mail, and one for fan mail. And she noticed that most of the hate mail came from so-called Christians. Some of it included death threats. Some of it even came on church letterhead.

And then one day she received two simple pages from a local pastor. And Butterfield writes, “It was a kind and inquiring letter. It had a warmth and civility to it, in addition to its probing question.” The letter disagreed with her ... kindly. She said, “It was the kindest opposition I have ever received in my life.” And she couldn’t figure out which box to put it in. So, she left it right in the middle and it stayed on her desk for seven days.

She waited a week. And finally, she couldn’t take it anymore. She contacted the pastor and said, “Can we have a conversation?” So, they met for a cup of coffee. And wouldn’t you know it, she became friends with him and his wife. She even went to church with them. Rosaria writes, “They were kind to me.” There’s that word again. “And they talked with me, they

disagreed with me, in a way that didn't make me feel erased." And she credits this friendship as one of the most important parts of her journey to faith in Jesus.

Be kind. Imitate Christ. Because true kindness may just help others to get to know Him.

You don't just white-knuckle your way to a kinder soul. You can't just force yourself to become a kinder human being. Instead, you focus your attention and your affection on Jesus himself. And you remember His lovingkindness. And then you let His grace and the Holy Spirit change you. And let the Spirit change how you look at other people. And you'll begin to stop looking at them as "others," and "them" and "what's wrong with the world." And you'll begin to see them as individuals whom God dearly loves and Jesus died for. And then you'll be able to show lovingkindness.

Let's stop just being nice. That is a false fruit. Let's not settle for counterfeit kindness anymore. Let's seek the real thing.

The theologian N. T. Wright says that when we think of an older, physically diminished person, we tend to say that "they're just a shadow of their former self." But when someone is a Christian, when someone belongs to Christ, we should actually say that "they're just a shadow of their future self."

Because as the Spirit works within us to produce fruit, real fruit, we're becoming more like Jesus. And we're becoming more the person we were created to be and who we will be into eternity. What we are now is merely a shadow of what we are to become. So, let's live into that. Be kind. Imitate Christ.

Would you please pray with me?

God, we thank You for who You are. God, we thank You that You show us incredible kindness, this lovingkindness that has never given up on us; this lovingkindness that sent Your Son to die for us, people who don't deserve it, but people You love anyway.

God, we pray that we would become people—would be ambassadors of that lovingkindness; that we would become people who would show it to those around us; that there would be something unique and different about us because we know who You are. And because we know Your kindness we can share it with others.

God, we pray that this week You would give us an opportunity to be kind to someone in our life; to show You to a world that needs You. We pray these things in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.