
The Fruit of Kindness

DAVE BAST

I like supermarkets; I especially enjoy walking around in them; not just shopping for the things I need, but looking at all of the appealing foods and beverages; and one of my favorite parts of my favorite supermarket is the produce section, which always features a stunning array of fresh fruits and vegetables. Well, we have been exploring one of the produce sections of the New Testament in this series of programs about the fruit of the Spirit. That is the phrase the Apostle Paul uses to describe the values, attitudes and behaviors that characterize a healthy Christian life. These qualities are a sort of harvest of grace that God is looking for in us—the produce of the life of the Spirit within us. Today, we want to look at one of the simplest and most down to earth of these qualities, the fruit of kindness. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; and so, Scott, as I mentioned in the intro, developing this idea of produce or fruit of the Spirit, we are right in the middle now, exactly halfway. This is number five in a series of nine programs, because we are talking today about the fifth fruit; so, just again to repeat all nine of them: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control. So, today we are looking at kindness.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And one of the things that we also said, and that we have mentioned on previous programs in this series, is that the fruit of the Spirit are different than the gifts of the Spirit. Gifts are different for different people, but the fruit are supposed to be common to all. In fact, one of our guests on one of the previous programs, Shiao Chong, pointed out that Paul uses a singular verb before he gets to...the fruit *is*, not the fruit *are*, but the fruit *is*, as though all nine are...they are a boxed set. You get one, you get them all—you are supposed to get them all. We are not called to different fruit. All of us are supposed to bear all nine because, well, they are a matched set.

DAVE BAST

It is not like you can say: Well, I am not really very gentle...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

I have a temper, and I am not always kind...I am kind of impatient, but I am full of joy; I have real peace, so I am okay, right? No. It is all the fruit in every Christian that is looked for; and we might also point out that this is a fairly common biblical metaphor, the idea of God's people bearing a crop—bearing fruit, and that God looks for this; so, in the Old Testament, in the book of Isaiah, God compares Israel to a vineyard...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Jesus often used that idea in his parables...

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am the vine, you are the branches...

DAVE BAST

Yes, you must abide in me if you are to bear fruit; or, by their fruit you will know them, he says in the end of the Sermon on the Mount; so, a fairly common biblical analogy or metaphor.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you mentioned the supermarket at the beginning, Dave, but...and of course, there were markets and farmers markets all through history, but in biblical times people lived a little closer to the land than a lot of us do today, so they probably also thought about fruit hanging on the trees—hanging on the vines, and fruit needs cultivation; it needs nourishment; it needs water; there are a lot of things you have to do, and a lot of things, therefore, the Holy Spirit has to do in our lives to help us grow these fruit on the branches of our lives.

DAVE BAST

Right; one of the things that I found helpful some years ago in thinking about the fruit of the Spirit is a suggestion that John Stott has...the great Evangelical teacher, preacher, writer, John Stott, who suggests that we could think of these nine fruit in three groups of three; so, the first three: love, joy, peace, primarily relate to our relationship with God; the love that he engenders in us, the joy that we feel as a result of our faith, the peace that God gives—the peace that passes understanding; the last three primarily have to do with qualities in ourselves, like self control or faithfulness; but the middle three are relational, as we think of our dealings with others—with other people—both Christians and non-Christians. So, patience, kindness, and goodness are all describing ways of behaving toward other people.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and of course, there is a little...and Stott, I think, said this...there is a little overlap here. They are not quite neatly that compartmentalized; but certainly, we think of other people when we think of something like kindness. You have to have somebody to be kind to, after all, right? You cannot be kind in a room all by yourself, you have to have somebody else to extend this to; but having said that, I think in history a lot of people have read this list of the fruit of the Spirit...and some of these things are pretty big and robust, like joy and patience, but kindness...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Really, that is a fruit? That is one of the ways we will look like Jesus, just being nice?

DAVE BAST

Yes; I thought of a book: *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, by a man named Robert Fulghum, published a number of years ago now; but it became a New York Times number one bestseller...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Huge...it sold millions!

DAVE BAST

Right; here is what he said: Most of what I really need to know about how to live and what to do and how to be, I learned in kindergarten. These are the things I learned: Share everything; play fair; don't hit people; put things back where you found them; clean up your own mess; don't take things that aren't yours; say you are sorry when you hurt someone; you know, just basic kindness; and we are tempted to think: Wow, I mean, everybody knows that, right?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, you would think so, but one of his points in that book was grownups do not do this stuff anymore; and maybe we would do better if we would all hold hands when we cross the street, and just treat each other the way our kindergarten teacher told us to treat them. We would be a lot better off; but, in the New Testament...and this is pretty universal, by the way, most world religions advocate some version of kindness, because it really does make life better. It reminds me of a quote from the writer, Henry James, who wrote a letter to his nephew one time. He said: My son, there are three things that are important in life. First, be kind; second, be kind; third, be kind...

DAVE BAST

Yes...

SCOTT HOEZEE

And he went on to say kindness is not the same thing as holiness, but kindness is often the doorway through which holiness enters our world. You cannot have a holy lifestyle if you are cruel to other people. Kindness is the doorway through which holiness can enter our lives. I like that.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and you said, Scott, just now that this is something sort of common to various traditions throughout the world. This seems to be part of God's general revelation, that this is how we ought to be; so, you think of Jesus' Golden Rule: Do unto others...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

As you would have them do unto you; well, there is a version of that from ancient China, from Confucius; there is a version of that from the rabbis in the Old Testament. So, we all get this, I think, which is maybe all the more surprising to reflect on how little kindness there actually is in our world, especially now, it seems like, in our various countries and societies and cultures. We live in a very unkind moment, where people are just, you know, screaming at each other and ripping at each other and tearing each other down, like animals, really.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and one of the things that...when we thought about doing this series, Dave...one of the things we talked about is, we want to look at these fruit of the Spirit in the face of Facebook and Twitter and Instagram, and all these forums in which people are just a little bit removed enough from each other...they are not face to face; it is Facebook, but we are not really face to face...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so people find it much easier to be cutting and cruel. You post something and thirteen people pile on. There are even these people called *trolls*, who spend all their day going on Twitter—going on Facebook—and just leaving nasty comments just to be nasty. So, you are right. We do not have a very kind

world right now.

DAVE BAST

And the question is, would you do that face to face with someone?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Probably you wouldn't.

DAVE BAST

And the answer is, probably not. So, a very basic way to behave...a very basic quality...the simple virtue of kindness, it is a fruit of the Spirit, it is in short supply; and what we want to talk about next is why we should care so much about being kind to one another.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this, the fifth program in a nine-part series on the fruit of the Spirit, and specifically today, the fruit of kindness. We were just talking, Dave, about why we should value this, and maybe how we should practice it; and here is something that is revealed in the New Testament, although there are hints of it, we will say in just a minute, in the Old Testament, too; but a number one reason why kindness has something to do with having the Holy Spirit in us is because the New Testament tells us: You know why you need to be kind? Because God is kind, and guess what? God's kindness spells your very life.

DAVE BAST

Yes; isn't that interesting? I mean, if you think of all the attributes of God...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And ask, you know, ordinary people in the pew: What is God like? I am sure you would begin with things like: Powerful and eternal and majestic; and loving, and close and father-like, and all that stuff; but I wonder how many people would think of the word *kind*, and yet, over and over, scripture uses that word to describe God's basic treatment of us. So, here, for example, is a passage from the Gospel of Luke. This is sometimes called the Sermon on the Plain. It is sort of Luke's version of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. There is a lot of verbal overlap, but Jesus is saying to the crowds:

^{6:27}I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you; ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also. From one who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic. ³⁰Give to everyone who begs from you... ³¹and as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. (So there is the Golden Rule; and then he goes on)...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; he says: ³²If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them...(but you have to go beyond that, Jesus says)... ³⁵Love your enemies and do good and lend expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great and you will children of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil, ³⁶so you be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

So there it is: God is kind to people who do not deserve it, so you be kind to people who do not deserve it; because, guess what? You did not deserve your salvation once either.

DAVE BAST

Right; yes, absolutely; and not just kind to your friends, you know?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; if God were that way, we would not be saved.

DAVE BAST

Right; he would not be kind to anyone if he was just kind...except his Son and the Spirit and the good angels, maybe—the unfallen angels—but, God is kind to those who do not deserve it; God is merciful to those who do not deserve it; and that is basically what we are called to be and what we are called to do.

There is another wonderful passage that says: God makes his rain fall on the just and the unjust alike. There is this sort of general benevolence in the way God operates in the world that gives people what they need, and not what they deserve.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know...so, this is in the New Testament, and there is that other great passage, too, that a lot of people know from Ephesians Chapter 2. Paul writes: ⁴But God, being rich in mercy with the great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. It is by grace that you have been saved. (And then he goes on to say): ⁷So that in the coming ages, he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

So, that is New Testament; but of course, in the Old Testament...and you see this all through the Old Testament, but especially in the book of Psalms, what was the number one characteristic of God that made Israel want to praise him the most? It was not his almighty power, his majesty...it was the Hebrew word, *chesed*, which means loving-kindness...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The loving-kindness of God. So, the idea that God is kind toward those who do not deserve it is already in the Old Testament. It comes through with great clarity in the New Testament when Jesus dies for us on the cross, although we did not deserve it.

It reminds me of what a theologian once said...you know, when you are on the receiving end of somebody who is rough and brutal and tough, you might react to that in different ways, but mostly you recoil from being treated roughly...but this theologian said: Kindness is always transformative for the one who receives it. How many times have we seen somebody who is really kind of not always a very nice person, but then you do something nice for them and they look at you and they soften...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And they say: Why are you doing this for me? Why do I deserve this kindness? Kindness is transformative. It changes the person who receives it; and certainly that is true in salvation.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely; in fact, kindness is almost a synonym for salvation there in that passage you read from Ephesians 2; that he might show the immeasurable kindness of his salvation—of his grace—in Christ Jesus. That is what God wants to do for us; that is what he *does* do for us. We have been talking about God in general, but if we focus on Jesus himself, this is also an aspect of his character...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, exactly.

DAVE BAST

And there is a wonderful passage, many people probably know it or they are familiar with it, in the old Book of Common Prayer from the Church of England. It is referred to as the comfortable words because they are full of comfort, where Jesus says, in Matthew 11:

²⁸Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls; ³⁰for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

We want to talk about this passage in other programs as well, but just for now, kindness in the fruit of the Spirit is *chrestos* in Greek. It means sort of goodness, basic benevolence, gentleness. The word in Matthew 11, where Jesus says: My yoke is easy, literally is: My yoke is *chrestos*—my yoke is kind. He knew a thing or two about making a good yoke that fit well, that did not chafe, you know, on the necks of the oxen or the animals; and that is how Jesus treats us—that is how he acts toward us. He is gentle with us; he is kind to us; he knows that he can set us free from the burdens that we carry if we will follow him, which is not to say discipleship is easy or grace is cheap...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

But it is to say that it fits us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So here is the thing that I think is wonderful to revel in and savor, and we have been doing that in this part of the program. You know, if you ask people: What are the top three of four characteristics of God, I would imagine they might say God is love. They might say he is almighty. One of the first things you ought to say is, what is God like? Well, he is kind. He is kind. Now, that does not mean he is soft, right?

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It does not mean he is just...

DAVE BAST

He is not a kindly old gentlemen, as we sometimes...a doddering...you know...sort of...no.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But somehow, kindness is the spring of our salvation. This is where our salvation comes from; the fact that God is able to be kind toward people who do not deserve it—all of us, in other words; and yet, he is kind; and therefore, kindness is a fruit of the Spirit.

Before we close the program, let's talk about some resources that we have for growing this particular fruit in our own lives. We will take that up in just a moment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and we are talking about the spiritual fruit of kindness today; and we have already noted that, at first, kindness seems like a surprising fruit. It does not seem nearly strong or robust enough to be something that should characterize Christians; so kindness seems like a surprising addition to the list of

the fruit, but then maybe not, because in the last segment we said: Guess what? You know who is the first one who is the kind one above all? God.

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Paul says: You know why you got saved by grace alone? Because God was kind to you. Well, wow! That really elevates kindness. It is not just being nice. There is some real strength behind kindness.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely; and we looked a little bit at what this involves...what it means. We looked at the Golden Rule and how common this is. This is something we teach our children. We teach them from a very young age. They need to learn it, because they are not necessarily naturally kind by nature; so, we sort of raise them in this way: Be kind to one another; you know, we teach it in kindergarten. It runs across cultures; it runs in various religious traditions; but why and how? How do we do it? How, in a world...in a culture...in a society, as we have said, where kindness seems to be in such short supply, what are the practical means by which we can sort of encourage this in one another?

I want to mention just one other verse as a starting point for the how, because it starts...and it is sort of pulling together all that we have been saying about God's character and the way God treats us. It starts by imitating what God has done for us in our actions toward one another. So here is a verse from Ephesians 4, where Paul says:

³¹Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Boy, that would be a great verse to put on your computer, you know, before you go onto social media...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Put that all away, and then, in verse 32:

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

So, step one is, remember how God has treated me, and then attempt to try to show that to each other; and the link between being kind and being tenderhearted, I love that, too. You said, Scott, a little bit ago that kindness toward one person often softens them, even if they are tough and rough; and when we think of how God has treated us, that ought to soften our hearts and help us to be kind likewise to others.

SCOTT HOEZEE

For all of the fruit of the Spirit, kindness, too, they are all rooted in baptism; they are all rooted in the fact that we have now been made one with Christ in baptism. We have union with Christ. We are one with Jesus; and therefore, by the Holy Spirit, these things flow out of our lives. It is almost like when you get up in the morning, you put on Jesus the way you pull a sweater over your head, right? We talked all about that before. Paul says in Colossians 3: Put on...get dressed up with...kindness, humility, meekness, patience. Above all, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony; and so, you choose to do this. You put this on by the Spirit's power every morning, and you try to let that outfit be visible to all whom you meet.

I read something interesting by a Broadway playwright by the name of Wendy Wasserstein, and said: You know, so much of our world...we are told that the only way you can get something done is to be tough and to be cold; but she said: You know, a lot of people in New York City instead choose to be kind. She said: This is the secret weapon of the New Yorker. You think everybody in New York is going to be tough and cold...and of course, you run into tough, cold people in New York, and everywhere...but, you know, when I have been to New York, I cannot believe how helpful people are when I am lost, or cannot figure out which subway line to take. She said: Kindness is our secret weapon to outsiders; and she says: You know what? It takes way more courage to be kind to a stranger than to ignore them or dismiss them. It takes more courage to be kind. I think that is an interesting idea.

DAVE BAST

It is. You know, we have been reading a number of passages from the epistles. We have read a couple of different passages from the book of Ephesians. You just read, Scott, from Colossians; and one of the things that we learned way back in seminary...I am sure you did, too, as I, is that the basic pattern of a New Testament epistle is indicative and then imperative...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

So, in Paul's letters, he always starts out reminding us of the facts of the Gospel. This is who God is; this is what God has done. This is who Jesus is. This is what he has done. And then it gets to the commands. So, the New Testament—the Gospel is never sheer exhortation. It is never just "do it." Like Nike, you know, just do it. It is always: Do this, but grounded in what has happened to you, as you said, Scott, in our baptism, symbolizing our union with Christ—our washing by Christ. We have this newness of life, we now have the Spirit; and so we can put Jesus on every day, like we put our clothes on, and his attitudes and his behaviors, and begin to exhibit them through the course of the day.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and as I say to our students in preaching class, when you look at all of the commands and the imperatives in Paul's letters, they never come down to Paul saying: Now listen; do this so you can become what you are not. You know, behave so you can become better people and God will love you. No, Paul's commands are always: Be who you are...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, as you said, he is always reminding them, the thing that comes up again and again, particularly in I Corinthians, where Paul says to them: Do you not know who you are? You are baptized people now. You have a new identity. Act like it. Be who, by grace, you have already become; and in this case, that includes being kind; and as we said, that is always transformative, and there is a certain universality to beaming kindness toward somebody. It reminded me of an episode of the old TV show, *M.A.S.H.*, where Colonel Blake encounters this Korean woman who has done something nice for him, and he says: Boy, I wish I could speak to her...you know, I wish I could talk to her, but I don't know Korean; and his clerk, Radar, says: Yeah, but isn't it nice that you can smile at her in Korean? That universality of exuding that warmth; it is transformative. God's kindness transforms us. Our kindness transforms others; and indeed, if we could just live out those kindergarten virtues, the whole world might be a better place.

DAVE BAST

You know, one of the things I found helpful is each day to pray at the beginning of the day these fruit into my life. So, I pray something like this: Lord Jesus, I want to clothe myself in you today. Help me to treat others as you would. Holy Spirit, I pray that today your fruit would grow in me: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Help me to walk in step with you today. Amen.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Amen, indeed. Well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast and Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we study the spiritual fruit of goodness.

Connect with us at groundworkonline.com and let us know scripture passages and topics you would like to hear discussed on *Groundwork*.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/the-fruit-of-kindness>

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