

Step By Step

Kindness: Ephesians 4:32

- We've been walking through a series together entitled, Step-By-Step where we are going through the Fruit of the Spirit that Paul lays out for us in Galatians 5.
- And we've been intentional about pointing out that **Fruit**, in this context means, **"A work, act, or deed, that comes from or originates from something else."**
- And what we so desperately need to understand, is that there is no part of the fruit of the Spirit that originates from us.
- And we do not have the ability or capability to manufacture anything genuine on this list in our own power
- They originate from God Himself and we can only begin to practice them if we rely on the Power of the Spirit

- So up to this point we have talked about Love, Joy, Peace, and Patience

- So today we're going to talk about Kindness
- And to do that, I want to break down the 3 aspects that Paul gives us in Ephesians 4:32 when he says, ***"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."*** -Ephesians 4:32 (ESV)
- PRAY
- When I was in high school, my predominant sport that I played was basketball. I wasn't a phenomenal athlete but I could hold my own, and I just loved playing sports. But while I was entrenched in the basketball world, I also played soccer, mainly just to stay in shape for basketball. I was not very good, and I predominantly played left bench on the soccer team. And I didn't really feel a desire to put my all into soccer and really push myself to get better mainly because it was a world I didn't really understand. It was like people were too

nice on the soccer field. In all of the other sports that I played, they were all very results driven. If you were missing shots, turning the ball over, or if the plays you were trying to make weren't working, then you were most likely chewed out and pulled out of the game. However in soccer, there were so many times I would go to make a pass that got taken away by the other team, or missed a shot by 10 feet, and I would anticipate getting yelled at but my coach and teammates would just say, "Ahhhh good thought!" What do you mean, good thought! It didn't work! The encouragement actually made me a little uncomfortable because I wasn't used to it.

- Another term I heard over and over again on the soccer field was "Useful." There would be times where I felt like I made a really sloppy play and they would just say, "Ah, that was useful." Now I didn't feel useful at all, all I did was kick the ball to the other side of the field! It didn't lead to a goal or anything! But it's like they could see 4 plays ahead and how things

could play out and they could appreciate the attempt even if the results weren't immediate. But in the other sports that I played, you could be trying as hard as you want, giving it your all, but if the results weren't almost immediate, you were being pulled. But in soccer, it was like as long as I was trying to be useful, I would be kept in the game. Now if I gave up and sulked, then I would be taken out. But as long as I kept up the effort, it was like they had faith that the results would eventually come.

- Now I share that with you today, because the word used for Kindness in Galatians 5:22, can also be translated as usefulness.
- Which is to say:
 - **A KIND CHRISTIAN IS A USEFUL CHRISTIAN**
 - On the flip side, an unkind Christian is a useless Christian
- And it makes sense that this would be because we are relational beings created in the likeness of a relational God.

Sunday, May 21, 2023

- The foundation of our faith is based around a relationship with God
- That's why Jesus said the whole law could be fulfilled in Loving God and Loving your neighbor
- Christianity is the only religion in the world in which the Deity that is worshipped, desires an intimate relationship with the people who worship Him
- And an intimate relationship is not possible without kindness
- We would never be able to have a relationship with God if it were not for His Kindness.
 - Paul is clear in Romans that it is His Kindness that leads us to repentance
- And He wants the same Kindness that He has shown us to be shown to others.
- That's why Paul is adamant about telling the church to **BE KIND** to one another
- First and Foremost, that kindness is to be shown to each other, here among the church body
- Because how are people supposed to know that God is a kind and relational God if His people are not kind and relational people?
- It's sad to admit, but if we're honest we all probably know that Christians in the eyes of unbelievers have more of a reputation of being critical people rather than kind people
- Now there are a lot of big issues that face our world and our churches today, in which we need to stand firm in the truth and confidently share what God teaches and what we believe.
 - However, you can be confident without being critical
 - You can be bold without bashing
 - You can actually speak the truth in Love, with gentleness and respect.
- Now to be fair, there are some issues that we face where it feels like no matter how loving,

caring, and kindly we approach the issue, we will still be seen as critical, unloving, unaccepting people.

- For example: When it comes to the issue of Homosexuality, this is our stance here at Hope Hickory.
 - We accept everyone. But we do not condone everything.
 - Now by saying that statement, there will be some who demonize me and accuse me of being an unloving, unaccepting bigot.
 - And there is nothing I can do about that.
 - Because our culture has married the two. And satan has been very strategic in that in making accepting and condoning one in the same in the eyes of most of the world.
 - But they are two very different things. God accepted me, when He did not condone my behavior.

- *He loved me so much that He meet me where I was, but He loved me too much to keep me where I was.*

- While we were yet sinners, Christ showed His willingness to accept us by dying for us on the cross so that we could have the opportunity to have a relationship with Him.
- And that is the same approach that I need to take when addressing strong issues like this one.
- Now I do have 2 other options.
 - I could condone it. I could give in and just say, "You know what? God loves everyone! So you do you and have your own relationship with God on your own terms..."
 - A lot of churches have done this, the issue has just gotten too difficult that they throw their hands up and say, "Never-mind! It's ok!"
- However, to condone it, based on what I believe, would actually be the most unkind, unloving thing, I could ever do!

- Because I do not base my beliefs on my opinions and my feelings, I base my faith on the Word of God and the Leading of His Holy Spirit.
- And even though a lot of other Christians are softening on this issue, the Bible doesn't.
- The Bible is very clear about this, so I need to be very clear about this.
 - Some will say "WHAT IF YOU'RE WRONG!"
 - I would LOVE to be wrong here! But if I'm genuine with the Scriptures, it's clear, and the eternal ramifications are too serious to play around with.
- The other option would be just to stay silent on the issue.
 - Many churches take this approach as well. They take the don't ask don't tell approach to it.
 - But that is just as unloving and unkind as condoning.
- And here's why: If I truly believe this Bible. And if I truly believe in intelligent and intentional design. And if I see someone living a lifestyle, or struggling with whether or not TO live a lifestyle that I know will be destructive and hinder them from having an intimate relationship with God. If I see that, and do nothing, or promote it, all that is saying is, "I don't care."
 - That's saying, "I don't care whether or not you ever know the love of God or spend an eternity in hell."
 - That's saying, "I don't care that according to National Center for Infectious Diseases, active male homosexuals are 1000x more likely to contract HIV than the rest of the population, and therefore have HALF of the expected life span as others.."
 - How could I call myself a loving and caring Christian if my actions or inactions say, "It's ok by me if you want to live a lifestyle that is spiritually and physically destructive. It

doesn't really matter to me if you go to heaven or hell, just as long as you like me....”

- That is the most selfish approach I could ever take.
 - No, we have to get to the point where we can confidently say, “We accept you, we love you, we see you, you are welcome here! However we do believe that God has a better plan for your life.”
 - “God isn't trying to keep you from anything, I truly believe that the love and acceptance that you are looking for in this life is found in Jesus. And He said He has come to give you life and give it to the full.”
 - “But even though we may not fully agree with each other, we're all still growing and learning, but Jesus has changed my life so much, I'd love for you to experience that!”
 - “So I would encourage you, you've pursued this lifestyle, why don't you try pursuing Jesus. Here's some scripture you can read, why don't you try talking to Him when you're

alone. Just try that for a season and see how it goes, and if you have any questions or need anything at all, I'm here for you.”

- Some might even say that is being soft on the issue, but I don't think so. Because I think where we go wrong is when we try to behavior modify rather than just opening the door to allow the Holy Spirit to do what He does.
 - I can't change anyone, but I can lead people astray. So all I can do is faithfully share the truth in love, rely on the Spirit to be as loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, and gentle as I can possibly be and leave the results up to Him.
 - I will not argue, get defensive, or use scripture verses and these statistics as ammunition.
 - That's not the point. Like we've said before, argument and debate will never result in faith. But compassion and care can.
 - And there will be plenty of times where we handle it with the utmost care and kindness

and it still not be received well. Jesus told us to expect that.

- But a lot of times that just frustrates us and we just want to give up and either start bashing people we don't agree with, or just stay silent all together.
- But if we keep up the effort and attempt, we will continue to be useful and we can leave the results in God's hands.
- I have a pretty lengthy quote from Chip Ingram out of his book entitled, "Culture Shock." And I tried to shorten it up but I just felt like we needed the whole quote. He wrote:
 - ***"As believers, we must treat homosexuality as we do other temptations and sins. We need to be forthright and truthful as we present the truth of the Scriptures, but do so with humility and compassion, not a sense of condemnation or superiority. Out of fear of taboo we often hide and fail to share the truth of the Gospel with members of the gay community. Most of those in the***

gay community have never met a kind, nonjudgmental Christian who had the courage to share God's love and plan of forgiveness and eternal life. Just because a person is currently living a homosexual lifestyle, it does not mean that he or she is not open to the love and forgiveness of Christ. Our message is one of hope, deliverance, and love. God is not trying to take away someone's fun or remove valid alternatives. God so loves us all that He wants to protect us and provide the best for us. If you genuinely love your homosexual friend, you will risk the relationship in order to share the promise of forgiveness you have received for your own sin." -Chip Ingram: Culture Shock

- Now, when I meet someone from the homosexual community, it's probably not going to be the first thing that I bring up. I'm probably going to try and find some common ground

first. I want them to know my heart before they know my stance.

- Because no one cares what you know until they know that you care.
- However, if I never say anything at all. Then I don't really care.
- And I love that Pastor Chip brought up that we need to treat this the same as other sins and temptations, because that's how the Bible treats it.
- In 1 Corinthians 6, it says, ***"...The unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God... Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." -1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (ESV)***
- So often we take that verse and we just highlight the homosexual part. And we

probably do that because that just might be the one or one of the few that we haven't personally struggled with.

- Have you ever been sexually immoral as a heterosexual, you ever looked at pornography, Jesus said if you even look lustfully at someone who isn't your spouse it's the same as committing adultery.
 - You ever been greedy? You ever taken advantage of someone else? Here, I love this one. He adds in Revilers. Other translations say, Slanderers
 - So those who do nothing but slander the homosexual community are in the same list as they are!
 - Anyone here completely innocent in this list?? No? Well that's the point. Here's what Paul says in the very next verse.
- ***"And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were***

justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” -1 Corinthians 6:11 (ESV)

- Maybe we need to be overcome with gratitude about how much we have been saved from, and how every man women and child has the same opportunity for salvation that we had and care more about seeing souls saved than arguing against an agenda.
- Maybe we need our hearts softened a bit.
- Which is why Paul also tells us in Ephesians 4 to be **Tenderhearted**.
- It means to be compassionate, or sympathetic.
- Now that bodes the question, how do we get a Tender heart? Well I believe that:
- **A TENDER HEART IS A RESULT OF PRAYER AND REPENTANCE**
 - My heart will will begin to grow callous whenever I slack on my prayer life.

- And it is incredible how much more patient I can be toward the people that I pray for.
- Not long ago I jokingly but also truthfully told a friend that Rachel can tell if I missed my devotion time with the Lord that morning because of how much more irritable I am throughout the day
- Because Patience does not come natural to me, its a fruit of the Spirit. Now irritability does come natural to me, it runs in my family. We're a bunch of Irish people from Philadelphia what do you expect??
- So it makes so much sense why Paul wrote in his letter to Timothy: ***“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people,” -1 Timothy 2:1 (ESV)***
 - Not just the people we like! Not just the people God put on our heart that day. But also for the politicians we don't agree with, those who oppose Christianity and everything Jesus represents, those who have

wronged us, those who irritate us. We're told to pray for them, intercede for them, ask God to bless them.

- And that's not very easy to do!
- I remember one time I was in a season where I was very frustrated by a lot of things, and I had one person specifically that was frustrating me more than anything else.
- And I was talking with one of my Pastor's Jeff Marburger, and I was venting to him, and letting him know all of my frustrations, why I was frustrated, and why I was justified in being frustrated.
- And he agreed with me. That's one of the reasons I wanted to vent to him, I wasn't trying to be spiritual and accountable, I was wanting to talk to someone who thought the same way I did about the issue.
- But he didn't affirm my frustration. He just smiled, in a very Jeff Marburger manner and said, "Hey brother. You been prayin' for him?"

- "Ugh....no....I haven't....I don't want to pray for him, I just want to be frustrated and complain!"

- But it was amazing how much less those things frustrated me when I actually just prayed about them.

- Pastor Craig Groeschel once said, ***"My prayers for other people don't always change them, but they always change me."***

- It's almost a guarantee that my heart will soften toward an individual, no matter how much they might be frustrating or irritating me, whenever I take the time to really pray for them, intercede for them, and ask God to bless them...even if they don't change the way I want them to.

- Because a lot of times, whenever I stop and get into the presence of God and really pray over those things, I also become convicted about the things in my heart that need to be dealt with.

Sunday, May 21, 2023

- I start to deal with the log in my eye rather than the spec in theirs
- That is why repentance is so key when it comes to having a tender heart because it doesn't allow us to put ourselves on a pedestal over other people because we are reminded of how we constantly need to be forgiven of ourselves.
- It's very for us to lose sight of our constant need for forgiveness.
- Pastor Jim Cymbala is one of my favorite pastors on the planet, he pastors Brooklyn Tabernacle Church in Brooklyn, New York.
- And he likes to tell a story about one day when had just finished preaching the last service of the day one Sunday. And he was a little more exhausted than normal. He was sitting off the edge of the stage while people were praying, he kept thinking about how tired he was and how he was ready to go home.
- When he looked up and saw a man on the third row to his left staring at him. The man looked a

mess, raggedy clothes, hair all matted up. The man was looking at him as if to ask, 'can i come talk to you.' The pastor thought to himself, 'oh here we go, a guy looking for money.'

- So the pastor waved him over to himself. The closer the guy drew, the more the pastor would get hit by the smell. The worst smell he had ever experienced, the man hadn't had a bath in probably a few years, and had literally been laying in his own urine outside when he was drawn into the church by the music.
- So the pastor kind of turned his head to get a breath asked him his name, it was David. Asked why he wasn't in the shelter, said that he almost got killed there and it was too dangerous. Pastor said "ok." Now he normally made a practice of not giving our money in these situations, but he was tired. So reached for his wallet to give him a few dollars, but when he reached out the money, he felt his arm being pushed down and David said, "I

don't want your money preacher, I want this Jesus you talk about.”

- Then the pastor began to break down, and David began to break down. They grabbed each other, and hugged each other as God was working on both of their hearts.
- He recounts this scene when he says, “There we stood, A preacher in need of God, and a guy from the street in need of God...I knew who was really in need of prayer that day; it was Jim Cymbala. I lifted my hands and just said, “God, please forgive me! What kind of cheap, two-bit preacher have I become? You sent me somebody who’s searching for you, and I want to give him a few dollars and get rid of him. Please help me!” And God, at that moment, baptized me with His Love and with His Grace. He saw how pitiful I was...”
- Thats when He felt the Lord speak to him and said, “Jim, if you cant learn to love that smell, I can’t use you.” The Lord said, “That’s

what the world and all of the filthiness of sin smells like to me, but I loved them anyway.”

- You see whenever we have moments of repentance like that, our hearts are softened, because we are reminded of how desperately we need God and we also gain a deep desire for others to know God.
- Repentance leads us to seek forgiveness for ourselves.
- Jesus said, whoever has been forgiven much loves much. And Paul in Ephesians 4 says that we are to be ...**“forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.”**
- So if we want kindness and tenderheartedness to be attributes of our lives, we need to be reminded how of much we are forgiven and we need to show that same forgiveness to others.
- Christians should be the the most forgiving people on the planet. Not just out of appreciation for how much we’ve been forgiven, but also because we’re commanded too!

- And the more we forgive, the softer our hearts get, and the kinder we become.
- However we have too many hard hearted, unbearable Christians in the world, and one of the main reasons why is that we refuse to forgive.
 - Someone says something without thinking, we get offended, and we don't forget it
 - How many church splits and divisions happen over the most petty things??
 - If we allow those things to bind us up, imagine how we act when someone does something to really hurt us, really betray us, or really let us down.
- *If there's one thing I can promise you, its that you are going to get hurt, people are going to let you down*
 - *However, It's up to you whether you are going to allow that to dictate the rest of your life or not*
- This is why forgiveness needs to be a regular practice in our lives.
- YOU DON'T HOLD GRUDGES, GRUDGES HOLD YOU
 - Forgiveness brings freedom
 - Every time you choose forgiveness, a prisoner gets set free, and that prisoner is YOU
 - You get set free from the prison of bitterness, anger, and ill-will
- Forgiveness does not necessarily mean you become BFF's with the person who hurt you
 - You can forgive from a distance
 - You may have been in a relationship that was just not a good situation, that relationship or friendship led you to start living an ungodly lifestyle, the other person could have emotionally or even physically abusive... forgiveness does not mean you got back into a destructive situation.

- Sometimes people hurt you or sin against you in a way that changes the relationship forever, you'll just never be close with that person ever again...and there's nothing you can do about that.
- But even in that, forgiveness can still happen because:

- FORGIVENESS IS THE ACT OF RELEASING BITTERNESS FROM THE HEART

- You may have so much anger and hatred built up toward someone who hurt more than we would be able to understand. But sometimes what it takes to pray for and about that person. In by doing so, you are giving that bitterness over to God
- Like we've said before, prayer is the transference of a burden, and sometimes you need to transfer that bitterness over to Him
- And when you do, sometimes He will lead you toward restoration, to have a conversation, to offer your forgiveness in

person, and sometimes even to ask for forgiveness yourself

- One of the greatest relationship builders is asking for forgiveness even when you feel like you don't need to.
- Pastor Jeremy Peeler once said, "The two greatest words in evangelism is: I'm Sorry."
- But other times He'll take the bitterness and lead you to just let it alone and move on.
 - Recent prayer story
- So God might lead you to do something like that. But every situation, and every person is different.
- And we need to allow God to shift our hearts and our minds away from the bitterness and on to something better.
- At my ordination back in 2014, my dad was one of the speakers. And at one point in his message, he said to me, "You know some of the people who hurt me the most in this world, who stabbed me in the back and completely

betrayed me were Christians, and some of them were pastors.” But then he said, “But Some of the people who loved me the most, who took care of me and my family, and I had my back the most were Christians and some of them were pastors.” He said, “Whichever one you choose to focus on is up to you.”

- Man if we can take that kind of approach, we can have less cross-armed, closed-off Christians...
- And we will have more open-armed, forgiving, tenderhearted, kind Christians.
- Isn't it interesting that the very posture that Jesus had on the cross, was open arms.
- And as He hung there, suffering in ways that we could never imagine, as they were in the middle of mocking Him, and gambling over His clothes, He musters up the strength, to say OUT LOUD!

- ***“Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” -Luke 23:34 (ESV)***
- ARE YOU KIDDING ME?! FORGIVE THEM??
- No, I think they knew what they were doing Jesus! I think they knew what they were doing when they put the nails in your hands and feet! I think they knew what they were doing whipped you until your kidneys were showing! I think they knew what they were doing, put a crown of thorns on your head! Even right now, they're mocking you, they're making a game out of your execution...its seems like they know!
- Jesus understood and wants to show all of us that other humans are not the enemy
- Paul says we wrestle not against flesh and blood
- My fight is NOT with humans doing wrong, it is with the enemies of hell that are influencing them to do wrong

- Then I can look at people do me wrong and see that's not really what God intends, and pray for God to work a miracle in their lives in order to walk in their true identity as a child of God that Jesus died in order to give them
- Every time I choose forgiveness it's a slap in the enemy's face!
- Someone may do me wrong, but I can let the devil know not today, I'm not gonna let bitterness take root in my life because I am free in the Forgiveness of Jesus
- Because of the Forgiveness of Jesus, I am free to forgive EVERYONE else
 - When I choose forgiveness, prison doors swing open, chains fall off of my heart, I walk in freedom, I become Useful to God, and I become dangerous to the enemy
- Who doesn't love to be around a forgiving person?
 - Who says, *"Ugh I don't want to hang around that person, they're just sooooo forgiving..."*
- No, Forgiveness breeds community, if we can create a culture of forgiveness in our church, we can continue to build and increase our community and our influence
- Remember how much Christ has forgiven you, and forgive in that same capacity.
- ***"For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in His steps. He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone. He did not retaliate when He was insulted, nor threaten revenge when He suffered. He left His case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly. He personally carried our sins in His body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By His wounds you are healed."* -1 Peter 2:21-24 (NLT)**
 - He set the tone and led the charge
- And now we get to follow in His steps. If we are to be Kind, Tenderhearted, Forgiving people,

Sunday, May 21, 2023

we need to Holy Spirit to constantly remind us of all that He's done for us.

- We need to be enamored with how Good He's been to us and allow Him to use us as an extension of His Kindness in this world.