

## SPIRITUAL FRUIT

### *Kindness*

By Peggy Dirollo

Galatians 5:22-25

For the last several weeks, we have listened to Pastor Gary extol the virtues of the Spiritual Fruits. We have heard him preach on love, joy, peace and, patience. The one thing that he did not say last week, though, about patience is that you NEVER pray for it. Otherwise, enough circumstances will be placed in your path to teach you patience. I learned that lesson the hard way many years ago because I was prideful, didn't listen and asked for it anyway. All it did was make me very frustrated and very impatient because I wasn't ready. God has such a wonderful sense of humor...

So, Pastor Gary has also taught us that in order to have these spiritual fruits in abundance, we have to feed the "good wolf" instead of the "bad wolf" and that it is better to have spiritual fruits than religious nuts.

This week though, I am going to talk about the fruit of kindness. Webster's dictionary defines kindness as the act of being kind. Big help that is....

Well, in all honesty, that IS a big help. Kindness is very different from love, joy, peace and patience in the sense that with the latter four fruits, they actually come from within. If we are spiritually fit, we have these fruits automatically. What does it mean to be spiritually fit? It means that we have a conscious contact with God. We meet God on a daily basis for prayer and guidance. When we do that, love, joy, peace and patience are a natural outpouring of that contact.

Kindness on the other hand, in this context, is actually a verb. It is an action word. It is the first fruit that we must literally make a decision to go outside ourselves and interact with someone else and give it away.

So, what does it really mean to be kind to someone else. Especially in this day and age of fast food, fast cars, the internet, and instant gratification? How many times are we in such a hurry, that we race through our day? Heads down, intensely concentrating on what to do or say next, that we go through that day not ever really noticing anyone or anything around us. Even though we may be in a good mood, it seems that people think we have a scowl on our face due to that concentration? How many people might have benefited from our presence, had we just been living in the moment, totally aware of our surroundings with an actual smile on our face for the sheer joy of being alive. Or how many times have we been so exhausted and think to ourselves, "I just can't help one more person" as they come up to us for this or that? How we respond to them is so very important. If we are short-tempered, or brusque, we can leave them feeling unimportant, dejected and worthless. Meeting them instead with a smile and "what can I do for you?" with genuine unconditional positive regard, can make all the difference, possibly lifting them back up to feeling their humanness again.

First Corinthians says: love is patient, love is kind.... So, does this imply that if we are unkind to someone that we do not love them? Or, if we are unkind to someone, how do we make them believe that we do love them?

Well, chances are that if we have known the person for a while, they know that from interacting with us over a long period of time, that we are not usually unkind and will generally be willing to write off that unkindness as a momentary lapse rather than a huge character flaw. On the other hand, if our unkindness begins to be the norm rather than the exception, people will begin to question our behavior, motives and character and rightly so.

But what about the stranger on the street or someone we have just recently met? They do not have enough of a history of knowing us to make that call, so our actions, words and attitudes are extremely important because we may never get another opportunity with that person again. Pastor Gary was talking last week about road rage and impatience. A couple of years ago, I was coming home from work and the traffic was backed up on Merrill Road where I was coming off 9A. Some guy was more impatient than I was and cut in front of me. I confess that I was not paying attention, and I am extremely ashamed to admit I was extremely unkind, muttering some expletive I won't mention or repeat here. When I looked up a bit to see if he had moved, I was looking directly into the eyes of his 5 or 6 year old daughter. Right there in that moment God convicted me in my spirit. I was devastated to know what I had just called her father and she was watching me intently. Hopefully for her sake and mine, she could not read lips and will never know what I called him. For all I know, he is actually a wonderful man, yet I passed a very harsh judgment on him. This made me realize that I needed to be more aware of my actions because I might never know who was watching me.

Jesus on the other hand was never unkind, because aside from being the Son of God, He maintained that constant conscious contact with God. All of his strength and energy came from God. Unlike you and I, who get so caught up in our day that we forget to constantly reconnect. To me, kindness is like a second tier spiritual fruit. What I mean by that is that the first fruit of the spirit, love, is the first tier. For without love nothing else is possible. It was that love, that compassion for the people, and His genuine kindness that allowed him to heal and free one person after another without ever once thinking "Why won't they ever leave me alone?"

So what about that person we have just been unkind to that does not know us very well? How do we convince them that we love them? First of all, the sooner we can apologize and own up to our unkindness the better. Sincerely asking for an opportunity to right the wrong would be extremely helpful and might go a long way to repair the damage. Most times that is all we can do and just wait prayerfully on God to repair the relationship. Time is on our side.

The thing that we most need to remember though is that we are human – and we are entitled to kindness and love ourselves – especially from ourselves. So, it is important for us to remember to put the baseball bat away and not beat ourselves up continuously forever when we are unkind. Like Pastor Gary mentioned last week, we tend to hold on to every negative thing that we have ever done to anyone. We actually hurt ourselves more than we hurt the other person. So, it is easier to own up to the mistake, apologize, be accountable and move on. Yet, it is important that we must never forget the lessons we learn in the process.

I want to close with one of Aesop's Fables, The Lion and the Mouse: Once when a Lion was asleep a little Mouse began running up and down upon him; this soon wakened the Lion, who placed his huge paw upon him, and opened his big jaws to swallow him. "Pardon, O King," cried the little Mouse; "forgive me this time, I shall never forget it: who knows when I may be able to save your life one of these days?"

The Lion was so tickled at the idea of the Mouse being able to save his life, that he lifted up his paw and let him go. Some time after the Lion was caught in a trap, and the hunters who desired to carry him alive to the King, tied him to a tree while they went in search of a wagon to carry him on.

Just then the little Mouse happened to pass by, and seeing the sad plight in which the Lion was, went up to him and soon gnawed away the ropes that bound the King of the Beasts. "Was I not right?" said the little Mouse.

The moral of the fable is that you never know when, in the course of performing one little act of kindness that that act of kindness could produce such a ripple effect that it causes a tidal wave of kindness in your favor. Amen.