

How You Can Cultivate a Lifestyle of Mercy and Kindness

It had happened again. I just couldn't believe it. Seriously? How could I be so absentminded?

I had double-booked myself, totally forgetting about a prior commitment I had made. I only realized it a mere 24 hours prior to the double-scheduled events. For some this may not seem like a big deal, but the friend who I had to cancel on is extremely punctual and organized.

Honestly, our senses of time have always been at odds.

By nature, I'm not guided by any sort of inner clock. I live in the moment. But I am self-aware enough to know that's not how everyone operates.

In recent years, I've tried my best to be respectful of my more punctual friends, but this time I'd failed. Big. I had inconvenienced and disappointed my friend—and I knew it.

I was in need of kindness ... and forgiveness.

I could tell you all the reasons (and there were many) why I had forgotten about our get-together in an effort to inspire kindness from you toward me, but the reasons really are not the point.

The point is that my friend had every right to be frustrated. But God used this situation (and my friend's response) in an unexpected way in my life: to remind me to be kind. It was through this situation that I was convicted of how frequently I scrutinize and judge others when I have no idea what is going on in their lives.

Inspiration for Kindness

I've often approached frustrating social situations with an attitude of "How could you?" instead of "How are you?"—focused on the inconvenience it has caused me as opposed to the well-being of the other person involved. My friend did the latter. She asked how I was doing and what was going on. By doing so, she turned a frustrating situation into an opportunity for connection and growth.

Are you like me? Far too often I have been quick to reach frustration with others and abounding in judgment and harshness. Furthermore, I assume the way I would respond to others is the way God responds to me.

Thankfully, we serve a God who does the exact opposite. Psalm 86:15 says, "But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (ESV). "Steadfast love" is often translated as "loving-kindness." Our God is abounding with kindness.

In another place in the Bible, Jesus says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30). The word *easy* in verse 30 can be translated as "kind."

"My yoke is kind and my burden is light." What a relief. That is the God we serve.

Putting Mercy Into Action

So how does a person set out to practice more kindness?

I could provide you a list of cutesy ideas of how to be more kind to those around you—pay for the person's coffee behind you in line type of stuff. There's nothing wrong with sharing those types of ideas, but I don't think we primarily lack

ideas on how to be kind. Pursuing kindness for kindness' sake will only last so long; trying harder will only get you so far.

Cultivating a lifestyle of kindness and mercy will come only through a radical shift in our mindset.

My motivation to be kind to others must come from the understanding that God has been endlessly kind to me. He didn't have to save me from sin and death, but in His loving-kindness He did. Ultimately the Bible says that God's kindness is what leads us to repentance of sin (Rom. 2:4), not His severity, not fear of judgment, not our own internal sense of right and wrong. God's kindness leads us to repentance.

Truthfully, the root issue of unkindness is that we have not fully internalized God's immeasurable kindness toward us. We are like the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18:21-35. This chilling parable details how a master forgave his servant's enormous debt (about 20 years' worth of wages) only for the servant to turn around and demand a debt (about one day's worth of wages) be paid him by a fellow servant.

The unmerciful servant had his fellow servant thrown in prison until the debt was paid. When the master found out, he was angry and said, "You wicked servant. ... I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" (vv. 32-33, NIV). Then he threw the servant in prison to be tortured until he could repay his debt.

Unsettling to say the least. Lord, let us not forget Your kindness to us!

So again, how do we become more kind? Cultivating a lifestyle of kindness requires heart change.

Marvel daily at the kindness and grace God has shown to you. Then seek to share that same level of kindness with others. As

you slow down and meditate on the kindness of God, I'm confident He'll bring to mind the specific kind actions and people He has prepared for you.

When my friend decided to approach my scheduling mishap with kindness, she chose connection over correction. She chose relationship over rebuke. Our friendship, already 16 years strong, grew even stronger. Because of her lifestyle of kindness, my friend ministered God's compassion and kindness to me in a time when I really needed some encouragement. I'm thankful for her example.

How will you be a vessel of God's kindness today? {eo}

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