

**Relationship Series: Kindness**  
***Delivered November 11, 2012***

A couple of weeks ago, as many of you know, my father passed away relatively unexpectedly. As you can imagine, the days around that time were quite a blur for me and my family as we dealt with the unexpected on so many different levels. Throw into that mix a hurricane the week following, and our life was in quite a shambles.

We were not prepared for my father's passing, and we were not prepared for a hurricane at all. But in the midst of this chaos, so many people from this church took it upon themselves to help us out in various ways. We had friends volunteer to take our dog. We had friends volunteer to clean out our refrigerator and freezer. We had friends travel to spend time with us at the wake and the funeral. We had friends send cards and flowers and food and so many other expressions of love and support that it was a little overwhelming.

And I'll be honest to say that my very first instinct was to say "no thank you" to the people who were offering to help us out. I am used to being the one that people come to for help, support, advice and encouragement and by nature I tend to be a prideful (and rather stubborn at times) person, and I didn't want to be the person accepting help, I was much more comfortable being the person giving help.

But in my conversations with God that happened around this time, I consistently felt God pushing on this area of my life. He didn't want me to be so prideful, so stubborn and so resistant to the kindness of others. He actually wanted me to allow other people to show kindness to me. It was completely humbling and a completely helpless feeling to be on the receiving end of such a generous outpouring of compassion. At the same time, it was very compelling as well – it made me want to do the same for others in my turn.

Given the chance, most of us would say that we would rather be on the giving end than the receiving end of kindness. The truth is that we don't want to feel helpless. At the same time, if we listened closely last week, we did our best to establish that in our relationship to God, every one of us is on the receiving end of kindness – unbelievable, incredibly liberating kindness. His active love towards us has completely changed the atmosphere of our relationship to him. He is willing to be kind to us, and if we receive that kindness our relationship with him is transformed from one of enmity and hostility to one of peace between us. His kindness changes us, even while he remains the same.

But then if we're honest the kindness wants to stop with us. If we take a hard look at our lives, we might find that we want to be on the receiving end as long as the helplessness doesn't last too long, and then we don't really want to be on the giving end at all either. We receive kindness, and then we start to hold onto the good feeling that comes when we receive that kindness, and we start turning our attention inward. This is not our intention, but it is our experience. We revel in God's kindness towards us, or in the kindness of someone else towards us, but then don't allow that kindness to pass through us on its way towards someone else. God's compassion for us is not meant to simply draw us to himself, but to change us into people who express his compassion in our actions as well.

When kindness flows through us to others, the atmosphere of our relationships changes,

just like the dynamic of our relationship to God changes when we receive his compassion. We become the ones who offer kindness as a rule in every aspect of our relationship lives, and can you imagine the effect that would have on every relationship?

The story of David and Saul takes up most of the second half of 1 Samuel as the writer highlights the deterioration of one king and the rise of his successor. You could put labels on the relationship between King Saul and David which would range from “stormy” to outright “homicidal” as twice Saul attempts to pin David to the wall with a spear in a fit of jealousy and rage. But while Saul is trying to kill David, David manages to develop a close friendship with Saul’s son Jonathan. Despite the fact that Jonathan is being displaced as the next king by David, they promise their devotion to each other, making a covenant together to care for one another throughout their generations.

Eventually Saul and Jonathan both die in battle, David is anointed king over the nation of Israel, and he begins his very successful rule over the kingdom. That brief outline brings us to our text this morning in **2 Samuel 9:1-11**. David is at the height of his power, having just read through the record of his victories in chapter 8 the author has highlighted very well the strength of David’s kingdom.

At this moment he reflects on the covenant he had made with his good friend Jonathan. As he reflects on this covenant he starts to ask questions about Saul’s family, wondering if there is anyone left from his family to whom he can show kindness for the sake of his covenant with Jonathan. In many respects it is a crazy request – can you find someone from the family of the guy who was hunting me down and trying to kill me so that I can be kind to him? Who does that?

They bring in one of Saul’s servants, named Ziba. This time when David asks the question he asks it in a slightly different way. Instead of talking about showing kindness for the sake of Jonathan, he asks if there is someone he can show kindness to on behalf of God. It’s almost as if David understands the great kindness God has showed to him in preserving his life all these years, and now he wants to pass it on to someone else.

Ziba tells David about one of Saul’s grandsons named Mephibosheth. He is one of Jonathan’s sons, lame in both of his legs and living at the mercy of a person who had decided to take him in. David sends for Mephibosheth and this is where the tension in the story really ratchets up. If David is like the other kings around him at this time, then it would be customary for him to find the other potential rivals to his throne and stamp them out. This would have been an opportunity for David to fully establish his kingdom and make sure that none of Saul’s heirs would cause trouble for him in the future.

Mephibosheth comes before David and if he has any idea of what’s going on, he probably has this same thought in mind – this could be my execution. He comes before David with fear, trembling and nervousness at David’s intentions and if you look at the scene you have a perfect delineation between the strong and the weak. On the one hand is David with all the royal authority in perfect health and the height of his power, on the other hand is Mephibosheth completely stripped of power, living off the mercy of someone else, and lame in both feet and so completely incapable of caring for himself. Mephibosheth bows before his king, wondering if his king will be his executioner.

But when David speaks, it is to allay his fears, not confirm them. Don't be afraid of me or of my intentions, because I am not going to do to you what everyone else thinks I should do to you. Instead I am going to show kindness to you. The kindness I show to you will have nothing to do with your worth or ability to earn or deserve it – it will simply be a result of my faithfulness to the covenant I made years ago.

You will note, of course, that kindness in this case is very specific, not just generic. David does not just say, "I will be nice to you", he takes a concrete and costly action. He restores to Mephibosheth all the land that had belonged to his grandfather Saul – land which was certainly now David's property. I will give you back all your grandfather's servants who will care for you and provide for you all your days. He gives Mephibosheth the means to provide for himself again, takes him off the hands of another benefactor, but then he goes beyond again.

David says that he will treat Mephibosheth like his own son. He will not just be some random guy that David knows and says hi to every once in a while – that's not the extent of kindness. Mephibosheth, who has no place to call his own before, walks into the king's palace and gets welcomed like a son, an heir and eats with the king. David says, in effect, I will treat you with such abundant kindness that you will be absolutely overwhelmed. You could be bitter towards me because of your lost position as future king, but my kindness is going to wash over that like the ocean on the shore. You will never be able to fathom the depths of this compassion. Mephibosheth's response captures it perfectly: What am I but a dead dog that you would treat me this way?

And in the best picture of kindness that I could think of, Mephibosheth sits down at David's table for dinner every day with David's sons. David takes on all the expense, all the cost and gets nothing in return – not a warrior, not a powerful prince – just a lame in both feet person who can't even offer practical service. What he does get, however, is the joy of reflecting God's kindness and faithfulness to another human being. **That kind of kindness, the genuine love in concrete action, changes things.**

How would that kind of kindness transform your relationships if you allowed it? What would happen in your marriage, with your children, your parents, your friends or even your co-workers if you allowed genuine love to take concrete action towards people? People want to talk about random acts of kindness because those are easy – it's easy to pay for the coffee of the guy behind you in line, it's much harder to pay for the coffee of the person who stresses you out the most at work. This week I challenge you to think of the one relationship in your life which is in the worst shape. It could be your marriage, it could be with your brother or sister – the person doesn't matter. And then I want you to make a move towards them in an intentional act of kindness. Think about how kind you could possibly be and then go further. And while you get ready to take that action, and while you take that action, and then again after you take that action I want you to pray for God to empower you to do it again, trusting God's kindness to change the tone of every one of those relationships.

We are going to pray with you for a total change in the way those relationships are, and we're going to trust together that the God of all kindness is going to make a significant impact in those lives through you!