



Welcome to #Be Kind. I'm Craig Finnestad, the pastor of The Water's Edge United Methodist Church in Omaha, Nebraska.

We have some really good resources to go along with this four week Life Group adventure.

Resource #1 is a 30 day Bible reading plan. I picked short verses. All of them have to do with kindness. Here is one way to do the plan. Find a quiet place. Read the Bible verses. And then reflect. Write down a way that God is speaking to you. If there is an application you are getting from the scripture, write that down and commit to applying God's words to your life.

Resource #2 is "30 ways to be kind." This is a list of 30 things you can do to practice and experience kindness. You probably won't be able to do all of them because some of them are pretty specific based on context, but most of us can do most of these things.

The high point of your Life Group experience will be your discussions. Learn and grow with each other. The next ten minutes is just my attempt to set the stage for a great conversation.

So welcome to #BeKind. I'm in a Life Group, too, and I'm excited to be taking this journey with you.

I messed up my knee in July. Physical therapists, MRIs, Orthopedic Surgeons—I guess it's a big bone bruise on the inner part of my knee. I didn't even know such things existed.

Usually my schedule is pretty doable. The last few weeks not so much.

I looked at my lawn one morning as I left for my first appointment and thought it needs to be mowed. Then I thought to myself: I don't really have the time to mow. And even if I did, I can't really walk. So I decided to let the grass do what grass does best: grow. In my manicured neighborhood, I was going to be a breath of fresh air. Going to give the neighborhood kids and all the passersby—a glimpse of what the Nebraska landscape looked like before people.

And then the phone rang.

I was at the intersection of 180th and Q. Where else would I be? That is where I hang out. Staring at red lights and sport utility vehicles.

I see who it is.

Haven't talked to the guy for a week or so.

I answer.

He says he is on the way to my house to mow my lawn. He knows I've been busy and injured. He also drove by the house and noticed the lawn needed some love. And he added that he isn't going to take "no" for an answer.

No arguments here. I simply thanked him for his kindness.

His kindness made those next moments at 180th and Q better.

His kindness toward me made my day.

Kindness does that. It makes our moments and days better.

I remember a couple weeks before that, I was in Chicago. I was taking a weeklong seminar on fundraising for non-profits. My hotel was like a mile away. So I walked to the school in the morning and back to the hotel in the evening. Hyde Park is an interesting area. I hope I can go back some time.

On the first day I noticed a young man. I'd put him in his 20s. He was wearing an old school, yellow soccer referee shirt. I thought it was an interesting choice in clothing. I was waiting to see if it was some kind of prank video and he was going to give somebody a yellow card. He didn't. I went on my way.

I was working in the hotel lobby the next evening. My room was too quiet. I noticed the same man walking by in the same shirt. I totally missed it the first time. He was homeless.

An hour later or so I had gone through enough email and decided to walk to Kohl's.

I bought a grey hoodie.
Some socks.
A few pairs of underwear.
A baseball cap.

I got a box of Clif Bars and a large bottle of water at Whole Foods.

And then I went and bought a Chicago Classic deep dish Giordano's Pizza.

It was getting dark. I found the man. We walked a block to a park. Ate the pizza. Or at least part of it. He said it was his favorite. I gave him the water and the Clif Bars and the clothes. That night, I experienced that being kind is pretty darn amazing.

Being kind is a win – win lifestyle.

The one receiving kindness is blessed.

So is the one doing the kindness.

God is kind.

**You are merciful, LORD! You are kind, slow to anger, and always loving. –
Psalm 145:8**

God is kind. We are created in God's image. Therefore, we at our best are kind.

I want to talk about the difference between being nice and being kind.

Being nice is externally motivated. Low self-esteem leads us to please others to earn their approval.

Kindness is different and better. It is compassion emerging from health. When describing love, it's no surprise one of the first words God comes up with is "kind".

Let's get over this nonsense that being kind is for weak and feeble people. For people who are doormats.

Acts of kindness are reserved for the strong, the bold, and the courageous.

**Kindness isn't always the easy thing to do.
But kindness is always the right thing to do.**

When we practice acts of kindness to undeserving, unsuspecting, and hurting people--we slowly, but steadily, impact the world. We become a needed catalyst that sends grace and love to heal broken places and people. A life of kindness changes the world.

Paul makes a list of the nine attributes of a person who has encountered God. Here is what he comes up with:

**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.
-Galatians 5:22-23**

There is no law against kindness.

It connects us to God and others in way that few things can.

You don't need a reason to be kind to people. Kindness tears down walls and builds bridges. Kindness tells hurting people that hope still exists. Kindness costs nothing. Kindness is contagious.

So let's look at what Jesus says about kindness.

#1 Kindness points people to God.

All the following verses are from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. His most prolific teaching. Jesus says in Matthew 5:16...

In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father. –Matthew 5:16

Do the good deeds.

Do lots of them.

Be a light in a dark world.

Let your actions point people to Me.

A few years ago in early December, two high school students knocked on my door. I knew them both. One was in the church. They said they had been doing some odds and ends. They made \$324 and gave it all to me. They told me to give it to people who needed it.

I looked at them with gratitude and inspiration. Their actions pointed me to God.

I took a photo of all the cash and posted the story on Instagram and Facebook. Their actions pointed hundreds of other people to God.

#2 Kindness is proactive.

Kindness takes initiative.

Jesus says in Matthew 5:23-24

So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God. –Matthew 5:23-24

Kindness seeks and is proactive. It's a big deal to be waiting in line to give your sacrifice. Jesus says how we treat each other is a bigger deal.

He says: "Go." Offer the kindness of forgiveness. Invite reconciliation.

Kindness is proactive.

Jesus didn't sit around in the Temple waiting for opportunities to be kind. He went out and looked for those opportunities.

Don't wait for somebody to ask you to help...just help.

Jump right in and clean up the mess.

Give somebody a compliment on social media.

Write a thank you note.

Stand up for somebody being picked on.

Don't listen to gossip.

Kindness is proactive.

#3 Kindness is blind and universal.

Jesus gives us a challenging teaching here.

**You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!
-Matthew 5:43-44**

Kindness is blind and universal.

Let's get over this nonsense that being kind is for weak and feeble people.

Acts of kindness are reserved for the strong, the bold, and the courageous.

Kindness is rarely the easy thing to do. But kindness is always the right thing to do.

Jesus is saying here:

Be kind to people who are kind to you.

Be kind to people who aren't kind to you.

Kindness has nothing to do with the worthiness or object of the kindness.
Kindness has everything to do with the character and integrity of the one who is being kind.

For example, when Jesus was dying, what did he do for the men who were humiliating and killing him? He showed kindness by praying for them.

“Father, forgive them. They don’t know what they are doing!”

So kindness isn’t always easy. But it is worth it and then some.

#4 Kindness treats others the way we want to be treated.

Jesus has some well-known sayings. Matthew 7:12 is one of them.

Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets. –Matthew 7:12

How do you want to be treated?

You want to be listened to.

You want to be respected.

You want to be given a chance.

You would love it if people showed you a little grace. Or a lot of it.

You would love it if people were kind to you.

Jesus says: Treat others the way you want to be treated.

I was talking to a guy a week or two ago.

It was a frustrating experience.

Because I wasn’t talking.

He was. And only him.

He must have been breathing through his nose because he didn’t even slow down to take a breath.

I had questions.

I wanted to clarify a few things.

I couldn’t do it.

He just kept on talking.

I wanted to be understood.

It didn't happen.

Then I think of the people who when I have a conversation with them it is like I am the only person in the world. They listen. They ask questions. They give space for reflection. That is kindness. Listening to understand.

More generally, kindness is treating others the way you want to be treated.

Kindness is not primarily something we do. Kindness is who we are.

#5 Kindness is not primarily something we do. Kindness is who we are.

This one is essential. It's from Matthew 7:17

A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. –Matthew 7:17

Jesus uses an agriculture example here. Healthy trees produce lots of good fruit. Unhealthy trees create little, if any, fruit.

So, kindness is not primarily something we do. Kindness is who we are.

Then, who we are shapes what we do.

Kindness has more to do with character formation than it does with saying a bunch of good words and performing a bunch of good deeds.

In my life there have been times, looking back, that I wasn't overly healthy: spiritually, emotionally, or relationally. I still held the door open for people at the store. I would be polite and say "thank you." But that wasn't kindness. It was being courteous. Being kind was tough during these days. My gas tank was pretty empty, and I didn't have much to share.

There have been times in my life when I have been very healthy. Spiritually, emotionally, and relationally. Here the kindness is so simple because it comes from the overflow. The days when we think and speak and act like God—kindness is a given.

Who we are shapes what we do.

My son David and I were getting pie at Village Inn. We both got water. Our server was awesome. Kept checking on us. Filling our water. I needed it. The Key Lime pie is amazing but it is like a sponge and absorbs all the water from your body. We got the bill. It was a massive \$7. So it came time to pay. There is no way in the world I could give her a 20% tip. Like a buck fifty? So I gave her two \$20 bills and told her to keep the change. I'm not saying this to look good and I don't do this all time. But I had been praying and reading a lot lately about generosity and gratitude. And at that point in time it just really seemed like the right thing to do.

You don't have to drop 33 dollars to be kind.

Compliment somebody today. Verbalize their strengths and accomplishments, not their weaknesses or mistakes. Compliments are an audible form of kindness and a spoken form of sunshine.

Give somebody a hug.

Let somebody in line in front of you.

Authentic kindness naturally flows from who we are.

Develop who you are and get ready to take this amazing journey of kindness.

So....The most important part of your small group hasn't happened yet.

It is about ready to happen.

It is not my teaching.

It is the small group discussion.

I encourage you to listen to the stories and experiences of others.

I encourage you to share your stories and experiences.

Ask questions.

Be real and authentic.

Support each other.

Encourage one another.

Be kind to each other.

Grow in your relationships with God and each other.

Have a great discussion, and I'll see you next week!