



We are wrapping up our #BeKind study.

But more importantly—I really pray that we are kicking off our #BeKind lives.

I hope the Bible readings, the kindness activities, and your small group discussions are equipping and inspiring you to be kind and to do kindness.

I'd love to hear stories about how God is working in your life through this study.

I want to introduce you to one more person. His name is Zaccheus.

He makes only one appearance in the Bible. It's in Luke chapter 19, verses 1-10.

He was an adult.

Zaccheus stood barely five feet tall with his shoes on.

He was Jewish.

He was a crook...a legman for the Roman IRS.

Following the practice of the day, he collected taxes for the Roman government branch in Israel. He would have collected extra, too, and pocketed the difference.

He wasn't terribly popular because of this. He was rich and powerful, but lonely and definitely missing something.

That something was acceptance. People didn't accept him, and he didn't accept himself for a number of reasons.

Some of those reasons he had no control over – like his height. Some were his own doing – like being a bully and a crook.

Zaccheus was despised and hated by people. He wasn't too thrilled with himself either. So he reached for the kindness of God.

It was like a desperation shot in the last second. A prayer to a God you don't believe in but you have no where else to turn.

He had heard about a man who accepted tax collectors and sinners. And that this man was on his way to Jericho.

There was a party going on. The people lined the streets to see the man. His name was Jesus.

They were excited. This party wasn't like one of our Fourth of July parades.

Blankets on the side of the street saving places.

Shriners have those little cars.

A couple marching bands of overheated teenagers.

A few politicians.

Some local businesses that throw candy to the kids.

I imagine this party was like the Tour de France.

The people stood on the edge of the narrow mountain roads. They were feet away from the riders shouting encouragement.

Zaccheus was determined to see Jesus. He knew standing in the crowd might be a dangerous thing for him. He wouldn't be able to see anything besides the back of people's heads, so he climbed a sycamore tree.

When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. "Zacchaeus!" he said. "Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today." –Luke 19:5

So this one is really cool and it means something to us.

Jesus and Zacchaeus had never met before. Yet Jesus knew his name.

Who initiated the relationship? It was Jesus.

He made the first move. Zacchaeus was just trying to catch a glimpse of Jesus from afar.

But Jesus seeks. Jesus invites. Jesus offers kindness.

I wonder if one of you—right now – is just trying to get a glimpse of Jesus? You don't feel accepted or acceptable to others or God. But Jesus is calling you down for your sycamore tree into a conversation with him.

I bet the people at the parade were excited about Jesus and his upcoming conversation with Zacchaeus. Jesus is going to do some justice. Jericho hugs itself in anticipation of hearing Jesus giving Zacchaeus Holy Hell.

He didn't give Zacchaeus a lecture. He invited himself to the house of a man whom nobody else would touch with a ten-foot pole.

Jesus accepted Zacchaeus right where he was.

Zacchaeus begins his way down the tree for the rest of us. He's this sawed-off little social disaster with a big bank account and a crooked job, but Jesus welcomes him aboard anyway.

Jesus' encounter at a party on the roads in Jericho teaches one of life's most important lessons:

You are acceptable to God not because of your attributes or righteousness. You are acceptable to God because of God's grace and kindness.

The coach told the boy he wasn't good enough, and he didn't make the team.

Her boyfriend broke up with her.

You didn't get the job. Heck, you didn't even get an interview.

The kids don't visit or text as much as they used to.

Maybe you are not feeling too accepted these days.

But Jesus calls us down from our trees and offers us kindness.

Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. –Luke 19:6

Did you catch those last three words? Excitement and joy.

Zacchaeus hasn't had much of that lately.

Have you?

Some of you have. Some: not so much.

But things change when Jesus calls you down from the tree.

An encounter like this changes your perspective.

The Creator of the world.

The God of the people knows your name.

You can stay up in the tree if you want.

I guess it's safe up there. It's a way of running from your problems without running.

But we are not created to be consumers of stuff or observers of others. We are created to be full participants in the Kingdom of God. So participate. Be kind.

Come down from your tree. Embrace excitement and joy.

Because of this party on the streets of Jericho – like Zacheaus – you can change your perspective in life.

You choose your perspective. Small attitude adjustments will change the way you see people and things. Be open-minded. Look for the best in people and the beauty in things.

You will find what you are looking for.

If you are looking for pain and despair and mediocrity and gossip and failure – there is enough of it out there to keep you occupied for the rest of your days.

If you are looking for hope and forgiveness and restoration and courage and kindness – there is enough of it out there to keep you excited and joyful for the rest of your days.

You will find what you are looking for.

But the people were displeased. “He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner,” they grumbled. –Luke 19:7

Can you blame them? Here is the bad guy.

I used to read this story that way.

This is dumb. Jesus should do justice here. Hang out with the good people lining the streets. Not this traitor who is loyal to the Roman government.

But then one day I realized I have more in common with Zaccheaus than I do with the people lining the streets. And the people on the streets have more in common with Zaccheaus than they would care to admit.

Zaccheaus – his failures and shortcomings were public. The people lining the street – their failures and shortcomings were more hidden.

So I’m thankful. I’m guessing you are thankful too.

That

Jesus invites himself to parties that nobody else would ever attend.

So I was working at Panera one day. Not making bread. I had my computer and was drinking mango tea. I was sitting by myself. A man came and sat with me.

He asks: “Do you mind if I join you?”

I’m thinking this a bit strange. I’m working. Lots of empty tables.

I smile and nod.

He takes a bite of his turkey sandwich and chews.

I just sit there.

After his first round of digestion, he tells me his dad was a preacher. Then he takes another bite of his sandwich.

I'm still wondering what is going on!

He then tells me he has been to a few of my weddings. And he follows my daily devotion on twitter and occasionally watches our worship experience online. And that he prays regularly for my two boys.

For the next ten minutes or so he speaks kindness into my life. Lots of it. He gives me a Panera gift card and tells me to work here more often. He then asks me how he can pray for me. He prays, gives me his business card, and leaves.

I was like, "Wow, that was really cool."

Sometimes it takes the uninvited guest to get the Gospel across. I was too busy doing the work of the church and needed an uninvited guest to show me the Gospel.

Jesus says – get out of the tree. I'm coming over.

The guy comes and sits with me.

The uninvited guests.

Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, "I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!" –Luke 19:8

Do you see what happens here...

**The one who receives kindness becomes kind.
The one who experiences kindness does kindness.**

So now it is our turn.

We are created into God's image.
God is kind.
We, like Zacchaeus, have fallen short of that image.
Jesus invites us, wherever we are, to experience his kindness.
As recipients of kindness we get to be givers of kindness.

We live in a tough world.

My oldest son is a soccer referee. He has had some rough parents yell at him and even threaten him. Seriously? He is a seventeen year old boy who loves the game and is doing his best.

I drive around a crowded, frustrated city. People fight for their place in the line to get from point A to point B as fast as possible.

Our street is a quiet street. A lot of us don't know each other very well. Maybe a little small talk if we are picking up our mail at the same time.

Kindness makes the tough world better. Uninvited guests in our lives make our day.

I remember a few parents came up to Benjamin after a game one time and told him what a great job he did. I don't even think they were from the winning team. The smile returned to his face.

Occasionally when I'm pulling out of my neighborhood in the morning, instead of blocking the intersection, a car will stop and let me in. We exchange a wave and go on with our day. It's a sacred moment.

I was walking the dogs a while back and one of the neighbors came out with snacks for them. She also introduced herself. The dogs got a treat and I have a new friend. We both feel like we live in more of a community now. It's because of her kindness.

One of the cool things about kindness is that it usually doesn't cost anything.

The compliment.
Letting somebody in line.
An introduction.

We are like Zaccheaus. Sinners in need of a Savior.

God invites us down from our trees to experience God's grace and kindness.

And like Zaccheaus, we respond to kindness with our own kindness to others.

From this point on...you get to be the uninvited guest. Sharing kindness with an unsuspecting world because God offered you kindness first.

So this will be our last discussion. You have some questions to talk about and reflect on. The most important part of your conversation will be your plan moving forward.

I don't want this to be just a four week study where you learned some things about kindness. I want these four weeks to matter. To really matter. I want the world to be different because of your kindness. I want you to be different because of your kindness.

It has been great being with you over these four weeks. Thank you for inviting me into your lives. Have a great discussion and be kind!