

Kindness

When we were told our potholders might be a part of the fruit of the Spirit that we needed to work on, I was a little disappointed. Sure, patience—or joy—or love—those could make sense, but I got kindness. I was pretty sure I had that set already. And yet I don't think I was able to sustain that line of thinking for more than 30 seconds before that still small Voice chided me with a "really?" The thing is, kindness on the outside and kindness of the heart can be two totally different things. I might seem kind, but since I'm privy to my own innermost thoughts, I know that's not really the case. I have a member of my extended family whom, confidentially, I struggle to love—and you should hear what I can come up with about her. I *seem* kind when I ask how she's doing, but in reality, and this is kind of disgusting to admit, the retorts that I come up with in my head are anything but kind. And that's just scratching the surface.

So, from the very beginning I knew I was supposed to talk about kindness with you (even though I was secretly hoping to have this baby way before I needed to do the devotional)—because I knew I had a lot to learn about kindness, and this was a way I could study it. But I was faced with the question: what does kindness of the heart—real fruit of the Spirit kindness—the kindness that can't be faked, look like? I needed to know.

I realized quickly that kindness in general is one of those (at least to me) words—words we talk about a lot, but I struggle to define in any way other than to say, "you know, kindness?" "Caring" comes to mind—maybe "goodness". I know enough to know that the thoughts that I have are NOT kind. But what is kindness exactly?

So, I looked to the Bible. I was excited to see the concordance led to two instances of God's kindness. Perfect. Who better to look to than Him? Romans holds these two references:

Romans 11:22:

Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness, otherwise you will be cut off.

In this passage, Paul is speaking to the Gentiles, but what I find striking is the contrast between severity and kindness. Kindness, by this passage, seems like it leads to an extension of grace and mercy. In Bible dictionaries, kindness is often given the synonym "benevolence", which could also lend itself to this idea of giving grace and mercy.

The other passage is Romans 2:4:

Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

Again, it's interesting the words that are grouped with kindness—tolerance and patience.

Kindness is linked with words that suggest God's forbearance with us—and, therefore His mercy and grace. And I know that I love that verse—I hold onto it dearly. When I think of *HIS*

kindness, I am just awed and humbled and so grateful. He leads me to repent with *kindness*?

This *is* mercy. This *is* grace.

Does true kindness of the heart mean that *I* am giving both of grace and mercy? Maybe?

So, what else does the Bible say about kindness as it relates to me and my actions?

Here are just a couple references that stuck out to me:

Colossians 3:12

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

I LOVED that kindness keeps getting grouped with other words! Compassion—I NEED to see people with mercy; humility—I CAN'T look at them as being less than I am (and I find that creeps up in little ways with people I struggle to love—I need to make them meaner than I am or more selfish) ; patience—(one of the words grouped with kindness in Romans to describe God with us!)... So, if I'm not looking down on others in a prideful manner, seeing them with compassion, gentleness, and patience—I'm *free* to be kind—not distracted by the desire to make myself feel better by contrast, or make myself the injured party, or anything else that one can chalk up to ugly pride—I'm free to be gracious and merciful and giving—and *kind*.

Pride...I'm going to have to come back to that...

One more verse: Ephesians 4:32:

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

There it is...mercy and grace again. God, in His mercy, although He didn't need to—although He's PERFECT in every way and in every way I fail, has forgiven me. Like it says at the end of Jude: He's able to present us blameless before the presence of His glory *with JOY!* If the perfect God of the universe can look at me, so absolutely flawed and faithless, surely, with the Spirit abiding in me, I can be this way with others...

So, what stands in my way of being kind? Pride. Always. Like Augustine I really think that pride is the root sin. Why do I struggle with being kind to extended family member? Kindness-of-the-heart kind? Because I like to nurse my hurt feelings. And instead of forgiving the tiny, insignificant things that need to be forgiven—instead of seeing her with the compassion, gentleness, humility, and patience that are linked with kindness in Colossians, I see her with my pride—and I can be severe indeed—when I have been forgiven SO much. Where's my grace? Where's my mercy? I'm like the servant who has been forgiven millions of dollars by the King of Kings, and yet turn around and want to demand my small sum from anyone I imagine owes me something. Why is this? I need to fix my eyes, my heart, my mind on the One who has forgiven me EVERYTHING to live with the humility, compassion, and tenderheartedness that frees me to be truly (kindness—of—the—heart) kind.