



The Fruit of the Spirit “Kindness”

August 9, 2015

Courage Church, Detroit, MI

Lets start by opening our bibles up
the Luke 10:25-37.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

And behold, a lawyer (a law expert) stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read

it?” And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

The first thing that sticks out to me about this passage, before we ever even get into the actual story of the man beaten on the side of the road, is this conversation between Jesus and this law expert. The law experts in Jesus’ day, they weren’t too fond of Jesus in most cases, they believed that

he belittled the law. He was always talking about this Kingdom that was here now... this kingdom that he was inviting everyone to be a part of and he seemed to be inviting people into it, without the law. That is what this lawyer is trying to get Jesus to do here... he is trying to get him to say, "you don't need to do anything to be saved." But instead, Jesus traps him in his own ways. Jesus is really good at this... he doesn't in any way speak negatively of the law, but rather just shows this law expert that the law itself is un-attainable. Really, he gets the lawyer himself to admit in a way, that the law is unattainable.

So the lawyer asks Jesus this question... "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus, of course, turns it on the lawyer. He asks him this question... What is written in the law? But then he asks him an even more interesting question... he asks him, "How do YOU read it?" What is your interpretation? How do you sum up what the 613 commands are saying to do? Now remember, in Matthew 22 when Jesus is asked, which command is the greatest, he says this... "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your mind and with all your strength... this is the first and greatest commandment and the second is LIKE it... you shall love your neighbor as yourself." That is how Jesus summarized the whole law, he broke the whole thing down into those two principles. But here, we have an expert of the law, telling Jesus that he breaks it down the same way! He says the same thing. Love God. Love your neighbor as yourself. It's very obvious that this was a common way to simplify the commands, But the lawyer doesn't even like the way that he himself has to break down the law. He is questioning his own breakdown of the law when he asks "Who is my neighbor?"

Who do I have to actually love like this? As much as myself? And what does that even mean?

In this series, we have been dealing with fruit.
Love, joy, peace, patience....

Here is the Greek recap:

Love is agape.
Joy is *chara*.

Peace is *Irene*

Patience is the word *makrothymia*

These words all describe aspects of your life that more than anything are internal aspects... They deal in your mind and really, it is the lack-there-of that becomes external, or a positive affect that one may have that becomes external.

When I lack peace, I get anxious, like in the elevator. It's unbearable. I become very hard to be around when I am this way. When I lack patience, I am quick to become angry... short tempered... I let things unravel before problems can be solved. A lack of these first four fruits manifests itself moreso through their opposites becoming evident in our lives. Patience is not necessarily evident until it is lacking. Peace is not necessarily evident right away, until it is lacking.

But kindness is different. Kindness, where it would still begin in your mind, it would immediately become external the moment it comes to fruition. It is a deed. John says in 1 John 3:18, little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and truth... Let us not agape in word and talk, but in our actions. Let the fruit of our love be an action. Be a deed. Paul, in one of the most famous passages of scripture ever written, says this... (1 Corinthians 13:1) Love is patient. Love is kind... All fruit of the spirit, all connected.

Kindness It is the Greek word *Chrestotes*

Kindness is an outward action... A good one. It is being nice, and doing something nice, knowing that God is in it. Being secure enough in the big picture to know that what little you may have is all Gods anyways, so you live your life as an offering for others.

I think if you look back at our time together so far, and we look at the Intentions series and how that lead us to the series about our fruit, you start to see similarities. Next week we will talk about goodness, which is honesty and transparency and truly being the person that you put on...we will look at it from a different angle than we did in the "Intentions" series but the heart behind it is the same. Today, it's kindness. It's an outward expression of the Spirit living in your heart.

It's love, serve, repeat.

Even when it hurts. Even when other people don't deserve it.

You should find that all of the fruit leading up to this one, is connected to this one. Suddenly, fruit is tangible.

Kindness is a manifestation of the love in your life. It's one of the things that make it real. It takes it beyond your mental state and it puts flesh and blood to those emotions.

When we first moved here and started setting up the office, Dawn took a blank piece of paper and wrote on it Hebrews 10:24 which says "let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works" and she stuck it on our office door so we would see it every day. And every time I see it, I process it a little differently.

How do we keep inspiring one another to be more and more kind in more and more radical ways?

Jesus says it this way and you hear this a lot around here... "People will know my disciples by their love one for another."

Let me simplify this a little. Let's say that you want to tell a friend about Jesus... You start telling him all about the great things that Jesus has done in your life, how he has completely transformed you... How you were blind, and now you see. And it all could seem a bit spacey and weird to them. Like speaking in a foreign tongue entirely.

You could even bring them to church. And they could hear me give a message. And you could get totally stoked because you thought the message was perfect and it was the perfect week to bring your friend, and I didn't even talk about money, and you may think for certain during altar call time, "they are going to raise their hand!"

But then they don't.

And a later conversation shows you that my words seemed just as spacey... Just as out there as when you told them "I was blind but now I see." It is a foreign language... It's a different kingdom entirely. Something has to grab ahold of their heart.

But kindness... Kindness is undeniably out of place in our world, it's really just as foreign. But the difference is that kindness makes our love tangible. It makes the fruit, tangible.

Nobody can look at someone giving exponentially of their finances, time, and resources and not at the very least acknowledge, "there is something different about that person." Its just not possible.

But kindness is radical. You should feel it. If you don't feel it, you should do more. It should change the way that you are able to live. It should be night and day. It's all Gods anyways. There should be a physical affect, an affect that maybe even the world would think is a negative one on you and your own circumstances.

Not only that, but When you give, it should be with great joy.

Sometimes it hurts to give... Sometimes it's hard. It's easy to just say, "I'm not really in a finacially place right now to help the poor... To help my brother in need... I have my own needs." Giving through that, it is hard. And it hurts. But you should have a peace about it. You should have peace of mind to know that by being generous, by being kind... You are doing what Jesus has asked you to do, and you will be okay. It may hurt you to the point of thinking, "how am I going to take care of my own needs when I am always being so kind and generous to those around me?" But kindness has to be done with trust, which is connected to peace. In fact, you will be blessed for it. It takes peace to believe that... It takes peace to trust God with your tangibles, it takes trusting God with everything... Even when you wonder, "what is going to happen to me?"

Jesus addresses this issue in the parable that he tells to this lawyer.

When we read that the man is passing on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, most of us think, "this could be any old road... its just a parable. Its

a story that Jesus is using to show us something, and it just so happens that he chose these two cities and this attack was totally random.” But in reality, the choice of roads is incredibly strategic. This road was very known in that day, and was a highly dangerous route to travel on. There is a section of this road that was known as “The pass of blood” because of how often people were literally beaten and left for dead in that pass. For a person to see another person there who had just been beaten senselessly, it would not be a stretch to think that the same people who beat him up and left him for dead will do the same thing to you if they are to come in contact with you. So likely the first instinct of ALL three of these men would be to get out of there as quickly as possible. Of course, The third man, the Samaritan man, would have fought against that instinct, and won. Stopping was risky. It potentially would have come at a great cost to yourself.

Martin Luther King Jr. spoke of this road in the speech he gave the day before he was killed, called “I’ve been to the mountaintop” - and I am going to read you a passage from that speech to give you perspective:

“I remember when Mrs. King and I were first in Jerusalem. We rented a car and drove from Jerusalem down to Jericho. And as soon as we got on that road, I said to my wife, "I can see why Jesus used this as the setting for his parable." It's a winding, meandering road. It's really conducive for ambushing. You start out in Jerusalem, which is about 1200 miles -- or rather 1200 feet above sea level. And by the time you get down to Jericho, fifteen or twenty minutes later, you're about 2200 feet below sea level. That's a dangerous road. In the days of Jesus it came to be known as the "Bloody Pass." And you know, it's possible that the priest and the Levite looked over that man on the ground and wondered if the robbers were still around. Or it's possible that they felt that the man on the ground was merely faking. And he was acting like he had been robbed and hurt, in order to seize them over there, lure them there for quick and easy seizure. And so the first question that the priest asked -- the first question that the Levite asked was, "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?" But then the Good Samaritan came by. And he reversed the question: "If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?"

The Samaritan asked the right question. The Samaritan loved his neighbor as himself. If he was laying on the side of the road, what would he want

someone to do for him? He would want someone to help him. To pick him back up... to care for him and bring him back to life. So the Samaritan did that for the man on the side of the road. That's loving your neighbor as yourself.

Ok, now this is Detroit. You can't wait at a red light without seeing someone there, holding a sign. Asking for something. You can't walk the city blocks without getting asked for money for food, a bus ticket, or a ticket out of the city entirely.

But Isaiah (Isaiah 32:8) says a generous man devises a generous PLAN. He plans it. A lot of times I try and carry single bills so I can help in small ways because of how often people ask around here, (and I manage to justify that I am giving my best as I hand them 1 dollar bills) yet more often than not find myself uncomfortably cornered by someone asking for something, and I am not prepared to help.

What do you do? What is your generous plan? We want our church to be a body of people who loves Jesus, and lives it both strategically and spontaneously, all at the same time. Never losing our sense of the adventure that is the gospel... The adventure that is the great commission Jesus gave us... The adventure of living the great commandment in new and creative ways. We don't want to fall into a rut of helping and never understanding why we do it or never understanding why it is we are helping... But that would be better than falling into a rut of not helping anyone at all.

Chris Hooten is an example of this. he is a red letters guy... when he reads "don't let your left hand know what the right is doing," he tries to live by that. He sounds no trumpets when he gives, but I personally from a distance witnessed this account and so I will brag on him for a moment. I was sitting at "cafe con leche" where he works one afternoon having a delicious pour over cup of coffee, and someone came in off of the street, went up to the counter and asked for money. Chris has kind of established this little reputation in the community, that if you come into his coffee shop and ask him for his tips, he will give them to you (let me state now that I do not want anybody from our church asking him for his tips). Anyway, this particular time, he had already emptied his tip jar for the last person who asked, and

so I literally observed him tell this person, “come back after two, and I should have some money to give you by then.”

Come back after two... allow me to fill up a little, so that I can empty myself into you.

I was blown away by this. Literally, it amazed me.

Last week, I was talking to Chris and to Matt Brown after Equip and we were talking about this type of thing, I even asked him about that scenario... I remember during that time his wife was in school, so he was the only one bringing in money at the time, they have two kids, and tips seem to typically account for a good amount of the money you make in that industry. It has to really hurt to give like that under those circumstances... and Chris said this to me: “Jesus says to give to those who ask (Matthew 5:42)... so I am trying to do that.”

But it's so hard to get our minds around that isn't it... How often do we read that and think, "yeah... But Jesus didn't actually mean give to those who ask... I mean, no matter what the circumstances? We would all be broke! It couldn't be what he meant.

Well then, what did he mean? And why didn't he just say that???

One thing Chris said that people will often tell him, is that this only applies to his neighbors... Jesus talks a lot about loving your neighbor, but in Chris's reasoning, the people in Southwest, who come into the cafe, are more his neighbors than anybody. He lives in Southwest. He goes to church in Southwest. He works in Southwest.

A lot of people argue, “its only your community... its your friends, your family... its your church... baring one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2) should be in the context of relationships you already have.” But Jesus addresses this through this parable, in fact really, the answer to the question "who is my neighbor?" Is the point of this whole parable.

(Luke 10:29) (the lawyer) desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

Notice this. The lawyer was trying to justify himself. He wanted to feel like the people that he was already helping, was enough. That the circle he took care of, was his only concern... On other words he was asking: "How much can I get away with NOT doing?" Who can I get away with not helping?

So he asks this question... Who is my neighbor? How little can I do? And Jesus senses the heart behind that question, so Jesus tells the most extreme of extreme examples of who you should help. He says that the religious leaders distanced themselves from the need, while the Samaritan engaged it. There is a lot to this. Lawyers of the day, they were law experts... they loved the scriptures and the laws and they considered Samaritans to be bitter enemies. There was no love for each other at all. One way that you know how deep this hatred goes, is by what the lawyer says at the very end. Jesus asks him after the parable, "Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" and the lawyer said to Jesus, "the one who showed him mercy."

He didn't say, "The Samaritan."

He would never dare say something good of that group of people... so instead, i am picturing him mumbling through it...

the one who showed mercy....

At this point, we have come to this... That is who your neighbor is. Its the one who needs you. Its the one who lives next to you and the one that you pass on the way to work. Its the one you bump elbows with downtown and the one you sit next to at the Tigers game.

But Jesus is trying to say, it's more than that. It's more than you ever imagined!

It's The one who hurt you. The one who you have a deep seeded, long standing hatred for... a multiple generation rivalry with.

You see the way that Jesus tells this story is absolutely brilliant. the logical move in this story would be to have made the third man passing be a lawyer... or a Jew... or someone who this lawyer would have been able to relate with... That was a Jewish storytelling trick... drop your hearer right in the middle of the story! You would put the character that the hearer could relate to as the hero to display what they should do. You drop him right into the story you are telling...

Had Jesus done this... Had Jesus said, “and third, a lawyer came along...”, the lawyer could have put himself in the center the story, he would have seen himself meet a STRANGERS NEED, and then the answer would have obviously been, “my neighbor is anyone in need, whether I know them or not.”

Even if he had left the third man open... A generic named person, not identified by a nationality or a position... The lawyer easily could have placed himself in the story and saw that as the moral "your neighbor is anyone in need."

Thats not what Jesus does, because there is more to the moral of the story than that. Instead, Jesus makes the hero someone that the lawyer would have considered to be a villain. Often when the story is told, it is told that the man who was beaten was a Jew, an enemy of the Samaritan. And where that may be a safe assumption, it is not written that way, nor is it necessary... we already know that the lawyer is. We already know that he hates Samaritans. But Jesus left the man who was beaten as the only open ended one. Don't miss this. Suddenly, the only person that the lawyer could relate to, was the one who needed the neighbor. He certainly could not relate to a Samaritan.

So Jesus asks him, “Who was a neighbor to the man?”

“The one who showed mercy!” said the lawyer.

But thats only half of the answer. The answer is the Samaritan! The Samaritan is your neighbor.

The answer is “the person that you hate.”

The answer is that person who you don't even speak of anymore.

The person who you thought was incapable of love or kindness or any good deed is the neighbor because he stripped himself of his pride, his skin color, his social status, and even being "clean" - he got down on his hands and knees.... got dirty, and helped someone who was bloody and would bleed all over him... someone who is different from himself. He helped him get medical attention... he EMPTIED his wallet for him to have a place to rest and recover... I read just this morning, in the Matthew Henry commentary, and he explained the 2 denarii... "Twopence of their money was about fifteen pence of ours, which, according to the rate of things then, would go a great way." The Matthew Henry commentary was released in the early 1700s, so imagine what 15 pence of their money would equal now. I have also read that 2 denarii would have been around 2 months wages.... He didn't just give this guy a nickel. He emptied himself for this stranger.

Who is your neighbor?

Who are the ones you can't even get your mind around ever being kind to that person? You feel like you could never show *Chrestotes* to?

and as my conversation with Chris and Matt after Equip progressed through few basic scenarios... we came to the question: when is it ok to give, when is it ok to say no? Matt was telling me about a specific man that had come through that night, and he had an infection and was in kind of rough shape, but it seemed to be an ongoing thing with this guy... Still we were able to help him with some food from the emergency food pantry... And we were talking about that... How much is too much? How much is just enabling a lifestyle of dependency? And where does that fit with the red letters? Is it ever ok to say no?

If we were to be concerned with how those we are helping were using what we give them, then the bible would not say so much about entertaining strangers... Taking care of people who ask... Doing unto the least of these. There is not an inspection process that goes along with generosity, in fact we are supposed to not let one hand know what the other is doing, and if

there is one thing that is certainly clear with a simple reading of the red letters it's this: you and I are not going to be judged for the way that people use the things that we give them, but we will be judged for the way that we respond to the need that is before us.

and again, Chris brought some very good perspective. He said, "I suppose, if it becomes law to YOU (the giver), maybe that's a good sign that it's time to re-evaluate."

maybe then, you are missing it.

Chris is a pastor by the way.

Wow. When it becomes law to you. I couldn't stop thinking about that. We always think about the law, and we think about these 613 rules laid out in the old testament... but taking rules and making them religion has always been the recipe of the Pharisees. They were the most generous people, yet they were the ones Jesus was hardest on even in the midst of generosity being at the core of so much of his teachings. Because there was a law that was driving the good deed rather than life driving it. The spirit was not in it. Paul, after he lists the fruit of the spirit, he says "against which there is NO law." These aren't laws. They are fruit. These things are life. They are life giving, life altering reflections of Jesus, that should be continuously changing you as they are demonstrating your changed life to the world.

Paul says in Romans 7:10 "The very command that promised life proved to be death to me." He tried to live by the law and it was destroying him.

Well, I think that Jesus would rebuke some of us the same way that he rebuked the Pharisees, for the way we ritually hang on the words of Jesus more so than we do the heart behind them. Jesus didn't die to create more rules or to set up more boundaries. That is why it's so hard for us to read Matthew 7:22 when it says "on that day many will say LORD LORD! Did we not prophecy in your name? We did mighty works in your name?" Yet Jesus will say you did not know me. We know what Jeremiah says it is to know God... But how will you ever do those things if you don't know to do them? And how will you ever know to do them if you aren't in a relationship with him?

Because it became a ritual when Jesus wants a relationship. And a person who has a true relationship with Jesus will have a heart that is becoming more and more like Jesus every day... you should be growing in your compassion. You should be growing in your love for your family. You should be growing in your love for your enemies. You should be growing in your generosity.

But if it becomes an obligation to you perhaps its time to look at it again. And not look at it again so you can decide “not to give” but look at it again to remember WHY you give. Jesus’ words are the same, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. It is us that grow numb to the red letters, and us that grow numb to the hurt right in front of us. But kindness should be an outpouring of our love, done with joy, having the peace to know that God has our best interests at heart.

But If you are serving Jesus out of ritual rather than relationship, it is religion.

And it is those who only give ritually who miss it when the moment gets real. Think about the parable.

You have a priest. A ritual religious person. Everything was about the letter to this guy.

And you have a levite. A Levite assisted a priest... they prepared offerings (1 Chronicles 23:28-32), they took care of the sanctuaries...

They were full time caregivers... the tithes of the tribes would pay their wages. Their job was to care. But they didn't. They didn't love their neighbor as themselves... they loved their position... and they knew that according to the Levitical law if they were to come in contact with this mans blood they would become unclean and no longer able to man their own posts.

They didn't want to risk defiling that by touching a body that was potentially dead and unclean... they loved themselves... and didn't want to get jumped by robbers and left for dead either... so they crossed the road and

went the other way. They turned a blind eye to an absolutely broken situation.

They valued their world more than his world. They valued their future, over his future.

Ritual said keep on walking. So the things in your life can stay the way that they are. So you can keep the life you've worked for. So you can keep the things that you've worked for. Even religion, it said keep on walking. That's why Jesus used the example of people of a profession that common sense would say they stop, but on paper, the law said keep going, and they actually played by the book.

But love says to stop.

See if there is anything you can do.

And believe it or not, Ritual can go the other way.

You can decide, you know what, I am going to give to every person that asks every single time they ask no matter who they are or what the circumstances. And I am not saying that is a bad thing, it certainly would be taking Jesus at his word if you can get your heart around it... but if it becomes a ritual then it will become death before it can ever birth life. And here is why:

Ritual leaves no room for compassion.

Jesus said that the Samaritan man, when he saw the man beaten on the side of the road, he had compassion.

And compassion always precedes kindness. Every kind deed Jesus performed always started by him having compassion.

One of Jesus' greatest miracles (John 11:1-44) was when he raised Lazarus from the dead. Most of us read this and think, "that's great, just another miracle for Jesus!" Because we stop reading after verse 44, but verse 45 begins telling us what happened when the people who witnessed

the miracle went and told the religious leaders about it, and how that was the final straw. It was too much, and they began to plot against him. (John 11:53) says “so from that day on they made plans to put him to death.” It was incredibly kind because he did it knowing it was this miracle that would put them over. There was no way that Jesus could resurrect his friend from the dead without setting the stage for his own crucifixion... but the bible says that when Jesus saw Mary weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit. Something stirred him to act. So he acted.

In Matthew 9:35-38 it says that Jesus went throughout all of the cities and villages, teaching and proclaiming the Kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction... It said, “He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

These people were outcast and it stirred something in Jesus heart, and he did a great work in their lives... and it changed them.

When Jesus feed the four thousand (Matthew 15:32) he started by saying “I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.” - He had compassion on them, so he performed this amazing miracle and feed four thousand people.

Over and over and over again, before Jesus performed a great miracle, he was stirred by a great need. He always let himself be moved, and it caused him to move. It caused him to act. It caused him to be kind.

Ephesians 4:32 says "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

Be kind!

Tenderhearted... open your hearts... prepare to be compassionate.

Forgive...

Don't be like the lawyer, who was so bitter at the Samaritans that he was not even able to speak their name in order to identify that one of them was a hero. Don't hold things against people, or people groups. hold nothing against anyone because Christ doesn't hold anything against you.

Kindness is a deed. It is a deed that carries Jesus into the world of people who otherwise may never see him.

Kindness is generosity as a lifestyle.

There is a story told of John Wesley, during his time as a teacher at Oxford. He had just purchased some pictures for his room there... Decorations for his walls, and soon after met one of the chambermaids at the school in the dead of winter, and she had on only a very thin shirt, there was no way it was keeping her warm... It was freezing out, and he felt terrible for her, so he reached in his pocket, in order to give her some money to go and buy a coat, only to realize that he had spent most of his money on the pictures and did not have enough left for her to buy a coat with.

He had this conviction, that God was not pleased with the way that he had spent the money that had been entrusted to him, and he asked himself "will thy master say 'well done thy good and faithful steward.' Thou has adorned thy walls with the money which might have screened this poor creature from the cold! O Justice! O mercy! Are not these pictures the blood of this poor maid?"

So this was his approach moving forward: He didn't change anything.

That may seem like a strange approach. Normally, when the Holy Spirit convicts you like that, you make a drastic change. Well, he made a drastic mental shift. He looked at his life, what it cost him to live, and he figured it all out and he gave the rest. He lived off of 28 pounds that year, and made 30. The rest he gave away.

But the following year, he got a raise, and he ended up making a lot more money. His income doubled, from 30 pounds a year, to 60 pounds a year... He did not change anything about the way that he lived, his cost of living stayed the same, 28 pounds per year. He gave the rest.

The third year, he got another 30 pound a year raise... he was now making 90 pounds, but again, he did not change a thing. He lived off of 28 pounds, and gave the rest away.

This continued. One year, he made 1400 pounds... and either he gave himself a raise or the cost of living went up that year, because he lived off of 30 pounds that year. He gave away the rest.

He once said:

“[When I die] if I leave behind me ten pounds ... you and all mankind [may] bear witness against me, that I have lived and died a thief and a robber.”

He gave it all away.

He lived his life always seeing how he could help others. Always looking for ways to be kind. Ways to be generous.

We have been working on this here. A few weeks ago, we announced our food pantry. Its been amazing, we have been able to help quite a few families put food in their cupboards already. We have been able to be a blessing to people who are a part of our church, and who aren't a part of our church yet... They are all our neighbors. If you hear of someone who needs some help, send them to us. Lets find needs and fill them in our neighborhood. But if you think of it, when you are at the store, grab a couple cans, grab a box of food and bring it by. We have a supplier who helps provide these things, but somebody has to pay for it whether it comes from him, from me, or from you. Be a part of the generosity.

Your generosity so far with the benevolence fund has been awesome, we have a few incredible stories already of people we have been able to help in incredibly practical ways... but don't forget these things. Keep dropping the occasional bill into the box. These things exist so that we can quietly be the most generous place on the planet. I was so proud of you guys last week, in the offering when Jerome came... You guys were so generous and we were able to play a substantial part already, in what God is going to do down in Lansing through that church. Its an amazing strategic partnership that I am so excited to see the fruit of in the coming years. But its only by your kindness. Its only by your generosity, your deeds... your practical gospel lives.

Listen, we have a great church. Its a really great church. We have a great community and we love each other and we love our city... Kindness, in a lot of ways, its already our thing. But I believe that God's dream for this place is that we would constantly grow in love. We would grow in love for each other, and grow in love for our community. I don't want to just be a church in a city... one that meets in the city and does life in the city... I want to be a church FOR the city. That meets the needs of the city and makes life better for those in the city.

We aren't a social club in the middle of the need.

We are here to meet the needs. And that is why we are working to create avenues of kindness. But if we are truly going to be that, a church for the city... then kindness needs to be a default for us, because our hearts are just constantly being stirred to compassion and never growing numb to the harsh realities that the people in our community live in every single day. But kindness is not just a handout. It can't just be a handout. Its not just creating a culture where the community is dependent on what we do for them. No. Kindness is the window that shows the world Jesus. Its the window that shows our community that God is not finished with them yet.

Kindness is a deed that is driven by compassion that leads people to repentance.

The bible says (Romans 2:4) that "Gods kindness is meant to lead people to repentance."

Gods kindness. We are a reflection of that, and we are ambassadors of that... and our job is to point people to that. Because what he did is the only true example of love. Its the only true example of kindness. Nothing you can ever do will ever be as self-less. And what Jesus did for us, it was so kind, that when people see it, and they grasp it, and they realize that the kind of love that He showed us, we are not even capable of showing him...

we are not even capable of showing our neighbor...

that leads people to repentance. That leads people to dependability on God.

And there are all sorts of arguments as to why its wrong to be generous in some cases or why its not “kind” to give people what they want and not what they need... or should I say “what we think they need.”

Its really easy to look at someone, and the circle that they are standing in in that moment and create in your mind all sorts of roads that lead them now to that circle, and you can easily justify your own selfishness by coming up with every excuse why “you will only be feeding the problem” or even just flat out conclude that you worked for what you have, and this person didn’t so they don’t deserve it.

But that flat out is the anti-gospel. Because we don't deserve it. Nothing about the person I am or the person that you are deserved what Jesus did for us. Nothing about our lives and whatever fruit we may bare has earned us the right to be called children of God. We are all wrong. We are all cut off. We are all dead. We are all separated and if Jesus wanted to give us what we deserve we would all burn. But thank God, Jesus didn’t base grace on merit. So we must not associate our good deeds to the credentials of those receiving them.

The thing that to me is so incredible about the parable of the good Samaritan is this... This guy who knew every law... he was a lawyer... a religious lawyer... a person of the law, a LAW EXPERT... he asked Jesus this question about his neighbor as a way to justify himself, because he wanted to leave the conversation thinking, “I do enough.”

But he didn’t do enough. In fact, no matter how much he did do, it wouldn’t have been enough. The fact that he was trying to justify himself in the first place showed that he missed it, and that is why Jesus used such an extreme example.

Because you can’t justify yourself. We are justified by faith through Christ Jesus alone. (Romans 5:1) - The lawyer knew the law... he knew all of the laws. He knew that the sum of the laws was to love God, and to love your neighbor as yourself, but he knew that he didn’t do that. All of us, if we are honest with ourselves, we know that we don’t do that. Maybe we are like the Samaritan, and we will run across the road and help the man beaten

and left for dead on a good day (like 4 days, or Joy to the D when we take part in high impact ministry opportunities)... yet on a normal day we pass by 15 people that we can help in even more practical, simple ways and we don't because we are so consumed in our own lives that we often don't even see our neighbor.

And that is why Jesus told the story in such a way that the only character that the lawyer could relate to by the end, was the one who needed a neighbor. The one who needed to be shown what real love is. Because until we can understand that the kind of love it takes to love your neighbor as yourself is impossible apart from Jesus, we will never be able to treat each other with the same kindness that Jesus tells us to show people. We will never look at other peoples circumstances with the compassion it takes to free them of them, until we understand that apart from Jesus we aren't even capable of that kind of love.

And until we can realize that we can't work our way to righteousness, we will never have it. Jesus died to justify us, because there is no justifying yourself.

Even the priest crossed to the other side of the road...

and even the Samaritan needs Jesus.