

Imagine a World without Kindness

"It's a Wonderful Life" - part 3

December 15, 2013

DAY 1: God's Eternal Love

In the Christmas movie, "It's a Wonderful Life," George Bailey, a banker, has fallen on hard times. He decides that the world would be better off without him so he plans to jump off a bridge to take his life. But an angel is sent to rescue him. The angel's approach is to show George just how important his life really is. The angel does this by showing George how the history of his town would have unfolded without him. It's not a pretty. People he would have helped go without his help and their lives end up worse because of it. The town of Bedford Falls is taken over by his banking rival, a ruthless man whose greed brings crime and poverty.

What George gets to see is how life would have turned out without his kindness!

Jeremiah 31:3 The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness."

1. God says that He loved the people with two kinds of love. What are they?

2. "Everlasting love" is the Hebrew word "ahabah."

"Everlasting" has both a quantitative and qualitative meaning.

- Quantitative "everlasting" love is love from everlasting to everlasting.
- Qualitative "everlasting" love is love "to the full." The idea is love that covers every person and every situation.

b. Which of these, quantitative or qualitative strikes you the most? Why?

3. Below, are a few verses that use this same Hebrew word (though not necessarily translated as "eternal"). Underline the phrases that are descriptive of God's love.

Zephaniah 3:17 The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."

Hosea 14:4 The Lord says, "Then I will heal you of your faithlessness; my love will know no bounds, for my anger will be gone forever."

DAY 2: God's Loving Kindness

1. Kindness is not *first* a human quality. It starts with God. His kindness is not *human* kindness. It is far more.

Jeremiah 31:3 The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness."

2. The phrase, "loving-kindness" is one Hebrew word: "hesed."

3. Below, are a list of verses that describe God's "loving kindness," His hesed love. Jot down your insights about God's "loving kindness" below each verse.

Jeremiah 9:24 But those who wish to boast should boast in this alone: that they truly know me and understand that I am the Lord who demonstrates unfailing love and who brings justice and righteousness to the earth, and that I delight in these things. I, the Lord, have spoken!

Jeremiah 32:18 You show unfailing love to thousands, but you also bring the consequences of one generation's sin upon the next. You are the great and powerful God, the Lord of Heaven's Armies.

Lamentations 3:32 Though he brings grief, he also shows compassion because of the greatness of his unfailing love.

Daniel 9:4 I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: "O Lord, you are a great and awesome God! You always fulfill your covenant and keep your promises of unfailing love to those who love you and obey your commands.

Hosea 11:4 I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them.

4. What did you learn most about God's "loving-kindness?"

DAY 3: God's Loving Kindness (continued)

1. We've spent two days looking, not at human kindness, but at God's kindness! There are two reasons.

a. God's eternal and "hesed" love define our relationship with Him. His love establishes our identity in Him. It is a love that is freely given and cannot be lost.

b. We are called to reflect His love, his eternal (qualitative) and "hesed" (loving-kindness) in our relationships!

2. How does this calling to reflect God's love strike you?

3. What is most striking about God's kindness is that it is completely *undeserved* on our part!

It's one thing to be kind to someone who is kind to you. It is quite another to be kind to someone who is critical of you, angry at you, or doesn't give you the time of day.

How does the idea of showing kindness to someone who doesn't like you strike you?

4. Paul expresses this very idea in his sermon to the unbelievers in Lystra.

Acts 14:17 "Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy."

5. These people couldn't have cared less about God, yet, what did Paul say that God had done for the people? List at least four items.

6. Look back at that list. How important are each of these?

7. Think about someone who has "done you wrong." Now try to imagine giving that person the kinds of comparable kindnesses God gives everyone! What resistance do you sense rising in you?

8. This is what God has done/and does for you!!!

DAY 4: Learning to be Kind

1. It's easy to assume you are a "kind" person. That's because you can think of something kind you have done for someone *you already like*. Does that make you a kind person? Let's see what Jesus had to say...

Matthew 5:43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?

2. For Jesus, what qualifies as being a "loving" person?

3. Jesus noted a group of people that were notorious for being scoundrels: tax collectors. Even *they* considered themselves loving people!!! Hah!

4. What is the point He is trying to drive home?

5. Jesus adds another example:

Matthew 5:47 "And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

6. Many have misunderstood Jesus' words in Matt. 5:48. He is not talking about being "perfect" in terms of sinlessness. That is impossible this side of heaven. "Being perfect" is the standard to which we reach in terms of expressing and reflecting God's kindness to people. Don't settle for human kindness. Emulate God's "hesed" loving kindness!

a. How does this strike you?

b. Can you see yourself reaching for God's higher standard of giving undeserved kindness?

c. Is there someone with whom you should direct kindness?

DAY 5: Kindness is Costly

1. If you have even tried to show kindness to someone who doesn't like you, you know there is a painful cost. It's one thing to do something bad and get criticized. It's another thing to do something good and get nailed for it! Welcome to God's world. This is what it's like for Him to relate to people!

Romans 2:4 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?

2. Paul wrote the letter of Romans to the church in Rome. It was mainly addressed to Christians. Yet, what did Paul observe in *even Christians'* response to "the riches of God's kindness?!?!"

3. Have you shown contempt for the riches of God's kindness, tolerance and patience to you? How?

4. God's kindness is not just a grandfatherly "Boys will be boys," attitude. In Romans 2:4, what is God's kindness meant to produce in you?

Romans 11:22 Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.

5. God's kindness is meant to keep you from going off track and bringing shame on your life and on others. But if we will not respond to God's kindness what will we face from God?

6. God loves us enough to do whatever He can to keep us from going awry, even if that means us thinking God is bad or unfair.

7. Kindness is rooted in God, and is meant to help people walk with Him, enjoy Him, and live for Him. You, in turn, are to relate to the people around you with the same intent! Undeserved kindness is your calling!