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**Grace & Grit**  
**Part 2 – Four Acts of Kindness**  
Pastor Ted Cunningham

We're in this series called *Grace & Grit* and today we're talking about the grit required to give kindness. We're looking at four acts of kindness. The first two we look at require no grit. The last two we're going to look at require grit. I think what happens, if we're not careful, is we allow the first two to lull us into thinking we're kind enough as people, but we need to move into the last two that we look at this morning to know what it means to take the unmerited favor that we have received from our Father in heaven through Christ Jesus and give to others.

One of my favorite stories about just simple kindness is of Mamie Adams. I just want to read it to you. *Mamie Adams always went to a branch post office in her town because the postal employees there were friendly. She went there to buy stamps just before Christmas one year and the lines were particularly long. Someone pointed out that there was no need to wait in line because there was a stamp machine in the lobby. "I know," said Mamie, "but the machine won't ask me about my arthritis."*

So, take that, self-checkout. We go places and receive that kindness. In Ephesians 2, we started there in this series last week. Verses 1-10 of Ephesians most believe is Paul's most concise presentation of the gospel, our condition before Christ, and how we come to faith in Christ Jesus and have a relationship with God. Last week, we looked at Verses 8-10, but we want to jump in with Verses 1-7 today as we talk about the grace we've received and what it means for us to become grace givers.

Ephesians 2 - ***As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.*** Meaning we're spiritually dead, we're of our father the devil prior to salvation. ***3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.*** This is where we started last week. You and I deserve death, but the follower of Jesus has been given life. Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

***4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.***

So, we want to talk about how we take the unmerited favor that has been shown to us and make sure that we're giving that to others. And that we would be known as a church, as a body of believers who lavishes kindness onto others.

We're going to look at these first two acts. Again, I believe these first two acts require no grit. The first one we talk about is simply:

**1. Daily Acts of Kindness.** You might even say just being nice. Common courtesy and gracious words with no spotlight. It's the things we say and the things we do that are gracious and we don't need any attention. We don't get any attention. It's being nice to your wife in the morning, before coffee. It's being nice to your husband throughout the day. It's children being nice to parents. It's just daily acts of kindness.

This plays a big role in our lives. We read in Proverbs 16, ***Gracious words are a honeycomb... Actually, kindness does something to us physically, the Bible says. ...sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.*** If you look at the research on this... I'll just show a few of them to you so we can get what the scripture is talking about here.

*Like most medical antidepressants, kindness stimulates the production of serotonin. This feel-good chemical heals your wounds and calms you down.* – Talya Steinberg, Psychology Today

And then even witnessing acts of kindness even if it's not done to you or you're not giving it to someone else, when we hear these stories, when we are reminded of kindness, it does something to us.

*Witnessing acts of kindness produces oxytocin, occasionally referred to as the 'love hormone' which aids in lowering blood pressure and improving our overall heart-health. It's why if you ever watched the news... I go all the way back to the Peter Jennings Nightly New. We'd get all this dark news for 28 minutes. We'd be like *whoa that's heavy stuff*. But then there would always be this little pick me up at the end of the news of somebody rescuing a puppy from a drainage pipe. That's because they were like, *we're not going to leave you on this note*. Oxytocin also increases our self-esteem and optimism, which is extra helpful when we're anxious or shy in a social situation.* – Natalie Angier, The New York Times.

*About half the participants in one study reported that they feel stronger and more energetic after helping others; many also reported feeling calmer and less depressed, with increased feelings of self-worth.*  
– Christine Carter, UC Berkley.

*According to research from Emory University, when you are kind to another person, your brain's pleasure and reward centers light up as if you were the recipient of the good deed - not the giver. This phenomenon is called the "helper's high."*

Has anybody in here ever had a meal paid for by a total stranger in a restaurant. The waiter or waitress says, "Hey, your meal has been taken care of." I'm not going to ask you to raise your hand if you've done this. That's fun too. At times, you take their check and then you open it up and you're like,

“Whoa, hey, alright. Cut down on the wine there, buddy! I didn’t see it over there. We’ll cover the food.” But anyway...

So, you understand the helper’s high.” I asked some people this week, just for some acts of kindness that were given to them. Again, when we do acts of service and acts of kindness to others, we want to follow the scripture’s teaching and try to be very quiet about it, so our rewards is with our Father in heaven and not to be seen by men. So, I asked people what has been done for you lately.

Jim said, “A neighbor we never met removed snow from our driveway without wanting payment or even our request. Ours was not the only driveway in the neighborhood.”

Who had a driveway shoveled by someone? We have some work to do Woodland Hills, we were all sitting at home anyway. Get the shovel.

Angie said, “My teenage daughter walked over and gave me a hug after I started crying from an extremely stressful week... that I had taken out on her.”

Kurt said, “Someone sent me a card of encouragement along with a restaurant gift card for leading in different ministries and did not sign the card or leave a return address. I know Kurt watches from Chicago. The anonymous ones are my favorite. I usually get the anonymous other things, but that sounds fun.

Paula says, “They gave me their new car to use and I totaled it. They showed me grace, care, love, and kindness. And you know who they are.” So, I’m hopping to learn that. I’ve never heard the story. I know Paula is probably watching from California.

Sally said, “Someone I have never met came and fixed my central heating unit. It was just before the big snow and ice storm that we had. Also, my neighbor across the street paid someone to shovel my driveway.

Joni said, “My church has shown a great amount of kindness while my dad was sick and after he passed away from COVID. Between the prayer team and the members of the church reaching out.” So, thank you, Woodland Hills.

Liz speaks of our church as well, saying, “They helped me with my rent when I was jobless and had no money coming in. So, thank you, Woodland Hills.

Marsha said, “The day my dad died last year, one of my dearest friends put a reminder in her phone for one year later. She new that that day would be difficult for me, full of lots of emotions, and she wanted to make sure she was there for me.”

“Fast forward 365 days, on February 13, 2021, I got a message from this friend from over 600 miles away, acknowledging that I had survived a whole year without my dad, letting me know that she had been praying for me over the past year and praying me through all those firsts that happens after you

lose someone. I pray that my children will make lifetime friends like this that actively shower kindness and love no matter the distance.”

Those are the daily acts of kindness.

**2. Random Acts of Kindness** This second one became very popular with radio stations and churches years ago. Remember when churches and radio station even gave out little coupons to remind people to do this. When you go through a drive thru, pay for the car behind you. These are spontaneous, fun, easy, and the require no grit.

Who has had their coffee or meal paid for in a drive-thru? Yeah, those are fun. It’s what we loved about our Thursday meet ups during the pandemic early on... or during the shutdown I should say. It was just fun to pay for meals. Honestly, there was no work and no grit involved in that from an emotional perspective. That was easy. We were thriving on that. We loved those moments. Random acts of kindness.

And if we are not careful, we take these daily acts of shoveling snow from someone’s driveway, buying someone a meal in a drive-thru, which is great. Don’t hear me say it’s not. That’s great, but we have to be careful that we don’t pat ourselves on the back and say, “That’ it! That’s all we need to do. Show that level of kindness and the Lord is pleased with us.” We need to go to deeper levels of kindness that requires grit.

**3. Extraordinary Acts of kindness.** Extra grace required people require extraordinary acts of kindness. We all have EGRs in our lives. Extra Grace Required people. All of us have them. I have one. He’s probably watching right now. I’m not going to call him by name, but he knows who he is. He wears me out on social media, absolutely. But I’ve turned a corner with him because I have labeled him extra grace required. He doesn’t agree with me on anything. We don’t vote the same. We don’t have any political opinions... I say some strong things about this, that, or the other, and he just comes at me. And now I just wait for it. I post something and I just wait for the reply coming right at me, to which I respond, “There you are again, my friend, bringing the sunshine. You’re a bucket of rainbows today, my brother.”

It’s that person in your life. Grit is required to show kindness to those who are difficult, intolerable, agitating, pot-stirring, and constantly getting under your skin. You’ve heard it said before, “They are the difficult people, different people, dangerous people, and the democrats. It’s those four primary people. NO! stop it! It’s all of those people in your life. I have to break it to some of you. Some of you didn’t even know it, but you bought coffee for the car behind you that was full of democrats. Think that one through. But this requires something.

In Ephesians 4, the scripture says it this way, ***29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.***

I don't block people a lot on social media. But I have to sometimes when people are name calling or belittling. That's because I tend to know some of the people they're going after and my shepherd's heart... I'm like, you don't know what that person is going through; could you not blast them like that. So, I'll delete those type of comments, but typically, if it's coming at me, my flesh wants to have fun with it, but I just have to say extra grace required. *Ted, I know your sarcastic comment seems very funny right now. I need you to hold that for about an hour before hitting the reply button.*

It goes on in Ephesians 4 – ***32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.***

This is why we are called in scripture to bear with one another, to forgive one another, to love one another. What that requires is not the behavior of the other person but understanding the source from whom you receive it. I understand that I receive it... If I lose sight of what I have received – saved by grace through faith – and this kindness is shown to me on a daily basis... If I lose sight of that and I'm not tuned into that, I resist giving it to other people. Have you ever been shown extraordinary kindness? And you know, "I don't deserve this." Just sit in that for just a second. "I don't deserve what I'm getting right now, but I'm grateful for it."

In November, I received my first speeding ticket ever in my life. I got it in Dodson, Louisiana. If you've been on the highway out of Louisiana, you know these little speed traps... I mean towns. It's 65, 55, 45, 35, 45, 55, 65. You do that for like three hours. I was in Alexandria, Louisiana and left after the 11:00 service at Calvary Baptist Church. I was driving north and *I'm getting home*. Let's just say it that way, my friend. *I'm getting home*.

I'm pulling through Dodson, Louisiana and there sits the officer, and we lock eyes. I look right at him and my face says, *Guilty, I did it. I know I'm wrong here*. But I was too far from the Arkansas border to make a run for it. So, I pull over. I pull over and he walks up. I immediately... My very first words were... and lawyers would tell me don't ever do this, but my very first words were, "Guilty. I did it. You got me. I'll take whatever is coming at me."

He goes, "I got you going 74 in a 45."

Oh, don't judge me! Raise your hand if you've transgressed more than that.

He takes my license and registration and goes back to his car. He comes back with a ticket. This officer is wearing blue jeans and a tee shirt, a badge and a gun. I was wondering if this guy was legit, but it was a squad car, so I pull over.

Then he said these words to me. Now I was fine. I knew I was guilty. I knew I deserved whatever I was about to get and I'm not going to talk myself out of it. He goes, "You know, because of how fast you were going, I could take you to jail?"

You know your heart on that roller coaster? You know when you hit the dip at the bottom of the roller coaster and your heart goes somewhere down around your knees? I said, "I'm not built for a Louisiana prison. I can't go to jail today. That ain't going to happen."

He goes, "I'm not taking you to jail."

Then I want to say, "Can you transfer me to a more liberal state like Illinois or California where they are releasing inmates?" I've learned you have to really make sure you are appropriate with your humor with officers because they're not...

He goes, "You know what?" and it's interesting that he used this word. He said, "Hey, I'm not taking you to jail because you've been kind."

Like a \$295.00 ticket later... with that we are going to take another offering. No. It's interesting I didn't go to jail, I got the ticket, and a judge showed me kindness. I'm not going to get into all that. It's still 65, 45, 55... I call my friend, Paul Harris for help with being in the deep woods. I said, "Paul, I've got to get to the Arkansas Line; I'm not feeling real comfortable right now. He goes, "You ain't any better off in Southern Arkansas. You be careful all the way to Little Rock."

I want you to think of a time, of a story where you know, "I deserve this" and then you don't get it. These are extraordinary acts. Watch what it says in Luke as we transition to what is the most important act of kindness for us to talk about today. **35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.**

"I will show kindness to you when you show me the proper respect I deserve." Have you ever heard that or heard that tone come out? "I will be kind to you when you straighten out your attitude, mister. When you change the way you are coming at me right now." This is why we want to show grace and mercy.

**36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.** Meaning not only is he our source, but he's also our model. We're not looking to the behaviors of others to determine whether or not we are going to be kind. We're not going to look to how they come at us online to determine whether or not we will respond in kind. We show kindness because of the unmerited favor that has been brought to us. And that leads us to the fourth one we want to talk about the most today.

**4. Undeserved acts of kindness.** You don't announce this to people. You don't tell them, "Hey, you've been a jerk, but guess what? I'm going to be good to you." It's not an announcement we make. It's the undeserved kindness that's rooted in our deep appreciation of what Christ has done for us, being mindful of this, walking in this, resting in this. This is why I'm going to encourage you today to go to that person who doesn't deserve your kindness and show it. Before you show up, you pray up. Before you show up, you read up. Before you show up, you call a friend who will help get you in the right frame of mind to show a level of kindness to give this act of kindness that the person you are going to show it towards does not deserve.

Philip Yancey calls this, "Grace-healed eyes." I love this. Every follower of Christ should have grace-healed eyes. *All of us in the church need grace-healed eyes to see the potential in others for the same grace that God has so lavishly bestowed on us.* – What's So Amazing About Grace

It's not the fakey, fakey kindness we show people. It's not the gritting the teeth and saying the right thing. We looked at it last week. We're paid for how we perform, we get applause for how we perform, we get awarded and get rewards for how we perform. God is not looking for a kindness performance. He's looking for a genuine, not pretend kindness. That we know how much has been poured out on us and now we want to give that to others.

Philip Yancey talks about this a lot. *"Ungrace does its work quietly and lethally, like a poisonous, undetectable gas. A father dies unforgiven. A mother who once carried a child in her own body does not speak to that child for half its life. The toxin steals on, from generation to generation."* - Philip Yancey, What's So Amazing About Grace.

For some of you, the kindness that needs to be shown is to a family member you haven't spoken to for years. You're like, "Ted, they are difficult. They're challenging." I know we just had Gary Thomas here and we talked about when to walk away, how to walk away. But we don't have to do that with bitterness, resentment, and anger because we know our source. We need to be reminded, "I've been not only forgiven, but daily this is coming to me, daily I'm receiving it, and I want to pour it out onto those around me, those in my family." The unmerited favor given to us requires us, followers of Jesus, to give undeserved kindness and to show that.

When you read the Old Testament story of Joseph... I really encourage you sometime this week to open your Bible to Genesis 37 and, if you can in one reading, read Genesis 37-50, to the end of the book. It gives this great story of brothers asking for kindness for their family after they treated the brother, that they are requesting the kindness from, so poorly. It's a great story that reminds us... Sometimes want to talk about grace and talk about kindness and how it's been received from the Lord and how we give it to other and we think we have to go to the New Testament. A good chunk of the Book of Genesis deals with the kindness we're talking about today, the undeserved kindness.

I hope you read it sometime this week. I'm going to give you a very short and very quick walk through of those chapters, 37-50. Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt by his brothers. Remember he comes looking for them and they are planning on killing him, but his older brother Ruben says, "No, no, let's not kill him." And he ends up going into slavery in Egypt.

He's falsely accused by Potiphar's wife of sexual harassment. That puts him in prison and when you read the story, you see that God continues to show him kindness in prison. He ultimately becomes the second in command under Pharaoh. And then when the famine hits the land, he is the one that leads them through this for seven years. And guess what? It effected his brother, the brothers that sold him into slavery in Egypt. They come needing food.

I have to be honest... If it's your first time reading this story, you're going to have moments where you're like, "They don't deserve it." If you've ever had a sibling rivalry and you've gone after your sibling... This is what exhausts parents. The siblings are going at it until one is going to give up. You read this story and you're like "Don't you dare give it to them Joseph. You make them starve to death!" When you think about all the tragedy that hit Joseph and what he went through.

That's not what we read. We read someone who shows undeserved kindness. We're going to pick up in Chapter 50: 15-21. We always tell you to go read these 13 chapters and then give you the ending. How do you like that?

**15 When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" 16 So they sent word to Joseph (good move), saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: 17 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.**

**18 His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said. 19 But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? 20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good... Even when we go through difficult trials and seasons that have been brought on us by other people, people we are related to, people that we love, and they treat us poorly, God can do good with that. ...to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. 21 So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children."**

Even when you read that... If you do it all in one reading and you get to that part right there, you feel convicted. Have you ever seen an act of kindness that you know is the right thing, but your heart hasn't quite caught up to it? You're like, "Yeah, I know you should do that for them. I just want them to suffer a little. Put them in prison for a week before you give them grain to go home with. Just do something to stick it in." This is how our sinful nature works. **And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.**

Why is it so hard for us? Here's why. This is the sinful craving. We want people who hurt us to feel the same pain they caused us. This is why it's so difficult. Amy and I talk about this all the time in our work with couples. It's like this couple is charging hard after Jesus. They are following the Lord. I'm seeing it all the time. We're seeing miracle after miracle take place in this church and it's like the forgiveness has been given and this person is moving toward this person and they are moving forward, but there's just some withholding still going on. What's the withholding? And it's not even really just trusting.

The withholding is, "I need you to truly feel what you caused me for all these years. I forgive you, but I want you to feel it." We want people who hurt us to feel that pain, however, as we've learned today from the scripture, we show kindness to those who hurt us because we want them to experience the same grace Christ gives us. That's grace-healed eyes. We know we've received it and why is that not available for every single one of you in here and every single person watching online. Of course it is. We want that for you.

So, the homework assignment... Some are like, "Don't you dare." Find that person, and for some it will be an extra grace required person. For some, it's going to be the person who has caused you great pain. One of the best lessons we take out of the story of Joseph is that he comforted and showed kindness to those who did not deserve it. Who is that person for you? Who do you need to offer that to?

If you've never trusted Jesus as your Savior, let me tell you, that's your starting point; that received grace. For by grace you are saved through faith; it's not of works so you can't boast about it. It's not about works. Works flows out of our salvation. He has created us in Christ Jesus to do good works but works do not bring salvation. So, we work out, not for, our salvation. If you've never placed faith in Jesus, I encourage you to come down after we pray and meet one of our care pastors, somebody from the prayer team. They would love to walk you through what it means to be a Christian, what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

Father, give us grace-healed eyes today. Let us walk in this online. Let us walk in this in our town. Let us walk in this in our very divided nation. In these times where there are so many strong opinions and so much frustration toward one another on the way this should be done or that should be done. Give us grace-healed eyes toward one another. When we don't feel like offering it. When we withhold it, may we tune in, may we lean in, may we listen, may we receive it, the kindness that you pour out on us, so that we can give it to others.

We pray all of this in the name of Jesus and everyone agreed and said... Amen.