

# Proverbs: Skillful Living - Kindness

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, we are going to continue our study in Proverbs this morning. And I just want us to notice that my sign, it has like buttons on it.

I don't know. It's just, it's a little fancier than the rest. So feeling pretty good about myself. Um, well, join me as we ask God's blessing on our study.

This morning. Father, we are, um, so thankful to be called your people, to not have gathered because of work.

So we have somehow done in righteousness, but Lord, we gather, um, simply because you are merciful. Uh, that you have washed us, that you have cleaned us and that was based upon your own work, your perfection, your sacrifice for us.

Father, would you instruct us this morning as we consider all that you have to say, uh, related to kindness in particular from the book of Proverbs? And Lord, would you, would you change us?

[ 1 : 21 ] Lord, might we hear your word and it, uh, and it cut to the, to the deepest portions of our heart, to our soul. Lord, that we would have a sense that we have met with you and we have heard from you.

So would you speak to us now through your word, through the power of your spirit? And Lord, we will give you thanks for what you accomplish in our lives as we worship you this morning.

We love you Jesus. It's in your name. We pray in all God's people said, Amen. Well, the subject this morning is kindness and I don't know if you have recognized this or not.

I would assume you have, but kindness is sort of a rare commodity these days. Um, since short supply, you can look in our culture and, um, you see a lot of indulgence, a lot of self promotion, quite a bit of retaliation, vice.

So I would say we live in a society of unkindness, of ungrace, a society that has little charity and it's only getting worse.

[ 2 : 36 ] You can turn on the news and you can, um, hear stories of the people who are in the world, hear stories of just the vitriol and words that are, that are spoken between people, or you can see the, the violence and hatred of, of man towards his fellow man, little regard for life.

I would say civility has left our nation. We live on a planet that in large measure has denied God. And that's what we have morphed into this very brutish of beasts that lacks charity.

And even those that seem to want to preach kindness to the rest of us with their bumper stickers remind us to be kind, I would believe that their kindness is probably most suspect of all.

And yet as God's people, we have been called to live according to a different kingdom ethic. Eric just read from Ephesians four and it's a key text and I just want to begin there this morning in Ephesians four verse 32.

We are given this ethic of the kingdom in which we, we find ourselves in God's kingdom. This is how we're to live and Paul gives the Ephesians these six attitudes and behaviors that are not our ethic, right?

[ 4 : 02 ] Bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander and malice. But to be God's people, we are to live in a spirit of kindness towards one another.

As God has forgiven us. Kindness, graciousness. This phrase here, be kind to one another.

It literally translates, keep on becoming kind to one another. Continue in this stead, which tells us that kindness for the believer is not just the target, but it's also the measure of our own sanctification.

Be kind, Paul says. The adjective there is Christos. Sounds a lot like Christos. And I think we have there an image of perhaps looking to the one who is kind and you have to wonder if these first century believers made that association as they spoke and thought in the Greek.

Kindness, it's not a new concept in the New Testament. It is been God's heart for his people from the beginning.

[ 5 : 23 ] You can look in the Old Testament and you have these, these, these, these, these Old Testament and you have these examples throughout of this praise worthy characteristic.

We think of in the pages of Genesis, we have Joseph who shows this unusual kindness towards his brothers. They had sold him into slavery.

They had, they had perpetrated evil against him and we have the scene in our mind of him saying, come near, come near to me. And he shows kindness to those that were very unkind to him.

Don't be distressed. In Exodus, we see Pharaoh's daughter who shows kindness to this baby Moses, knowing full well he's a Hebrew and adopts this, this baby and raises him as her own.

It's a great image of kindness or Ruth and her devotion towards Naomi and then later to Boaz, this loyalty that she shows to them.

[ 6 : 31 ] So Proverbs as we are in this book, it has actually much to say on this subject. And I think perhaps there's no better place to start than in the first portion of the book in Proverbs three.

It's a very familiar verse, perhaps to most of us here. The context of Proverbs, the first nine chapters of Proverbs is really it's a king.

It's King Solomon speaking to his prince of a son saying, hey, how are you going to live life? Are you going to pursue a life of wisdom or a life of folly? And these two paths are personified in Madam folly and Lady wisdom.

And so the king is saying, which one are you going to pursue in life? And so Proverbs chapters one through nine is are these 10 speeches that this father gives to the son.

And and if you want to just generally sort of give a structure to Proverbs, then chapters 10 through 31 are just the myriad of examples of this life of wisdom. Proverbs three versus three and four.

[ 7 : 42 ] The Solomon speaks to his son says, let not steadfast love, which is the word kindness there and faithfulness, dependability, forsake you, bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart so that you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man.

So a couple of things that we learn here right off the bat related to kindness. Solomon says to his son, bind kindness, steadfast love, bind this around your neck.

And we have this image of kindness being this precious jewel. It's compared to this this beautiful pendant.

And it tells us something intuitively that we know about kindness, and it is this that it is attractive. Kindness is attractive. We are drawn to kind people.

And we are repelled by those who are not. Julie and myself were at a nursery, not a baby nursery, a plant nursery.

[ 8 : 55 ] We're done with, I mean, I assume we're done. I don't know. And the sales lady was very short in her words, very in her tone.

And we left the nursery not wanting to spend money there nor to spend more time with this individual. Just was very unattractive to be around her.

I then read a story recently about a woman who had opportunity to go to the post office and avoid the long line because all she needed to do was buy stamps. And she was told by the clerk, hey, you don't need to stand in this line because there's a machine right over here.

You can buy stamps and be on your way. And she actually declined and the clerk was very surprised. Like why would you not want to go and use the machine?

And she said, well, the machine won't ask me about my arthritis. Kindness is attractive.

[ 9 : 59 ] And perhaps we see something in the response of that individual of just the favor, the blessing that it is that you find favor with man because of kindness.

The second thing that we learned from this proverb, not only is it attractive, but we're told to write kindness on the tablets of our heart, which tells us that kindness is not actually a suggestion for the believer.

But it's rather the code of our conduct of life. So much so that we are to etch these words onto the tablet of our heart as God has etched His word on stone as you think about the Ten Commandments.

There's a permanence there. God desires His people to be kind. In fact, Paul told Timothy and 2 Timothy 2,24, serving of the Lord isn't to be quarrelsome, but to be kind to everyone.

Great. Well, let's go do it. Should I pray? Jay, I'm ready.

[11:19] But what exactly is kindness? I want to kind of drill down and try to bring a little bit more definition here to this word. I would first maybe tell us what kindness is not.

And I think we live obviously on a planet with a real enemy that likes to twist and deceive and change definitions. And so you hear things like love is love, as though that is sort of the definition of what it means to be a kind human.

That's not kindness. To be towards truth is not kindness. Accepting everyone's opinion of God, of Jesus, well, that's kindness.

That's not. I don't accept a view of gravity that changes what it happens to be just because you want me to be kind.

I don't do that with the deity of Christ. But the fact that salvation is by grace alone. Kindness is not always getting your way.

[12:30] Kindness is not having all your prayers answered in the affirmative. Kindness is not some sort of mousy posture where you run around with sort of a quiet, meek voice and you just tell people, just bless your heart.

Bless your heart all the time. Bless your heart. I mean if a man did that to another man in the foyer, they had a rough day, rough week, maybe they went on a honey trip, didn't get a mousse.

And then the other man responded with, bless your heart. It would be weird and it would just end the friendship right there.

Just don't say, bless your heart. I don't even really know what it means. Well, let's consider what kindness is according to Proverbs.

And we have here in Proverbs 3.3, it's a steadfast love. You translate that word kindness and the Hebrew word is *hesed*.

[13:38] This word is found 250 times in the Old Testament. It's translated in a myriad of ways, which makes a firm definition a little difficult. It's translated as mercy, as compassion, as love, as grace, as benevolence, as faithfulness.

And these are certainly manifestations of kindness. But what I want us to first see here is that kindness is rooted in the very character of God.

In fact, when Moses is receiving the Ten Commandments for a second time, he declares in Exodus 34, Oh, the Lord, the Lord, who's a bounding instead fast love.

The Lord is a bounding in kindness. This is who our God is. Our God is a God with a benevolent, gracious disposition towards man.

But, Jay, I don't want to be benevolent. Formhearted, gracious towards, he's filling the blank.

[14:49] To this person, to this unkind or this uncharitable person, this rude individual, this thoughtless person, the guy that's driving in front of me.

Second thing I want us to note about this word has said, it's a commitment.

In fact, kindness has said is also translated with the word loyalty. And so has said actually describes God's covenant loyalty towards his people.

It's how God has obligated himself to act. He's going to act in benevolence, in grace, towards us. His desire is to meet our needs, to do what is appropriate in the moment.

So just a simple definition of kindness. It's a gracious disposition towards others rooted in the character of God. It's a gracious disposition to others rooted in the character of God.

[16:00] And there is this heart posture towards desiring to provide what is needed, what is useful in the moment. So maybe you're asking, okay, well, when do I get to take a break?

Like from kindness. Is there times, is there special like half times when I, you know, if someone's horrible to me, do I have to continue to act in kindness?

Well, let's continue on to see what Proverbs has to say on the matter. Mark 31, 26, it describes here the virtuous woman. And it says here, she opens her mouth with wisdom and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

On her tongue is the phrase I want us to focus on here. And it's an image here that it is always on her tongue. That it is not situational.

This is the rule of this woman's life. Kindness is always in fashion.

[17:07] It's not as though if there is a benefit towards us, then we turn the knob and go, okay, it's time to be kind. It's the salesperson that sees like a potential sale and all of a sudden they're charming and interested.

They make the sale and they become perhaps their real self. I was Ubering a woman this past Wednesday and I got a message because the Uber was actually for this gal's mother-in-law and she wrote this.

She says, hey, take care of my mother-in-law and I will send you a big tip. There was no big tip, by the way.

It was interesting to get that message because I was wrestling with myself going, she didn't need to say that. Or she shouldn't need to say that. And yet often when we think about kindness, it's associated with a benefit that's going to somehow come to us.

Kindness is not situational for God. In fact, he's purpose to act kindly to all men. In fact, we call this doctrine common grace. But the sun, as it says in Matthew 5, it shines down upon those who love God and those who do not.

[18:30] It's God's kindness. It's consistent. And I think it really confronts an unbiblical mindset that, oh, I can be kind or I only have to be kind to those people that I like or that I find interesting.

Or if they're kind to me, then I will do likewise to them. I'm thankful that God did not go harsh when looking upon the rebellion in my own life.

Great, Jay, I'll show kindness. But here's the thing. If I do that, I'm going to seem weak.

And I need to appear strong. I need to appear that I'm in control. Let's continue Proverbs 31.

Continue to look at this virtuous woman here in Proverbs 31, 24 and 25.

It says, she makes linen garments and sells them. She delivers sashes to the merchant. Strength and dignity are her clothing. And she lasts at the time to come. There's no worry here.

[19:43] God's in control. But I love that we have this woman described as being strong. Strength and dignity are her clothing.

This is a strong woman. And I want us to see here that kindness is not a weakness. And what you have here described in Proverbs 31 is probably one of the more competent people in all of the Bible.

Skilled, competent. And yet what you have here is someone where kindness is on her tongue. The competence and kindness ought to coexist together.

It is the code of our lives. How do we know if we're growing in kindness here, folks? How do we know if kindness is actually part of our sanctification that it is occurring in our lives?

And Proverbs gives us a bit of a self-gauge on the matter. And it says that we can evaluate the growth, production of kindness in a couple of key areas in our lives.

[20:51] The first one is found in Proverbs 29.7. It says, a righteous man knows the rights of the poor. A wicked man does not understand such knowledge.

And so it appears here that kindness, there's an indicator that the way that we interact with the poor reveals how we view them.

Do we have a benevolent heart towards the other, perhaps the other that we would deem as less than us in some measure? A similar verse in Proverbs 18.23 says, the poor use in treaties.

They got no resources, so they just got a plead for mercy. But the rich answer roughly. I have resources.

I don't have to be kind. And I think the rich are more susceptible to believing in their own self-importance, and hence can more easily brush aside the needy that somehow I'm better than you.

[21:58] I don't have to give you my time. Kindness is not situational.

This is the heart of God. This is who God is. It's how He sees people. It's His graciousness to all. It's part of my sanctification to drive Uber, because I am faced with people that I would maybe deem less than me often. This past week I dropped off a couple of gentlemen to a substance abuse clinic. I had another passenger who reeked of smoke so bad, so unkept that I had to drive with the window down. And I tried to be charitable and not make a scene of it, but I'm counting the seconds to drop them off so I can put all the windows down.

But I wanted to be charitable, so I didn't want to just all of a sudden, like, you know, we got a detox, sorry. And I'm faced with my own heart.

[23:05] How do I view this individual? How will I give them my best? Will I seek to meet whatever need that they have? And so Proverbs sort of puts a spotlight on our heart.

How do we interact with those that are less than in our eyes? And he speaks about the poor here. Another self-gauge on this.

Proverbs 12-10. It says this. Whoever is righteous has regard for the life of his beast, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel.

How do we interact with animals? It's so practical, but it exposes the true level of charity in our hearts.

And in this proverb here, the kindness of the wicked, it only rises to the level of cruelty, while kindness of the righteous, it overflows even towards animals.

[ 24 : 15 ] This one convicts me a little bit. I'm not by nature an animal lover.

I married a woman who is, and the contrast is highlighted daily. And yet there's something that exposes our hearts in terms of how we treat animals.

And in fact, there's a spiritual discipline that I participate in daily, and it's filling the water in the bird bath. It's a spiritual exercise for me, because those birds don't care about me.

They're just going to destroy the bird bath. And yet I dump the water out and I put in fresh water daily.

And it's a good exercise for me because it's like, yes, we're to grow in charity. It's so interesting to me that Jesus, look at the ravens.

[ 25 : 22 ] I'm not supposed to learn from them, but I can't even give them clean water. I do, I do.

I think both the poor and the animals, they reveal how we interact basically with those who we deem as weak, as we deem as being less than us.

Do we still have this benevolent heart posture towards them? We get nothing in return. Are we just so self-important?

I love the example of Abraham Lincoln, our 16th president in the Civil War. He would often visit the hospitals and cheer the wounded.

And on one occasion, he came to this young soldier who was on really near death, and he asked him, hey, is there anything that I can do for you?

[ 26 : 17 ] And the soldier responds, yeah, could you write a letter to my mom? And the soldier didn't recognize who Lincoln was, but the president sat down, wrote this letter for this youth to his mom, and the letter said, my dearest mom, mother, I was badly hurt while doing my duty, and I won't recover.

Don't sorrow too much for me. May God bless you and father. Kiss Mary and John for me. This young soldier was too weak to go on, and so Lincoln signed the letter for him, and then he added this post-script written for your son by Abraham Lincoln.

This young soldier then got the letter and read it, and he was shocked to discover who was writing this letter for him, and he said, are you really the president?

And he said, yes. And then Abraham Lincoln said, is there anything else that I can do for you? And the soldier said, yeah, could you hold my hand and just sit with me through the night here at the end?

And that night, this soldier, he passed away, and yet Abraham Lincoln sat with him in that war clinic. It's an amazing image of kindness in action, and that's what kindness looks like.

[ 27 : 38 ] It's often extravagant. Proverbs 15-1, let me give us some images of kindness, and it's interesting to me that as you read through Proverbs, the thing that you find is that kindness is often displayed through words.

Proverbs 15-1 gives us an example of what kindness looks like through our words. It says, a soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

Harsh words divide. Gentle words sow a harvest of community. The another way you can measure is, am I growing in kindness?

Well you look behind your life, and is there a harvest, is there a wake of community that follows you? Or is it division?

Gentle words, they keep the gospel from being veiled. When we have harsh words, people don't see Christ, because kindness is the heart of God.

[ 28 : 46 ] How could they understand the heart of God if we display something other than kindness? I've had many occasions when I drove in Seattle of having to apologize to passengers as I dropped them off at a concert or a Mariners game, because down in very blue at the stadium was a guy in the corner with a bullhorn, and just the vitriol, there was no charity in the tone, and I had to apologize.

I said, that's not representative of the gospel, of God's heart to people.

I would encourage us. I would caution us to be careful about the zeal in which we talk about things. Politics, that can often get in the way of people seeing the gospel, and I think we have to be careful of their church. Let us not veil the gospel with a harsh tone.

Peter says it this way in 1 Peter 3.15, when you make a defense, do it in gentleness, do it in charity, do it in kindness.

[ 30 : 03 ] Another example of what kindness looks like, and I put this under the word category with our words, even though it doesn't speak of words here, but I think you'll see where I go with this, Proverbs 25, 21, and 22, it says this, if your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat.

If he is thirsty, give him water to drink, for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you.

It's interesting because as you read these Proverbs, you see something about the favor of God following those that act in charity towards others. And I don't know, but I need all the help I can get, and I want God's favor on my life.

And there's this correlation in terms of how we conduct ourselves with our fellow man, with our brothers, with our sisters in Christ. Well, this passage, there's a bit of debate on what exactly is the writer of Proverbs saying here about heaping burning coals on the head of another.

There is, and I've done the research that I can do, and I have exhausted my resources, but I could not find any evidence that in fact there's a biblical custom of, you know, if the fire in your place goes out, you go to your neighbor, and they will then give you an ember, a coal, and you will then put it in a basket on your head, and walk back and then put it on your fire.

[ 31 : 39 ] Like, it's just unverifiable. I have not seen that, and I know some have interpreted this passage in that way, that it is somehow this very kind thing that you are doing for an individual.

My problem is that when I read heaping burning coals on the head of another, it appears to be a very unpleasant experience.

In fact, it's so unpleasant that our kindness towards another, that we don't repay them as they deserve, it's like heaping a burning coal. It brings conviction of their sin.

So is the burning coal here, is it a good thing or a bad thing? Yes. It's bad in that you are faced with your own uncharity as it's highlighted in the face of somebody else's kindness.

It's good, however, is that you have opportunity to repent, that you don't repay evil for evil, and I think specifically related to our words, this is huge.

[ 32 : 53 ] Kindness does not retaliate. Julie and myself just celebrated our 30th anniversary.

I didn't think I'd get applause, but that's okay. Yeah, yeah. So I was like, well, what am I going to do? 30 years, that's a long time.

So I was like, what is my wife like? Animals? No, we're not getting any more of those. Trees. So, we had a friend let us go dig up some fir trees, and I brought home 30 trees, like little saplings, and then we have been spending, like it was a great idea, until I realized I have to plant these.

So my full-time job is not past or it's tree planting, and we have been doing this. Anytime we have a free moment, we're planting a few more trees here and there, and we're out doing this earlier in the week, this last week, and the neighbor drives by, and our neighbor often has words for us that I don't know why, but she does, and she looks at us and she's like, man, I'm so glad you're planting tree there.

I like that you're putting trees right there. I don't have to look at your animals. That's so good. And then she just drove off.

[ 34 : 13 ] And I was just like, because there was a lot of words I wanted to share back with her, and I'm a little amped because she's already shared other words, and so I'm ready, like the round is chambered.

But I didn't. And she's just like, okay. We were kind. Two hours later, she drives into our driveway, and she's just like, I'm so sorry.

That didn't come out right. And she apologized. And it was just like, I'm so thankful that I didn't flame her.

I don't tend to do that. Okay, don't like, oh man, good job, Jay. But I think it's a great example of this, right?

Allow God to do work in a person's heart, the conscience that he has placed in man, right? We don't have to play Holy Spirit.

[ 35 : 23 ] This doesn't retaliate. And I would say there's great power in words. It's not just withholding, but man, we have opportunity to bless.

Let me give you a couple of proverbs on this. Proverbs 12, 25 says it this way, anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad. Isn't that good?

Man, you can live on like an encouragement for like a month sometimes. It's like, oh, so good in a world of unkindness to receive some encouragement.

It's so good. Proverbs 15, 4 says it this way, a gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness, it breaks the spirit. Oh, I had a great image.

It's a tree of life. We have such power in our words. When I walked on to the University of Washington, I'm only referencing that because I think they're doing well this season.

[ 36 : 24 ] And I know I'm surrounded by crimson, but needless to say, I still remember walking into the coach's office and saying, you know, I know I'm kind of small and saying, you know what, his response, dynamite small.

I'm still encouraged by that today. I'm just saying, you know, it's like words have power. I had another friend share with me when I was sort of at the bottom, feeling very unforgivable.

He said, Jay, hey, the Lord, he's busy setting the table all the while we're wallowing in the pig's tie. And that was a word at the moment I needed.

Great power in words. Mark Twain said it this way. He said kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see.

And I think as God's people, we desire that we want to be kind. We want to be, we want to give ourselves away for the benefit of someone else. We want to serve them. We want to encourage them.

[ 37 : 39 ] We want to bless them. That's in our heart. That's who we are as God's people. How do we grow? How do we grow? Well, let me end with this.

First way I would encourage you, find some other kind people and spend some time with them. It's just a biblical truth, right? The company you keep, it's going to, it's going to pour out. It's going to affect.

Thankful I get to serve with a very kind staff here at 4th. It's so good for me. And hopefully I'm good in return in that regard.

Spend time with people, but ultimate kind people, but ultimately to cultivate kindness, we have to believe the gospel. We have to believe that indeed the gospel is true.

Soak in the gospel. The most important became the least important.

[ 38 : 41 ] And we have to go back to that.

I saw a strange sight. I stumbled upon a story most strange, like nothing in my life. My street sense, my sly tongue had ever prepared me for.

Fresh child, hush now and I will tell it to you. Even before the dawn one Friday morning, I noticed a young man handsome and strong walking the alleys of our city. He was pulling an old cart filled with clothes both bright and new and he was calling in a clear tenor voice.

Rags. All the year was foul in the first light, filthy to be crossed by such sweet music. Rags. New rags for old.

I take your tired rags. Now, this is a wonder I thought to myself. For the man stood six feet four and his arms were like tree limbs, hard and muscular and his eyes flashed intelligence.

[ 39 : 44 ] Could he find no better job than this? To be a ragman in the inner city? I followed him. My curiosity drove me and I wasn't disappointed. Soon the ragman saw a woman sitting on her back porch and she was sobbing into a handkerchief.

Sighing and she shed a thousand tears, her knees and elbows made a sad ex. Her shoulders shook, her heart was breaking. The ragman stopped his cart.

Quietly he walked to the woman stepping around, tin cans, dead toys and pampers. Give me your rags, he said gently and I'll give you another.

She slipped the handkerchief from her eye. She looked up and laid across her palm a linen cloth so clean and new that it shined. She blinked from the gift to the giver. Then she began to pull the cart again, the ragman did a strange thing.

He put her stained handkerchief to his own face and then he began to weep, to sob so grievously as she had done. His shoulder shaking yet she was left without a tear.

[ 40 : 43 ] Well this is a wonder I breathed to myself. And I followed the sobbing ragman like a child who cannot turn away from mystery. Rags, new rags for old.

In a little while, while the sky showed gray behind the rooftops, I could see the shredded curtains hanging out the back windows. The ragman came upon a girl whose head was wrapped in a bandage, whose eyes were empty, blood soaked her bandage.

A single line of blood round down her cheek. Now the tall ragman looked upon this child with pity and he drew a lovely yellow bonnet from his cart. Give me your rag, he said, tracing his own line in her cheek.

And I'll give you mine. The child could only gaze at him while he loosened the bandage, removed it and tied it to his own head, the bonnet he set on hers. And I gasped at what I saw.

For with the bandage went the wound. Against his brow it ran a darker, more substantial blood, his own. Rags, rags, I take old rags, cried the sobbing, bleeding, strong, intelligent ragman.

[ 41 : 53 ] The sun hurt both the sky now in my eyes and the ragman seemed more and more to hurry. Are you going to work? He asked a man leaning against a telephone pole.

The man shook his head. The ragman pressed him. Do you have a job? Are you crazy? Sneered the other. He pulled away from the pole revealing the right sleeve of his jacket.

Flat the cuff stuffed into the pocket. He had no arm. So said the ragman, give me your jacket and I will give you mine. So much quiet authority in his voice.

The one our man took off his jacket, so did the ragman and I trembled at what I saw for the ragman's arm stayed in his sleeve and when the other put it on he had two good arms thick as tree limbs but the ragman had only one.

Go to work, he said. After that he found a drunk line unconscious beneath an army blanket. An old man hunched, whizzed and sick and he took that blanket and wrapped it around himself for the drunk.

[ 42 : 53 ] He left new clothes. And now I had to run to keep up with the ragman. Though he was weeping uncontrollably and bleeding freely at the forehead pulling his cart with one arm stumbling for drunkenness falling again and again exhausted, old, old and sick yet he went with terrible speed.

On spider's legs he skittered through the alleys of the city this mile in the next until he came to its limit and then he rushed beyond. I wept to see the change in this man.

I hurt to see his sorrow and yet I needed to see where he was going in such haste perhaps to know what drove him so. The little old ragman, he came to a landfill.

He came to the garbage pits and I waited to help him in what he did but I hung back hiding. He climbed a hill with tormented labor. He cleared a little space on that hill, he laid down, he pillowed his head on a handkerchief and a jacket.

He covered his bones with an army blanket and he died. Oh, how I cried to witness that death. I slumped in a junk car and wailed and mourned as one who has no hope because I had come to love the ragman.

[ 44 : 04 ] Every other face had faded in the wonder of this man and I cherished him but he died. I sawed myself to sleep. I did not know how could I know that I slept through Friday night, Saturday and it's night too, but then Sunday morning I was wakened by a violence, light, pure, hard demanding light.

Slammed against my sour face and I blinked and I looked and I saw the first wonder of all. There was the ragman folding the blanket most carefully, a scar on his forehead but alive.

And beside that healthy there was no sign of sorrow or age and all the rags that he had gathered shined for cleanness. Well then I lowered my head and I trembled for all that I had seen.

I myself walked up to the ragman. I told him my name was shame for I was a sorry figure next to him and then I took off my clothes in that place and I said to him with dear yearning in my voice, dress me.

He dressed me. My Lord, He put new rags on me and I'm a wonder beside him. The ragman, the ragman, the Christ.

[ 45 : 23 ] You're a wonder. That's the gospel. It's a joy. And let's live.

Father, forgive us for not believing what you say is true.

That you were touched by violence, by evil, by uncleanness, Lord, that we might be forgiven, that we might be new, that we might be a wonder to behold.

And Lord, as we have touched, we have tasted of your mercy, of your loving kindness. Father may we walk in that joy and then have it to give to another.

But Lord, let us believe that what you say is true. And in Christ, we are new and we are becoming new.

[ 46 : 33 ] Lord this morning, we repent of their sin in our lives. Lord, we repent. Lord, we want to turn from an order to turn towards you.

And Lord, thank you that there is such power in the cross that it's not about now a new pattern of trying to obey for a few days that you would accept us, Lord, but it is your mercy that you could forgive and forgive and forgive.

Might we walk in that joy today? And Father, as we do, might there be something attractive about our hearts to all those around us? We love you, Jesus.

Amen. Amen.