

Sunday 10th May 2026 - Values: Kindness

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[0 : 0 0] We're in the third week of this series on values, these principles and priorities that we've settled on who we want to be as people, as church under God so that this sense of being shapes what we do, you know how we practically put our being into doing.

doing. And if you haven't already picked a postcard up already, there's plenty out in the foyer for you to grab and maybe take home and stick on your fridge or whatever, because it's good to sort of hopefully let these absorb into ourselves. Because so far we've looked at humility and integrity. And as well as picking up a postcard, if you've not managed to catch up with what you've been doing the last couple of weeks, do have a listen online if you can. Because each of these six values that we're looking at, the hope is that they're all pretty interrelated with each other as well. But as Marie said, today it is time for the third of the six values, which is the value of kindness. Now what is kindness? Well I think of all the values that we're exploring, kindness is arguably, and perhaps maybe surprisingly, I think the most difficult to define. I think we know kindness when we see it or experience it as you know everything really from holding the door open for someone, to complimenting their hairdo, to consoling them in their grief. You know, they're all kind actions, words or gestures. But since in a way so much of life could be seen as or being called kind. And things like the hashtag, be kind, which is a good hashtag, but it's become so widespread that it risks perhaps losing some of its meaning or power as a word. In much the same way as if we call someone nice. You know, it's a bit underwhelming, isn't it, sometimes? A bit of bland of a word. And maybe kindness and being kind loses some of its meaning because we use it as a word so much. And yet, kindness is so much more than simply being nice. And the call for us to be kind, well that runs much deeper than a simple hashtag can convey. And so in order to begin to unpack this value of kindness, I want to start this morning by looking at a Hebrew word that appears some 250 times in the Hebrew scriptures, our Old Testament part of the Bible. And it's this word, chesed. And as with many Hebrew words, it's got that kind of hucking sound at the beginning, chesed. So if you're feeling hayfevery or snotty or bunged up this morning, this is a good one for you today. So if you want to join me with a bit of sinus cleansing Hebrew today, you want to say chesed after me? One, two, three, chesed. Nice, nice. Now, what does chesed mean? Well, here's the tricky bit because there is no single equivalent word to chesed in English. Instead, chesed represents a whole cluster of ideas, ideas that include unfailing love, compassion, grace, and mercy. And what's more, chesed also points to ideas of loyalty and commitment within a relationship, maybe a family or even to the whole of humanity. We might call it a covenant kind of relationship as well. So all sorts of undercurrent sort of meanings and words, all sorts of ideas, all totally good ideas. And the fact that chesed is represented by all these good ideas is important because with all these ideas wrapped up together, if you like, chesed, I think is one of the broadest, but most beautiful ways in which God is described in the Bible. So in the book of Exodus, for example, Moses, he is God described as merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in chesed and faithfulness. Now, if you look up Exodus 34, 6 in different English Bibles, they each translate chesed, perhaps in sometimes different ways, either as love or unfailing love or unfailing love, steadfast love, mercy, goodness, loving kindness, you know, all legit attempts to define this all-encompassing word of chesed. Same is true if you flick through the Psalms, especially ones like Psalm 136, in which the word chesed appears in each of the 26 verses of that Psalm. So if we start at the top of it, verse 1 in Psalm 136, give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his chesed endures forever. And again, chesed here is translated in different Bible versions as maybe love or steadfast love, mercy, or loving kindness. It's quite a famous verse, that one, we use it often in our worship. But then another equally perhaps famous verse, this is from Micah 6, verse 8, we read this, what does the Lord require of you? Well, it's to act justly and to love chesed

and to walk humbly with your God. We often perhaps translate this passage as to act justly and to love mercy, and that's a legit translation, but we could equally translate it as meaning to love compassion and to love kindness. Indeed, arguably, the best translation of this *chesed* word would be loving kindness or perhaps even just kindness. *Chesed* meaning kindness. And that to me feels significant because far from simply being a nice word or reducing it to a hashtag, kindness gets to the very heart of who God is and therefore who God is calling us to be. Indeed, there's a fascinating verse in the book of Hosea where the prophet Hosea declares on behalf of God, for I desire *chesed*, not sacrifice. In other words, I want kindness in your lives, not religious rituals. It's the way you treat others, it's the way that we treat others that is our true worship. Now, aside from the way in which God desiring *chesed*, kindness, not sacrifice, aside from the way that might give us pause for thought, at least with what the cross of Jesus is actually all about, what's interesting is that Jesus himself chooses to quote this verse from Hosea. He says, at one point, he says, go and learn what this means. I desire mercy, the word is *chesed*, not sacrifice. Go and learn what *chesed*, what we might say kindness means. So Jesus takes this statement of what God desires, this description of God's character, and he tells in this instance in Matthew's gospel, the Pharisees, but then also us, to learn why God desires kindness and what this kindness looks like in practice because kindness, this *chesed*, matters. It's what God desires. And so how do we learn what kindness means? Well, I think as with humility, as with integrity, we look always to the life and person of Jesus for our example.

[8 : 33] And really, you could stick a pin in the gospels and see kindness writ large in Jesus's life. But some of my favorite examples of him living out this *chesed*, this compassionate, loving, kindness, they would include perhaps the way he heals the woman who's been bent double with back trouble for years, the way he heals the man lowered through the roof, the invitation that he gives to Levi, also known as Matthew, to come and follow him, the way he zones in on Zacchaeus, this social outcast, and makes a point of letting Zacchaeus welcome Jesus into his home, the way he protects the woman caught in adultery from being stoned to death, the way he welcomes little children or champions, the example of the poor widow who gives money or extols the virtues of women who anoint his feet with their tears, the way he spends time with the woman at the well engaging with her as an equal, the way he feeds hungry people and tells them, tells us, to come to him because in him we will find rest, and so on and so on. Like I say, you could pick pretty much any story of Jesus and kindness is shot through it. Jesus, if you like, is the king of kindness, reflecting the very *chesed* of God, the one who's loving kindness, as the psalmist says, endures forever.

Yes, his kindness sometimes means delivering a strong word of rebuke perhaps, or of guidance certainly, and there's a good argument to say, I think as Brenny Brown says, being clear is kind, there's kindness in clarity and helping people to think clearly.

But even Jesus's firmest words reflect another truth about God's *chesed* from the psalm. Since God, since Jesus, we know, is slow to anger and rich in love. The word there again is *chesed*. And I encourage you, I don't know how often you do this, but I encourage you in your own time to read through the gospel accounts of Jesus's life, or watch the videos of the gospels that we sometimes use here, which can all be found on YouTube in their entirety. You know, paying specific attention to the way in which Jesus exhibits and expresses kindness. Have that as a theme perhaps as you're reading through the stories, because Jesus is the best blueprint for how we might live lives of kindness. But with that blueprint, if you like, as a basis, I think it's always then worth seeking God's guidance for practical ways in which kindness might take hold in our experience. You know, putting the example of Jesus in a practice in our context, in our lives, in our community.

What might kindness look like in practice, in our lives? Well, I'm going to share a couple of examples this morning. A recent example of kindness that's stayed with me happened back in January, a few months back in this year, when I first had this herniated disc in my back, which put me off work for a couple of months. And I'd simply picked up a snowball in the garden to throw at Bobby, and my back went, so that was the cause of it. Not Bobby, the snowball. But the disc popped, hit the spinal nerve, I collapsed, and the spasms were like nothing else, really. Took me a good hour, really, to crawl in from the garden, get to our lounge, where I lay on the floor, waiting for an ambulance. But because of the demand and loads of snow and ice, the ambulance, it took 13 hours to get to me. So when the paramedics arrived, I was grateful to see them, as you can imagine. And they were fantastic with me. It gave me copious amounts of morphine, which really

helped, mixed with real compassion as well for my situation. Anyway, Gemma took a photo. Here's the two who looked after me.

[12:56] This is James and Sean. I think it's James on the left and Sean on the right. But as I said, I'd had a fair bit of morphine at this stage. So I can't quite be sure, but I think that's who they were. But what I do remember is the conversation I had with Sean there on the right. Conversation I had with Sean about his life. We were chatting first in my home and then in the ambulance on the way to hospital. And we were just chatting. But it came out that he'd become a paramedic after being discharged from the army. He served in Afghanistan in Helmand province. And he shared how on this one day, they were loading up the trucks for manoeuvres. He forgot his kit bag. He ran back in to get that.

But that meant he had to get in the truck behind the one he was supposed to be on, the truck that actually had his best friend in. And while in convoy, these trucks came under attack. And Sean saw the truck in front of him being blown up and his best friend was killed instantly. And as he shared this story with me, you know, he was very calm. But he sort of looked into the middle distance. You can almost see it in that photo there. Sort of looked into the middle distance as he quietly said, And then I got discharged with PTSD. He then explained how soon after he came back home from the army, he sort of, well, he was caring for his parents a bit, but his dad had a heart attack in front of him.

And although we tried to give him CPR, his dad died. And so this poor guy, you know, your heart breaks for him. He's in his early twenties. He's experiencing more than anyone should have to go through.

But he said it was those two experiences that prompted him to train to be a paramedic, because having been through what he had been through, he now wanted to help other people and do his best to save lives. And so we kept chatting. It was because of the weather and stuff and the delays. It was a long ambulance ride to get to the manor. We chatted in the ambulance.

I shared, I was a vicar. We talked a little bit about faith and pain and healing and where God might be in all of that with us. He shared about his home life as well, that he now had a son and how that was the best thing he said that had ever happened to him.

[15:52] And him and his partner, they'd name their son Castiel. Castiel. It's an unusual name. I asked him why, why they chose that name. And he said he was named after a character called Castiel, who is an angel in his favorite TV series called Supernatural. And how generally he was fascinated with the idea of spirituality and spiritual realms and so on. And so for some reason, I guess it's kind of what I do, but I also felt prompted lying in the ambulance on my back, got my phone out and I looked up on my phone, the meaning of the name Castiel, because neither he or I knew what it meant. And I told him that Castiel is a name of Hebrew origin, which means shield of God or my cover is God. And it was one of those moments. I'll never forget, I don't think, in an ambulance, queuing outside the manor hospital at about three in the morning.

And I simply said to Sean, no doubt slurring a bit from the morphine, but I got my words out and I said something like, you know, I could be wrong, but I suspect that choice of name is significant. A way for you to know that in all that you've gone through, God's got you and always will, shielding your heart, shielding your head. And he welled up a bit, so did I.

And then he went back to checking my blood pressure and we chatted about other TV shows we liked and I was soon admitted to hospital. But in that moment of, I guess, of vulnerability and of sharing, in the reality of pain and trauma, kindness came to the fore through Sean's actions as a paramedic, through his love as a dad. But most of all, I'd say through God's presence with us in that conversation to bring his reassurance, his hope, his mercy, his chesed, in other words, his loving kindness into our lives.

You see, that's what God does, because kindness is who God is. His being shapes his doing. And when we glimpse or experience true kindness, well, I suggest it opens our eyes to the reality of God's presence with us in good times and in bad, and it prompts us to pursue kindness in our own lives.

[18:41] That's one example from earlier this year. Another different example, though, from recent times, was that the other week, I was asked to write a reference for a local teacher who was going for a quite senior job.

And although I'd been on a couple of community groups and committees with her, I'd never seen her in a work setting. So I did a character reference for her. And I simply described a person who I

knew and I've known for 10 years or so, outlining that she was someone who was kind and caring, wise and empathetic.

Strong, yeah, but someone you'd want to work alongside. But above all, someone who had a good heart. Underpinned, I know, by a quiet, but a real faith. And as I always do with references, I share my reference with her so that she'd know what I'd written about her. So she had the interview. And the next day, she wrote a little card to me saying that despite being in a male-dominated room full of intimidatingly confident characters.

She said, it was your words that I focused on and that gave me the confidence to show how I was different, that being a kind and compassionate leader is just as important as using big words or having authority.

Now, I'd argue my words were just holding up to her character and that she has authority because of her kindness and compassion.

[20 : 22] But I was glad that she felt able to be herself and give of her best in the interview. And you know what? She got the job. She got the job. In a competitive world where confidence and swagger, where bravado and ego often seem to be rewarded, actually the value of kindness and mercy, goodness, love, chesed, as it says in the Bible, will never fail.

You know, I find these words from the end of Ephesians 4 to be particularly interesting. It says this. It says, It says, In other words, let God, let God, let God, let God, let God, let God, let God, let God, let God, let God, let God have that.

to help us resist that clamour so that instead, as it says, we might be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another.

Because in this way, we'll learn, we'll follow, we'll emulate, we'll imitate, as it says, God in his chesed, his kindness.

[22 : 16] Someone who I read a fair bit about is from this guy. He's a social and political commentator called Ian Dunt. And I'd recommend following his stuff. He's got a right potty mouth, okay? So be prepared, because he does swear a lot in what he writes.

But I really enjoy his reading. And he grew up a Christian, I think. He doesn't call himself a Christian anymore. But he recently said this. He said, kindness is the most radical proposition available in human society.

And this is more important the higher your status. If you have a high social status, your effort to bring people into a conversation at a party will be doubly effective.

If you have a senior position in an organisation, your behaviour is of paramount importance. It will have a significant impact on the unspoken cultural rules of the organisation.

If you behave in an egalitarian, respectful, generous, warm-hearted way, that is the kind of organisation which will start to develop underneath you.

[23 : 23] People take cue from those of a high status, at work and at play. If that's you, you have a responsibility to make sure those cues are beneficial.

Now, it's interesting. We might not think that we've got high social status, maybe. But we all do, relatively speaking.

There is always someone who will look up to us, who will look up to you because of age or experience, wisdom, knowledge, character. And that means we have a responsibility to set a tone of kindness that others will benefit from.

So if we think about church life, for example, even if this is your first time today, if you come next week, then you will have a higher social status than someone who comes here for the first time because you have already experienced something that they haven't, this church.

And therefore, that means that how we treat people who walk through our doors, even if it's only our second week of coming, we can all set a tone of kindness and tenderness and care.

[24 : 41] You know, if we're at work, whatever our position, we can help lead that organisation in the kindness by setting the tone, by being kind.

Yeah, in some ways that might feel more achievable and easier to influence if we're in a kind of leadership position. But even if we're more of a smaller cog in a bigger wheel, every cog, every person is vital because even the smallest cogs, you know, those little things and little moments we were talking about last week, they're vital if a shop or a business and organisation or an environment is to keep turning towards kindness.

that if we're serious when we pray, as we will do in a bit, your kingdom come here on earth as in heaven, then valuing kindness is of paramount importance.

and if we're at home choose kindness, choose kindness. I think being kind at home can be the hardest place to be consistently kind because our guard is down and perhaps we want to switch off. But how we treat, say, those we live with, those we might have round, how we treat our neighbours, those who cold call on our doors, those who deliver our packages, those who collect our rubbish, choose kindness.

[26 : 14] As the author J.M. Barry writes, always try to be a little kinder than is necessary because in that way we're always open to the way in which God will increasingly grow his spiritual fruit of kindness in our lives.

Indeed, we choose kindness because it is a reflection of God and is therefore a good thing in and of itself but an added bonus of kindness is that it's for my money the most effective, most winsome, most beautiful way in which people are ultimately drawn to God themselves.

I think people are attracted by kindness and that means they will ultimately, whether they realise it or not, be attracted to God. The writer Madeline Lengel puts it like this.

She says, we draw people to Christ not by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it.

I like that. Fair few quotes today, I know, but there's a lot of wisdom out there on kindness if we look for it. So I just want to finish with one more and this is from a Swiss philosopher and poet, Henri Frederick Amiel and it's a prayer.

[27 : 49] So I just finish with this. He says, life is short and we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who make the journey with us.

So be swift to love and make haste to be kind and the blessing of God who made us, who loves us and who travels with us be with you now and forever.

Amen. Amen.