

**Intro:** Garrison. LT. Got a bible go to Luke 6:27

If you're hopping in with us we're in the middle of our series the Fruit of the Spirit in a Time of the Flesh. We've been building out our discipleship framework throughout this series as we talk about how to become like Jesus. Our goal each week is to look at how each of the fruit of the spirit that we're called to cultivate is displayed in the teachings and character of Jesus.

Tonight we're looking at kindness in a time of bitterness. Let's talk about bitterness. **Pray.**

**Bitterness is defined as: Resentment, anger and disappointment over being hurt or treated unfairly.**

Here's the first reality we have to be on the same page about for tonight to make sense:

**We will all experience mistreatment.** People will hurt us. They may say untrue things about us. Or say true things without compassion. Abuse or neglect. Close friends may turn their back on you. That's not me being cynical. It's me being honest with you. But it will happen. It's part of living in a fallen, broken world filled with billions of sinners. And it's a promised part of following Jesus. It's one of the hardest things Jesus talks about.

**Bitterness in our relationships is our default mode of dealing with hurt apart from God.**

	<b>Bitterness</b>		
Action	Hurt		
Response			
Result			

**Bitterness happens through a process.** The process can have different elements but it unfolds in really similar ways. Bitterness doesn't happen overnight. It starts as hurt. The type of hurt can vary, it can be from perceived hurt or a misunderstanding or even severe mistreatment. But it always starts with hurt or pain.

**If you've ever dealt with relational hurt you know it can be complicated.** And there can be a range of the type of hurt. It can be something small. I've seen real hurt come from small misunderstandings. Maybe your spouse said something to you with just a slight bit of aggression or condescension in their tone. Or an eye roll. Maybe they've done it a few times and it's getting a little old. Or when your friend forgets to invite you to a hangout. Or makes a pointed comment about a weakness or insecurity of yours.

And it can be bigger. Insults, yelling matches, possibly even abuse. It can be a friend or leader who failed you or sinned against you. A family member just won't take you seriously or respect your decisions on how you want to live. Sometimes we even get bitter because someone is bitter with us right? Either way, a real or perceived hurt happens. And we struggle to let it go. We re-run the situation or conversation in our minds. Did they really say that? Why didn't I respond differently? Do they really even care?

And then the hurt grows. We get angry about that hurt, maybe even talking about it with close friends or family. We really do try to resolve it. It doesn't feel good to be full of resentment. But sometimes it feels like we just can't let it go. It just hurts too bad or feels as if it's the other person's responsibility to resolve it. It's their fault right?

Whatever the cause, we get angry and we struggle to forgive. We grow resentful. And lastly it starts to fester, leaving us with bitterness. I love how one psychologist says it:

***“Bitterness is unforgiveness fermented.” Gregory Popcak***

**When we get hurt we have to figure out how to respond.** Our culture is one of bitterness and it actually pushes us in the direction of bitterness.

Can play out a few different ways. Labeling people as toxic. Or saying things like I’ll forgive but not be reconciled. Or canceling them. Whatever it is, we respond to hurt or to sin by withholding mercy.

	<b>Bitterness</b>		
Action	Hurt		
Response	Withheld mercy		
Result			

This framework is becoming so common that last year an article was published in the NY times called ‘*I Quit Friendships Regularly: Telling someone you don’t want to be friends anymore can be awkward. So don’t tell them.*’

In the article, the author Mariah Smith talks about whenever a good friend and her disagree or get into a fight she’ll just walk away completely. Unbeknownst to the friend, she’ll intentionally go out to dinner with them one last time, calling it ‘The Last Supper’, before cutting them off completely.

Unrelated, I’m actually unavailable for dinner this week. Thankfully I’ve yet to hear of someone intentionally putting on a Last Supper before putting a friendship to death. But I do know some of our stories well enough to know that there have been plenty of friendship breakups experienced by those in this room. Where a friend cuts you off because of a perceived or real wrong.

*A couple years ago, one of my best friends decided it’d be best if we weren’t friends anymore. He was involved in a really complicated situation that I was trying to help with. Did my best but to be honest I don’t think I handled it perfectly. Lots of things I’d do differently. The situation unfolded over 6 months. In hindsight I realize we drastically grew apart and I didn’t even realize it. We went from talking every day to a point where we had 3 convos in 3 months. I finally sat down with him and asked what was going on. He basically read me a laundry list of everything I had done wrong. Full of anger. Some true and some out of left field. It really hurt to hear. It was honestly odd hearing all this anger coming at me from someone I considered to be a best friend. After he finished I just looked at him and asked something I’ve never really asked anyone seriously: I asked, “Do you hate me?” And he just broke down. It was this awful moment of confirmation. We couldn’t recover. Tried. Had no interest in restoring our relationship. It still hurts.*

**Sadly, many times bitterness wins out even in the family of God.**

We think we’re getting rid of our bitterness by getting rid of the person, but really we’re stuck. Withholding mercy just results in more bitterness.

	<b>Bitterness</b>		
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Action	Hurt		
Response	Withheld mercy		
Result	Bitterness		

**Another way we deal with our bitterness is with niceness. Where we dress up our bitterness or resentment with a smile.** This is a big one in the church and in the south. We say things like 'Oh bless their heart.' Or we gossip under the premise of 'I'm just really concerned about them.'

**You're not allowed to be mean so you have to be nice.** One friend told me recently that growing up a friend of hers, whenever she was upset with someone would look at them and say "Your hair looks so nice."

	<b>Bitterness</b>	<b>Niceness</b>	
Action	Hurt	Hurt	
Response	Withheld mercy	Fake external mercy	
Result	Bitterness		

Niceness can be tricky. We tend to mistake niceness for kindness.

Being nice can't go as far as kindness. Kindness and bitterness can't co-exist, but niceness and bitterness can. Being nice is conditional. Being nice is just waking up on the right side of the bed. **Anyone can be nice. And anyone can mistake themselves for being kind.** CS Lewis says it this way:

*The real trouble is that 'kindness' is a quality fatally easy to attribute to ourselves on quite inadequate grounds. Everyone feels benevolent if nothing happens to be annoying him at the moment. Thus a man easily comes to console himself for all his other vices by a conviction that 'his heart's in the right place' and 'he wouldn't hurt a fly,' though in fact he has never made the slightest sacrifice for a fellow creature. - CS Lewis*

	<b>Bitterness</b>	<b>Niceness</b>	
Action	Hurt	Hurt	
Response	Withheld mercy	Fake/external mercy	
Result	Bitterness		

A quick gauge to know if you're being nice or your being kind. How often do you tell people hard things? How often do you shy away from being honest? When other people ask you for feedback, do you sugarcoat to the point that you're really vague or dishonest? You may have thought you were being kind.

But that's niceness. And niceness isn't always loving. Sometimes its cowardly. Jesus was the most kind person to ever live and he brought the heat to the Pharisees and the disciples often. Honesty isn't opposed to kindness, in fact it's integral.

**Either way, through withholding mercy or faking mercy, we hold onto our bitterness.**

	<b>Bitterness</b>	<b>Niceness</b>	
Action	Hurt	Hurt	
Response	Withheld mercy	Fake/external mercy	
Result	Bitterness	Bitterness	

**Bitterness is a clear work of the flesh.** Let me show you how. Galatians 5:19

**Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions...**

All the words highlighted in the text: enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions and divisions. They're all symptoms of bitterness..

**Bitterness will rule our hearts without the power and the presence of Jesus.** We cannot overcome our hurts and our pain alone, or they will rot and turn to bitterness.

Bitterness is our response to hurt outside of Christ, but the way of Jesus would show us that we have another response:

**Kindness.** Let's talk about kindness.

**If bitterness looks like being actively resentful and angry at those who hurt us, then kindness looks like actively seeking to treat others as we'd like to be treated.**

**Kindness is the counter-conditional love of God displayed in our thoughts, words and actions.**

Meaning kindness as a posture is not dependent on your circumstances or what other people have done to you. In fact, it's counter to it. Kindness is best displayed *WHEN* others have treated you poorly or harmed you.

**Kindness is directly connected to the character of God.** Often in the Scriptures the word we translate as 'kindness' is the word *hesed*. *Hesed* can be translated a lot of different ways. Love, mercy, generosity, patience. One of the older translations is the phrase **"loving-kindness"**.

**When God acts in *hesed*, or loving-kindness, it means God is being faithful to his covenant promises.**

He's paying careful attention to the needs of His people, acting in generous and merciful love, and providing everything for our blessing and benefit. **He does this despite the sins committed against Him by His people.** Tim actually hit on this talking about the Israelites last week. But they constantly

sinned against God. Complaining, choosing idols, wanting to go back to Egypt. But God constantly responds with kindness.

**God acting in *Hesed* shows us the picture of our God who gently shepherds us, responds graciously when we fall short, and faithfully stays true to what He's promised.**

**So all kindness bleeds from God's kindness to us.. So when we're hurt. We extend mercy.** We respond in light of who God is. The result isn't bitterness. It's healing.

	<b>Bitterness</b>	<b>Niceness</b>	<b>Kindness</b>
Action	Hurt	Hurt	Hurt
Response	Withheld mercy	Fake/external mercy	Extended mercy
Result	Bitterness	Bitterness	Healing

This is what Jesus pushes us to. Kindness instead of bitterness. To love those who mistreat us, instead of resenting them.

**Jesus gives a clear framework on how to display kindness to those who mistreat us.** So what I want to do for the rest of our time is unpack 3 distinct ways that we can show kindness to those that hurt us.

Want to be upfront, some of what I'm about to say is going to be repetitive. And that's because Jesus is being repetitive. In fact, my 3 categories are really 3 ways to do the same thing. Show kindness to those who mistreat you.

Hop in at v 27

*"But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 <sup>u</sup>bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you. ...32 <sup>r</sup>"If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.*

### 1. Bless your enemies.

**Context.** Jesus is in the middle of preaching the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' longest sermon recorded in the Gospels. The heart of this sermon is a description of what life looks like in God's kingdom. He describes what it looks like to live the blessed life, the good life. Essentially Jesus breaks down what a life of flourishing in the upside down kingdom of God is.

As he unpacks life in God's Kingdom, he spends a good bit of time on relationships. Specifically with those who mistreat us. At the heart of it is the push for us to **love our enemies**.

We're to show kindness to those Who hate us. Who accuse us. Who dismiss us. Who try to take advantage of us. Even abuse us.

These are some of the most painful experiences in life. And Jesus says to do good to those who have hurt you. To bless those who curse and hate you. To pray for our abusers.

**These are some incredibly hard words from Jesus.** I know many of us in the room have experienced real and painful abuse. I just want to take a second and tell you that God sees you. He sees your pain. And He loves you. We love you. We see you. And we'd love to talk to you and help you work through your pain and hurt. Sometimes what the Bible calls us toward can be painful and maybe even strange. And right here Jesus is actually talking to people who are dealing with real abuse. He's talking to people who will be killed, beaten for their faith. And the call is the same.

Jesus here is calling us to show kindness to the people who have abused us. Who have cursed us. Who have become our enemies.

**Biblically: Blessing is the bestowing of privilege, right, responsibility, or favor upon some portion of creation, by God or by one whom he has blessed.**

**Blessing those who don't treat us well is action taken to seek the good, the happiness, and the prospering of the other person.** It means praying, encouraging and serving those who hurt us.

- To the friend who doesn't want anything to do with you anymore. Pray and bless.
- When your boss scolds you for something small, it means still seeking their good. Praying for them.
- When your kid has 0 gratitude for anything you do, maybe even actively complains about your efforts to keep them alive, don't disengage, seek their good, encourage them, correct them gently.
- When a person takes a cheap shot at you, in person, on social media, don't assume the worst. Pray for them. Not in a 'thank God I'm not like them' way. Asking God to move in their life, draw them to Himself or to show His love to them. And respond with respect and grace.

First way to show kindness is to bless those who treat us poorly. Hop back to v 29 for the second:

*29 <sup>v</sup>To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. 30 <sup>v</sup>Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. 34 And <sup>v</sup>if you <sup>v</sup>lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount.*

## **2. Turn the other cheek.**

Really hard words from Jesus again. When people strike us, take from us, beg from us, we're to take a posture of non-resistance. When people sin against us, we can either react, hold it against them or we can choose to not resist. We can turn the other cheek and respond with kindness and forgiveness.

One author talked about it as, a choice to "be wounded rather than to wound." I think part of choosing to turn the other cheek is voluntarily taking a wounded posture. It's being wounded over being right.

This is a really counter-cultural statement by Jesus. And we may be tempted to find where the line is. But He does not draw one. **And that's because these words are tied closely to the Gospel.** That by laying down our lives, our comforts, our pride, God would use it for His glory.

*In the fall of 1955, 5 missionaries attempted to make contact with Huarani Indians, an unreached people group in Ecuador. They began flying their airplane over the tribe, dropping gifts to the tribe members. After a few months they built a base near the camp, and eventually had friendly encounters with the Indians. They were encouraged and began making plans to visit the village. On January 8, 1956, the missionaries were approached by 10 tribesman and killed with spears. Jim Elliot was among them. He was survived by his wife, Elisabeth and young daughter. Elisabeth began learning the language of the tribe and in 1958 she traveled to live with the Huarani Indians, the people who had killed her husband, the father of her daughter 2 years before. She moved to Ecuador to love and serve the people who had hurt her the most. Rather than say, "You've taken everything from me" she actually goes back, puts her own life and the lives of those with her in danger, to share the gospel with those people. Many people from the tribe end up coming to the faith because she returned to them.*

Part of me thinks that's absolutely insane. Like no way. Crazy. Foolishness. The reality is the church has been built on stories like this one. It's the heart of the Gospel. That Jesus on the cross would look out at those killing Him, jeering at Him and pray, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do. His heart for us is the same.

**The basis for turning the other cheek is remembering the depths of the forgiveness we have in Christ.** How many times has Jesus turned the other cheek for us? It's unfathomable.

How quick are you to react in anger? To hold onto resentment? Does bitterness rule in your heart? Remember Jesus on the cross. Looking out at the crowd, talking to them and to us. Knowing we'd sin against Him over and over again. Father, forgive them, because they don't know.

**Who do you need to give that same type of grace to?**

- Next time you're frustrated over someone's immaturity or sin, choose not to gossip about someone even though they genuinely did something wrong. Heard a quote this week that I think many of us need to remember:
- Next time your kids say that you don't really care about them, lovingly correct it and let it go.
- Next time a friend makes a joke that really hurts your feelings, turn the other cheek and go encourage them.
- Next time someone you find out someone was talking bad about you or gossiping, make the choice to talk well of them in front of others. *"If any man thinks ill of you, do not be angry with him. For you are worse than he thinks you to be."* - Spurgeon

When we see how God looks at us, as children, friends in need of grace and savior. We can start to do the same to others. We resist bitterness and continue to love and serve others, even when they hurt us, because that's exactly what Jesus has done for us.

1. Bless your enemies.
2. Turn the other cheek.

**36 Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.**

**3. Show mercy.**

Bitterness tells us we should respond with an eye for an eye. To get even. To cut off. Kindness tells us to treat our enemies with the type of love we offer our friends.

I think a huge problem we will have with kindness, with turning the other cheek, with blessing those who have hurt us, is that it doesn't feel fair. And I'm with you on that. It doesn't feel fair. That's a lot of where bitterness starts.

Culture. But If you really think about it, the reason those things are compelling is because they appeal to our desire for justice. We need to be seen, we need to fight when things are wrong. When things aren't fair! Or evil.

**The Bible actually talks about this a lot. And it's a key piece of how we show mercy.** This is how Paul says it in Romans 12: *Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."* *20 To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."*

**According to the Bible, God sees evil, says that it matters, and He has executed, is executing and will execute perfect justice for all evil at the cross or in the end.** We're able to "never avenge" ourselves but rather "feed our enemies" and act honorably towards those that hurt us because God says that vengeance is His.

**This frees you to love your enemy, EVEN IF they never make any signs/moves towards repentance.**

**So if you're waiting for your enemy or circumstances to change, or for time to pass, in order to forgive.** you're wrong... because God's command to love your enemy isn't based on any contingencies.

It's on the basis that HE will finally and ultimately serve justice. And knowing the surety of that-- God's final justice-- is what frees us to love enemies here and now.

**Justice demands a price to be paid. It will be on the cross or for eternity. And we deserved to pay.** Forgiveness is costly. Kindness is costly. But it leads to freedom.

Tim Keller talks about it this way:

*Once you have been wronged and you realize there is a just debt that can't simply be dismissed— there are only two things to do. The first option is to seek ways to make the perpetrators suffer for what they have done. .... There is another option, however. You can forgive. Forgiveness means refusing to make them pay for what they did. However, to refrain from lashing out at someone when you want to do so with all your being is agony. It is a form of suffering. You not only suffer the original loss of happiness, reputation, and opportunity, but now you forgo the consolation of inflicting the same on them. You are absorbing the debt, taking the cost of it completely on yourself instead of taking it out of the other person. It hurts terribly. Many people would say it feels like a kind of death. Yes, but it is a death that leads to resurrection instead of the lifelong living death of bitterness and cynicism. -TK*

## **Conclusion**

**"Forgiveness means refusing to make them pay for what they did."** This is the Gospel. Trading bitterness for kindness. We were God's enemies. And He absorbed our debt. He died so we could live.

The basis of showing others mercy is God's mercy to us. The reason we turn the other cheek is because Jesus turned the other cheek. The reason we bless those who curse us, pray for those who abuse us, is because Jesus Himself did it. He did it for us.



Titus 3 says it this way:

*But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

In our sin, we've cursed Him. We've hated him. Abused Him. Struck Him. And Jesus responded with *hesed*. With loving-kindness. He went to the cross, when it should have been us. Jesus is the lovingkindness of God. And He saved us to become heirs so that we could show the lovingkindness of God to others.

**Grace and Grit.** Practice guide(Read the guide):

1. Lectio Divina. Many of us will struggle with kindness because we struggle to see God's kindness to us. Know that God loves you. He is not withholding from you. In Christ He calls you a son or daughter. Meditate on that truth this week.
2. Pray for your enemies

**Pray.**

Communion