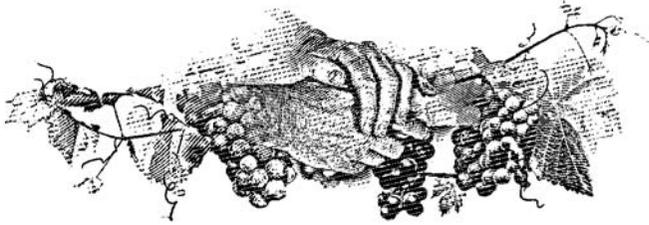


# The Fruit of *the* Spirit Is Kindness



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *2 Sam. 9:1–13; Prov. 15:1–5; 25:11–15; Matt. 5:43–48; Luke 6:35, 38; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:12–14.*

**Memory Text:** “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering” (*Colossians 3:12, NKJV*).

When Paul illustrated how love behaves, patience came into his mind first: “Love suffers long” (*1 Cor. 13:4, NKJV*). Immediately after patience, he wrote that love “is kind,” showing that love and kindness so belong together that without kindness no act is truly done in love!

Patience, we saw, is love forbearing. Kindness, on the other hand, implies a more active expression of love. Often patience might be manifested by doing nothing; kindness, in contrast, is manifested by what we say and do and, more important, by how we say it and do it and, even more important, why we say and do it.

Kindness is not beyond the reach of any, although it may require the sacrifice of time and energy. Kindness is a verb that reveals itself in numerous ways. And like its close cousin “love,” kindness contains incredible power; it is a witness in and of itself of what our God is like.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 6.*

## The Model of Kindness *(Matt. 5:43–48)*

Jesus clearly illustrates in the Sermon on the Mount the kindness and goodness of God. Read Matthew 5:43–48 and answer the following questions:

- To what high standard is Jesus calling us here?

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- What reason does Jesus give for calling us to this standard?

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- Notice Christ’s use of the word *perfect* in verse 48. What is the meaning of *perfect* here, and how can the use of the word here help us understand what it means to be perfect like “our Father in heaven” is perfect?

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God’s gracious gifts are just that, gracious gifts. They are unearned and unmerited by all human beings, all of whom have willingly sinned against Him and either ignored or neglected Him. In this sense the greatest sinner is in the same boat as the holiest saint: neither deserves the kindness and goodness that God gives to us all.

With these verses, Jesus is calling us to be “perfect,” even as perfect as God is. How so? By loving our enemies, by praying for those who mistreat us, by being kind to those who have not been kind to us. This is how Jesus defines being “perfect.” Try to imagine what our church would be like and what our homes would be like were we to die to self so that we actually could live this way! We would have a power and a witness against which the gates of hell could never prevail. What’s the only thing stopping us? Nothing but our sinful, vengeful hearts, which, more often than not, cause us to act like “publicans.”

**What painful and deep changes must you make if you are going to follow Christ’s words in these verses?**

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## *The Lesson in Brief*

▶ **Key Text:** *Ephesians 4:32*

▶ **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Meditate on the truth that kindness is a hallmark of the genuine Christian.

**Feel:** Express a desire to respect the feelings and behavior of others.

**Do:** Determine to show kindness to others in all relationships.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: Kindness—A Sign of a Converted Heart**

**A** Respect for other people was a distinctive feature in the life of Jesus. In what way is this true for us, as well?

**B** How did Jesus treat those who opposed Him? Judas? The high priest?

**C** While it may be true that we best express kindness to others when we experience it ourselves, why is their treatment of us not to be the basis for how we treat them in return?

**D** How effective could kindness and respect be in witnessing?

**II. Feel: The Effects of Unkindness on Others**

**A** How can understanding that unkind words and actions hurt and diminish people help us:

1. To be kind?
2. Feel pain for our acts of rudeness?

**III. Do: Showing Kindness**

**A** The key text relates how God's kindness to us should motivate us to behave in the same way to others.

1. In what way is kindness on our part as Christians important?
2. How would being nasty, rude, and hurtful affect our influence?
3. Is being kind an option or an obligation?
4. How would you support your choice?
5. How do character traits developed in acts of kindness have positive influences in our life?

▶ **Summary:** Kindness is essential to Christian culture. Being rude and nasty hurts us as well as others. God's mercy to us motivates us to practice mercy toward others. Christ's kindness is our model.

## Kindness to a “Dead Dog”

**Read** 2 Samuel 9:1–13. How did David show kindness here? How did he, by this act, reveal the character of God?

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“Through reports from the enemies of David, Mephibosheth had been led to cherish a strong prejudice against him as a usurper; but the monarch’s generous and courteous reception of him and his continued kindness won the heart of the young man; he became strongly attached to David, and, like his father Jonathan, he felt that his interest was one with that of the king whom God had chosen.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 713.

David’s kindness to the house of Saul reveals that he sought to use God as the pattern for what he wanted to do for Saul’s house. He recognized that he, a sinner like all of us, had received undeserved mercy and kindness from the hand of God and was going to reflect that kindness to others.

**Before** we can pass on God’s kindness to others, what must we first recognize? See *Luke 7:47*. What crucial principle is found here that can play an important role in helping us understand the whole question of kindness to others?

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Think for a few moments about the goodness and kindness of God toward you. Do you deserve it? Is it something that’s owed you? Are your thoughts, your deeds, your words so selfless, so holy, so loving and accepting that God is merely doing to you as you have done to others? Most likely the answer is No. And herein is a crucial point. When we realize how much God has forgiven us, when we realize that God loves us despite what we are and what we have done, then we truly can understand what it means to be kind and loving to those who don’t deserve our kindness or our love. How important, then, that we keep the Cross and what it means to us, individually, before us at all times.

**What things has God forgiven you for over the years? How should that realization help you treat those who have done things to hurt you?**

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## *Learning Cycle*

### ► **STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Kindness, as in gentle, courteous, thoughtful treatment of others, whether they deserve good treatment or not, is a trait modeled after God’s treatment of us.

**Just for Teachers:** Divide your class into small groups and ask each group to think of several examples of kindness in the Bible. Then ask each group to choose one of these stories to act out as a charade for the rest of the class. Have the rest of the class guess the stories as they are acted out and list these stories on a chalkboard.

**Consider This:** What would be unkind reactions in these same situations? What makes the difference between a thoughtful or thoughtless reaction to a situation? Have you ever made a conscious choice between being kind or unkind in a response? What thought processes preceded your choice?

### ► **STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** As you discuss the Bible stories below, write the title of each story on a chalkboard and list aspects of the story that are important in modeling kindness.

## Bible Commentary

**I. Since God has treated us better than we deserve, we should treat others with the same generosity and kindness.** (*Review Luke 7:36–50 with your class.*)

Neither Judas nor Simon responded kindly to Mary’s gift of perfume or to a woman of Mary’s reputation touching Jesus. Jesus’ response, however, in striking contrast, was one of appreciation so generous that He spoke of a memorial to Mary that would last as long as the story was told. In connecting her story with His, Jesus’ tribute to Mary’s act of kindness was an eternal one.

Mary’s treatment of Jesus came from a heart overflowing with love, and Jesus attributed her gratitude to being forgiven much. Jesus is willing to forgive all of us, including Judas and Simon. But neither Judas nor Simon had recognized or appreciated the depth of His patience and tender-

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## Kind Words *(Eph. 4:32)*

Ephesians 4:32 begins with the words, “And be kind to one another” *(NKJV)*. Look at how this verse fits in perfectly with what we saw yesterday, about treating others as God has treated us!

Kindness is to mark the Christian at all times. But there are at least three specific needs that call for three specific kinds of encouragement.

First, we are to show kindness to spiritual babies. “But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children” *(1 Thess. 2:7, NKJV)*.

Second, we are to show kindness and encouragement to the weak. “We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves” *(Rom. 15:1, NKJV)*.

Third, we are to serve as a nurse to the spiritually sick *(2 Tim. 2:24, 25)*.

A businessman was once heard to say, “I can’t wait to get home at night—I get so tired of being kind all day!” What a sad attitude to have toward human life.

Kindness, especially in our homes, is crucial. And one of the most important ways we can manifest kindness, especially in our homes, is in the way we talk to each other. The atmosphere of the home largely is determined by the words we speak. So many problems, so many hurts, so many tensions and outright fights could be avoided if we were careful not only with what we say but how we say it. Oftentimes one could say something and not hurt or offend, or one could say the exact words to the same person and greatly hurt and offend. The key is how we speak. Human speech is more than just the meanings of words themselves; tone, facial expression, body language, and stress are all part and parcel of conveying our thoughts, emotions, and ideas to others.

**Read Proverbs 15:1–5 and Proverbs 25:11–15. What important principles about what you say and how you say it are revealed in these texts? As you read them, ask yourself about your use of words when talking to others. In what ways could you be kinder in your verbal communication with others?**

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Learning Cycle CONTINUED

ness with their faults and how much He was willing to forgive. If they had, they, too, might have offered some gift of gratitude rather than begrudging Mary's gift. Their responses to Christ's remarks were very different, however. Judas took Jesus' comment as an insult and was hardened in his determination to betray Jesus. However small-minded and selfish Simon had been, when he saw how well Jesus knew him yet refrained from shaming him in public, he responded to Jesus' gift of love. "Simon was touched by the kindness of Jesus in not openly rebuking him before the guests. He had not been treated as he desired Mary to be treated. He saw that Jesus did not wish to expose his guilt to others, but sought by a true statement of the case to convince his mind, and by pitying kindness to subdue his heart."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 567.

**Consider This:** What makes the difference between our hearts becoming hardened and being softened by God's kindnesses to us? How does the way God loves us translate into how we love others?

## II. The Importance of Kind Words (*Review 1 Samuel 25 with your class.*)

David had been insulted, and he rashly vowed to repay insult with violence. Abigail met him on the way. She bowed down before him, treating him like a king, and her kind words and humble address changed an angry man's course. "The piety of Abigail, like the fragrance of a flower, breathed out all unconsciously in face and word and action. The Spirit of God was abiding in her soul. Her speech, seasoned with grace, shed a heavenly influence."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 667.

With her kind, respectful words, Abigail was able to make David see how foolish and impulsive his passion for revenge was, and David trembled when he realized how close he had come to taking rash action against someone who had slighted him. These were not just the words of a wise woman, however. They were evidence that God's Spirit was living in her heart and shaping and molding her words.

**Consider This:** What situations do we face in which our calm, kind words may intervene in a volatile situation and perhaps prevent trouble? How may our words shed a heavenly influence?

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## Kindness Returned *(Luke 6:38)*

“ ‘Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you’ ” *(Luke 6:38, NKJV)*. What is Jesus saying here? What principle of life is He talking about?

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So often, how we treat others comes back on ourselves. That is, when we are kind, it's so much likelier that others will be kind to us. It works the other way, too: be mean to others, and others will be mean to you, as well.

Of course, it doesn't always happen that way. (Look at Jesus and how He was treated!) But whether it does or doesn't, in one sense it doesn't really matter. As Christians, we always should be kind, even if that kindness is not given back to us. In fact, as we have read, being kind to those who are unkind to us is a hallmark of being a true follower of Jesus. In general, however, how we treat others will impact how we ourselves are treated. “ ‘Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets’ ” *(Matt. 7:12, NKJV)*.

**Read** Luke 6:35. How does this fit in with what we've been talking about all week?

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It's always easy to be kind to someone who could be of benefit to you down the road. Anyone will do that. What's harder, however, is to be kind, especially when it costs you something, to those who can never do anything for you in return. That's the real test.

**Examine yourself. Is your kindness motivated by selfless and self-sacrificial love, or is it motivated even slightly by a desire to look out for number one? If it's the latter, how can you change?**

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*Learning Cycle* CONTINUED**III. Kindness at Home and Abroad** (Review Ruth 1 and 2 with your class.)

Naomi had been a stranger in Moab, and Ruth was a stranger in Bethlehem. Ruth didn't have to return to her mother-in-law's land, and once she was there, she bore the brunt of providing for Naomi and for herself in strange fields where she was likely to face abuse. How relieved she must have been to find kindness in Boaz. And he, who was so kind himself, was quick to recognize it in the woman who was gleaning in his fields.

There are many other stories of hospitality in the Scriptures. There is the story of the couple who fed and sheltered Elisha, gestures the prophet much appreciated and God rewarded (*2 Kings 4:8–37*). Abraham, Lot, and perhaps others, in caring for strangers, “entertained angels without knowing it” (*Heb. 13:2, NIV*); we are advised to do the same.

Jesus Himself, even as He was caught in the throes of the most agonizing crisis the universe has known, thoughtfully provided for His mother (*John 19:25–27*). Acts of kindness should grease the wheels of all our interactions with others, but especially at home. “Those who cherish the spirit of Christ will manifest politeness at home, a spirit of benevolence even in little things. They will be constantly seeking to make all around them happy, forgetting self in their kind attentions to others. This is the fruit which grows upon the Christian tree.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, pp. 423, 424.

**Consider This:** How does it feel to know that the Judge of all the earth does His best to speak kindly to and about each of us, excusing our weaknesses as far as possible? How tender should we be to those who are struggling, who are weak and tempted?

■ *What opportunities do we have to be kind both at home and abroad?*

**►STEP 3—Apply**

The sentence “Practice random kindness and senseless acts of beauty” is said to have been coined by peace activist Anne Herbert, who apparently wrote it on a place mat in a restaurant in 1982 or 1983. Many movies, books, and Web sites have taken up the phrase or been based on the concept, including the 2000 movie *Pay It Forward* and the 1993 book *Random Acts of Kindness*, published by Conari Press.

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## Put on Kindness *(Col. 3:12–14)*

**Read** Colossians 3:12–14 and then rewrite it in your own words. In what ways do these verses reveal the essence of what it means to be a follower of Christ (notice the use of the term *perfect* or *perfection*)? Also, think about how powerful our witness to the world would be were we to put these words into practice.

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Alexander Maclaren, noted London clergyman of the late nineteenth century, wrote, “Gentleness is the strongest force in the world. You take all the steam hammers that were ever forged and battle at an iceberg, and except for the comparatively little heat that is developed by the blows and melts some small portion, it will still be ice, though pulverized instead of whole. But let it move gently down to the southward, there the sunbeams smite the coldness of death, and it is dissipated in the warm ocean. Kindness is conquering.”

As Seventh-day Adventists, we have very powerful scriptural evidence to back up our positions. (If we don’t, then what are we doing here?) And that’s, of course, important. But we need more than just correct teaching, don’t we?

“If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 189.

When we teach the doctrines of the church, we include the Sabbath, the state of the dead, the origin of sin, and other defining beliefs. But are we as careful about emphasizing the importance of kindness and the other fruit of the Spirit, along with the Sermon on the Mount and 1 Corinthians 13? Knowing that the Sabbath is the seventh day or that the dead sleep until the resurrection or that Christ’s righteousness covers us now and in the final judgment is all fine and important. But having knowledge alone isn’t the same thing as knowing the truth as it is in Jesus (*John 14:6*), for the truth sets us free (*John 8:32*); that is, the truth changes us and makes us more like Christ. Could one then ask, Do we really have the truth if the Truth, Jesus, doesn’t have us?

*Learning Cycle* CONTINUED**Thought Questions:**

- 1 Jesus said that Mary's act of kindness would be spoken of as a memorial to her. As a group, reminisce about acts of kindness you have experienced. What makes these acts memorable?
- 2 As a group, recount some of the kind, generous, thoughtful things that God has done for you. What kind acts of God are most memorable to you?

**► STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** You may choose to make copies of several of the ideas below and challenge your class members to try one of the ideas during the following week. Suggest that if they have some interesting experiences, they can e-mail you with their stories to share with the class the following week.

- 1 Take a walk in nature and examine your surroundings for random acts of kindness that God didn't have to provide but that He did anyway.
- 2 The Web site for the Random Acts of Kindness Foundation, <http://www.actsofkindness.org>, offers suggestions, stories, and quotes on kindness. One story, offered anonymously, goes like this: "I was just in the mood to make someone's day. So I went out and bought some flowers, and I put a flower in the plastic newspaper bags in the neighborhood. I put flowers in everyone's bag I could find until I ran out of flowers. The next day my neighbor said, 'I got a flower in my newspaper!' and I just said, 'Someone cares for you!' " What kinds of anonymous things would be fun to do for people in your neighborhood?
- 3 Christ asked the disciples for a kindness in the Garden of Gethsemane that they were too weak to supply. He was lonely for recognition and appreciation, especially by the ones for whom He was offering this greatest of all sacrifices. However, He remembered Mary's kindness to Him, even as He entered into the dark time of His trial and crucifixion. That act was a strength and comfort to Him. While we cannot retrieve those lost opportunities to serve Christ, examine Matthew 25:34–46. Every little thing we do for others, Christ counts as doing for Him. "Christ values acts of heartfelt courtesy. When anyone did Him a favor, with heavenly politeness He blessed the actor. He did not refuse the simplest flower plucked by the hand of a child, and offered to Him in love."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 564. What kindness can you offer Christ this week?

**Further Study:** “From every Christian home a holy light should shine forth. Love should be revealed in action . . . showing itself in *thoughtful kindness*, in gentle, unselfish courtesy. There are homes where this principle is carried out—homes where God is worshiped and truest love reigns. From these homes morning and evening prayer ascends to God as sweet incense, and His mercies and blessings descend upon the suppliants like the morning dew.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 37, emphasis supplied.

“There are many who regard the expression of love as a weakness, and they maintain a reserve that repels others. This spirit checks the current of sympathy. As the social and generous impulses are repressed, they wither, and the heart becomes desolate and cold. We should beware of this error. Love cannot long exist without expression. Let not the heart of one connected with you starve for the want of *kindness* and sympathy.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 107, emphasis supplied.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, go over the final question at the end of Thursday’s study: “Do we really have the truth if the Truth, Jesus, doesn’t have us?” What are the implications of your answer?
- ❷ “Love cannot long exist without expression.” What does that mean, and why does it represent a principle that’s so important for us as a church?
- ❸ Review the texts this week that talked about us being “perfect.” How should we understand what this idea means? What are the common problems and misconceptions that we as a church have struggled with over the use and meaning of this term?
- ❹ Trace in your own experience how the attitudes of other Adventists have affected you and your faith. That is, were folks kind to you and, if so, how did that kindness impact you? On the other hand, were folks unkind to you and, if so, how did that impact you? Share your stories with others in the class. What can you take away from these experiences that can help the class better understand how important kindness is in our witness?