

Kindness Counts



Christopher News Notes

AUTHOR AND SCREENWRITER MYLES CONNOLLY ONCE SAID, “Everybody at one time or another has known such people—strangers, relatives or friends—who have changed the quality of the day for others...The shining quality of goodness radiates from them, from their mere presence. All these, humble and unaware, carry with them the kindness and generosity of their lives. These are the greatest artists, they practice the highest of arts—the art of living, the art of life itself.”

Kindness. Consideration. Compassion.

Many words express that moment when a good thought

translates into a good deed, when a generous gesture touches the life of another.

An act of kindness can be as simple as a smile or as extreme as saving a life. It may cost time and convenience and be done without expectation of return. It is rooted in a recognition of our own worth and the ties that bind us to God and all His children.

In the book *A Pocketful of Prayers*, an unknown author asks God to “Give me a quick eye for little kindnesses...a quick perception of the feelings and needs of others, and make me eager-hearted in helping them.” That’s a good reminder that while many kindnesses can be planned, others are spur-of-the-moment. God provides an opportunity. How we act is up to us.

An elderly man stood at an automated teller machine in a Manhattan bank while the line behind him grew long—and the customers grew impatient. One man called out, “Hurry up, you jerk!” But another person politely asked if he could help. The elderly man, anxious and confused, explained that he had never used the machine before. He got the assistance he needed from somebody who cared enough to ask.

One person vented feelings of frustration and succeeded only in embarrassing another. The second person may have been equally irritated, but acted instead out of compassion.

“Thus says the Lord of hosts: Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another.”

—Zechariah 7:9

Kindness thrives in the home

The word “kind” comes from the Old English “cynd” for kin or family. Within the home, we first learn to respect and care for others. Yet it’s easy to take those closest to us for granted.

When their young son married, Marilyn and Bill Fanning invited the couple and their baby to live with them while they finished school. Then Mrs. Fanning’s parents also moved in because her

mother broke her arm. The crowded four-generation household became selfish and argumentative. “Life had become one raw nerve,” said Marilyn in *Guideposts*.

Finally, the Fannings decided to encourage respect, saying: “We all love one another. We’re just not showing much consideration for one another.”

They set ground rules on chores, budgets, mealtimes, and late night noise.

Attitudes improved and life became more pleasant.

Kindness on the job

Every line of work offers its own possibilities for showing consideration to co-workers, business associates, clients, and customers.

Bill Ogburn, a milkman, delivered good cheer to his customers in Los Angeles’ Boyle Heights area for over 40 years. He brought groceries to older persons who found it hard to get out. And for those who needed credit, he said, “If they tell me the truth, I won’t cut them off. I’ve got a lot of great folks.”

Dee Torrell was an executive assistant at a large New Jersey firm, who said she was “deeply concerned with America’s corporate culture losing touch with human and spiritual values.” Ms. Torrell wrote to her company newsletter making a case for kindness: “Do we answer the telephone, respond to a memo or interact with each other differently because we consider our work more than a job—in fact, a career, a ‘vocation’?”

Kindness in the community

Good neighbors have always made a difference. Ruth Hammond remembers the woman who cared for her children while she was in the hospital

A prayer for kindness

Keep us, O God, from pettiness; let us be large in thought, in word, in deed. Let us be done with fault-finding and leave off self-seeking. May we put away all pretense and meet each other face to face—without self-pity and without prejudice. May we never be hasty in judgment and let us always be generous. Let us take time for all things; help us grow calm, serene, gentle. Teach us to put into action our better impulses, straightforward and unafraid. Grant that we may realize that it is the little things that create differences, that in the big things of life we are as one. And, O Lord God, let us not forget to be kind! Amen.

—Mary Stuart

having her fourth baby. And when she returned home, her Colorado neighbor made dinner and kept an eye on the older youngsters. “She brought peace into my life at a time when I desperately needed it,” said Mrs. Hammond.

For many, the place they worship offers practical compassion. Lynn and Bryant Applegate’s youngest child was only eight months old when she was diagnosed with cancer. The Orlando, Florida family found support in their faith and in the help their church gave them through babysitting and providing meals.

But it doesn’t take a tragedy to bring out the best in others. “I live alone, and it can get lonely, especially on weekends,” said Hugh Woods of Philadelphia. “What a difference it makes when people at Mass treat you like a family member, not someone intruding on their private space.”

Kindness among strangers

Since we are all the children of a loving God, acts of kindness towards strangers are really a form of reaching out to our brothers and sisters. For instance, Martin Dominguez of Los Angeles once reunited a man with Down syndrome with his family. When he saw a missing person picture on the TV news, Mr. Dominguez was convinced he had seen him. He spent two days searching before he found the lost man.

Joy and Gary Couch of Longview, Texas, answered their phone to hear an elderly woman, disoriented from a stroke, seeking help. They kept her on the phone for an hour while the police and phone company traced the call. Rescuers got to her and saved her life. And 10-year-old Sarah Meyers of Wilmette, Illinois, was grief-stricken when her grandfather died. She wrote him a letter, attached it to a balloon and released it. Don Kopp, from York, Pennsylvania, found it and wrote back: "Sarah, whenever you think about your grandpa, he knows and is very close by with an overwhelming love."

"Happy are those who are kind."—Proverbs 14:21

Simple, not easy

The simplicity of kindness cuts through the complexity of our lives and our age. But that doesn't mean it's easy. And for those dependent on others, gratitude can become a burden.

"Helpers who quietly get things done, rather than announcing their efforts, leave a dependent person's pride intact," according to Wendy Lustbader, author of *Counting on Kindness*. "The indebted position is not emphasized, and no mention is made of special accommodations." A 48-year-old terminally ill man said that "when Christmas came I got more fruit and candy than I could possibly eat. I went door-to-door here in my building and left little packages outside everybody's door. Now that felt good. I was on the giving end for a change."


**"It's better to light one candle
than to curse the darkness."**

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"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you."

—Ephesians 4:32

Pass kindness along

Good examples have a way of inspiring kindness. Consider Dr. Robert Silverman, a Pennsylvania dentist who lost his son Jason to leukemia. The family got a great deal of help from strangers who raised funds for them and even lent them a house close to the hospital at which Jason was a patient. Dr. Silverman started making kindness a part of his routine as well, working with families of leukemia patients and with those who have Down syndrome. He also led dental teams offering free care to Central America - and every year on his son's birthday, he treats anyone who comes to his office without charge.

"Those who are kind reward themselves."

—Proverbs 11:17

A certain Samaritan

Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-35) is a famous example of kindness. Why? This Samaritan "saw the victim as a 'neighbor'—a fellow man—and treated him as one, at some cost to himself in time, effort, and money, and without any apparent reward," says writer Morton Hunt. "But, one may reasonably say, it is only a parable; Christ was teaching how people should behave, not how they do behave."

Yet, against all odds, people do treat one another with kindness. Knowing the value of generous love in action, men, women, and children give of themselves in one moment and over a lifetime.

"When someone accuses us of being naive and not living in the real world, we don't have to become apologetic and defensive about our idealism," says columnist Dolores Curran. "We can reply, 'I'm not content with the real world as it is. I believe reality can be better than this.'"

The preceding is a reprint of the classic Christopher News Note "Kindness Counts."