

# What is Kindness?

**Ben and Jen Waaraniemi**

“Think and speak well of him and put the best construction on all he does.” – Martin Luther, *Small Catechism*

With the simple instruction above, Martin Luther summarizes the eighth commandment in his *Small Catechism*. It is a message that is consistent with the teachings of Jesus that are recorded for us in the Bible. From a young age, children can grasp the truth and simplicity of Jesus’ teaching of the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” It is a lesson that we need to teach and learn again and again throughout our lives.

Kind behavior is described in the Bible: Apostle Paul teaches that as we have opportunity, we are to “do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). Thus, believers have a special responsibility to help and support brothers and sisters in faith. God’s kingdom is made up of many individuals who have differing perspectives and personalities. The enemy of God’s kingdom works to use these differences to create contention and strife between believers.

John especially instructs about the importance of preserving love between believers: “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God” (1 John 4:7). We need to fight against the instinct of our flesh to see those with a different perspective or opinion as opponents but rather as those for whom Christ died. When differing opinions in matters of faith or doctrine arise, we can trust that when we approach each other with love and humility God reveals the way forward in His time.

## **Bear One Another’s Burdens**

God has also created all His children with varying abilities and disabilities. This does not change the fact that each of His created children has an undying soul of equal worth. Christian love teaches us to help and serve those with particular needs or conditions: “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).

Paul also instructs every person “not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think” and “Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate” (Rom. 12). This passage instructs us to strive to be helpful, rather than superior to others, offering our individual abilities to serve Him and all humankind.

The eighth commandment speaks of our neighbor: “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.” In addition to not lying about others, we should also extend love to all people. Jesus teaches

in the parable of the Good Samaritan that ‘neighbor’ applies to all of humankind who are created in God’s image. It may seem easy to not spread lies and to think well of those we love or respect. It is much more difficult to apply the commandment and this message of love to those with whom we disagree or who live and speak contrary to God’s Word. Yet the teaching of Jesus is clear: “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you (Matt. 5:43,44).

Apostle Paul also instructs that “as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” A Christian has the responsibility to work for temporal peace. Disparaging or harming others with our words or actions is sin. We pray for the mind of Christ in confessing our faith and preaching sin as sin.

### **The Golden Rule**

In his *Large Catechism*, Martin Luther expands on his explanation of the eighth commandment: “Now we have the summary and substance of this commandment: No one shall use the tongue to harm a neighbor, whether friend or foe. No one shall say anything evil of a neighbor, whether true or false, unless it is done with proper authority or for that person’s improvement. Rather, we should use our tongue to speak only the best about all people, to cover the sins and infirmities of our neighbors, to justify their actions, and to cloak and veil them with our own honor.

Our chief reason for doing this is the one Christ has given in the gospel, and in which he means to encompass all the commandments concerning our neighbor, ‘In everything do to others as you would have them do to you.’” Luther’s words here highlight the Golden Rule. This rule is so simple, yet it is necessary for us to think deeply about how to apply it in everyday life.

## **A Forest of Kindness**

### **Katriina Edoh**

Our new home is nestled in a birch grove. When we arrive, the summer is at its finest. Gentle, slender birch trees shine day and night, green and silver branches rustle as if to whisper their welcome.

As summer wanes and autumn approaches, the lush green deepens, and suddenly we see that this is not just a birch grove we live in. We notice that in a corner of the yard grow bushes of black and red currants. Their berries will soon be ripe for the picking. Beside the shed, a tall old pine stands high. Birds flock to the yard to feast on the ruddy orange berries of the winter ash. And later, when the greens

turn to brown and yellow, I see it. A little maple, right outside the window. Unlike the sociable birches, the maple stands bravely alone. It dazzles with its large golden leaves.

If God's congregation on earth were a forest, would we all be birch trees? Clustered together, safe and secure? Whispering when the maple shows its splendor, that "he is not one of us?" And what about the poor winter ash that is picked clean in September? Would we wave our branch arms in protection?

God's congregation is a group of individuals. We are human and all so different. Some of us – it might be a majority of us – have grown up in an area where we are surrounded by believers and relatives. Yet, there are some believers who might feel that they do not fit in because of personal life situations, such as having repented from the world, having lost family to the world, having moved from a different country or continent, or just having a different perspective on life because of life's circumstances and experiences.

How can we show kindness to such individuals? How can we show them that their uniqueness is valued, and that they and their different perspectives are welcome?

Kindness does not stem from obligation, but from the true desire to care. The Bible says, "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18).

What sort of deed is kind? It is a genuine gesture, unassuming. It is showing the love God has for us to our neighbor. It is trying to accept others and their differences even though we can't completely understand them.

If God's congregation on earth were a forest, we would stand, some like the birches, in clusters, safe and secure. Some of us would be like the tall pines, strong and confident and a little aloof. Some like the brave, lonely maple. Some smaller, unassuming. All exposed to the storms and winds of life but experiencing them differently depending on where we stand. And all thirsting for and thriving on the water that gives life.

Like the trees of the forest, we are indeed, all different. We have different needs, experiences, and feelings but are united by the gospel message. Jesus died for all our sins, and in God's kingdom the refreshing gospel flows freely. May we have the strength to always support each other by showing kindness.

## When Teasing is Bullying

**Elaine Nikula**

Is it bullying or just bad behavior? Should we be concerned about kids' taunting chants of "fatty-fatty two-by-four?" It's just kids being kids, right? What's a little teasing? But are the kids who are teased and bullied able to rise above being continually or even occasionally hurt by others?

A group of boys constantly muttered humiliating comments to a teenaged girl when she walked by. Day after day they tormented her.

One boy sat with a group of boys at the lunch table – they walked away. He wasn't called to play hockey at the neighborhood rink and was ridiculed for his inability to pronounce the letter "s."

Another boy was jeered for his weight. Showering at camp was deeply humiliating. His underwear was strewn on the lawn, and his bunk was filled with grass and suitcase littered with garbage. Did he want to go to camp next year?

It happens more than we want to admit. It happens at church services and at camps. How would you feel if these things happened to you or to your child?

These young people battled feelings of shame and worthlessness. Some cut their bodies to dull the pain of rejection. Some had thoughts of ending a life that felt not worth living. They may carry scars into adulthood – low self-esteem, anxiety or depression. Some denied faith, overcome by temptations and doubts.

"The devil whispers loudest to the victim," says Brett Nikula, Minnesota licensed Associate Marriage and Family therapist, "planting lies and seeds of bitterness, saying, 'God has forgotten you. They can't be believers when they act like that. This can't be God's kingdom.'"

The heart aches for victims and may feel animosity towards the bully. But what about the bully? Don't bullies want to get to heaven too?

The enemy of souls also tempts the bully. He may be struggling after being mistreated himself. This may be his misguided way to try fit into a group. Or he may be unaware of his bullying, thinking that he is just teasing and people should just "lighten up."

The bully needs to be stopped, even by removal if necessary. And the victims need to understand that nothing they did caused the bullying – no matter what they may have done. It may take time before the victim is able to encounter the bully, and any encounters should only be arranged when the victim is ready.

Ultimately, both bullies and victims need loving encouragement to come to the grace altar to put away bitterness, doubts, pride and sinful actions.

When a penitent heart believes sins forgiven, then miracles happen. Parents whose son was bullying other boys called the boys and parents together. This matter was discussed in love, and all wished to believe sins forgiven. The boys played together from then on.

The enemy of souls wants to break love between believers and cause turmoil in homes and congregations. The most powerful tool against this is the forgiving gospel which can heal a bitter heart

and broken relationships. Even after the blessing, victims may need professional help to repair PTSD, low self-worth and depression.

It's important to make clear that bullying is never okay. If we make excuses for it, then the misunderstandings about bullying continue. Bullying isn't simply a harmless part of growing up. Wouldn't we wish to do our part to stop it?

Kindness is a learned behavior. Let's teach our children to include everyone and to invite a newcomer into the group. Let's take a seat next to anyone sitting alone and get to know them. Let's celebrate that we both love soccer instead of ridiculing the other's shoes.

Everyone has faults and sins. And perhaps most of us can remember a time when we left someone out or went overboard with teasing. Maybe we even bullied. As ugly as the sins may be, the beauty of God's kingdom is that no one needs to be condemned for these transgressions. Both bully and bullied can freely believe all sins forgiven in Jesus' name and blood.

## Show Kindness

**Sonja Ojala**

*Be nice!* We often tell children this, but how can we encourage them to show goodness to others? We can start teaching kindness by asking: what is kindness? Why do we want to be kind?

Kindness is showing goodness to others, being friendly, helpful, patient, gentle and considering the feelings of others. Showing kindness through our actions makes others feel comforted and happy, may solve conflicts and problems and moves others to be kind in return.

There are many Bible passages that remind us how important kindness is. The Bible reminds us that the most important thing is charity, the love that is deep care for others (1 Cor. 13:4–7,13). The Bible instructs us, “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18). We are reminded to show love to all people, even complete strangers (Lev. 19:34). Kindness is a fruit of faith; our love for God and thankfulness that our sins are forgiven moves our heart to show kindness to all people (Gal. 5:22).

We can teach children to show kindness in simple ways, such as by saying hello, smiling at others and using nice words. We can also instruct them to help someone who has fallen down or to notice peers who are alone and to go have a friendly chat with that person. Children notice when adults show kindness toward others and can see how these actions make others happy. As an example, we can tell Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan who helped a wounded stranger. Jesus, the perfect teacher, was an

example when He met the scorned Samaritan woman at the well. He shared with her the kindest thing of all: the forgiveness of all sins in the name and blood of Jesus.

It is good to learn the Golden Rule, which says to treat others the same way you wish to be treated. This refers to what Jesus taught in Luke 6:31: “As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.”

When we think about our feelings when we are treated a certain way, it helps us to understand how our own actions make others feel. We can ponder whether we are always kind to everyone, and whether this is an easy task. Sometimes it isn't easy and sometimes we aren't as nice as we should be. Jesus reminds us we should try when he admonishes, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). He teaches us that this pleases God and that He will stay close to us.

If we are unkind, we want to apologize. If the person we hurt is a believer, we can ask for forgiveness in Jesus' name and blood. This uplifts us, and we can make a promise to again show love one to another.

I am a preschool teacher at Sunday school, and it is always uplifting to see what forgiving and open hearts four-year-olds have. This was evident the day of our Sunday School Christmas Program. One little boy was in tears of nervousness waiting for our class' turn to sing. I asked if he would feel happier if he had a friend to hold his hand. He nodded through his tears. Every student in the class raised their hand when I asked for a volunteer to hold the boy's hand. He dried his tears and went to sing happily, surrounded by kindness and holding the warm hand of a friend!

May God help us to keep an open heart like a young child, feeling love for others and showing kindness to all people in truth and deed.

## Kindness in the Home and among Siblings

**Laura Laho**

“A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother” (Prov. 18:24).

I reflect on my childhood and the people with whom I spent my young years, those tender years of growing up, learning about life and faith and preparing for the future.

How has it come to be that those with whom I often clashed are now my best friends, angels that God has given me as escorts on the narrow pathway to heaven? They are my mother, my father, my sisters and brothers – not only parents but also friends in living faith. We often say, “To have friends, one must be a friend.” We find this teaching in the Bible (Prov. 18:24).

I recall being sad once when I was left out of my circle of friends. My parents lovingly reminded and encouraged me to be patient. They told me that this will pass, that my friends will still be there. Dad often instructed, kill with kindness: the meaner someone is to you, the nicer you be to them.

I recall becoming upset with a brother as we struggled for the same toy. Now these memories are happy! The recollections of some fights and battles are lighthearted and funny. How happy I am for these people in my life! How can we have remained close into adulthood after those experiences of growing up together?

We were taught to care for offenses. As each day ended, we sang a song and said a prayer and preached the gospel of forgiveness in Jesus' name and blood. The instruction was simple and clear. It was the same for all of us living under the same roof. And this instruction is still the same in my adulthood: take care of offenses as they arise. Use the gospel of forgiveness of sins freely. It is a gift! Put away by name those sins of which you are aware and which trouble your conscience.

Kindness and the bond of living faith have kept my parents and siblings close in adult years. As a fruit of faith, siblings and parents have desired to counsel and support each other in life's questions and challenges.

Now I am the mother of a large family of my own. God has blessed me richly. I hope the instructions from my childhood carry over into my life as a mother – that my children can grow with the same home teachings I have been given. I hope that my children too will experience kindness in the home and be loving, believing escorts to each other as they travel through life toward their heavenly home.

## **Bullying – a Threat to Young Believers?**

**Rachelle Kurtti**

Is bullying a reality in God's kingdom? What about cyberbullying? Some may believe that it isn't an issue, or that one who falls victim to it needs to "buck up," "develop a thick skin," "stand up for yourself" or some other platitude. Many, myself included, have been victims of bullying at some time or other and have been told things like this.

In Phoenix's Youth Presentation "Friendships, Bullies, and Social Media," however, we heard that you don't know the mindset of those to whom you are telling to buck up, or of those you yourself are bullying. What you say or write can be incredibly hurtful, and you must think before you post, said presenter Andy Kesti.

## **Then and Now**

Kesti started his presentation with a description of his experience with the quintessential bully at his school as a kid. He went through how it happened and was handled. Then, he discussed how this might have been if they all had been handed smartphones and social media accounts.

## **What Experts Say**

Kesti showed a video about how social media influences teenagers and affects the rise of depression and anxiety in teens and the resultant suicide rate. An issue emphasized in the video was the impact of phones on teens' and pre-teens' psyche. We heard how "Giving a phone with access to social media without education or training to an 11-year-old is equivalent to giving them a car with no driver's ed." Some teens are so dependent on their phones that a simple phone confiscation can result in self-harm.

## **What the Bible Says**

Kesti referenced a few verses on friendship from the Bible regarding how we should treat one another, as shown in this example from Galatians 6:1,2: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself. Lest thou be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Simply put, we need to care for our friends and treat them with kindness, as Jesus teaches.

## **Bullies as Friends**

How do we make friends? A friendship can be formed by greeting someone, showing them kindness, and finding common ground. However, a friendship could also be formed between a person being drawn to someone who bullies others. This type of magnet is someone who is mean to others and puts others down. So why are people friends with them? Well, because many of us, somewhere in that human part of us, like that the person is mean, and we want to be mean too. Maybe we're not the one actually being mean, but secretly, or not so secretly, we like to watch the person be mean to others.

Another component of friendship is sharing. We share fun, beliefs and values. Beliefs and values are only shared between true friends. If these are not discussed between friends, the friendship doesn't last. A true friend would never leave you for rebuking them because you share values.

## **Cyberbullying Has Impact**

The clincher of this presentation was a true story (with fictional names) of cyberbullying that happened among the youth in Phoenix. After reading the narrative, Kesti referenced this verse from Paul's guidance to the Colossians 3:8: "But now ye put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy

communication out of your mouth,” and asked the listeners: “What part of Paul’s guidance in Colossians are the people in this story not following?”

Kesti concluded his presentation with the gospel, then reviewed the gravity of cyberbullying and the harm it can cause. Although we can believe sins forgiven, we have to be accountable for our actions – what we say, do and post. If we have posted something that bullies another, we must take it down and speak to that person and take care of matters.

Like many other aspects of being a believer in today's times, social media is a place of watching. It may feel like a safe place to vent one's anger or to say something mean or nasty because you are not face-to-face with the other person. However, an online environment is no different in terms of sin: offense, wrath, anger, and a host of other negative experiences are found there as anywhere else. Bullying – and cyberbullying – do occur in God’s kingdom. Awareness can help prevention efforts.

### **Ask for Help**

If you are being bullied, reach out to an adult. Sometimes the first person you reach out to may not be able to help but keep trying to tell someone. If you are a parent or adult, listen to and believe the victim. Remind them that although we all have faults, they did not cause the bullying and they are not being too sensitive. Ask how you can help, or what would be helpful right now.

If you are the bully, you too can reach out for both forgiveness and help. You too can learn to find kindness and empathy in yourself and show these qualities to others.

Find a comprehensive list of ways to ask for help at [PacerTeensAgainstBullying.org](http://PacerTeensAgainstBullying.org).

### **Discussion Points**

1. Read and discuss the 12th chapter of Paul’s letter to the Romans. How can you apply this to your relationships with other believers?
2. How can you apply this instruction to your relationships with those who do not have this faith-gift?
3. Who comes to mind when you think of kindness? Why? Who deserves your kindness?
4. How can we spread kindness and teach kindness to young ones in our lives?
5. How often do you do something for others without expecting something in return?