

Pay It Forward

Love People Enough to Take Action

Maybe it's happened to you. You pull up to the drive-thru counter, ready to pay for your dinner. Then the cashier tells you that the car in front of you already paid for your food. A small gesture, maybe, but enough to make your day a little better and perhaps inspire you to pay it forward to the car behind you. This past December, the chain of vehicles that "paid it forward" at a Minnesota Dairy Queen extended to 900 customers. Strangers gave each other over \$10,000 of food, one act of kindness at a time. Couldn't our suspicious, anxious world use more good deeds — big and small — to restore some faith in each other?

We're modeling our mercy after Jesus' mercy as we continue our [Cross Training](#) journey. Mercy comes when we receive God's grace, forgive others, show kindness, and develop patience. So how is a merciful heart reflected in acts of kindness?

What You Need to Know

The Lord has always wanted people to show mercy more than he wanted sacrifices (Hos. 6:6; Matt. 9:13). It's at the heart of God's desire for us: "*He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*" (Mic. 6:8).

One Greek word translated as "kindness" in our Bibles is *philanthropia* — literally "love for humanity." The native islanders showed "*unusual kindness*" to Paul and his shipmates when they wrecked on Malta, welcoming them and kindling a fire for them (Acts 28:2). The other Greek word for "kindness" is *chrestotes*, which describes benevolence, helpfulness, generosity, and goodness. It's a virtue found in the "*fruit of the Spirit*" (Gal. 5:22) and Paul's famous description of love (1 Cor. 13:4). Both words describe God's goodness toward us (Titus 3:4; Rom. 2:4), which we must "*put on*" ourselves (Col. 3:12), as we imitate him (Eph. 4:32-5:2).

We don't *feel* kindness, we *show* it! Jesus' famous story about the Good Samaritan illustrates how *feeling* compassion leads to *acting* mercifully. After others passed by the other side, the Samaritan saw the helpless man and "*had compassion*" (Luke 10:33). A flurry of action words follows that feeling of compassion: He went to him, bandaged him, anointed him, "*brought him to an inn,*" and "*took care of him*" (Luke 10:34). He took out his wallet and paid an innkeeper to care for the man, promising to return and pay for any other expenses later (Luke 10:35). The Lord closes his parable with a question, asking who "*proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?*" (Luke 10:36). The correct answer isn't "the man who felt merciful" but "*The one who showed him mercy*" (Luke 10:37). So while we can't always help, when we do, our actions reveal our hearts — "*if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?*" (1 John 3:17-18).

What You Need to Do

Enter each day looking for ways to show kindness. One of our hymns speaks of the "Beautiful Life" that comes from doing golden deeds and helping those in need. So open your eyes, like Jesus and his disciples did, to those who are hurting and in need all around you (John 5:6; Acts 3:4).

And while you're looking, try to find the opportunities to do good that offer no apparent earthly reward. Lend money expecting nothing in return (Luke 6:35-36). Help people privately (Matt. 6:2-4). Give to strangers (Heb. 13:2,16) and those who actively dislike you (Matt. 5:38-48).

Aim to give something to every person you visit. Bring a blessing, a gift, a card, or an act of service. Small acts of kindness add up. "Do your little bit of good where you are" said Desmond Tutu, "it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world." Remember the simple truth of Christ's words: "*It is more blessed to give than to receive*" (Acts 20:35).

Through the Week

- **Read** (Mon) — Luke 10:25-37; 2 Sam. 9:1-13; Zech. 7:9-10; Matt. 25:31-46; Col. 3:8-14
- **Reflect** (Tue) — Ask yourself, "*Do I look outside my bubble and create ways to show kindness?*"
- **Request** (Wed) — Pray, "*Lord, keep me from growing weary in doing good*" (cf. Gal. 6:9).
- **Respond** (Thu) — Bless each place you go today with an act of kindness.
- **Reach Out** (Fri) — Ask someone, "*What was the last kind thing someone did for you?*"