

A Heart of Kindness

Rich Nathan

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1 and 2 Samuel: The Heart After God Series

2 Samuel 1 and 9

Today I want to talk about one of the most precious words in the Bible. It is a word that needs to be reclaimed by Christians and made part of our regular vocabulary. The word is kindness.

I have been a follower of Christ for a little over 32 years. I became a follower of Christ when I was 18 years old, as a college freshman at Case Western Reserve in Cleveland. As I was thinking about this week's topic of kindness, it struck me that one of the major ways that God has blessed me as a Christian is through the extraordinary kindness shown to me by other Christians. There have been moments in my Christian life in which I have been the recipient of unusual acts of extraordinary kindness. These acts of kindness revealed to me at a deeper level what God is like.

My wife, Marlene, and I were married when we were both very young. I was 19 years old. Shortly after we got married, my mother sold her car to me. It was a 1969 gold Ford Cougar with those old fastbacks. If you know what a fastback is, you are also probably ready to receive a Golden Buckeye Card in the mail. In any case, Marlene and I spent down nearly our entire savings account to buy this car. A week after we purchased the car, I was awakened one evening at 3:00 a.m. by a neighbor pounding on our apartment door. When I opened the door, my neighbor said, "Some drunk in a Cheyenne camper trailer smashed cars on both sides of the street. Your car is totally destroyed and firemen are now spraying water into the gas tank."

I ran downstairs and discovered that my neighbor had actually minimized what had happened to my beloved Cougar. The car had been tossed up onto a lawn. The backend was smashed into the front seat of the car. And firemen, indeed, were filling the car with water.

We were now without a car, without a savings account, and the few hundred dollars that the insurance company paid us on the car was totally insufficient for us to buy a new car.

A few weeks later, Marlene and I were the recipients of an extraordinary act of kindness. One of our friends at Case was a guy named Gary. Gary, along with his wife Lita, were planning to go to a graduate school in order to prepare them both for the missions field. Before he left Case, Gary dropped by our house. We thought he was simply coming by to say good-bye. He said, "I have something for you guys." And in a very understated, matter of fact, way, he handed us a card. We opened the card and out from the card fell a set of car keys.

Gary began telling us what we needed to do to transfer the title of the car. He gave us some of the car's repair history. He told Marlene and I what great friends we had been to he and his wife and then said good-bye and left.

This happened 30 years ago, but I still remember Marlene's and my stunned reaction. We sat at our kitchen table with our mouths open. I finally said, "Marlene, did Gary just do what I think he did? Did he just give us his car?" She said, "I think so."

Gary and his wife, Lita, had two cars. One was a brand new Volkswagen; the other was a 10-year old broken down car. Gary and Lita gave us their brand new car, kept for themselves the old car, and took off for grad school.

Have you ever been on the receiving end of an extraordinary act of Christian kindness? Sometimes the kindness comes not through the receipt of a great gift, but rather through the non-receipt of expected anger or condemnation. Have you ever been kindly let off the hook by someone who you expected to nail you? Maybe you had an affair. You expected your wife or husband to walk away, or at least to hold a grudge. But instead, they welcomed you back and they refused to throw your affair in your face every time you had a disagreement. Maybe you were kindly let off the hook by a teacher, or coach, or a judge, or your parents. Not receiving the negativity you are expecting is also an act of kindness.

Shortly after our church joined the Vineyard movement, a former member of our church became quite angry with me and with our church leadership. She began a letter writing campaign alleging, among other things, that our Vineyard church was a cult, and that I was a cult leader. She wrote a list of the most slanderous and utterly false charges about me to Christian leaders all over the country. One of the people she wrote to was a prominent cult watcher, who without ever contacting me, or confirming this woman's story, joined her in the attack on me and our church. He sent out letters urging people to leave our church and urging Christian leaders in Columbus to disassociate themselves with us.

Of course, I wrote to him and tried to present my side of the story. He wrote me back and dismissively said, "This is what I would expect from a cult leader – denials and defensiveness."

One of the people that this woman wrote to was John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard movement. So I, along with our little church at the time, was slandered to the Vineyard movement's leader, who I respected greatly. At the time, John Wimber didn't know me at all and I thought my goodness, we just joined the movement and the first bit of news that John is going to receive about our church is that we abuse people and that we are being investigated by a cult watcher. I will never be able to escape this box of negative perception. First impressions are lasting impressions.

John assigned our case to a Christian author and psychiatrist named John White, who had a very warm relationship with the Vineyard movement. So I flew out to California to

meet with Dr. John White. I dreaded the meeting. He was a famous Christian author who had sold hundreds of thousands of books. I was a nobody. A prominent cult watcher was calling me a cult leader. There were all these slanderous charges. How could I possibly defend our church and myself to this great Christian man without appearing defensive or self-interested?

I sat down with Dr. John White in a restaurant. He immediately saw that I was intimidated. He reached out his hand and put it on my arm. He said, "It's okay. You don't need to be afraid."

I began to cry and said, "Dr. White, I don't know what to say. I think if you asked folks in Columbus, they could tell you about our church and our reputation."

He said, "I've already done that. I've also read through the entire file, including this woman's psychiatric file, which she sent along with her charges against you." Then, looking me in the eye, he said, "Rich, I believe you are a good man and I believe your church is a good church."

I said, "Dr. White, do you think I made any mistakes in the way I handled this particular person?"

He said, "No, I don't think so." And then he paused and said, "Yes, I do. Your only mistake was not exercising church discipline earlier with this woman." Then he said, "Rich, do not worry. Neither John Wimber, nor I receive any of these accusations against you. Your reputation has not been damaged in the Vineyard."

I walked away from that lunch with Dr. White and I felt like I had spent two hours with Jesus himself. After months of being hammered and slandered in this continuous letter writing campaign, I was released by an extraordinarily generous act of kindness towards me.

Have you ever experienced extraordinary kindness where you didn't receive the negative response that you expected?

Today, we are going to continue our study of King David from the Old Testament book of 2 Samuel. The theme of our study has been a focus upon the heart. Our theme verse has been 1 Samuel 16:7,

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1Sa 16:7 The LORD does not look at the things human beings look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

By the heart, the Bible is talking about the real you, the you below the surface, below the appearances. What should the real you be like? The real you out to be kind. I've called today's talk, "The Heart of Kindness." Let's pray.

We read in 2 Samuel 9.1

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2Sa 9:1 David asked, “Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan’s sake?”

2Sa 9:3 The king asked, “Is there no one still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show God’s kindness?”

2Sa 9:7 “Don’t be afraid,” David said to him, “for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table.”

The word kindness that is mentioned three times in 2 Samuel 9 is a notoriously difficult word to translate from the original Hebrew. The Old Testament Hebrew word here is the word “hesed”.

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The great Bible scholar, Leon Morris, in his book *Testaments of Love* said that there seems to be no accepted English equivalent for the word “hesed.” *The New English Bible* uses 33 different English words to translate the Hebrew word “hesed.” The old *King James Version* uses words like “loving kindness,” and “mercies.” The *NIV*, which we use here at the Vineyard tends to use variations on the word “love” to translate the word “hesed.” So, in the *NIV*, we read phrases like “unfailing love,” or “great love,” or “wonderful love,” or “faithful love” as a translation. All told, the *NIV* uses 25 different variations for translating this one Hebrew word “hesed.”

As I’ve investigated this Hebrew word “hesed” in various lexicons and theological dictionaries, it has a very broad semantic range. It includes love words on the one hand, and commitment words on the other. You could translate “hesed” as loyal love. It is love that is more than a feeling; love strengthened by loyalty; love strengthened by covenant. It is love strengthened by commitment.

Here is how I would define the word “hesed.” “Hesed” very simply is

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Kindness as a commitment.

By kindness as a commitment, I mean kindness regardless of the subject; kindness in spite of the subject; kindness that is not called forth by the pitiful condition of the other person. See, most appeals to charity and kindness will display a photograph of a beautiful little 3-year old girl in a pitiful condition staring straight at the camera with these big, sad, brown eyes. “Hesed” is not your response to the big, sad, brown eyes of a child. “Hesed” is your commitment to kindness regardless of how you feel. It is your

response to a Starbucks barista who gets your order wrong three times, or can't figure out how to punch in your order when you are in a hurry.

"Hesed," a commitment to kindness, is your chosen response to the dry cleaners who ruins your favorite shirt. "Hesed," a commitment to kindness, is your chosen decision to bite your tongue when you find out your cheating ex-spouse's new wife has decided to cheat on him.

Why is "hesed," kindness as a commitment, so important for the follower of Christ? It is because "hesed" is what God is like. "Hesed," kindness as a commitment, is the quality most often attributed to God in the Bible. There is no term used more often of God in the Old Testament than "hesed" – loving kindness, mercy, unfailing love, steadfast love. When the Lord wanted to reveal himself to the children of Israel, he spoke to Moses and said, "Moses, here is what you can tell people about me so that they will have an accurate picture of me." Exodus 34.6

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Ex 34:6 And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness,

The word "love" in verse 6 is "hesed."

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Ex 34:7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

The word "love" there again is "hesed." What God is saying to Moses is, "Moses, go tell the world that I am fundamentally committed to being kind."

In Psalm 136, this is a 26-verse Psalm that contains the refrain 26 times,

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His love endures forever.

His hesed, his commitment to be kind to us, endures forever. 26 times we are told this, just in the case we might forget. So it begins in verses 1-3, a commitment to a heart of kindness is a requirement to for every follower of Christ, because this is what the Lord is like.

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Ps 136:1 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. *His love endures forever.*

Ps 136:2 Give thanks to the God of gods. *His love endures forever.*

Ps 136:3 Give thanks to the Lord of lords: *His love endures forever.*

Abraham Heschel, the great 20th century Jewish Bible scholar said,

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When I was young I used to admire intelligent people. As I get older, I admire kind people.

Mother Teresa, who may have been the world's greatest contemporary model of the heart of kindness that I'm talking about today said,

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Be kind to each other. It is better to commit faults with gentleness than to work miracles with unkindness.

So to whom did David show kindness? He showed kindness, first of all, to his enemy, Saul. On two occasions David had a golden opportunity to get rid of the person who was making his life miserable. King Saul had chased him all over the wilderness, threatening to kill him. Today, at the very least, we would get a Civil Protection Order, which by the way is a very good thing to do if someone is repeatedly harassing you and abusing you.

On two occasions, David had a golden opportunity to get rid of his harasser and persecutor, King Saul. On one occasion, King Saul had moved to the back of a cave where David and his men were hiding. Saul had entered the cave to, if I can put it in polite terms, use the 'men's room.' And while Saul was using the men's room, he was surrounded by David and his men. David could have killed him and Saul would never have known what had happened. But David refused.

On another occasion, David came upon King Saul when Saul and his bodyguard had fallen asleep. We read in 1 Sam. 26.7-11 these words:

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^{1Sa 26:7} So David and Abishai went to the army by night, and there was Saul, lying asleep inside the camp with his spear stuck in the ground near his head. Abner and the soldiers were lying around him.

^{1Sa 26:8} Abishai said to David, "Today God has delivered your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of the spear; I won't strike him twice."

^{1Sa 26:9} But David said to Abishai, "Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the LORD's anointed and be guiltless?"

^{1Sa 26:10} As surely as the LORD lives," he said, "the LORD himself will strike him, or his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish.

^{1Sa 26:11} But the LORD forbid that I should lay a hand on the LORD's anointed. Now get the spear and water jug that are near his head, and let's go."

Why would David not permit his lieutenant to strike down King Saul? It was because David had a commitment to kindness even towards his enemies. He understood what was written in the scripture in Deuteronomy 32.35,

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Dt 32:35 It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them.”

What does kindness look like towards one’s enemy? Certainly, part of it involves a refusal to get even with the person who has hurt you. Certainly, part of a commitment to kindness involves a rejection of any act of revenge.

There was an article in the newspaper not too long ago which reported that one of the most often hit websites was a site devoted to two guys who buried something like 50 pounds of raw meat in their neighbor’s yard. They buried the raw meat in their neighbor’s yard because they found out their neighbor had read a postcard that was addressed to them. So they set up a video camera which recorded the neighbor digging up this stinking, rotten, maggot-filled meat in his yard. They posted his reaction on the Internet.

A few years ago the Tokyo police arrested a man who was denied entrance to a graduate school 14 years before. Since the man was denied entrance to this graduate school, he averaged about 10 phone calls a night between 8:00 p.m. and 2:00 a.m. to a former professor who he blamed for his lost opportunity. The police estimate that during these 14 years he made over 50,000 calls to harass his former professor. 50,000 calls.

Revenge? This man took it to a whole new level.

A study has been done on people’s driving habits. Listen to how average Americans have responded to various questions regarding their driving habits and ask yourself how you would have responded:

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1. I sometimes tailgate other drivers to encourage them to speed up or go faster.

Do you occasionally tailgate to encourage people to speed up? 68% of Americans say they do.

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2. I occasionally use obscene gestures with other drivers.

80% of Americans admit that they do.

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3. If someone cuts me off, I sometimes return the favor.

45% of Americans say they sometimes cut people off who have cut them off.

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4. I feel like most other drivers in my city are complete idiots.

60% of Americans say that most other drivers are idiots.

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5. If someone flicks me off on the road, I return the gesture.

53% of Americans say that if someone flicks them off on the road, they return the gesture.

There is an old joke in which an ex-wife is walking along the beach where she finds a magic lamp. She rubs the lamp and a genie comes out. The genie says, "Thanks for freeing me. I grant you three wishes." She says, "Anything I want?" The genie says, "Yes, anything you want, except that whatever you ask for, your ex-husband gets twice as much." She said, "You mean if I wish for something, my ex-husband gets double the amount?" The genie said, "That's the condition." She said, "okay, give me a million dollars." Immediately she received a million dollars, but her ex-husband has two million dollars placed at his feet.

She said, "okay, give me a huge diamond necklace." She received a new diamond necklace and immediately her ex-husband got one twice as big.

Then she said to the genie, "Ok, I know what I want for my third wish." The genie said, "What is it?" She said, "Scare me half to death."

In contrast to the harassing phone caller and the guys who buried dead meat in their neighbor's yard, and all of the people expressing road rage, David had a commitment to kindness, even with respect to his enemies. And not only is this commitment expressed by his refusal to get even, David's commitment to kindness is expressed by his reaction to the news of his enemy's death. We read in 2 Sam. 1:1-15.

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2Sa 1:1 After the death of Saul, David returned from striking down the Amalekites and stayed in Ziklag two days.

2Sa 1:2 On the third day a man arrived from Saul's camp with his clothes torn and dust on his head. When he came to David, he fell to the ground to pay him honor.

2Sa 1:3 "Where have you come from?" David asked him. He answered, "I have escaped from the Israelite camp."

2Sa 1:4 "What happened?" David asked. "Tell me." "The men fled from the battle," he replied. "Many of them fell and died. And Saul and his son Jonathan are dead."

2Sa 1:5 Then David said to the young man who brought him the report, "How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?"

2Sa 1:6 "I happened to be on Mount Gilboa," the young man said, "and there was Saul, leaning on his spear, with the chariots and their drivers in hot pursuit.

2Sa 1:7 When he turned around and saw me, he called out to me, and I said, 'What can I do?'

2Sa 1:8 "He asked me, 'Who are you?' " 'An Amalekite,' I answered.

2Sa 1:9 "Then he said to me, 'Stand here by me and kill me! I'm in the throes of death, but I'm still alive.'

2Sa 1:10 "So I stood beside him and killed him, because I knew that after he had fallen he could not survive. And I took the crown that was on his head and the band on his arm and have brought them here to my lord."

2Sa 1:11 Then David and all the men with him took hold of their clothes and tore them.

2Sa 1:12 They mourned and wept and fasted till evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the army of the LORD and the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

2Sa 1:13 David said to the young man who brought him the report, "Where are you from?" "I am the son of a foreigner, an Amalekite," he answered.

2Sa 1:14 David asked him, "Why weren't you afraid to lift your hand to destroy the LORD's anointed?"

2Sa 1:15 Then David called one of his men and said, "Go, strike him down!" So he struck him down, and he died.

Those of you who know your Bibles know that there is a difference between the Amalekites account of how King Saul died and the accounts of Saul's death that we read in 1 Samuel 31. In 1 Samuel 31, we read that Saul, who was surrounded by the Philistine enemy decided to commit suicide when his armor bearer refused to kill him to prevent him from being captured alive by the Philistines. And so we read in 1 Sam. 31.4-6 these words:

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1Sa 31:4 Saul said to his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword and run me through, or these uncircumcised fellows will come and run me through and abuse me." But his armor-bearer was terrified and would not do it; so Saul took his own sword and fell on it.

1Sa 31:5 When the armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he too fell on his sword and died with him.

1Sa 31:6 So Saul and his three sons and his armor-bearer and all his men died together that same day.

In contrast, in 2 Samuel 1, the Amalekite claims that he came upon a wounded Saul who was closed to death. Saul asked him to kill him and he complied. It is likely that these two incidents can be reconciled by assuming that the Amalekite lied to King David about his role in King Saul's death. This Amalekite probably was a battlefield scavenger, who happened upon the dead bodies of King Saul and some of his men. He thought to himself, "This is my lucky day. I can parlay my find of the dead King into a great reward for me. I'm going to go tell David that I killed his enemy and David is likely going to reward me."

The Amalekite is a prototype of every opportunistic schemer who sees in someone else's tragedy the opportunity to make a buck. How can I enrich myself off of this tragedy that has befallen another human being. Our nation is filled with Amalekites. The government can't even begin to calculate the amount of fraud that resulted from opportunistic schemers following Hurricane Katrina. Thousands and thousands of Amalekites saw in people's tragedy the opportunity to make a quick buck.

There were dozens of fake charities set up that supposedly helped the families of 9/11 victims. Anyone who has ever been in a car accident has had the Amalekites writing them letters soliciting business, or dropping by their hospital room to leave business cards. How often have you met an Amalekite as you sought to purchase a coffin for a recently deceased husband or wife or mother or father or child?

This Amalekite was certain that David would celebrate the news of King Saul's death. And he was also certain that he would receive a reward for killing David's enemy. What the Amalekite was unaware of was that David was not like him. What the Amalekite never anticipated was that David was a man transformed by his own experience of the kindness of God. What the Amalekite never fathomed was that he was encountering a man who had a heart of kindness towards his enemies. Rather than celebrate King Saul's death, David has an opposite reaction to the news of Saul's death. David grieves. 2 Sam. 1:11-12,

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2Sa 1:11 Then David and all the men with him took hold of their clothes and tore them.

2Sa 1:12 They mourned and wept and fasted till evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the army of the LORD and the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

Rather than reward the Amalekite for his supposed involvement in killing King Saul, David has the man executed.

Do you know how you can tell, friend, if you have a heart of kindness? You sometimes surprise people by your reaction to tragic news regarding someone who has hurt you. Has anyone ever been surprised by your response or your reaction to bad news regarding your competitor, your harasser, your abuser, your tormentor? They thought you would be happy to find out that the person finally got it in the neck. And you very honestly say, "What you are telling me doesn't make me happy at all. I'm very sorry to hear that."

Let me take this a step further. Have you ever surprised yourself by your reaction to bad news? You know, one sign that you are a truly converted person that you've been changed by the experience of God's kindness to you, is that you sometimes surprise yourself regarding the way you react to bad news concerning your enemy. You are not happy to hear that your ex is doing terribly. You are sad to hear that a boss who was utterly unfair to you has now been diagnosed with cancer. It gives you no pleasure to

hear that your old church, that you think was terrible, is experiencing a mass exodus. If your reaction to bad news regarding someone who has abused you is the same as it has always been, if your reaction to someone who is annoying and aggravating and inconveniences you, if it is utterly anticipated by you and everyone else, then you need to ask yourself: Have I been actually changed by an experience of God's kindness to me? Because if I have experienced God's heart of kindness, I can't help but demonstrate that same heart towards others.

And certainly part of our commitment to kindness is our chosen decision to speak well even of our enemy. In 2 Samuel 1.22 we read this:

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2Sa 1:22 "From the blood of the slain, from the flesh of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, the sword of Saul did not return unsatisfied.

David says, "Let me tell you about Saul. Whatever else you want to say about him, he was a mighty warrior."

Let me tell you about Pastor Jones. Whatever else you want to say about him now in all of his moral failures, that man was a great preacher. He was a good father. And at one time he was one of the great Christian leaders in our city.

You know that you've really embraced God's heart of kindness when you find yourself actually speaking well of someone who did you dirty.

A heart of kindness is not only shown to our enemies, a heart of kindness is shown to people who fail. We read in verses 17-18 these words:

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2Sa 1:17 David took up this lament concerning Saul and his son Jonathan

2Sa 1:18 and he ordered that the people of Judah be taught this lament of the bow (it is written in the Book of Jashar):

David orders the people of Judah to lament the deaths of Saul and Jonathan. And in verse 24, he calls upon the women to weep for Saul.

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2Sa 1:24 "Daughters of Israel, weep for Saul, who clothed you in scarlet and finery, who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold.

You see, a heart of kindness is what we read about in 1 Cor. 13 where it says:

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Love does not rejoice in iniquity.

A kind person takes no pleasure in finding out about the failure of someone else. This is the heart of God. We read in Ezekiel 18.23 these words:

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Eze 18:23 Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?

God is saying here, “I don’t take pleasure in, and I don’t do some dance of delight when I discover people who are self-destructing.” This heart of kindness towards people who fall was most fully expressed in Jesus Christ concerning the tragedy that was going to fall on those who rejected him. It says in Luke 19.41-44,

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Lk 19:41 As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it

Lk 19:42 and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes.

Lk 19:43 The days will come on you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side.

Lk 19:44 They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.”

How different is the heart of kindness that we see in David. How different is the heart of kindness that we see in God. How different is the heart of kindness that we see in Jesus than the perverse pleasure that we Americans seem to take in the humiliation and failure of public figures today. We have wall-to-wall coverage in Columbus of Maurice Claret. There is much speculation regarding that young man’s self-destructive spiral down. Wall-to-wall coverage of Mel Gibson’s self-destructive behavior. Newspaper coverage of pastors in our city who have a moral failure.

David says in 2 Samuel 1.20,

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2Sa 1:20 “Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines be glad, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised rejoice.

In other words, don’t cover Saul’s failure in the news. Don’t even talk about it. You know what’s on the news says something more about us as a nation than it says about the people whose failures are being covered. News in America, of course, is entirely market driven. The publishers of the news are constantly asking themselves, “What do the consumers want? Where is the demand? What will sell and drive up the ratings? How can we get more advertising?” All the reports of the failures of public figures says more about our national character than it says about any of the people being covered.

Our desire for juicy details of private people's failures also reveals to us our lack of hearts of kindness.

And how does David speak about Saul's failures? He doesn't. In fact, he is committed to speak well. Look at what David says in verse 23,

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2Sa 1:23 Saul and Jonathan— in life they were loved and admired, and in death they were not parted. They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions.

Saul was loved? No Saul was a mean person. Saul was a hateful person. Saul consulted with a witch. Saul was demonized. David, what's the matter with you? Saul was much loved? David, are you in some kind of denial here?

You know what a heart of kindness does? A heart of kindness practices forgetfulness regarding a person's sins and failures. Have you noticed how often the Bible does that? It practices a forgetfulness regarding people's obvious sins? In the New Testament when you read phrases like "righteous Lot" in reference to Lot. You say, "righteous? This guy was living in Sodom." Or that phrase in James, "Remember the patience of Job or the perseverance of Job." I don't know if when I read the book of Job, the qualities of patience and perseverance jump off the page. The one I love is when Paul speaks about Father Abraham in Romans 4.20,

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Ro 4:20 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God,

Did not waver? Abraham slept with another woman in order to bring forth a son. Did not waver in faith? In my home, if I slept with another woman and she gave birth to a son, that would be regarded as a *waver*.

You say, what's going on here? What's going on is that the Holy Spirit, who inspired scripture, is demonstrating to us God's heart of kind forgetfulness regarding our failures. Kind forgetfulness. It says in Isaiah 43.25,

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Isa 43:25 "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.

He removes them from the record and he remembers them no more.

A young person I know was picked up for drunk driving. They had a misdemeanor count of their record. But later their record was expunged. Now if they are ever investigated

for criminal activity, the response given will be, “We have no record of this person.” Their record has not simply been pardoned, it has been completely removed from the files and destroyed. It has been blotted out, never to be seen again.

This is what God does with our sins. When you trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior, God removes your record from the files. He doesn’t keep it there or daily add the long list of sins you continue to commit even as a Christian. And he not only blots out our sins, but he remembers them no more.

Let me apply this, friends. Some of you don’t know the kindness of the Lord towards failures because you don’t understand this principle of divine forgetfulness. You look at the various areas of sin in your life and as you scrutinize yourself, your self-scrutiny turns into self-condemnation. The only thing you are conscious of is all the areas where you fall short, or your fail, where your plans didn’t come about, where your faithfulness wavered. There might be issues in your life where you look back and say, “You know, I just can’t forget this. How am I supposed to receive kindness when I can’t forget what I have done? How can I practice forgetfulness regarding myself and my own failures?”

By practicing the remembrance of God’s forgiveness. Someone with ultimate authority to forgive sins, someone who has the power to declare a person innocent, namely the Lord, has taken that authority and suddenly, regarding you, your sins are blotted out. You are innocent. You practice forgetfulness of your own sins by practicing more strongly the remembrance of God’s forgiveness. When sin gets stirred up in your mind; I can’t seem to forget my lapse into immorality; I can’t seem to forget my failure regarding my abortion; I can’t seem to forget the lies that I’ve told; the betrayal I’ve committed; that stupid thing I did at work for which I was fired – immediately say to yourself, “Yes, but this will I call to mind. I will remember that Almighty God who has authority to blot out my sins has said, “I forgive you.” The remembrance of God’s forgiveness overwhelms the remembrance of my sins in the same way that the noon day sun overwhelms my awareness that the moon is still up in the sky.

You know, during the day the moon is still up in the sky. But the light of the noon day sun is so bright that you are not aware of the presence of the moon. The heart of kindness does that with other people’s failures. I just can’t forget what this other person did to me – my spouse who betrayed me through adultery, this person who did me dirty in my small group, this pastor, my father, my mother - I can’t seem to forget it, okay. Can you call to mind just as strongly or even more strongly the remembrance that you have chosen to forgive them? Can you call to mind even more strongly that you chose to tear up their debt and hand them over to Almighty God?

I believe that David practiced the remembrance of forgiveness so well that he was able to be forgetful of Saul’s sin. I believe that David so models the heart of kindness that he was sincere when he said, “Saul, in life he was loved and admired...”

And the last thing that I see in David is not only a heart of kindness towards his enemies, and not only a heart of kindness towards those who fail, but a heart of kindness to the unimportant. We read in 2 Sam. 9.1-7 these words:

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2Sa 9:1 David asked, "Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?"

2Sa 9:2 Now there was a servant of Saul's household named Ziba. They summoned him to appear before David, and the king said to him, "Are you Ziba?" "At your service," he replied.

2Sa 9:3 The king asked, "Is there no one still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show God's kindness?" Ziba answered the king, "There is still a son of Jonathan; he is lame in both feet."

2Sa 9:4 "Where is he?" the king asked. Ziba answered, "He is at the house of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar."

2Sa 9:5 So King David had him brought from Lo Debar, from the house of Makir son of Ammiel.

2Sa 9:6 When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor. David said, "Mephibosheth!" "At your service," he replied.

2Sa 9:7 "Don't be afraid," David said to him, "for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table."

Three times in seven verses we read the word "hesed." In verse 1

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2Sa 9:7 "Don't be afraid," David said to him, "for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table."

You know, David here is on top of the world. 2 Samuel 8 has reviewed for us the great victories of David. When David said in 2 Sam. 9.1,

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2Sa 9:1 David asked, "Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?"

This was on the heels of some of the greatest victories a man could ever experience. David's kingdom was expanding. 2 Samuel 8 tells us that the borders of Israel encompass in David's lifetime all of what we would call today modern Lebanon; the borders included modern Syria; the borders included modern Jordan. By 2 Samuel 9 David was a major world leader to be reckoned with.

But here is the principle. The heart of kindness is especially required of you when you are on top of the world. It is so easy when you are on top of the world, when your love life is rolling along, when you are making money, when you are esteemed by others, to overlook the unimportant people in the world.

Dave Barry, the humor writer, once said, "A person who is nice to you, but rude to the waiter is not a nice person."

"Hesed." The heart of kindness refers to how you relate to the man who empties your trash can at work. "Hesed," a heart of kindness, refers to how you relate to the young woman who has a learning disability at Bob Evans restaurant. "Hesed," a commitment to kindness refers to how you relate to children and the elderly and people who can't do anything for you.

David doesn't treat this crippled young man as a non-entity. David's heart of kindness is shown by him learning the crippled man's name. The first thing that David says to this man is "Mephibosheth."

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2Sa 9:6 When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor. David said, "Mephibosheth!"

Seven times in chapter 9 we read the name "Mephibosheth." What the Holy Spirit is communicating to us in the scriptures is that this cripple is a person with a name. And his name is not "cripple;" his name is not "disabled;" his name is not "handicapped;" his name is Mephibosheth.

Do you take the time to learn the names of the unimportant people who serve you? That is the heart of kindness.

Let me close with this story. The story comes from Christopher DeVinck's *The Power of the Powerless*. The author writes:

One October day in 1946 while my mother was pregnant with Oliver, her second son, my father rose from bed, shaved, dressed and went to work. At the train station he realized he had forgotten something, so he returned to the house and discovered the smell of gas leaking from the coal burning stove. My mother was unconscious in her bed.

My older brother was sleeping in his crib which was quite high off the ground, so the gas did not affect him. My father pulled them out of the room and outside where my mother revived quickly. And that was that.

Six months later on April 20, 1947 Oliver was born, a healthy looking plump beautiful boy. Oliver seemed like any other newborn. My mother and father told my sisters and brothers and me over the years as they repeated the story with their deep love and joy. There was no sign that anything was amiss.

One afternoon, a few months after he was born, my mother brought Oliver to a window. She held him there in the sun, the bright sun. And there Oliver rested in my mother's arms. And when Oliver looked and looked directly into the sunlight, it was the first moment that my mother realized Oliver was blind. My parents, the true heroes of the story, learned with the passing months that Oliver could not hold up his head, could not crawl, walk, sing. He could not hold anything in his hands. He could not speak.

After visiting several neurosurgeons, doctor after doctor repeated the verdict. Oliver's case was hopeless. Oliver could do absolutely nothing except breathe, sleep, eat, and yet he was responsible for action, love, courage, insight. For me, to have been brought up in a house where a tragedy was turned into a joy, explains to a great degree why I am the type of husband, father, writer and teacher I have become.

I remember my mother saying when I was small, "Isn't it wonderful that you can see?" And when she said, "When you go to heaven, Oliver will run to you, embrace you, and the first thing he will say is 'thank you.'" That leaves an impression on a boy. I remember, too, my mother's explaining to me that we were blessed with Oliver in ways that were not clear to her at first. We were fortunate that Oliver's case was so severe. The best we could do for him was feed him three times a day, bathe him, and keep him warm. He did not need us to be there in the room all day. He never knew what his condition was. We were blessed with his presence, a true presence of peace.

So often, parents are faced with a child who is severely retarded, but who is also hyperactivity, demanding or wild, who needs constant care. So many people have little choice but to place their child in an institution. Each circumstance is different. No one can judge.

I asked my father once, "How did you care for Oliver for 32 years?" He said, "It was not 32 years, I just asked myself, can I feed Oliver today? The answer always was, yes I can."

Once when I was telling my students the story of Oliver they said, "You mean Mr. DeVinck, that he was a vegetable?" I stammered for a few seconds and I said, "Well, I guess you could call him a vegetable. I called him Oliver, my brother. You would have loved him."

When I was in my early 20's, I met a girl and I fell in love. After a few months I brought her home for dinner to meet my family. After the introduction, the small talk, my mother went to the kitchen to check the meal, and I asked the girl, "Would you like to see Oliver?" For I had, of course, told her about my brother. "No," she answered. She did not want to see him. It was if she slapped me in the face, yet I said something polite and walked to the dining room.

Soon after, I met Roe, Rosemary – a dark-haired, dark-eyed lovely girl. She asked me the names of my brothers and sisters. She loved children. I thought she was wonderful.

I brought her home after a few months to meet my family. The introductions. The small talk. We ate dinner; then it was time for me to feed Oliver. I walked into the kitchen, reached for the red bowl and the egg and cereal, and the milk and the banana and prepared Oliver's meal. Then, I remembered, I sheepishly asked Roe if she would like to come upstairs and see Oliver. "Sure," she said, and up the stairs we went.

I sat at Oliver's bedside as Roe stood and watched over my shoulder. I gave him his first spoonful, his second. "Can I do that?" Roe asked. "Can I do that?" with ease, with freedom, with compassion, so I gave her the bowl, and she fed Oliver one spoonful at a time.

The Power of the Powerless. Which girl would you marry? Today Roe and I have three children... At Oliver's funeral, a Catholic priest said, "Parents take pride in the success of their children: a graduation, an award, financial success, worldly honors. So much to do with honor is filled with the pride of life. Oliver gave honor to his parents in a different way. He honored them by revealing them to us. We learned from him what kind of people Catherine and Jose are. They were people with hearts of kindness.

Friend, is it your desire to be a kind person? There is almost nothing you could desire in life that would make you more like Jesus than that God would put in you a heart of kindness. Let's pray.

A Heart of Kindness

Rich Nathan

August 12-13, 2006

1 and 2 Samuel: The Heart After God Series

2 Samuel 1 and 9

I. The Experience Of Kindness

II. The Hebrews Had A Word For It (2 Sam. 9.1, 3, 7)

III. The Demonstration Of Kindness

- A. Kindness To Our Enemies. (2 Sam. 1)
- B. Kindness To Those Who Have Failed.
- C. Kindness To The Unimportant. (2 Sam. 9)