*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

September 20 - 25

*Fruit of the Spirit: Kindness*

**Monday, September 20 Hosea 11:1-4**

*“I led Israel along with my ropes of kindness and love”*

 Hosea portrays two contrasting images: God the loving Father and Israel the stubborn, unrepentant son. When Israel was young and in need of tender care and guidance, God loved his people by delivering them out of Egypt. The nation, however, soon turned its back on God. Still, God did not give up on his child but took him by the hand and taught him how to walk—that is, how to succeed as a young nation among the older, experienced nations of the world.

 Kindness is the word used to describe God’s attitude and actions toward a rebellious Israel. He led his people gently yet firmly (“ropes of kindness”), delivering his people from the yoke of slavery and feeding them in the wilderness.

*Heavenly Father. I admit that I have done my own share of rebelling against you. Thank you for not giving up on me but continuing to guide me with kindness. Amen.*

**Tuesday, September 21 Romans 11:22-24**

*“Notice how God is both kind and stern”*

 In the verses leading up to this passage (11:17-21), Paul describes God’s dealings with his people, the Jews, who are likened to an olive tree. God has established Israel as his chosen people, but he will use his power to break off some of the branches if they refuse to come to him in faith. At the same time, God has no reluctance in taking wild branches (i.e., Gentiles) and grafting them into the tree, provided that the wild branches do what the original branches have refused to do.

 God is thereby “both kind and stern,” and it is the response of the people that determines which aspect of God’s nature becomes most clear to them. If they refuse to believe, stern judgment will come to them. If they believe, it is the kindness of God that will be their reality.

*Dear God. I know that you are a stern God when it comes to sin, and I confess that I have sinned. Still, in spite of my sin, you have offered me salvation and I have gratefully accepted it. Thank you for your kindness to me. Amen.*

**Wednesday, September 22 Ruth 2:1-23**

*“He has shown kindness”*

 Boaz and Ruth represent ideal models of extraordinary character. As Ruth seizes the initiative to show kindness to her mother-in-law, Naomi, a woman who has lost both her husband and her two sons, by foraging for food in the fields, so the text encourages its readers to take the initiative in showing kindness to others. There are risks involved, but Ruth’s selfless attitude, action, and hard work result in God honoring her.

 When Ruth thanks Boaz for showing kindness toward her by allowing her to gather grain in his fields, by inviting her to enjoy the companionship of the servant women, to take rest and water when she needs it, and by warning the young men not to harass her in any way, she asks what she has done to deserve such kindness. Boaz replies that his kindness toward her is a direct result of her kindness toward Naomi.

 It is not in some religious setting that Ruth and Boaz manifest their kindness. Rather, it is in the daily workplace, the place where too often kindness is lacking. Such manifestations of kindness are the result of commitment to the Lord, and both Ruth and Boaz exhibit kindness qualities to those around them.

*Kind Father, I pray that Ruth and Boaz will be models for my relationships with others. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

September 20 - 25

*Fruit of the Spirit: Kindness*

**Thursday, September 23 Proverbs 14:21-22, 30-31**

*“Whoever is kind to the needy honors God”*

 It is a sin to despise one’s neighbor by failing to help in time of need (the word “despise” is used in 14:2 for rejecting God and his way). Thus, to despise one’s neighbor is to despise God, but to be kind to one’s neighbor who is in need is to be kind to God. Those who plan evil toward their neighbor, that is, who withhold kindness in times of need, are rewarded with going astray, so it is better to plan for the good of your neighbor and enjoy its return in love and faithfulness.

 According to verse 30, one of attitudes that “rots life away” is jealousy toward others. But, a relaxed posture toward others opens up the opportunity for kindness. Verse 31 makes explicit what was implied in verses 21 and 22, that mistreatment of the needy is equal to insulting the one who made them and cares for them. To honor the needy is to honor God, and this results in the “return” of verse 22 which promises the unfailing love and faithfulness of God.

*Lord, it is my desire to honor you. I commit myself to showing acts of kindness to those in need, for in doing so I will be honoring your love for them. Amen.*

**Friday, September 24 2 Timothy 2:23-36**

*“The Lord’s servants . . . must be kind to everyone”*

 Paul is warning against disputes that produce quarrels. Verse 14 identified this quarreling as a kind of verbal warfare used by the opponents of God’s truth. Thus, it must not characterize a follower of Jesus Christ.

 Instead, the Lord’s servant must be kind. The word here carries the idea of gentleness and stands in contrast to a controversial spirit. Paul is not teaching passivity; there is truth to be taught, and taught in a strong, capable way. But, when there is evil opposition to God’s truth, God’s people must show patience in the midst of difficulty.

 The picture is one of meeting the behavior of aggressive, controversial people, absorbing the pain without losing one’s temper and lashing out at them. The hope is that God will use our kindness to change their hearts.

*Help me, Lord, when I am involved in conflict to set aside my desire to be quarrelsome and instead show kindness for the sake of the person with whom I am disagreeing. Thus, I agree with you that, ultimately, they are more important than the issue. Amen.*

**Saturday, September 25 Ephesians 4:30-32**

*“Be kind to each other”*

 The language of grieving the Holy Spirit is derived from Isaiah 63:10, “But they [Israel] rebelled against him [God] and grieved his Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit lives within us as our seal guaranteeing salvation. His role is to equip us to live God’s way. When we choose to hang on to our old habits, we bring harm to our relationship with God.

 With the Spirit’s help, we need to get rid of the hostility and selfish actions that destroy human relationships. Instead, we need to show kindness to others. Such kindness leads to forgiveness, the antidote to the old hostile ways in which we used to treat each other and which led to bitterness and carrying grudges.

 We are called to reflect God’s attitude and acts toward us. God is known concretely in the cross and resurrection. He is not “out there” to dream about, but present to change lives. He is the standard for our actions, and to be his child means to copy his acts. We have received his kindness, and we are to show kindness to others. He loves, and we are to love.

*Kind and loving Father, through your Spirit who lives in me, help me to cultivate the fruit of kindness that others may experience you in me. Amen.*