

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

ACTIVATED

Vol 23 • Issue 9

THE COMPASSION GAME

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A habit to foster

Here First

Right or rights?

Through the Looking Glass

My new life



EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

BEING KIND

I don't know about you, but I've been thinking a lot about the state of the world lately. The last few years have been anything but easy for most people, and intros to previous editions have covered aspects of the pandemic and the economic difficulties that so many have faced. But this year seemed like it might herald a different kind of reality, a new hope, as it were.

That's not really how things seem to have turned out, have they? I'm thinking in particular of the return of war of aggression to the European continent for the first time in over 75 years. (This issue of *Activated* features a firsthand account from a regular contributor who worked among refugees for many years, only to find herself fleeing Eastern Ukraine in March 2022.) But there are several other ongoing, more-or-less-frozen conflicts around the world, and there are also other types of pain and misery. In the face of it all, how can we, as individuals, respond? Kindness and compassion would be a good start, but what does it look like?

For a perfect example of kindness, we need look no further than Jesus. Jesus lived a life of perfect kindness, including three years spent continuously healing the sick, feeding the hungry, teaching the people, caring for widows, and nurturing children.

Jesus was perfectly selfless in everything He did. He noticed the needy and intentionally sought them out, even when He Himself was tired and weary. He was kind to everyone, even those who didn't "deserve" it. Jesus was the living expression of God's kindness in His mission to seek and save the lost, and He gave His life so that we might have eternal life.¹ Even on the cross, He displayed compassion by praying for those who were executing Him: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."²

So what does kindness look like? It looks like Jesus. Let's make Him our role model and kindness our lifestyle, today and every day.

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1. See Luke 19:10.

2. Luke 23:34

EVE'S PIANO DREAM

BY IRENA ŽABIČKOVÁ

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, one of my neighbors was a shy 10-year-old girl with very inquisitive eyes and a big smile.

One day, Eve mentioned her dream of learning to play the piano. Unfortunately, it was all her parents could do to put food on the table for the family of eight, and they couldn't afford to get her a piano, much less pay for lessons. Our conversation soon moved on to other things, but all I could think of was my old dusty keyboard stashed away in my cupboard for many years, and all the piano lessons I had taken as a child, which I hadn't been thankful for at that time. I remembered the Bible verse: "Freely you have received, freely give."¹

I asked Eve if she'd let me teach her, and her eyes lit up. "I would love that!" she exclaimed.

So it was that she started coming over for free classes and practice. We shared wonderful moments together,

during which I was also able to introduce Jesus to her. On lesson days, when I got home from work, she was always eagerly waiting at my door with her music sheets.

Eventually, our paths parted, but we've kept in touch over the years. She now has a family of her own, and no, she hasn't become a professional pianist, but she can play well enough to bring joy to her own life and to teach her children.

Even more importantly, she has put Jesus at the center of her life. He is her anchor and friend, and she shares her faith with others.

I'm very grateful that God brought Eve into my life, and that I was able to add my piece into the mosaic of her life. This experience taught me the importance of giving, and that giving of our time can sometimes have a greater impact than we can imagine.

1. Matthew 10:8

2. <http://www.perunmondomigliore.org>

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THE COMPASSION GAME

BY MARIA FONTAINE



IT'S NATURAL TO MAKE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT PEOPLE. Sadly, what we tend to assume is often *negative*. Personally, I have seen how very easy it is to do this, and I often pray that God will stop me at the first thought of any kind of critical or self-righteous feelings toward others. We all know that it's wrong according to Scripture for us to think this way about others. It doesn't reflect how Jesus is. Even if these perceptions are technically accurate, they may be uncharitable or shallow, and probably don't take into account all the factors behind why a person acts or responds in certain ways.

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1. Romans 7:15 CEV
 2. 2 Corinthians 10:5
 3. See Philippians 4:8; Romans 9:15.

I think this common human weakness of assuming the negative or drawing negative conclusions indicates how important it is that we actively and continually work to take on the mind of Christ. It takes a conscious effort to avoid defaulting to these negative tendencies. We often think we know what the situation is and that we can assess it correctly, when in reality, we see only part of the full picture.

Can we know what is going on in someone else's thoughts or heart? Can we look into a person's soul and ascertain the private details of their life? Of course we can't.

When a person's motives are unknown and we don't agree with their actions or perspectives, or they rub us the wrong way, it's easy to conclude that their motives are

more likely to be wrong than right. However, when we look to Jesus and allow Him to guide our thoughts, He can help us to see things as *He* sees them.

We know how wrong criticizing others is. We know it displeases God and is contrary to His Word. However, as the apostle Paul said, “I don’t understand why I act the way I do. I don’t do what I know is right. I do the things I hate.”¹

Overcoming our sinful human nature is an ongoing process. Being immersed in this world also influences us and we need to bring our attitudes into alignment with Jesus’ teaching. This is part of “bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”²

We can all recall times when our words were judged wrongly or unfairly by others, or our actions were misinterpreted and our sincere efforts were rejected out of suspicion or preconceived attitudes. That hurts. It can be very discouraging. Or we can remember when something we did or said was just an awkward or clumsy attempt to be understood or loved or acknowledged, yet others judged us as intentionally trying to hurt them or someone else. Since we know how that feels, perhaps we need to look at others and realize that *they* could be feeling the same way, and if so, we have an opportunity to help alleviate their pain.

Whether the person we are criticizing is right or wrong, *we* are wrong to allow a critical mindset to influence us. I know I’ve been guilty of making snap judgments about people, and often those judgments turned out to be wrong.

So I started trying to change this negative habit into a positive one of asking for *God’s* mind on the situation. He reminds me to play a sort of game, *the Compassion Game*,

of thinking about possible scenarios or reasons why what looks negative to me might actually be someone’s cry for help. Perhaps with God’s guidance I might be able to meet that need in some way. The help I can offer may sometimes be primarily through prayer, but that doesn’t make it any less powerful.

The Bible instructs us to think on the good things, the things of good report, the beautiful, the kind, the loving things, and to exercise compassion and mercy rather than assuming the worst.³ The more I practice letting God guide my thoughts to the good, the more I move toward making this reaction a habit.

Another way to develop this habit of seeing the positive is to implement what someone wisely said, “You learn something most thoroughly when you teach it.” As parents and grandparents, when we are with our children and grandchildren, we can use the experiences that we have had as teaching opportunities. Teaching children to play this *Compassion Game* not only helps them develop a tender heart for others, but it also teaches them humility and understanding, as well as about prayer and how to use it to make a difference in others’ lives. It can help them learn how to treat others the way they would want to be treated, and even how to look at their own struggles and shortcomings in a more positive way.

The *Compassion Game* is a game you’ll probably start off playing solo, but the blessings and benefits grow even more as you share what you’ve learned with others.

MARIA FONTAINE AND HER HUSBAND, PETER AMSTERDAM, ARE DIRECTORS OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL, A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF FAITH. ADAPTED FROM THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE. ■



BY LI LIAN

GRANDMA, GRANDPA, AND THE DRUMSTICKS

I KNEW A PAIR OF GRANDPARENTS WHOSE HOME WAS FURNISHED WITH ANTIQUE ARMCHAIRS, ornate flower arrangements, and burgundy carpets. Aside from being an experienced homemaker, opera singer and diligent gardener, the petite, elderly woman we affectionately referred to as Grandma was an excellent cook.

One of her favorite dishes to prepare was delicious roast chicken with steamed potatoes, herbs, and garnishes. Grandma had been raised to believe that the chicken leg was the most desirable part of the chicken, yielding the juiciest and most succulent meat. Grandma loved drumsticks, but when she divided the half-chicken she shared with Grandpa, she always gave it to him.

Grandpa, a prominent judge, was quiet by nature, spending most of his day poring over files related to his work and reading from his

large library. Each time Grandma served him food, he responded with a quiet “Thank you.”

That is, until one day a few years into their marriage, when he politely asked, “Would it be possible for me to have the other piece this time?” He went on to explain that he actually preferred the white meat.

Grandma was surprised at this request. All this time, she had assumed that the chicken leg was the best part and willingly gave it to Grandpa. In like manner, he had assumed she must prefer the chicken breast and willingly let her have it. Both of them had a good laugh about the incident, and from then on, each of them had their choice piece.

Their marriage lasted for over 50 years, as both of them were committed to living out the following principle: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition—but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”¹

Honesty and kindness are some of the most important qualities for successful relationships.

I think probably kindness is my number one attribute in a human being. I'll put it before any of the things like courage or bravery or generosity or anything else.

—*Roald Dahl (1916–1990)*

Spread love everywhere you go. Let no one ever come to you without leaving happier.

—*Mother Teresa (1910–1997)*

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1. Philippians 2:3–4 NIV

HAVE COURAGE AND BE KIND

BY ROSANE PEREIRA

THE 2015 ADAPTATION OF CINDERELLA PORTRAYS A YOUNG WOMAN WHO LIVES HER LIFE BY THE MOTTO THAT HER PARENTS TAUGHT HER BEFORE THEY DIED: “Have courage and be kind!”

While thinking lately on what God wants from humanity, I was reminded of this message. Why did God put us here in the first place? Theologians explain that the Bible tells us that God was already a community of three persons in one being—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—that had perfect, infinite love within Them and They didn’t need any more. They created us so that *more* beings could share in this love. God’s heart was bursting with so much love that He wanted to share it with more people.

Jesus said that the most important thing in our existence is to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.¹ And courage is nearly as important, because it often takes courage to be loving, to do the right things, to protect others from harm, and just to face the struggles of everyday living.

It took God infinite love, and also infinite courage, to send His Son into our broken world as a tiny baby, to walk our dusty roads, and to share in our sorrows and diseases. And it took Jesus infinite love, and infinite courage, to go through the pain of life, and the torture of death on the cross so that we could have eternal life!

The movie taught that Cinderella couldn’t have endured all the hardships she had to go through without

1. See Matthew 22:37–39.



these two important virtues, and I’m convinced that neither can we. We must choose to walk hand in hand in kindness with others, even when we don’t know the way ahead. And we must be courageous to face whatever comes our way, with the faith that our heavenly Father is leading us in His love and wisdom.

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THE WAY TO LOVE

[The] insistence on the absolutely indiscriminate nature of compassion within the Kingdom is the dominant perspective of almost all of Jesus’ teaching. What is indiscriminate compassion? Take a look at a rose. Is it possible for the rose to say, “I’ll offer my fragrance to good people and withhold it from bad people”? Or can you imagine a lamp that withholds its rays from a wicked person who seeks to walk in its light? It could do that only by ceasing to be a lamp. And observe how helplessly and indiscriminately a tree gives its shade to everyone, good and bad, young and old, high and low; to animals and humans and every living creature—even to the one who seeks to cut it down. This is the first quality of compassion—its indiscriminate character.

—Anthony de Mello (1931–1987)



BY MILA NATALIYA A. GOVORUKHA

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

I WALK IN AND HEAR VOICES ALL AROUND, but I understand nothing.

How many times have I been in a similar place?—In the facility of an association or nonprofit that works with people in need—the disabled, children with special needs, single mothers, orphans, the elderly, and of course, refugees from every imaginable corner of the world.

These types of places have a special atmosphere, one that's not easy to describe. You see broken lives up close, with your own eyes, along with incredible suffering, the kind of everyday pain that is often borne in silence and solitude. You face traumatized souls and aching hearts, and you realize that when desperation is met by hope, indifference turns into action, and depression can be overcome by the kind deeds of people who care.

I've participated in many such projects in different parts of the world and have often wondered what motivated my fellow volunteers—university students, middle-aged fathers and mothers, retirees—the everyday people who make such a difference. Was it empathy?

1. Matthew 25:40 NIV

Faith in God? The desire to do good, to be useful, to make a difference? Maybe a bit of everything.

I've spent years doing humanitarian work in Russia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Germany, Romania, the Philippines, Moldova, Iraq and, of course, in my own country, Ukraine. I spent five years in the mid-nineties in the Kharkiv region of Ukraine, working with orphanages, performing puppet shows, organizing the distribution of Christmas presents, rallying students to volunteer with us. More recently, I spent two years between 2015 and 2017 participating in and directing camps for children from displaced families from the Donetsk region, and before the Covid-19 pandemic, I was working with a team creating murals at children's institutions. Our last mural was



painted in December 2021, a time that seems like such a distant past. A previous life. Before the war.

Will I ever be able to return to my beloved, amazing, tortured, and now half-devastated land? Did I ever think that one day I would be on the run for my own life? Collecting all possible information about refugee status, rights, possibilities, and the limitations of temporary protected status? Trying to figure out at least some kind of semblance of a plan? Wondering how long it will take for the war to come to an end?

I walk into the room.

I was told that I could ask for information at this association, nestled in a simple street of the small Western European town I've fled to. A very friendly person at the gate greets me—in English, thankfully—and offers me tea or coffee. A choice! And the option of sugar and milk! Next, he hands me a packaged cookie.

Now I'm waiting in line in a little yard with people of at least 15 different nationalities—men, women, and children from the Middle East, Africa, and Ukraine.

When it's my turn, another person with a badge takes me inside to a tiny office with two tables and six chairs.

What do I need? Food? Shoes? Shampoo, toothbrush? Language classes? What about a free haircut?

Valerie, the very bubbly 52-year-old English-speaking hairdresser, takes me to the next room, which is the size of a big closet. She hugs me when I tell her that I am from Ukraine, then sits me in a simple chair, covers me with a black haircutting cape, and asks me what kind of hairstyle I would like.

That's when the tears come. What am I crying about? I'm not sure anymore. All I know is that my life will never be the same.

Valerie keeps up a bubbly conversation as she works, telling me a bit about her life. She prefers black coffee without sugar. She has a grown-up son who lives in Italy. And she keeps checking in about how I like my hair in the back and my bangs. She says she's a bookkeeper who works in the neighboring city and volunteers here once a month.

I feel taken care of, welcomed, rested, and understood. At the end she gives me a tiny blue card with her contact info. "Write me. Whatever you need. Even to simply meet for coffee and a chat."

My heart is overflowing with gratitude for Valerie, the lady that registered me and explained how I could be helped here, the volunteers in the corridor, the man at the entrance, and as I walk slowly through the streets of this brand-new-to-me town, a Bible verse I memorized in my early twenties gets a new meaning: "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."¹

With the care of kind people like these, and God's love and protection, I will be fine.

MILA NATALIYA A. GOVORUKHA IS A YOUTH COUNSELOR AND VOLUNTEER FROM UKRAINE. ■

BY KEITH PHILLIPS

THE BEST GIFT

LIFE IS FILLED WITH DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES, and at one time or another we all find ourselves in some particularly desperate situation. These desperate situations cause us to turn to God for help, but that's often when we feel that our own prayers are inadequate. Sometimes that's because we're out of practice, sometimes it's because we think we don't have as much faith as we need, sometimes it's because we feel undeserving of God's help, and sometimes we fear that even our most heartfelt prayers will fall short. It's at times like that when we most appreciate the love, concern, and prayers of others.

And it works both ways. Being there for others in their times of need and putting our love and concern into action by praying for them are two of the truest and most effective ways we can live the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

But praying for others is not only the right thing to do, it's also the smart thing. Worrying about the situation will get us nowhere. Taking matters into our own hands won't get us much further. But taking the situation to God in prayer will ensure the best possible results, for "this is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us."¹

Nothing else we can do for another costs so little or goes so far as prayer. Of course, when we pray, God may show us that there is something more we can do to help resolve the situation, but our first response to any problem should be to pray. Let's remember that the next time a loved one or neighbor needs our prayers—and, as Jesus taught, our neighbor is anyone who needs our help.

KEITH PHILLIPS WAS *ACTIVATED'S* EDITOR-IN-CHIEF FOR 14 YEARS FROM 1999 TO 2013. HE AND HIS WIFE CARYN NOW WORK WITH THE HOMELESS IN THE USA. ■

A PRAYER TO GIVE YOUR HEART TO GOD

Dear Jesus, thank You for dying for me so that all my wrongs can be forgiven. I now open the door to my heart and ask You to please come into my life, forgive me for my sins, fill me with the Holy Spirit, and give me Your free gift of eternal life. Amen.



1. 1 John 5:14 NIV

HERE FIRST

BY JORGE SOLÁ



MY THREE-YEAR-OLD SON WAS PLAYING AN EDUCATIONAL GAME ON THE COMPUTER WHEN HIS SIX-YEAR-OLD SISTER DEMANDED THAT HE LET HER HAVE A TURN. His response was typical.

“I was here first!”

I don't know where my son picked that up, but it got me thinking. It's a generally accepted principle of human society that those who “get there first” have more rights than those who get there after them. The first one to set foot on virgin land is entitled to take possession of it. The first one to find a pearl in the sea, or strike gold or oil may claim it as his own. The first one to make a scientific discovery or invention may patent his find and claim any profits that may result. The first one to settle in on a particular spot on the beach becomes the owner of that spot for the day.

In my children's case, if one of them has been playing for half an hour at the computer, I tell him or her that it's time to let the other one have a turn. Most other parents probably do something similar. But if we applied that principle to every aspect of society, there would be absolute chaos. Can you imagine a landowner saying, “I've had this plot of land for quite a while, so it's time to let someone else enjoy it”? Or can you imagine a man

who has a good job giving it to someone else who is out of work and short of money?

Those examples are rather extreme, but what about little acts of selflessness? How often do you see people who have a seat on the bus or subway offering it to someone who has just boarded, simply because they look like they'd appreciate a chance to rest their weary feet? Are little sacrifices like that too much to expect?—Or do we fail to make them simply because we don't see anyone else making them and no one really expects us to do so either?

It's a matter of selfishness, when you get right down to it, and selfishness is part of sinful human nature. But the love of Jesus can help us break out of that mold. “Give, and it will be given to you,” He taught, “for with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”¹ Those are certainly extraordinary concepts in this day and age. How we cling to our rights! But this giving, selfless kind of love is actually what God wanted for us all from the beginning—and His love can help us achieve it. If we would practice this kind of love, the world would be a different place.

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1. Luke 6:38

2. <http://www.arribalasmaños.org/>



SEEKING TO UNDERSTAND

BY MARIE STORY

THE PRAYER OF SAINT FRANCIS SAYS, “Master, let me not seek . . . to be understood, [but] to understand.” It’s not always easy to understand others. Each person comes with a different background, experiences, hopes, and dreams, and what makes perfect sense to me might not to someone else.

Because we’re all wired so differently, it can be pretty challenging to understand why people think and act the way they do. I think the natural tendency is to assume others are like us—or to *expect* them to be like us. This can cause us to jump to conclusions. The problem with jumping to conclusions is that we very often miss landing on the *right* conclusion. I could assume that something someone did or said was stupid, arrogant, or unkind because I don’t understand their motives or their circumstances.

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1. Matthew 7:1
 2. James 4:11–12 NLT
 3. See John 4:4–42.

It is so easy to assume. It is much tougher to take the time to consider the reasons behind a person’s actions or attitudes. It means that we have to step out of our own shoes—our own understanding, experiences, likes and dislikes—and into someone else’s. We have to intentionally seek to understand and move beyond our own assumptions.

The Bible tells us to “judge not.”¹ But when it seems like someone is wrong or even just different or deals with circumstances outside our personal experience, it can be hard to see much else. Before we even try to understand them, too often the tendency can be to put them in a box and slap a label on it. While we know (technically) that we’re not perfect ourselves, that’s often quickly forgotten when we’re confronted with the seeming imperfections of others.

When I see a flaw in someone else, I seldom think, *Well, I’m not perfect either*. But what if I *were* perfect. Would I *then* be in a place to judge? Not according to the Bible: “God alone, who gave the law, is the Judge. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to judge your neighbor?”²



“

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me bring love.
Where there is offence, let me bring pardon.
Where there is discord, let me bring union.
Where there is error, let me bring truth.
Where there is doubt, let me bring faith.
Where there is despair, let me bring hope.
Where there is darkness, let me bring your light.
Where there is sadness, let me bring joy.
O Master, let me not seek as much
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love,
for it is in giving that one receives,
it is in self-forgetting that one finds,
it is in pardoning that one is pardoned,
it is in dying that one is raised to eternal life.

—Author unknown, but popularly attributed to
Saint Francis of Assisi (d. 1226)

There has only ever been one perfect Person, Jesus. If anyone is in a position to judge, He is. So how did He deal with other people and their screw-ups? What kind of example did He set for us for interacting with all those less-than-perfect people?

When Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well,³ He had a prime opportunity to set her straight on a few things. However, that wasn't His objective. Jesus didn't judge her; He didn't write her off at face value—based on her appearance or her history. He took the time to really look at her.

Jesus sat with that woman and listened to her questions, her doubts, her misgivings. He took the time to answer her. He saw all she was and all she could be. Obviously, Jesus understood her well enough to be able to reach her on her own level, because she ran back to tell the whole town about Him. She had known Jesus not even a day, but she trusted Him enough to point to Him as the Savior. Because Jesus truly understood her, He was able to reach not only her, but many others in that Samaritan town.

How often do we judge people based on their appearance or their actions, without first trying to understand what makes them tick? How often do we label others—and then treat them according to those labels—without ever stopping to hear their full story?

Who knows what friendships we could forge or what opportunities we could discover to share the gospel if we would choose to love and understand over labeling and making assumptions? Perhaps that person we have labeled and avoided is at a point in life where they could desperately use a word of encouragement or a friendly gesture. We have to let go of the labels and assumptions before we can truly understand and value the person for who they are—a fellow human being created in God's image, someone for whom Jesus died on the cross, someone in need of His love and our understanding.

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HOW SHOULD A CHRISTIAN REACT TO WRONG AND EVIL?—Like Christ reacted in similar circumstances. Jesus chose to overcome evil with good, and so can we, as the Bible teaches us: “Don’t let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.”¹

In His famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?”²

Later in that same sermon Jesus also explained that we will receive only as much forgiveness and mercy as we

show others: “If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.”³

When some of the first Christians suffered wrongdoing, the apostle Peter advised them to follow Jesus’ own example. “When you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ‘Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth’; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.”⁴

Those who become bitter and yield to vengeful impulses, and take matters into their own hands instead of trusting God to right the wrongs, usually end up making an even bigger mess of things. Instead of the satisfaction they hope to gain, they wind up remorseful and in great need of forgiveness themselves.

But those who put matters in God’s hands and trust Him to make things right in His time find “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding.”⁵ ■

1. Romans 12:21 NLT
2. Matthew 5:43–46
3. Matthew 6:14–15 NLT
4. 1 Peter 2:20–23
5. Philippians 4:7



CAST A WIDE NET

BY MARIE ALVERO

I LOVE DOING SOMETHING KIND WHEN IT REALLY HITS THE SPOT. I will spend hours finding the perfect birthday gift to give a friend, or the exact right thing to say in a text, or the precise way to help a busy friend get through the day. But often I get paralyzed and anxious, and abandon my good intention because it's too hard to know *exactly* what to do. I guess I'm learning that kindness is not a matter of accuracy.

The Bible says those who sow sparingly will reap also sparingly, but those who sow bountifully will reap bountifully.¹ In the apostle Paul's time, fields were typically planted liberally, with the expectation that not all of the seeds sown would take root or mature, but if enough were sown, there would be a harvest.

When it comes to kindness, don't overthink it. Text to say hi, bring over a meal, hold open the door, send a random gift, invite someone over, take them out for a coffee, ask them how you can pray for them, pay a compliment. Reach out, don't expect something in return, just foster the habit of kindness.

Kindness isn't always convenient. You have to leave room in your life for it. You have to consciously slow

down and notice. I hear things like this said all the time, and frankly, the hardest thing for me is that so often I don't notice the other person's need, or sometimes even notice that person at all! Feeling guilty about that is a waste of time—I've learned that I will miss some opportunities—but paying attention to the things I *do* notice is a good place to start.

My husband always carries a multi-tool. I've seen him use it to help someone open a box, screw back in a cupboard door, pull out a splinter, and a thousand other things. He's so good at seeing those little needs and assisting with them. I don't have a multi-tool—and even if I did, chances are I wouldn't be too great at using it—but I have other ways to show love, like listening to people or connecting them to a resource.

None of us are incapable of showing some kindness, even if it's only by offering respect and dignity to those around us, remembering that we are all made in God's image.

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1. See 2 Corinthians 9:6.

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

RAY OF HOPE

I can't promise to spare you from the storms of life, but I can promise to be with you through them. My help may not always come in the form you expect, but it will always come. I will never leave or forsake you.¹ I will never leave you to struggle on your own.

When you ask for My help, I will answer your prayer. When you are worried or fearful, I will give you faith to trust Me, peace of mind, and courage to carry on. When you are weak and weary, lean on Me and I will give you strength. When your heart is broken, I will mend it.

I can't keep you from all hardships and sorrows, but I can give you the strength to bear the troubles of life and bring about good from every circumstance you face. I can help your spirit rise above the storms of life to My heavenly kingdom where the sun is always shining.

I am your sunshine on a rainy day, and the rainbow after the storm. I am the bright ray of hope that puts the sparkle back in your eyes.

1. See Hebrews 13:5.