

Refreshing, convicting, and extremely timely.

MARK BATTERSON

New York Times bestselling author of *The Circle Maker*

Discover the Power of
a Forgotten Christian Virtue

love

KINDNESS



BARRY H. COREY

PRAISE FOR *LOVE KINDNESS*

You can't hate a people and reach a people at the same time. So, in moments like this, when culture is changing and many Christians are angry, we need wise leaders to show a better way. That's exactly what Barry Corey does in *Love Kindness*. This will be an essential book for Christians as they engage the new cultural moment we are in.

ED STETZER

Executive director of LifeWay Research and senior fellow at the Billy Graham Center, Wheaton College

Barry Corey's reminder that Christians are called to "love kindness" is refreshing, convicting, and extremely timely. What if kindness became a more defining attribute of Christ-followers than defensiveness?

MARK BATTERSON

New York Times bestselling author of *The Circle Maker* and lead pastor of National Community Church

Deep disagreements often create strong frictions that at times flare up into hostilities and even wars. In this wise and compelling book Barry Corey draws on his personal and professional experience to offer an antidote: the forgotten virtue of kindness—not as a mere social lubricant of "niceness," but as a generous way of life modeled on Christ's. The proposal is simple but revolutionary: the world would change if people with deep disagreements agreed to be kind to one another. A very much needed book at this juncture of evangelical engagement with the broader culture.

MIROSLAV VOLF

Author of *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World*, professor of theology at Yale Divinity School, and founding director of the Yale Center for Faith and Culture

Love Kindness is a sorely needed plea, written at what I believe is the most opportune time of my life. The changes in the culture are breathtaking: escalating racial tension and questions of gender identity, equality, and rights, along with much more, present us with a unique moment in history to be voices of grace and truth in the marketplace. Shouting or silence are not the paths to influence. Instead we need a third way, the way of kindness, expounded and exemplified by my friend Barry Corey.

BRYAN LORITTS

Pastor for Preaching and Mission of Trinity Grace Church, New York City

If ever there was a book that was desperately needed in our day, let me “kindly” say, it is *Love Kindness: Discover the Power of a Forgotten Christian Virtue*. What is required of Christian disciples is that we should “love kindness.” Here is God’s gift to a watching world where the shrill tone of yelling at each other keeps getting louder and more acrimonious by the hour. In this beautifully written volume, President Corey has gently urged Christians to respond not in kind, but with God’s kindness and love. I warmly endorse Dr. Corey’s book as one of the most important antidotes to a dangerous moment in our history.

WALTER C. KAISER JR.

President Emeritus of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

Barry Corey is a kind man. He learned to be kind from his remarkable father. So Corey is well qualified—academically and spiritually—to write this book, a book that embodies the interesting approach of teaching different aspects of kindness through stories in his own life. For Corey, kindness is not niceness, adopting a position of compromise, or an expression of a desire to be received. Rather, it is having a firm center and soft edges, it is learning to be receivable, and it is learning to dialog with those with whom we disagree with kindness in the way of Jesus. The number of issues that divide us is multiplying each day. As a result, there never has been a time other than now when *Love Kindness* is so desperately needed. Get this book, read it, discuss it with your friends and those whom you oppose. You’ll be glad you did.

J. P. MORELAND

Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at Biola University and author of *The Soul: How We Know It’s Real and Why It Matters*

In a world of social media trolls and cable news shouting matches, people of goodwill everywhere are calling for a return to civility. Capable thinkers have addressed the issue philosophically and theologically. Barry Corey builds upon such foundational principles, but what makes this book distinctive is its narrative approach. Through real-world illustrations, Biola’s president walks us through what kindness in action looks like on some of the most difficult issues of our day. Highly recommended.

GREGORY ALAN THORNBURY, PHD

President of The King’s College

Barry Corey challenges believers in Jesus Christ to respond to the breathtaking cultural and moral changes around us with courage and kindness. *Love Kindness* is a road map for living in the world while not becoming part of it. Read it and take heart.

ROBERTA GREEN AHMANSON

Writer, philanthropist, and art patron

A warm, humane, funny but pungent book. Corey takes the reader into the real, day-to-day stuff of living and reflects on the practice of Christian kindness in the midst of all of this. He does so with poignant honesty and with real insight. Don't read this book if you don't want to be moved.

DAVID F. WELLS

Distinguished Research Professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological seminary

My friend Dr. Barry Corey has written an insightful and empowering book illustrating how kindness is a key that can unlock many closed doors. *Everyone* can and should strive to be kinder than we are. It's a fruit of the Spirit that requires deliberate effort to cultivate, but the results can be transformational.

JIM DALY

President of Focus on the Family

This book makes me realize we are in dire need of more people like my friend Barry Corey, people of startling authenticity and genuinely humble and joyful faith. But there's great news: if you read this book, you may well become such a person. You'll certainly begin that journey. I recommend it highly.

ERIC METAXAS

New York Times bestselling author of *Bonhoeffer* and host of the nationally syndicated *Eric Metaxas Show*

As compelling as it is convicting, *Love Kindness* shows how a life of selfless kindness can change the world for God's glory. This is Barry Corey at his finest. I highly recommend this for readers who want to better serve the kingdom of God.

D. MICHAEL LINDSAY

President of Gordon College

We evangelicals need this book. And the folks who see us as mean-spirited people need it too—to get a good picture of biblical fidelity at its best. Barry Corey makes the case for kindness with clarity and courage. In this book he has both inspired me and taught me!

RICHARD J. MOUW, PHD

President Emeritus and Professor of Faith and Public Life at Fuller Theological Seminary

Niceness is quiet and passive, often to the demise of a person and of a culture. But kindness is courageous and truthful because of love. It will trade its own popularity to seek the highest good of others. In his life, in his face and voice, in his university, and in this good book, Barry Corey shows us the way of kindness. He leads.

KELLY MONROE KULLBERG

Author of *Finding God beyond Harvard: The Quest for Veritas*

Love Kindness is insightful, enjoyable, and inspiring. In an age when rancor and opposition seem to be ramping up, Dr. Corey challenges Christians to embrace the way of kindness. I found myself cheering at some points and personally convicted at others. As Christians, we are committed to biblical teaching. And yet, as *Love Kindness* so clearly portrays, we must live and teach that truth with genuine kindness towards others. My thanks to Dr. Corey for providing a helpful road map for how Christians can live both the grace and truth of Jesus in our world today.

SEAN MCDOWELL

Assistant professor of Christian Apologetics at Biola University, an internationally acclaimed speaker, and the bestselling author of over fifteen books, including *A New Kind of Apologist*

A thought-provoking, heart-stirring challenge to consider kindness as a barometer of a grace-shaped life.

ALISTAIR BEGG

Radio host and pastor on *Truth for Life*

Finally . . . please EVERY ONE of us who follow Christ, PLEASE read this book. Our starting point with people probably reveals much more about what's going on inside of us, and Barry points us to a kindness that shifts our soul and opens our heart. With a deft way with words, he captures the essence of a winsome civility that our world so desperately needs.

NANCY ORTBERG

Author of *Seeing in the Dark: Finding God's Light in the Most Unexpected Places*

Kindness is not niceness: a trivial virtue that is easy to fake. It is rather a radical commitment that calls every follower of Christ to costly love. We need more kindness in our homes, where—strangely—we are often at our worst with the people we love. We also need it in the church, where sometimes our behavior is even worse. And we need it most desperately of all in our personal relationships with people outside the Christian faith. Few leaders exemplify the kindness of Christ as consistently as Barry Corey, whose compelling stories and wise exhortations elevate this necessary virtue to its proper place in daily Christian life and the church's witness to the world.

DR. PHILIP G. RYKEN

President of Wheaton College

Barry Corey's radiant life and deeply personal, poignant, and often humorous book beautifully capture the kind of Christian I long to be: wise and winsome, courageous and civil, known for what I am *for* . . . not for what I am *against*. Live out the message of *Love Kindness* and you will find yourself less in a culture war and more like the early church, growing in favor with God and people.

KEN SHIGEMATSU

Pastor of Tenth Church Vancouver and bestselling author of *God in My Everything*

Having spent my career working in the media, I am convinced that one of the biggest reasons Christians are marginalized in our culture is the perception that we're bullies, trying to push our agenda on nonbelievers. That's why this could not be a better time for Dr. Barry Corey's new book, *Love Kindness*. This is more than a book. It's a strategy for transforming culture.

PHIL COOKE

Filmmaker, media consultant, and author of *Unique: Telling Your Story in the Age of Brands and Social Media*

Barry Corey lives in the tension every single day. His commitment to live with biblical conviction and never shy away from the most difficult questions makes him one of my go-to sources for wisdom and encouragement.

GABE LYONS

Q founder and author of *Good Faith*

With candor and winsomeness, Barry Corey confronts the way I think about my life. Kindness has always been attractive, but he makes it magnetic. With relentless precision and great stories, he shows again and again that kindness is found where grace and truth come together. His

reach is broad—across the lines of race and ethnicity and theology and sexual orientation. So, when he calls the reader to aggressive kindness and “being receivable,” it makes sense. At his father’s memorial service in 1998, Barry asked me to read a letter he had written to his dad. I was honored beyond measure. That is precisely what I felt when I finished *Love Kindness*: honored. Read it. You’ll see.

RICHARD FOTH

Coauthor with Mark Batterson of *A Trip around the Sun: Turning Your Everyday Life into the Adventure of a Lifetime*

Love Kindness is a much-needed reframing of the cultural conversations of our day. *How* Christians express their allegiance to Jesus in the world is just as important as *that* they do so. Dr. Barry Corey invites us to again consider the way of Jesus and the postures of heart he embodied in his ministry. This book is a clear, compelling call to reexamine how Christians engage the culture. Highly recommended.

MIKE ERRE

Pastor, author, and teacher

While many books address faith and culture, I’ve yet to find one like *Love Kindness*. As I turned each page, I continually found myself convicted and challenged. Kindness is an uncompromising trait that all Christians should possess. We can all thank Barry Corey for writing this book and pushing us further toward what it means to follow Jesus.

CALEB KALTENBACH

Lead pastor of Discovery Church

Barry Corey has written an important book, which I thoroughly enjoyed. He advocates true kindness without reducing it to mere cosmetic niceness. Too many Christians choose between standing for truth and demonstrating grace, and the result is self-righteous meanness disguised as truth or indifferent tolerance disguised as grace. *Love Kindness* attempts to avoid both errors, and it’s full of both grace and truth, with warm and heart-touching stories. (I was particularly moved by the example of Barry’s dad.) The church today desperately needs the humility that rejects mean-spirited religion and exemplifies kindness while upholding biblical truth. You needn’t agree with everything in this book to profit from it immensely—it will make you think, reflect, and see yourself as others may see you. Most important, it may prompt you to ask Jesus, “Will you help me to love kindness?”

RANDY ALCORN

Author of *The Grace and Truth Paradox* and *Happiness*

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a Forgotten Christian Virtue

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BARRY H. COREY



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INTRODUCTION

*As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved,
clothe yourselves with . . . kindness.*

—COLOSSIANS 3:12

I held the hand of the kindest man I ever knew, sitting by his bedside in silent reverence while he lay shrouded in sheets bleached white.

We were alone in a Boston palliative care room, just the two of us except for a hospice nurse occasionally interrupting the holy to adjust a drip or check a vital. Room 402 was sacred space.

I looked at him that night as he looked at nothing, and I shook my head at the cruelty of cancer. After three years of potent drugs, radiation, wheelchairs, epidurals, and horrible pain that drove him to weeping, he never asked, “Why me?” When visitors walked into his room, even during his last days, he made *them* the honored guests. I thought about his kindness that night as the sounds of his irregular breathing softened.

By morning, my father—the kindhearted reverend—was dead.

Years later, what I recall is not his courage in death. It is his

kindness in life. His kindness was the open door for friends and strangers to enter.

I had never given serious thought to the revolutionary power of kindness until my father died. Then I started paying attention to the stories told about him. He wasn't quickly forgotten. His gentle influence rippled on and continues to ripple on. The stories were neither about his commanding leadership nor about his well-known status. He didn't start a company, earn much money, make the news, hold public office, or write a book. No one would have drafted his Wikipedia page.

The stories were about his spirit of kindness. His influence ran deep and wide, showing up in kindness lavished liberally. He was wildly welcoming, epic in life because he was epic in love.

I'm just now beginning to grasp how uncommon kindness is. My father's example doesn't seem to characterize the tone of conversations many Christians are having today in the public square. Kindness has become far too often a forgotten virtue. Christians often bypass kindness to begin a shouting match, or we just talk among ourselves about how awful the other side is. We have ranted before we've related, deeming the latter too soft on sin. Christians—and I've seen this especially in American Christians in recent years—have employed the combative strategy, and it's not working. The "culture wars" have done little to change our society, and we've lost many if not all of these wars. As a result, the church too often is marginalized and mocked, and

increasingly people are viewing the Bible as just as intolerable as our aggressive tactics.

To be Christian, kindness must shape us and define us. But this powerful virtue seems to be characterizing us less and not more. We have lost an understanding of the power of kindness, mistakenly dismissing it as fluff or flat. Kindness needs to be rediscovered.

Our reflex is to fight those who oppose us. Standing for our dignity and in defense of the truths we hold, we have too often led with harshness toward those antagonistic to the Christian faith. To prove we're not going soft on our faith (and sometimes understanding that fighting words raise more money), we're quick to label others from a distance. Leaders have been known to whip their supporters into a frenzy over the antics of their political, media, or theological "enemies."

I wrote this book out of frustration that those who represent the gospel are often caustic and harsh, picking fights with those whose views are hostile to theirs. In other words, Christians are often starting with *unkindness*. Unkindness has little effect beyond marshaling other Christians to admire our toughness and raising our own profile. This has gotten us nowhere in the cause of the gospel, our Christian call to be redemptive voices to that which is broken.

Our increasingly shrill sounds in the public square are not strengthening our witness but weakening it. Bullhorns and fist shaking—mustering armies and using war-waging rhetoric—are far less effective than the way of kindness, treating those with whom we disagree with charity and civility.

That doesn't mean we don't stand courageously for what we deem right, true, and just. But kindness is not incompatible with courage. Kindness embodies courage, although courage does not always embody kindness. Too often our centers are firm on conviction, but our edges are also hard in our tactics. This way is characterized by aggression.

And on the other hand there is the way of "niceness." Whereas aggression has a firm center and hard edges, niceness has soft edges and a spongy center. Niceness may be pleasant, but it lacks conviction. It has no soul. Niceness trims its sails to prevailing cultural winds and wanders aimlessly, standing for nothing and thereby falling for everything.

Kindness is certainly not aggression, but it's also not niceness. Niceness is cosmetic. It's bland. Niceness is keeping an employee in the job, knowing he's no longer the right fit but failing him *and* the company because you don't have the courage to do the kind thing. Kindness calls you to tell him he's not the person for the position and then dignify him in the transition.

Kindness is fierce, never to be mistaken for niceness. They're not the same and never were. Kindness is neither timid nor frail, as niceness can be so easily. *Kindness* is all over the Bible, plentiful in both Testaments. But you won't find *niceness* there once—or *nice*, for that matter. The ideals of kindness are rooted in Scripture, founded on Christian theology, and tested over the millennia by followers of Jesus. Since the early church, disciples have walked the risky and sometimes dangerous road of kindness.

In today's polarized culture, we are often pulled toward one extreme or the other, soft centers or hard edges. I'm proposing a different approach, a third way. Rather than the harshness of firm centers and hard edges, and rather than the weakness of spongy centers and soft edges, why don't we start with kindness? Kindness is the way of firm centers and soft edges.

This book is an attempt to explain what this means—not so much to define as to describe it as I've seen it in different people from different settings. My hope is that the stories I tell will help you understand what a firm center and soft edges looks like in your life.

It's time for followers of Jesus to rediscover the power of kindness. Kindness is a biblical way of living. It's a fruit of the Holy Spirit on Paul's short list in Galatians 5. It's not a duty or an act. It's the natural result of the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives. We exhale kindness after we inhale what's been breathed into us by the Spirit. Kindness radiates when we're earnest about living the way of Christ, the way of the Spirit. Kindness displays the wonder of Christ's love through us.

Many Christians nowadays tend to talk with bravado and bluster about heroism that impacts the world. I'd rather talk about the power of kindness to change lives, ours and others'. Paul got this when he said to Jesus' followers in Rome that God's kindness leads us to repentance (see Romans 2:4). Repentance, more than anything else, changes lives. And kindness leads us there.

Kindness is not a virtue limited to grandmothers or Boy

Scouts. We devalue its power when we think of kindness as pampering or random acts. Kindness doesn't pamper, and it's not random. It's radical. It is brave and daring, fearless and courageous, and at times, kindness is dangerous. It has more power to change people than we can imagine. It can break down seemingly impenetrable walls. It can reconcile relationships long thought irreparable. It can empower leaders and break stalemates. It can reconcile nations. Kindness as Jesus lived it is at the heart of peacemaking and has the muscle to move mountains. It's authentic and not self-serving.

Don't sell kindness short.

Kindness enables us to negotiate in a time when negotiating is dying and friendly discussions are yielding to rancor. Kindness—the higher ground—helps us find middle ground *and* common ground.

The greatest leadership influence lies ahead for those who walk the way of kindness in an increasingly fragmented and skeptical society. It's a path that will help us to be stronger leaders, more winsome neighbors, healthier husbands, better mothers, truer friends, more effective bosses, and faithful disciples.

Kindness is strong yet humble. Kindness is honesty and looks like truth with love. The psalmist David believed this, writing, "Let a righteous man strike me—that is a kindness; let him rebuke me—that is oil on my head" (Psalm 141:5).

This is our challenge: living from a Christ-centered core that spills out into a life of kindness. It's a life with a firm center and soft edges.

For many of us, venturing into the way of kindness will be hard. It's countercultural. It's risky. It's sometimes unwelcome and awkward. It's admitting our own messiness and imperfections on the journey.

This book's title, *Love Kindness*, comes from Micah, the Old Testament prophet who asks on behalf of Israel, "With what shall I come before the LORD?" (Micah 6:6). Micah answers his question with a few hollow suggestions that are in fact external religious rites, each of increasing value. Burnt offerings of calves? One thousand rams? Ten thousand rivers of oil? Our firstborn sons?

None of these is sufficient. Rather, the Lord's reply of what he requires is a simple threefold response of obedience: "To do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8, *ESV*). *Love* kindness. We don't "just do" kindness in some Nike-esque way. We are to *love* kindness. Perhaps the Scriptures so often use the term *loving-kindness* to make sure we don't separate *love* from *kindness*.

"Love kindness" is the partner of "do justice." If doing justice is the firm center, then loving kindness is the soft edges. Both are what God expects of us, not one or the other. And we do both of these with equal passion while walking humbly with God.

Love kindness. We need this more than ever. It's time for us to love kindness and in so doing rediscover the revolutionary force of this fading Christian virtue.

"To love kindness" seems like it should be an easy task for us—who *doesn't* love kindness? Kindness is easy to show

to the coffee barista when she gets our latte right. Kindness comes naturally to our family so long as there's harmony. But kindness is much harder to show those we might have previously ignored, avoided, judged, or condemned. Kindness is a tougher road when we live in tension with colleagues or in our marriage. Try walking the way of kindness then. Kindness is not intuitive. But Jesus calls us to demonstrate the power of kindness to everyone we come across. Neighbor or stranger. Wife or son. Colleague or enemy.

More profoundly, kindness calls us to the risk of encountering people with disease, those living outside of grace, and even those who would threaten to harm or destroy us. What does kindness look like when we extend it to our enemies or the outcast, the bullied or the lonely, the unsavory or the unlovely? What does it look like to be kind to the persecutors of Christians and not just the persecuted?

Jesus nevertheless calls us to the way of kindness—selfless, humble, vulnerable, open, risky, and faithful. He has called us to extraordinary kindness. Kindness opens us to adventurous relationships and the joyful journey we otherwise would miss.

The good news is that kindness has the potential to be contagious. When otherwise inconsequential, indifferent, marginalized, proud, stubborn, condemned individuals receive our genuine kindness, true connection with God can begin. And often they who have received our kindness then pay it forward.

The way of kindness is the answer for how Christians need to position themselves, especially today. Kindness is risky,

revolutionary, unconventional, costly, and hard. These are also the adjectives that define what it truly means to follow Jesus.

I wrote this book as an alternative to the voices of barbed-wire-wrapped Christians who are picking fights from pulpits, blogs, talk shows, town meetings, or political platforms. I also wrote this book to demonstrate that kindness is not anemic or convictionless. Rather, it has the power to influence others, revealing the truth and grace of the Christian faith far more than the insecurity of confrontational posturing.

I wrote this book for me, the ordinary guy who grew up wanting to live a life of meaning without meanness. I wrote this book for people like me who have discovered kindness as the antidote to struggles with fear and insecurity: the fear that we've fooled people into thinking we're special and the insecurity that rears its head in our own pride. I wrote this book to recover in my own life the revolutionary way Jesus called us to live. The way of selfless risks. The way of staggering hope. The way of authenticity. The way of profound love. The way of becoming the "kind" kind. I've got a long way to go, but I want to grasp the power of kindness the way Jesus intended it to be lived.

I wrote this book because as a university president, I care about how the rising generation lives out the way of Jesus in an increasingly polarized and mean-spirited culture. So I'm posing the idea of living the way of kindness, a way that is mercy filled, reverent, and God fearing. Kindness is a dimension of God's common grace through us. It's a civility grounded in gentleness and respect. At the same time,

kindness is neither milquetoast nor weak. It is fierce and passionate. The God-authored spirit of kindness in us has the power to upend the enemy and season the world around us for the good. Kindness as Jesus lived it presents the highest hope for a renewal of Christian civility, a renewal needed now more than ever.

As my friend Bryan Loritts wrote me when I told him I was embarking on this book, “We’ve tried legalism, and that has proven inept and unattractive. Some are trying a warped form of love that renders us saltless. The only thing that works is a life that embodies grace and truth lived out in relationship with others.” I call that kindness—a life with a firm center and soft edges.

My prayer is that this book gives rise to a call to live and love the forgotten way of kindness. A life that calls us to risk. A life that calls us to hope. A life that calls us to love. And the life Christ invites us to follow.

Chapter 1

A FATHER'S PROFOUND LESSON: THE WAY OF KINDNESS CALLS US TO BE RECEIVABLE

Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.

—MATTHEW 10:40, ESV

For my father's final days, we checked him into a Boston hospice center, referring to it as "palliative care" to mask the gravity of his last home. It was a welcoming room housing a welcoming man, and visitors sensed in this antiseptic environment the purity of my father's affections. As long as he was cogent, he was also kind.

Loving-kindness was my father's greatest way to help others see their greatest yearning: knowing the grace of God the Father. For him, it always began by making himself what he called "receivable." When he went into the receivable mode, he would reach out to others with love that could only be described as divine. That life of being receivable is the

starting point for the life of kindness. And as his life flashed before my eyes on that last night, I recalled one of the most profound lessons he ever taught me.

My father lived the receivable life, but he talked to me about it only once. One somewhat ordinary conversation on an early morning walk with him in Bangladesh stands out as that transformative moment when I began to grasp how his acts of being receivable were the first steps toward kindness.

I was researching in Bangladesh for several months when my father visited for a few days, traveling with my mother between missionary stops in Madras and Singapore. I was in my late twenties, ponytailed and single. Each morning before breakfast, he and I descended the staircase from the small flat I leased and stepped onto the streets of Dhaka, one of the world's poorest and most densely populated cities. On our walk we passed half-constructed homes framed by bamboo scaffolding. Dumpsters were permanent, not portable, made of brick and rummaged through simultaneously by dogs and children and widows. Open drains on each side of the street reeked of human waste, and rickshaw peddlers dodged us as we walked our morning route.

For the three or four days we were together, we spent much of our time catching up on all that was happening in each other's lives. He was particularly interested in what I was seeing and observing. This was nothing new.

But one morning our walk seemed different—quieter and more contemplative. As we turned the first corner, he shared

with me that five decades after he began his pilgrimage of faith, there was so much about God’s wisdom and ways that he still did not know. He held no seminary degree. He never completed college. But as we walked, Hugh Corey—the follower of God—began to share with me what his life in Christ had taught him.

“And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me,” he spoke in his native King James language, recounting the words of Christ near the end of Matthew 10, “is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.” Finally, he camped on the next sentence, the point of his recitation: “He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.”

Then he stopped talking for a few minutes, and I considered the last part of Christ’s words my father had just recited: “Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.”

I’m not sure my father grasped the full context of what Jesus was saying in that verse, but I’m certain he did understand what Jesus modeled in the Gospels: a receivable life. Love your enemies. Receive a child in Jesus’ name. Pray for those who persecute you. When you’re slapped on the cheek, turn the other. Listen to the shunned harlot. Talk to the scorned tax collector. When someone takes your coat, give him your shirt. When someone tells you she wants you to walk a mile with her, walk two.

Whoever receives you receives me. These are the instructions

Jesus gave one day to his disciples, prescribing for them what it means to be a faithful follower.

Knowing I was the student that moment as we turned onto the next street, I waited for my father to continue. He told me that in everything he did, he would choose to make himself receivable to the people God placed in his life.

He actually used the word *receivable*. This was the word that made him tick. I don't know if I've heard other followers of Jesus refer to themselves that way, but the word works for me. My father gave me the vocabulary to articulate his way of life and to help me understand it in mine.

He stopped walking and turned to me. "Barry," he said, "if the lives God intersects with mine don't have the opportunity to receive me, how will they ever know the love God has for them?" I nodded.

What he was saying made sense in light of everything I'd seen him say and do in all our years together. He started walking again, and I fell in beside him.

"I've got to live my life so strangers, friends, aching, lonely, family—they receive me," he said. "And through me they see God's inexhaustible love."

We finished our walk in silence. I knew that although he wanted to share with me his musings as he had so many times before and would do so many times after, this moral was different. It was as if he had traveled halfway around the world just to find me and bequeath a truth. Maybe it was different because I had not heard his voice for many months. Maybe it was different because I was trying to make sense of

my life in Christ while I lived among crowds of the world's poorest. Maybe it was different because I was ready to hear what he had to say. Maybe the Holy Spirit was speaking to me through a holy mouthpiece. I don't know.

This I do know: I have gone back to that walk many times. And as I have, I know that God ordained *that* moment when I would receive a cherished gift. On the fetid streets of Bangladesh—as from the local mosque the muezzin was calling Muslims to prayer—the bedrock of Hugh Corey's Christian faith was passed on to me, my father's son.

Two days after he spoke, I witnessed his demonstration of the profound power of the receivable life.

Shamsul was a poor Bangladeshi man of twenty-one who rented a bed in the servants' quarters behind the house where I lived. He spoke little English and, like many others, left his family in their village to seek work as a day laborer in Dhaka, Bangladesh's largest city.

I noticed my father begin to build a relationship with Shamsul in the few days since he arrived, something I honestly had not done. For my father, this was nothing new. All my life I saw him show love to schoolteachers, wayfarers, disgraced pastors, dentists, tailors, attorneys, and on and on. But it was not until after our walk earlier in the week that I had pondered how his life imitated the transforming power of Christ's words: "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me."

Then it happened. The receivable moment occurred between Hugh Corey and Shamsul when the words of Christ,

as they had so often before, called my father to show his radical kindness.

I was transfixed as this sixty-eight-year-old Canadian preacher reached out his hands in a moment of outpouring compassion and—as I had witnessed many times before—held another person’s face in his grip. I was willing to bet on what was coming next, and I would have won.

“Shamsul, my friend,” the Canadian preacher said, “I love you.” Then pulling my father’s face to his, Shamsul leaned forward and kissed him right on the head. On one day in Bangladesh my father told me what kindness looked like. A few days later he showed me.

Over the years I’ve been quick to relegate the way of kindness to someone who is simpler, who is less of a leader than I am. I’m quick to conclude that some people have the knack for kindness, but it’s not my thing. I’m too busy, too proud, too shy, too apathetic, too fearful, too macho, too passive, too oblivious. When I do this, I’m missing the point that for followers of Jesus, it’s not an option but a mandate, not an occasion but a lifestyle. This has been my struggle for the better part of my life.

We’re okay with occasional acts of kindness, but a *life* of kindness? That’s for those less burdened by the strains of responsibility and who have a lot more margin to pencil kindness moments into their schedules. Kindness is too soft for leaders.

But the Bible never talks about kindness as a gift you either have or you don’t. It describes kindness as a fruit of

the Spirit, a virtue that is meant to grow from all Christians, even when other people don't like the kindness they see in us.

This may sound counterintuitive, but the objective of the receivable life is not to be received, but to be *receivable*. The goal of the kind life is not to be thanked; it is to be obedient. Whether or not the grocery clerk or the college professor receives my overtures of kindness should not be my concern. Jesus never said we would be received. He simply said we need to make ourselves receivable—that is, to remove the distance or the obstacles that keep others from seeing Jesus within us. In fact, Jesus said that sometimes, despite our lives of grace, we will *not* be received. We can expect, then, to be ignored, rejected, or even persecuted. He even assures us of solidarity with him when we are snubbed, affirming in the Gospel of Luke that “whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me” (10:16).

I sometimes confuse living to be received and living to be receivable. Living to be received focuses on how others respond to my kindness. This is out of my control. Not only that, but living to be received ultimately inflates my ego. Living to be receivable is different. It decreases the ego because it's kindness that is not awaiting a thank-you. Living the way of kindness should not be measured by how people perceive me. Living the way of kindness calls us to a posture of humility, and humility is most authentically lived when I accept that my kindness will sometimes be rejected. Kindness focuses on how I open myself for others to receive me, whether they choose to or not.

Those who live the receivable life make it easy for some to love them. They also make it easy for some to despise them. But they don't make it easy for anyone to forget them. Kindness always stands out.

The alchemy we need as Christians to impact the world for the cause of Christ is to make ourselves receivable, to live the way of radical kindness. Even our enemies will know we are Christians by our love, though we may continue in the crosshairs of their scorn. To many around the world, Christ's love *for* us and *through* us is offensive.

Sometimes Christians raise eyebrows in our own faith communities when we engage in conversation with people or groups who believe far differently than we do. My father himself certainly raised a few eyebrows. It's easier—and sometimes more fun—to cast stones from the outside than to engage winsomely through building friendships, what Jesus models as the way of kindness.

I hear myself telling university students that they need to live in this humble posture of being receivable, of being kind. Of course we need to stand up and fight for convictions that are under attack, but more often combative and defensive posturing ought to give way to listening and civility, even with those we see as ideological opponents. Kindness means being more concerned with what we are for than what we are against. Kindness means taking off the steel-toed boots used to kick Jesus into our culture or to kick heresies out of our brothers and instead walking barefoot, the very position Jesus' disciples took when he washed their feet and told them

to do likewise. We need a firm center and soft edges. We need to tone down the saber rattling, the fist shaking, the scowled conversations, the voice raising.

The way of kindness is not just having right theology; it's being the right kind of people. It's understanding that our lives as Jesus' followers mean we have a common humanity with everyone, and therefore there's no need for exceptionalism. We owe all human beings the honor due them as beings made in the image of God.

Being receivable is Rick Warren saying yes to an invitation to address a gathering of Muslims, or Chuck Colson reaching across the aisle with Catholics, or Focus on the Family's Jim Daly initiating a quiet conversation with pro-choice activists to promote foster care. Being receivable happens when pastors stand up against the bullying and the harsh discrimination against those in their communities who identify as LGBT. To many in the church, this kind of kindness is awkward and risky. It makes some of us uneasy. It sometimes backfires. But erring on the side of being too kind is far better than never trying to build a bridge at all. The isolationism and overconfidence often characteristic of Christian fundamentalism can be relaxed without relaxing the gospel on which we stand.

My father took a risk that erring on the side of kindness was worth it. I still find myself stopping to think about what Jesus meant when he said, "Whoever receives you receives me" and then went on to say, "Whoever receives me receives him who sent me." By extension, when we make ourselves receivable in

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Jesus' name, representing him, those who receive us receive Jesus and the Father as well. This doesn't mean that by receiving us, they receive forgiveness for their sins. But it does mean that by receiving us, they get a taste of what it's like to know God's boundless and unconditional love.

The receivable life is the risky way, the Jesus way, the way of kindness. It becomes a habit of the heart, a fruit of the Spirit that is abundant and ripe. We are called to make a difference in the world for the good, and we will not go far making a difference without embracing and being embraced by the power of kindness.