



The
ONE
YEAR®

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DAILY ACTS OF
Kindness
DEVOTIONAL

*365 Inspiring Ideas to
Reveal, Give, and Find God's Love*

Julie Fisk | Kendra Roehl | Kristin Demery

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Daily Acts of Kindness Devotional



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The One Year Daily Acts of Kindness Devotional: 365 Inspiring Ideas to Reveal, Give, and Find God's Love

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Introduction

One year as we approached Christmas, we found ourselves frustrated with our kids' attitudes. We were tired of our children whining about Christmas, tired of hearing them say "I want that" each time a commercial came on television, tired of them complaining about how other children had things they wanted. As mothers, we wanted to find a way to change their attitudes from self-centered to others-centered by refocusing them on the love of God.

So we proposed an experiment during the month of December: we'd perform one kind act each day, then post about it on social media to encourage others to join us. What began as a parenting whim to reclaim Christmas evolved into a year-long experiment in generosity.

When we joined together, it was simply to push back a little against the materialism that seemed to be consuming our families, but the end result was far more than we ever anticipated. After continuing our habit of showing kindness every day for an entire year, we found that our own lives and our thoughts toward others had changed. Instead of being quick to judge others, we realized our hearts had softened as we saw God reflected in the faces of people around us. And the changes didn't begin and end with us: we saw our families—and more specifically, our children—change and grow too. They're now much more aware of the needs of those around them, and they've grown in their passion for specific issues affecting people around the world. We all have a newfound desire to live lives marked by intentional giving, serving, and advocating for the least of these (Matthew 25:40).

Perhaps most importantly, we came to realize that the idea of grace—the idea on which we base our faith—hinges on *kindness*. Jesus' command to love God and love others is impossible without kindness. Kindness teaches humility, is the antithesis of selfishness and pride, and leads to matchless grace. Throughout our year of kindness, we saw our relationships with God flourish as we put our faith into action and

as we witnessed the love of God—who hears the cries of his people—demonstrated in tangible ways.

If you've found yourself stagnant in your faith, wondering if there's more to life than just the daily routine, or if you've been frustrated with your kids' (or your own) selfish attitudes, this book will help you and your family see beyond your own four walls and into the community around you. We are so delighted that you would consider joining with us on this adventure we've begun. It is our greatest hope and prayer that these daily reflections will be both an inspiration and a call to action on your own journey to find and give away the love of Jesus.

- Julie, Kendra, and Kristin



January



JANUARY 1

A Crazy Idea

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

ROMANS 12:2, NIV

I had no idea my New Year's Day would end with a stranger and her son living in my basement.

My husband, Tim, and I had awakened with a rare sense of freedom. Our two- and four-year-old daughters were, surprisingly, still asleep. With no work commitments to fulfill, we were looking forward to a lazy holiday at home.

Within an hour of waking up, however, Tim's expression clued me in to the fact that our plans had changed. Lips quirked, brow furrowed, thumbs clicking furiously on his phone, he paced the confines of our bedroom, stopping periodically to chew on his thumbnail while he waited for a response.

A mom and her young son needed a place to stay until a unit opened up in their new apartment building. They had been sleeping at our friend's house, but that was no longer a feasible situation, and they were looking for an alternative.

Tim looked at me, an unspoken question in his eyes: *Could we be that option?*

It wasn't a new situation for us; we had hosted a homeless mom and her two daughters for three months that previous summer. But since the request came on the heels of a whirlwind December, I hesitated. *I'm used to girls*, I thought. *I don't know if I can handle a little boy. What if we say yes and wish we hadn't?*

There was a very real chance I would live to regret my action. But sometimes it's the crazy ideas, the ones that open us up to uncertainty, that end up teaching us the most. Paul reminds us in Romans 12:2, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (NIV). Sometimes we're led to take a step of faith that may look crazy to the world and trust that God will help us work our way through it.

— Kristin

— Today's Act of Kindness —

Start the new year by resolving to look for opportunities to extend kindness to others, even in small ways.

JANUARY 2

Up Close and Personal



Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets.

MATTHEW 7:12

That New Year's Day, when my family was faced with the decision of temporarily hosting a homeless woman and her son, I felt torn. After all, two of my friends and our families had spent the month leading up to Christmas performing acts of kindness each day: cooking a meal for a pregnant mom on bed rest, leaving treats for our mail carrier, filling a gas tank for a military servicemember. We had documented them on social media and invited others to join with us. One night, recalling the amazing things we'd experienced during our month of kindness, I had thrown out the challenge at dinner: *What would happen if we committed to doing one kind act each day for a whole year?*

Now, on the first day of our commitment, I was already being challenged to rethink what a year of kindness would mean for our family. A month of kindness required forethought but didn't demand too much else. It's one thing to spend an afternoon making baked ziti for someone, casually dropping it off while running errands. But to let someone see me in ratty pajamas before I've had a chance to brush my teeth? To let someone see me in the mess of my regular life—nagging my kids for sticking out their tongues, aiming dirty looks at my husband for checking sports scores instead of clearing dinner, failing to clean up crumbs lingering in cobwebbed corners—felt like a much greater challenge.

Yet in that moment, I was reminded of the Golden Rule: "Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you." If I truly believe that an essential part of my faith is living this truth out daily, surely I'm also called to do more than live a comfortable, easy life. Allowing someone to see my imperfections is a small price to pay in the face of another's need.

That afternoon, as I nervously opened my door to two strangers, I knew saying yes to trusting God in this situation was the right thing to do.

— Kristin

— Today's Act of Kindness —

How can you stretch beyond your comfort zone to reach those in need? Think of one small step you can take today to go beyond yourself, then do it.



JANUARY 3

Piano Man

[God] will not forget how hard you have worked for him and how you have shown your love to him by caring for other believers, as you still do.

HEBREWS 6:10

As I walked through one of many parking lots at Mayo Clinic, my eyes widened. License plates from practically every state were represented on the cars in the nearly full lot. While I told my three-year-old son that we were going on a big adventure, we were actually there for specialized testing. As we waited for the test results, my heart was in my throat and my eyes burned bright with unshed tears.

Walking through the rotunda while we waited, we were drawn to the sounds of an older gentleman playing a grand piano. Everyone is especially kind to children at Mayo, and this man was no exception. He smiled gently as my son wandered over to stand next to him, and the man leaned down to whisper that he had a special song just for my son coming up next. As the notes for “Jesus Loves Me” began to fill the air, he struck up a quiet conversation with me—asking me how often we come to Mayo and telling me that he volunteers to play every Wednesday at noon.

In this stranger, I recognized the love of my Savior. He faithfully comes to play, to smile, to whisper words of encouragement in this place where nearly every visitor walks the hallways in the midst of a medical crisis; good news and bad all mixed together.

His sacrifice of time, his musical gift, and his kind words brought peace and reassurance to my heart that no matter the test results that awaited us, my son was loved by not just my husband and me but by our Savior.

While I cannot remember the Piano Man’s real name, my memory of him is vivid, and I think of him often as a faithful example of someone who shone with the love of Christ in a place where desperation and hope, despair and joy, and mourning and rejoicing so often walk the hallways side by side.

— Julie

— Today’s Act of Kindness —

Pray about how you can use your gifts and talents to reveal the love of Christ. Find one small step you can take toward using your gifts to encourage and serve others.

JANUARY 4

Everyone Is Welcome Here



The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, "Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners."

LUKE 7:34, NIV

When I sit scrolling through social media outlets, I see posts as varied as the people represented there. I try to look for the good, and I am encouraged by people who choose to speak about love and grace and mercy.

My eyes wander to our dining room wall, where we recently hung a print of a favorite quote of mine I came across last fall. It says, "Come on in, there is always room at the table for you." It's a welcome beacon over my dining room table, reminding me of what I, as a Christian, am called to do.

Love my neighbor.

I think about Jesus' life on earth, how he invited people into community who were very different from him. I remember that he was called a drunkard and a glutton—not because he was those things, but because he chose to hang around people who were. I'm reminded of the words my pastor so frequently offers us: "You can belong here before you believe."

I wonder how many of the conversations we see on our social media feeds would change if we would be willing to invite people into our lives. If we would gather around our tables and have conversations, face to face. If we started seeing what makes us alike, not just what makes us different.

I wonder what would happen if we chose to see the humanity in one another. If we embraced one another even when we don't embrace the same beliefs. Rather than speaking in generalizations or feeling that sharing our opinions is the same as sharing our faith, perhaps we need to do more. We need to be willing to put in the time and energy to love people right where they are. This is not an easy task, I know. We may even be questioned by others, but we can rest assured knowing that this is the work that Jesus calls us to do.

— Kendra

— Today's Act of Kindness —

When given the opportunity to speak ill of a person or people group, instead pray blessing on them.



JANUARY 5

Legacy

Since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.

HEBREWS 12:1

I've got a milestone birthday looming. Instead of bemoaning the addition of a few more laugh lines, I've been pondering the notion of legacy. While legacy doesn't feel relevant as I navigate the parenting trenches of elementary school, I realize that if we aren't thinking about legacy now, then we're doing something wrong.

It is my heart's desire to leave a legacy of faith—that I would be remembered for reflecting Jesus to my children, my coworkers, and my neighbors. Not that I lived perfectly, but that I loved God and loved others to the best of my ability in the little moments and in the big moments.

Intentional kindness is an integral part of my legacy of faith. Kindness, especially when it is not the expected response to a situation, is how I tangibly reveal Christ's love in action. It is built through the quiet pouring out of time and resources into the lives of those around me and by living a life that looks beyond my own interests to the interests of others.

Hebrews 12:1 reminds us that our earthly lives are a race and that we are cheered on by the faithful Christians who have gone before us. We don't get to wait to build our legacy; we are building it every minute of every day, whether we want to admit it or not.

Wherever you are in your faith race, be encouraged! Our call to a legacy of faith is a marathon not a sprint. It is something that is built over a lifetime, not overnight. Just don't put it off, thinking that you are too busy and that you'll get around to it later. Your legacy is built day by day, small step by small step.

— Julie

— *Today's Act of Kindness* —

Prayerfully consider the legacy you are currently creating and take one small step toward the legacy you want to create.

JANUARY 6

Why Be Kind?



Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

ROMANS 12:21, NIV

Tim and I tumbled through the door of the coffee shop together on a chilly winter morning. We were on the cusp of our proposed year of kindness, and I was determined to get off to a good start.

As we looked around the shop for someone to bless, we spotted him. Fully dressed in his state trooper uniform, he sat at a corner table with a mug cupped between work-worn hands, visiting quietly with a woman. “Let’s get him a gift card,” I suggested. Nodding, Tim strolled to the counter and purchased the gift card and our drinks, then headed toward the trooper.

Finding a seat at another table, heart thumping, I glanced over to see my usually unflappable husband’s smile falter a bit. Eventually, he made his way to me. Excited to hear how the conversation went, I was instantly deflated when Tim told me the trooper seemed dismissive of the gift, accepting it only after my husband insisted. The rejection stung.

His casual dismissal could have thrown us off track as we began our year of kindness. In that moment, it would have been easy to think, *Well, if that’s the way it’s going to be . . . forget it. I don’t need the humiliation of a stranger’s rejection.*

Though I’ve never turned down a gift card, I know I’ve rejected other acts of kindness. I’ve deflected compliments and turned down offers of help. In our moment of rejection, as uncomfortable as it felt, we were forced to ask ourselves the question: *Why be kind?*

As I thought about the question later, I was reminded of this truth: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Our willingness to be kind shouldn’t be predicated on how someone else will respond; rather, it should stem simply from knowing that God desires for us to be kind. God sees our hearts, and our kindness is pleasing to him.

— Kristin

— Today’s Act of Kindness —

Think of a time when you didn’t thank someone for a kindness he or she extended to you. If you can, reach out and thank this person now.



JANUARY 7

Monthly Habit #1: Encourage

Encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:11

Sometimes in the busyness of life, creating an ongoing habit can be challenging. To battle this, our family decided that each month, along with doing small daily kind acts, we would focus on four kindness habits. We posted these four habits on our kitchen chalkboard, and we talked about them during our dinner times. Our first monthly habit was to offer encouragement to someone.

One evening when I asked for suggestions of who might need to be encouraged, my older son told us about another student in his class who had a debilitating illness. The boy was not a close friend of my son, but he had noticed that this boy had missed a number of days from school recently because of his illness. My son asked if we could offer him some cheer.

We agreed this would be a great idea, and the kids discussed what might encourage the boy. They decided that sending him movie tickets and a card would be the best thing to do, so my older son took out a card and the kids wrote words of encouragement and comfort to a young man they hardly knew.

The next morning my son took the note and gift card to school, explained to the secretaries what we were doing, and asked if they would mind sending it on to the boy and his family. They readily agreed and thanked my son for his thoughtfulness. When he came home he told us about his experience and how he felt good for offering encouragement to someone in need of a little support.

Encouraging one another and building one another up can be such a simple thing, but it requires us to intentionally recognize the needs around us. Just like my son did, we can stop each month to send a little note, to make a phone call, or even just to text someone to let them know that someone cares and has considered their needs.

— Kendra

— Today's Act of Kindness —

Write an encouraging note to someone
who may need a pick-me-up.

JANUARY 8

Monthly Habit #2: Thank



Give thanks to the LORD and proclaim his greatness.

Let the whole world know what he has done.

PSALM 105:1

The second monthly habit for keeping kindness at the forefront of my family's thoughts each month is to thank someone. We always try to come up with people who don't receive many thank-yous for what they do. For example, my children have thanked custodians at their school for keeping the bathrooms clean, our neighbors for helping us with our driveway in the winter, and our pastor for his messages that he works so hard on each week.

Each time we write a thank-you card, we try to think about all the ways we are grateful for these people and list the ways we've been blessed by their hard work. My children take responsibility for writing the cards themselves, and they hand them out when appropriate. It has become a fun challenge for us to look around for others who deserve thanks but rarely receive it. This in turn has fostered gratitude in our family for all the ways the work of others has blessed us.

It can be so easy to rush through our days without seeing the ways that others have helped our lives or bettered our communities. In fact, when our kids gave a handwritten thank-you note to the custodian at their school, he was so impressed, telling them it was the first time someone had written him one. When we take the time to notice what others do, especially behind the scenes, it reminds us of how grateful we are for the community of people around us and all the ways we benefit from a job done well. It is just another way we can give praise to the Lord, proclaiming and making known the things he has done.

- Kendra

- Today's Act of Kindness -

Notice the hard work of someone in your life, and send this person a thank-you note listing all the ways you are grateful for his or her hard work.



JANUARY 9

Monthly Habit #3: Bless

The generous will prosper; those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed.

PROVERBS 11:25

The third habit that helps us focus on kindness throughout the month is choosing to bless someone. This blessing can take many forms, anything from sending flowers to a neighbor who lost a loved one, buying stocking stuffers for kids who utilize our local food shelf, picking up extra school supplies in the fall, or volunteering at a local homeless shelter. There really is no limit to whom you can bless or what you can do to bless others each month.

Sometimes my children will do simple things to bless others, such as including a child who doesn't normally get picked to play a game or sharing their toys with a sibling. We as adults have paid for another person's lunch, given someone a ride, and spent time with a friend who just needed to talk. There are lots of ways to bless others, and teaching ourselves and our children to notice needs and act on them is another way we are all learning to be kind each month. If we aren't sure where to start or what to do, we'll often ask our kids (and ourselves): What have others done that has blessed us? Is there someone else we could pass that blessing on to?

Blessing others can be done in tangible ways, like buying someone a cup of coffee or a meal, or it can be offered through our words, simply letting someone know how they've benefited our lives. We don't always have to spend money to show kindness toward others. Sometimes the most thoughtful thing we can do is to show up and be present for the people around us. It's also good to remember that our kind acts don't benefit just others, but they benefit us as well. Proverbs 11 tells us that a generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed. What a wonderful benefit we can receive by simply being a blessing to others!

— Kendra

— *Today's Act of Kindness* —

Find someone you can bless, and see if it doesn't bring refreshment to your own life.

JANUARY 10

Monthly Habit #4: Serve



God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another.

1 PETER 4:10

The fourth habit of serving others is one that takes a bit of intentionality, but it also has the potential to be one of the most memorable of all the habits because it requires a sacrifice of time or resources.

My family has incorporated serving others into our daily acts of kindness by shoveling a neighbor's driveway in the winter or taking care of someone's house while they're gone on vacation. Throughout the year we try to find activities, either through church or a nonprofit organization in our community, that we can partner with in service to others. We've volunteered at homeless shelters, cleaned up local parks, painted community centers and schools, and washed windows at a local nursing home.

There are so many creative ways you can serve others. It can be done formally, like volunteering at a shelter, or informally, like helping out a neighbor. Along with being genuinely kind, serving others reminds us to consider putting someone else's needs before our own. It increases our desire to do something to help others out.

Serving is the action of kindness, the outward expression of linking ourselves to others, allowing us to use the gifts God has given us. Once we begin to notice needs in our neighborhoods or communities, it's hard to stop noticing—and even harder not to do anything about them. The habit of serving is one that becomes ingrained in us the more we do it.

These four monthly habits described in the last few devotions can be done as daily acts of kindness or in addition to what you are already doing. The point is that we want to establish these four habits firmly in our lives and not get stuck doing only familiar things. Kindness habits help us to make kindness a daily practice rather than one-off, occasional gestures.

— Kendra

— Today's Act of Kindness —

Find a simple way to serve someone in your life,
or take a small step toward a larger project you'd
like to accomplish in your community.