

# Kindness Starts Here

## Kindness Starts with YOU ...a word of promise

January is perhaps the hardest month. We are all tempted to take a culturally inspired measurement called New Year's Resolutions. Often with a harsh and unforgiving eye, we decide that we are: too fat, too thin, too lazy, too weak, too indebted, too wasteful, too unorganized. The "too-ness" could go on and on.

In January we resolve to change and shape up only to be demoralized a few weeks later when our latest quest for the new and improved self falls short

This January as we consider how "Kindness starts with You" consider how God loves you just as you are. God has chosen to love you because God made you warts and all. Psalm 139 tells us:

*For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*

You might want to write this verse down; put it on your bathroom mirror or your refrigerator. Take this promise from God to heart and let it shape your heart this January as you grown in kindness to yourself.

## The Kindness Campaign

It doesn't take much time with the evening news, our social media feeds, or a family conversation around anything of substance to realize that our world is in great need of kindness. Our scriptures teach us that kindness is an important part of our Christian witness in the world.

*Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you, (Ephesians 4:31-32).*

As we are people living whole lives in this world, we cannot prevent ourselves from being influenced by everything around us. The news we watch, the company we keep, the work we do, the images we see, the words we read, the things we buy, the food we eat, the ideas we subscribe to, all of these (and so many more factors) influence us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Therefore, it is important for us to become intentional about the ways we live our spiritual lives.

As a way of becoming more active shapers of our spiritual lives, Greystone is embarking on a year of kindness.

Throughout this year (2020), we will be learning about kindness as a spiritual practice. We will consider different areas of our lives and see how kindness might grow in each of those areas. For example, this month (January) we are focusing on kindness with ourselves. How am I going to be kind to myself today? Each month we will post blog entries written by members of this congregation, reflecting on kindness in the focus area for that month. Be sure to keep reading along or check out the website to see Chris Austin's

## Kindness Challenge: January

You may be asking yourself. Where do I begin? How can I practically and thoughtfully do something which would count for kindness toward myself in January? What could that look like?

To help you get started this month, here are a few challenges to consider:

- Read (or reread) a novel that inspires you
- Start a gratitude journal and write 3 things a day that you are grateful for
- Cook a nutritious meal for yourself and sit down to eat it
- Refrain from complaining for a week
- Give away one of your possessions
- Sit still (try to quiet your body and mind) at 5 different times for 5 minutes each time on one day

Hopefully, this list will help you think of more ways that you can demonstrate kindness to yourself. When you do an act of kindness, make note and think about how it stretched you, taught you something, created a thirst within your spirit, pleased God.

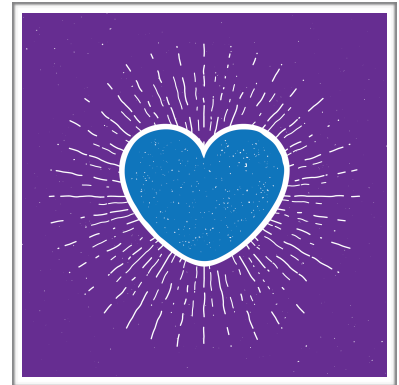
Every Sunday in the sanctuary you will find a bowl of Kindness tokens. We hope that you will take a few tokens and consider your acts of kindness. Put a token in the offering plates as they are passed in the worship service to symbolize and remember that all of our acts of kindness are offerings to God.



January reflection on kindness with ourselves. We will also issue kindness challenges for each of us to participate in. There will be opportunities for you to share your own experiences with kindness by bringing in a picture of something that made you act in kindness, contemplate kindness, or remember kindness. Together, throughout the year, we will pray for God to teach us about kindness. We will ask God to show us how to grow in kindness within ourselves and in our world. And we will share stories about how this experiment in Christian kindness is transforming our lives.

### Kindness Starts Here

The heart image was chosen as the logo for our year of kindness because it reminds us that if we want to make the world a kinder place, it has to start with the transformation of our hearts.



God teaches us about kindness through Scripture and through the life of Christ. So the first step in practicing kindness is to ask God to transform us from the inside out. The lines that radiate outward from the heart are a visual reminder that kindness doesn't stop in our hearts, but it is a gift we offer freely to everyone we encounter. Kindness starts here, in our hearts, and grows outward.

### Kindness with Ourselves

by: Chris Austin

Be kind to the writer! Here at the end of the "holiday season", to have first crack at some words of wisdom about kindness as Greystone reflects on this topic for 2020? Please! And about being kind to ourselves? It's hard enough being kind to others, but to ourselves too. Please!

Here goes. Maybe you remember Henry James from American lit. class (maybe not!). The following was attributed to him: "Three things in human life are important: the first is

to be kind; the second is to be kind; and the third is to be kind.” Not a bad idea, particularly in these days. And we also need to extend this kindness to ourselves.

Why? Because we really need to, particularly at this time of year. It’s the start of a new year. While we are just leaving the Advent and Christmas seasons, we don’t leave hope at all. We hope and long for so much better in the coming year. For better or worse our culture has set us up to make resolutions for a “better” us. Unfortunately, many of these hopes are dashed upon the rocks of reality by the time we honor Martin Luther King, Jr. on the third Monday of January.

Fortunately, if we are kind to ourselves, these hopes don’t have to be dead in the water. Just because we were gung-ho and then faltered at whatever it is that is a thorn in our side, doesn’t mean that we failed. We still have a choice as to whether push the thorn in deeper, leave it as is, or try to extract as much of it out as we can.

To put it in a biblical context, think of yourself as John Mark in the book of Acts. Yeah, he quit on his first trip, another thorn in Paul’s side. But then think of yourself as being more like Barnabas than Paul. Paul effectively quit on John Mark, but John Mark didn’t quit on himself; nor did Barnabas write him off. They both took up the journey again.

Amid failures and setbacks, instead of seeing ourselves as failures, we need to be kind to ourselves and press ahead and not just quit. See setbacks as momentary blips, not as “I undid everything because of what I just did”. Chances are you didn’t. Be kind. I’m OK, You’re OK. And remember that Jesus loves us, for better or worse, as we are. Maybe that is enough in itself to make us want to be better and kinder to ourselves and others.

## A Sunday School Trailer

I don’t know about you, but I love movie trailers. There is a certain thrill at catching a glimpse of what is coming. I am already anticipating this summer’s blockbusters.

Here at Greystone let me offer a little teaser about an upcoming Sunday School series. The Adult Education Committee is working to create a unit of lessons that delve into the stories of the Bible and celebrate what these ancient characters can teach us about God’s vision of kindness. In Hebrew the word used for kindness is *hesed* or *chesed*. It means a bit more than just being nice. The word speaks of a completely undeserved kindness and generosity. This was the Israelites’ experience of God. God showed up even when the Israelites were not looking, and God kept covenant with them long after their persistent breaking of it had destroyed any reason to do so. Like other Hebrew verbs, *hesed* is not just a feeling but an action. There is so much to learn here.

I can’t wait for all of us to dive into the stories of our faith and see how God is leading us to a deeper and truer understanding and living of this sacred imperative.



## The Living Stone

We hope that you have been enjoying Greystone's new podcast, The Living Stone. You will find Sunday's sermon posted there each week and special content related to the discussions we are having around church. As a part of our Kindness Starts Here Campaign we will be featuring different conversations exploring the growing edges of the work we being called to here at the corner of Lead Mine and Sawmill. Throughout the year we will be sharing our kindness journey and the different and surprising places it is leading us. Tune in! Subscribe! Share the links on your social media pages!

Are you wondering how to find the podcast? On your smartphone or tablet, open your podcast app. If you don't have a podcast app, you can download one from your app store. Once you're in your podcast app, search for "The Living Stone," and look for the logo image (left of this article). Click on the logo, then click on the "Subscribe" button. Once subscribed, you will be notified when new episodes are posted. To listen, scroll down to the list of episodes, where you'll be able to select the episode you want to hear. If you need help finding or playing Greystone's podcasts, let us know! We want to help you stay connected through this new media!

## A Whole Year of Kindness... Really?

So now that you've begun to see some of the plans for this year's Kindness Starts Here campaign, you may be asking yourself, "Are we really going to talk about this for a whole year?" If that's you, perhaps taking a look at the schedule of conversations and topics will help to shed some light on just how expansive the theme of kindness actually is!

January: Kindness with Ourselves

February: Kindness Online

March: Kindness with our Family

April: Kindness in the Workplace

May: Kindness with our Environment

June: Kindness in Sabbath, Play, and Rest

July: Kindness in our National Identity

August: Kindness in our Learning

September: Kindness in our Community

October: Kindness amidst Difference

November: Kindness in our Politics

December: Kindness as a Whole Life Practice

As you can see, there is so much to learn and *practice* with our kindness in 2020. We look forward to seeing how God will grow us and grow within us in this year of kindness.