

# Kindness

*A lesson from Where Lilacs Still Bloom by Jane Kirkpatrick*

*"When our fathers were in Egypt, they gave no thought to your miracles; they did not remember your many kindnesses...Yet he saved them for his name's sake, to make his mighty power known."*

*- Psalm 106:7-8*

Writer Madeleine L'Engle once wrote that "compassion isn't general, it's particular." Compassion in the general creates soup kitchens and homeless shelters. Compassion operates orphanages and sustains people on the mission field. Compassion creates hospitals peopled with dedicated physicians and nurses, orderlies and aides.

But compassion is truly known in the particular when the nurse not only removes the bandage and cleans the oozing wound but holds the patient's hand a moment asking "how are you doing?" It's when a child stops her doll-playing and throws comforting arms around her little friend whose tea set has just broken into a hundred pieces. We recognize compassion as a simple kindness when a neighbor asks if they can run an errand for us while they're out running their own.

The Psalmist recalls how fleeing our recognition of kindness and compassion is. I remember reading of the Israelites flight and God's providing manna to them daily, leading them by light, rescuing them from bondage. Yet not long after they complained and charged that God had forgotten them, returning to their old, familiar gods. "How could they forget all of that?" I remember asking my husband.

But I forget, too. That offer of kindness from a neighbor to plow our driveway of a heavy snow. The arrival of an unexpected check. A handpicked bouquet from a friend's garden. That card sent for no reason than to tell us we were remembered. These kindnesses were acknowledged at the time but days later I felt sorry for myself, wondering where God is in my life. My kindness memory is short term.

Even worse, I lament God's absence in the larger things, where nations struggle with each other, politics fills the airways, unkind words are spoken in coffee shops and on bumper stickers. Where is kindness in this fallen world? Have we forgotten all the kindnesses God has granted? I return to my gods of seeking money, disappearing into television, growling about the futility of hoping things could ever change.

But God saves us anyway, the Psalmist assures, to make his power known. So when I find myself wondering as the Hebrews did, where God is I look for the particular, a way I can act with kindness out of God's love. I'll drive my nephew to work while his car is being fixed even if it is inconvenient. I'll bring that book I promised to my neighbor and spend a little time taking tea with her. For today, I'll look for acts of kindness I can give and acknowledge those given me. Kindness is the humus out of which God's glory can grow.

*Kind God, help me reflect your compassion in particular ways today. Let me see with new eyes those in need around me. Give me confidence to offer kindness to others and may they see my actions as having come from your nurture in my life. Thank you for remembering me despite my short term memory. May I be ever faithful to reflect your kindness in my life. Amen.*