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BROTHERLY KINDNESS

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Have you ever been the recipient of a special act of kindness? Someone went out of their way to help you when you needed a hand. Someone did something nice that lifted your spirits. Someone offered a word of encouragement when you were down. Someone was kind to you even when you had failed to be kind. How did that make you feel?

When was the last time you did a deed of kindness for someone? It is possible that we sometimes get so busy and preoccupied with our work or other concerns of our own lives that we miss those opportunities to show kindness toward others.

Peter says we need to add to godliness the grace of “brotherly kindness” (2 Pet. 1:7). The word is *philadelphia*, which means “brotherly affection,” “brotherly love” or “love of brethren.” “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love” (Rom. 12:10). “Let love of the brethren continue” (Heb. 13:1).

It almost seems redundant that, in the list of graces in 2 Peter 1, the next (and last) is “charity” or “love” (*agape*). The two words are often used interchangeably, or at least overlap in meaning in some contexts. But Peter seems to make a distinction between them here. While *agape* is the active goodwill that should be extended to all, *philadelphia* here refers specifically to that love or kindness that is expressed especially toward our brethren—those in the family of God.

The special relationship that we have with God is summed up in the fact that God has shown his kindness toward us through Christ (Eph. 2:7). That relationship with God means that we have a special relationship with God’s children—our spiritual brothers and sisters. “Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another” (1 Thess. 4:9). The practical effect or manifestation of this relationship is that there is a familial bond—a tie that binds our hearts together—that causes us to empathize with one another.

How can we demonstrate brotherly love? Be kind, patient, and forgiving because we have been “chosen of God” (Col. 3:12).

Be ready to help our brethren when they are in need. “Let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith” (Gal. 6:10).

Be ready to extend hospitality and other acts of kindness to our brethren. “Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint” (1 Pet. 4:8).

Be ready to offer spiritual help and encouragement to our brethren when they are weak. “We urge you brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone” (1 Thess. 5:14). Spiritual weakness and loss of courage is the most serious kind of distress that we can experience. Let’s remember that our admonitions and attempts to restore are themselves acts of love and brotherly kindness, and so should always be done in that spirit.

Trusting God in Uncertainty

By Mark McCrary

Life can become burdensome almost every day for some people. The book of Habakkuk wrestles with the sovereignty of God in the face of suffering and injustice. Habakkuk teaches us how to embrace deep, unshakable joy in God, even when our circumstances seem overwhelming.

The Painful Cry of the Faithful (Habakkuk 1:2-4)

Habakkuk begins with a prayer of frustration with the wicked. How could God allow their violence on the poor? Why wouldn't He intervene and save? God's answer? You haven't seen the worst of it yet. He would deal with the oppressors in Judah through the Chaldeans (Babylonians) (Hab. 1:6-9).

Three pressing questions arise: Why would a good God allow this? How could a good God allow this? Finally, what would Habakkuk do? Habakkuk's cry resonates with anyone who has ever felt abandoned in their time of need. He was not turning away from God but earnestly seeking Him.

Here's the good news: God allows questions, which are a desire for a deeper understanding of His ways. Doubts don't mean one is unfaithful; they are a testament to deep faith. When we wrestle with our questions, we actively seek a greater understanding of God's will and character.

God is Still in Control (Habakkuk 2:2-3)

God's message to Habakkuk is that comfort isn't necessarily found in the removal of problems but in the sovereignty of God. Either what has come upon us has been put there by God (2 Corinthians 12:7), or it is something God has allowed because of our fallen world: 1 Corinthians 10:13 - God will not allow something in our lives that we cannot, by His power, endure.

This can help us find peace in our struggles. We may not always understand His ways, but we can trust that His plans are for our ultimate good (Romans 8:28). Things are not out of control. God loves you (Romans 8:36-39).

Trustful Responses (Habakkuk 3:17-19)

Understanding that God wants to hear even our questions and that He is in control of everything, what should be our response?

First, maintain your faith in Him. God declared, "The just shall live by faith" (Hab. 2:4). The idea here is more than simply believing in God; it is acting on what He says.

Second, verbalize your faith in God. At the conclusion of the book, Habakkuk wrote, "Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation" (Hab. 3:17-18). Saying something out loud makes it more real and commits you to it. Think of the first time you said, "I love you" to someone else. You probably thought about it a lot, but when you said it, things changed. State your faith verbally to God, not just in thought. State it to a friend. State it to your faith. Habakkuk's faith and trust were deeply rooted in the character and salvation of God. His joy came from the character of God alone (Hab. 3:18-19), not from external conditions.

Finally, know God will strengthen you. "God, the Lord, is my strength; He makes my feet like the deer's; He makes me tread on my high places" (Hab. 3:19). Move past trust. Know with confidence that God will be with you. Just as a deer nimbly moves along, know that in the midst of your uncertainty, God will give you the strength to do the same. Know.

Habakkuk's name means "embracer." He embraced God and trusted in Him. It is okay to question God and hurt when life isn't as imagined. Trust in the sovereign God. Put your faith and confidence in Him, not in circumstances.

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