

The world is swirling around us with violence, hate, bullying and dissension. But if you extend yourself with kindness, care and compassion, I can promise you that you will lift up arms that hang down and heal hearts.

In 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, we are taught that:

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

In the 1970's, researchers set up an experiment to examine the effects of diet on heart health. Over several months, they fed a control group of rabbits a high-fat diet and monitored their blood pressure, heart rate and cholesterol. As expected, many of the rabbits showed a build-up of fatty deposits on the inside of their arteries. But this wasn't all! Researchers had discovered something that made little sense. Although all of the rabbits had a build up, one group surprisingly had as much as 60 percent less than the others. It appeared as though they were looking at two different groups of rabbits.

To scientists, results like this can cause lost sleep. They couldn't understand this. The rabbits were all the same breed from New Zealand from a virtually identical gene pool. They each received the same amount of the same food. Did the results

invalidate their study? Were there flaws in the experiment design? The scientists struggled to understand this unexpected outcome.

Eventually, they turned their attention to the research staff. Was it possible that researchers had done something to influence the results? As they pursued this, they discovered that every rabbit with fewer fatty deposits had been under the care of one researcher. She fed the rabbits the same food as everyone else. But as one scientist reported, “she was an unusually kind and caring individual.” When she fed the rabbits, she talked to them, cuddled and petted them. She couldn’t help it. It was just how she was.

She gave more than just food. She gave the rabbits love.

At first glance, it seemed unlikely that this could be the reason for the dramatic difference, but the research team could see no other possibility. So they repeated the experiment, this time tightly controlling for every other variable. When they analyzed the results, the same thing happened. The rabbits under the loving care of that one researcher had significantly higher health outcomes.

A book was published by Dr. Kelli Harding entitled *The Rabbit Effect*, taking its name from the experiment. Her conclusion was that what affects our health in the most meaningful ways has as much to do with how we treat one another, how we live, and how we think about what it means to be human.

As Christians, as followers of Jesus Christ, this should lay another brick in our foundation of kindness as a fundamental, healing gospel principle – one that can heal

hearts emotionally, spiritually and as demonstrated here, even physically.

You can see in Matthew 22:35-40, when asked “Master, which is the great commandment,” the Savior replied to “love the Lord they God with all they heart,” followed by “Though shalt love they neighbor as theyself.” Jesus’ response reinforces our heavenly duty. An ancient prophet commanded “that there should be no contention with one with another, but that we should look forward ... having our hearts knit together in unity and in love towards another. We are further taught that power or influence ought to be maintained by gentleness and meekness, by kindness, without guile.

You already understand how important it is to be kind. Even still, you may sometimes have a hard time. There is no place for anything other than kindness and love in cyberspace, neighborhoods, schools, and here. It is up to us to make these places kinder and safer.

As adults, we have the primary responsibility to set a tone and be role models of kindness, inclusion and civility, and to teach Christ-like behavior to the rising generation in what we say and how we act. It is especially important as we observed a marked societal shift toward division in our world. The Lord expects us to teach that extending love and kindness is a positive means toward unity and that to act in any other manner leads to division.

Let each of us strive to be our very best. As you strive to extend yourself in love, respect and kindness, you will undoubtedly be hurt or negatively affected by the bad

choices of others. What do we do then? We follow the Lord's admonition to "love your enemies . . . and pray for them which despitefully use you. That's from Luke 6:27-28.

Do all you can to overcome the adversity that is placed in your path. Strive to endure to the end, all the time praying that the hand of the Lord will change our circumstances. We should offer thanksgiving to those He places in our path to assist us. You can choose to put your hope in Jesus Christ. This hope comes from His invitation and promise to be of good cheer, for He will lead you along.

God is the ultimate example of love. Through the Word of God, we are shown through the life and death of Jesus Christ what it means to love others first. Because of the love that God has shown us, we are called to show one another love. In fact, God tells us this is the greatest command!

In conclusion, look through the gospel lens and recognize that we too are under the watch care of a compassionate caregiver who extends Himself in kindness and a nurturing spirit. The Good Shepherd knows each one of us by name and has a personal interest in us. As it says in Luke 10:14, "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep . . . And I will lay down my life for the sheep. And we all know he has done this.

Let's Pray

Lord, heal our hearts. Help us to reach out with love, kindness and compassion. Guide and direct us to be the kind of person that acts in such a way as to always Honor you. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.

