**Week 12:** *Proverbs: Kindness and Generosity*

**Hook** A picture containing text, tree

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**Main Point: Generosity and lovingkindness are ways to love others as God loves us.**

Despite economic uncertainties, charitable giving flourished in 2021. According to Forbes, America’s top 100 charities reported a 10 percent increase in private donations. These 100 charities received a collective $54.4 billion in gifts in 2021.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Break your LifeGroup into smaller groups and ask them to answer this question: if you were given one million dollars and had to give away every penny of it, how would you choose to spend it?

**Describe a time when someone was generous to you. How did this act impact your desire to be generous?**

**Share an instance in which you had the opportunity to be generous, resulting in a kingdom impact. How did this affect your spiritual walk?**

**Week 12:** *Proverbs: Kindness and Generosity*

**Book**

**Main Point: Generosity and lovingkindness are ways to love others as God loves us.**

**Proverbs 3:3; 14:31; 19:17, 22; 20:6; 21:13, 25–26 [Read]**

**Talking Point 1:** Kindness and generosity reflect the heart of God.

**Q: Why do people desire to be loved with steadfast love and kindness?**

**Q: Why is being unkind to the poor an insult to God?**

The Hebrew word that translates as kindness or “steadfast love” in these proverbs (*chesed*) is most often used of God’s love for His people. We talked about this word in lesson 4 when we examined the nature and character of God. It is a uniquely biblical word used to describe an unconditional love that is wholly *undeserved*.[[2]](#endnote-2) It is most often used of God’s steadfast love for His people because He continued to love them, forgive them, and welcome them back into covenant relationship with Him over and over, even though they disobeyed His covenant and pursued “other lovers” (other gods) in generation after generation of biblical history. Scripture says the greatest demonstration of this kind of unconditional steadfast love was Jesus’ dying for us *while we were yet sinners* (Romans 5:8).

*Chesed* – pronounced “keh-**SED**” – can also be translated “mercy” or “lovingkindness,” a word Bible translators had to make up because they could not find an English word that contained all that *chesed* is. James Luther Mays wrote that *chesed* is “tantalizingly impossible to reproduce in English.”[[3]](#endnote-3) It’s a fierce, loyal love that expresses itself in unconditional benevolence, even to those who don’t deserve it. It is not a warm feeling; it’s *acting* in love even when that person is acting unlovable.

This is the love God has for His people, and it’s the same love He calls His people to have for one another as well as those who are not part of the family of God, even our enemies. In fact, the greatest ways to exemplify the nature of *chesed* is to show love to our enemies (who don’t “deserve” our love) and kindness to the poor (who cannot pay us back). Because it is such a defining part of God’s character, steadfast love should be a defining characteristic of each individual believer as well as a defining characteristic of the body of Christ, the community of faith, the church. Our churches should be known for our radical, selfless, unconditional love for one another, the poor and our enemies. After Jesus gave the disciples a tangible illustration of this kind of love by washing their feet, He said the world would know we were His followers by our radical selfless, humble, generous love (John 13:35).

Solomon tells us that many people claim to have steadfast love for others, but it’s difficult to find people who truly love others this way (20:6). Unfortunately, the impression many unbelievers have of the Church is not one of generous steadfast love and kindness. Research from the Barna Group has found that most other Americans think Christians do not reflect the kind of love Jesus showed for others.[[4]](#endnote-4) They describe Christians as hypocritical, insensitive and judgmental.[[5]](#endnote-5)

Solomon said to bind love and faithfulness around our neck and write them on the tablet of our hearts (3:3). This is covenant language, exactly what the Law told God’s people to do with His law (Deuteronomy 6:4–9; Jeremiah 31:33).[[6]](#endnote-6) Steadfast love and faithfulness are the very backbone of God’s law; love is what His law is all about. As Jesus said, the whole of the Law and the Prophets can be summed up in this: love God and love others the way He has loved us (Matthew 22:37–40).

Proverbs tells us that oppressing the poor shows contempt for God while being kind to the needy honors Him (14:31). If you really love God, you will love *all* who are created in His image the way He does. Not loving others shows that you really don’t love God, no matter what you say with your lips (1 John 4:19–21). It’s why Proverbs says that showing *chesed* and faithfulness will cause us to win favor and a good name in the sight of both God and man (3:4). When we show God’s steadfast love to the world, people will look at our communities and take notice. Matthew 5:16 describes good works this way, “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

This is what happened in the very first church. They were completely united in purpose. They were selfless and generous in sharing all that they had, and because of that, there were no poor among them. Everyone had everything they needed. And new people joined their community every day (Acts 4:32–35). The world around them was amazed at how they loved and wanted to be a part of it, because, as Proverbs tells us, everyone desires to be loved with *chesed* (19:22).

**Q: Why does being kind to the needy honor God?**

**Q: What strategy do you have in place to consistently minister to those in need?**

**Q: How has the Lord shown lovingkindness to you? In what ways has this impacted the way you view others and their worth?**

**Proverbs 11:24–25; 14:21; 19:17; 22:8–9; 25:21–22; and 28:27 [Read]**

**Talking Point 2:** Generosity to those in need is not only right, it will also lead to blessing.

**Q: How can being generous to those who can’t pay you back lead to prosperity?**

**Q: Why is it Christlike to be kind and generous even to our enemies?**

In the Jewish faith, kindness and generosity to the poor and anyone in need for any reason has been come to be known as *chesed* because it reflects the kind of unconditional, generous love God has for us. Chesed is Judaism’s primary ethical virtue, and acts of chesed are a *mitzvah* – literally a “commandment.” The word *mitzvah* can refer to the 613 commandments in the Law, but because chesed is so central to the purpose of God’s law, any act of kindness done in honor of God is a *mitzvah*. They also teach that an act of true chesed is not just giving money or things to those in need; it also requires personal service. It is the personal involvement, attitude, and effort that qualifies an act of kindness to be considered an act of chesed.[[7]](#endnote-7) Rabbinical writings argue that acts of chesed are the foundation stone and pillar of the universe. Without justice, kindness, compassion and steadfast love, humanity cannot exist.[[8]](#endnote-8) These acts of lovingkindness are not just nice things to do, they are required by Jewish ethical law.[[9]](#endnote-9)

Showing generosity and kindness to those in need is one of the greatest ways we can reflect God’s character. The New Testament wisdom book, James, says caring for those in need and keeping oneself unstained by the world is true religion (James 1:27). Paul tells us that true generosity comes out of a cheerful heart, not compulsion or guilt (2 Corinthians 9:6–7). Paul wrote to the Corinthians in awe at the Christlike love of the Macedonian Christians, who considered it a privilege to give generously (even sacrificially) to those in need in Jerusalem even though they were poor themselves (2 Corinthians 8). Proverbs says the righteous will give generously without sparing (21:25–26).

Proverbs tells us that those who give generously will prosper (11:24–25). God will reward them for their generosity (19:17). Allen P. Ross says this does not refer to a financial investment but blessing in God’s economy. In the world, you have to accumulate money to be rich, but in God’s kingdom, the way to become rich is to give it away.[[10]](#endnote-10) As Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

Proverbs encourages us to even show kindness and generosity to our enemies. The phrase “heaping burning coals on his head” is a not a reference to violent retribution but symbolizes pangs of conscience. Being kind to our enemies will make them feel guilty and repent. The New Testament agrees with Proverbs that the only way to overcome evil isn’t to fight against it with evil but to meet it with good (Romans 12:21).

**Q: Why would acts of kindness have to involve personal connection to be acts of chesed?**

**Q: How have you seen people bless themselves by generosity and kindness to others?**

**Q: If true generosity comes from a cheerful heart, not compulsion or guilt, how does someone cultivate a cheerful heart?**

**Proverbs 11:16–17; 16:6; 20:28; 21:21; and 31:20 [Read]**

Talking Point 3: Kindness, steadfast love, and generosity bring honor to yourself, too.

**Q: Why is it important for leaders to be kind and generous to those in need?**

Some people argue that kindness is a weakness, “nice guys finish last.” But even if your kindness and generosity mean you aren’t the wealthiest or most powerful person in the world, it usually means people respect you. Kind, generous, loving people usually “gain honor.” They have a good reputation, and people love and respect them (21:21). This was especially significant in the ancient world where honor was so important. Everything was done in an attempt to gain honor and avoid shame. But it’s important today, too. Many people believe that having people think highly of you is even more important than success, wealth, fame or power. Solomon said ruthless people will *only* gain wealth, but kindhearted people gain honor (11:16, NIV). The “only” makes it clear which one he thinks is more important.

As we saw in last week’s lesson, recent research has shown that what Proverbs says is true – the most effective leaders, even business leaders, lead with humility and care for their people with servant leadership. Proverbs tells us it is chesed that upholds the throne and preserves the king (20:28). This is a reference to what God said about why His kings were to be different from the kings of this world. Instead of using their people for their own gain, they were to serve the people and do what was best for them. Their leadership role was not about themselves and their own power; they were to lead as a representative of God, the true king (Deuteronomy 17:14–20).

Proverbs makes it clear that honor comes from character, not worldly gain. Worldly wisdom says to focus on building your own wealth, but the wisdom of God says that generosity and serving others with lovingkindness is the way to riches that are far more important than anything you could gain from this world (Matthew 6:19–20).

**Q: Describe someone you know who is exceptionally kind, loving and generous. Is that person well-respected? What kind of impact does he or she have on the community?**

**Q: What’s the value of a good reputation? How does this benefit you and the kingdom?**

**Week 12:** *Proverbs: Kindness and Generosity*

**Took**

**Main Point: Generosity and lovingkindness are ways to love others as God loves us.**

Choose an act of kindness and generosity to perform this week. Make a plan right now and be specific; name the person, the act and the need that you will be meeting. Prayerfully follow through on your plan this week, ask that God would use this opportunity to point back to Him and impact the kingdom. Next week, you will have an opportunity in class to share about your interaction and invite us to join you as prayer partners.

**CHALLENGES**

**THINK:** In what ways have you seen kindness and generosity change the world around you? Who are the kindest and most generous people in your life? How have they displayed their kindness and generosity? How have people responded to them? How have their communities been impacted by them? What things about them would you want to emulate?

**PRAY:** Ask God to show you how you can be more generous. Ask Him to give you a heart of generosity and steadfast love for others – even those who can’t pay you back, even those who are your “enemies” (those who irritate you, aren’t very nice, or even have hurt you in the past).

**ACT:** Do an intentional act of kindness. Not a “random” one. Remember how we said an act of kindness is an act of true chesed because of the personal involvement? Choose one person for whom you can do an intentional, personal act of chesed. Really think and pray about it. Think about someone who is truly in need. Their need doesn’t have to be financial. It could be the need for physical help with something around their house, a friend to listen, anything. It could be extra impactful if it were for an “enemy.” In fact, forgiving someone who hurt you is one of the most chesed acts of kindness there is because it reflects how God continues to forgive us over and over, no matter what we have done.

1. https://www.forbes.com/lists/top-charities/?sh=3b57bcad5f50 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. N. H. Snaith, *Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (London, 1944). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. James Luther Mays, “Worship, World, and Power: An Interpretation of Psalm 100,” *Interpretation 23, No. 3 (*July 1969). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. “Christians: More Like Jesus or Pharisees?” Barna Group Research, Jun 3, 2013 - https://www.barna.com/research/christians-more-like-jesus-or-pharisees/ [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. David Kinnaman, Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian*, (Baker Books, 2012). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Allen P. Ross, “Proverbs,” Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, ed., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Proverbs–Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Tossefta, Peah 4:19; Sukah 49b; Yerushalmi, Peah L 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Midrash Tehilim 89:2; Avot 1:2; Bereishit Rabba 3 8:7; Baba Metzi’a 30b [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Jacob Immanuel Schochet, Acts of Lovingkindness (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot Publication Society, 1967). [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Allen P. Ross, “Proverbs,” Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, ed., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Proverbs–Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)