



The Power of Kindness

*By being kind and patient, we can soften hearts
and encourage others to live righteously.*

From the Life of George Albert Smith

George Albert Smith firmly believed in the power of kindness to soften hearts. He taught that we should “meet our problems in the spirit of love and kindness toward all.”¹ His granddaughter told of how his kindness and consideration of others brought peace to a tense situation:

“Once on a hot summer day there was some problem happening under the street near Grandfather’s home in Salt Lake City, and some workers from the city had come to fix it. It was hot outdoors, the sun shone fiercely, and the job at hand was a pick-and-shovel kind that made the sweat pour off the men’s faces and backs as they dug into the roadway. The workers were not careful with their language, or maybe their mothers hadn’t taught them any better, but they were swearing and using terrible language. Their words soon became offensive to many of the neighbors whose windows were open to catch any breeze that might help to cool them.

“Someone went out and asked the men to stop their foul talk, and in the process pointed out that Brother Smith lived right there—couldn’t they show some respect and keep quiet, please? With that the men let loose a new string of bad words. Quietly, Grandfather prepared some lemonade and placing some glasses and the pitcher on a tray he carried it out to the struggling men with, ‘My friends, you look so hot and tired. Why don’t you come and sit under my trees here and have a cool drink?’ Their anger gone, the men responded to the kindness with meekness and appreciation. After their pleasant little break they went back to their labor and finished their work carefully and quietly.”² [See suggestion 1 on page 231.]



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One reason President Smith treated people with such kindness was his conviction that there is innate goodness in everyone. Just a few weeks before President Smith passed away, Elder Matthew Cowley, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, visited him in the hospital. “I walked up to his bedside,” he said, “and he reached out and took me by the hand, and gripping my hand firmly he said, ‘Young man, remember all the days of your life that you can find good in everyone if you will but look for it.’”

Elder Cowley then said of President Smith:

“He loved everyone because he could see the good within them. He did not look upon sin with the least degree of allowance, but he loved the sinner because he knew that God was love [see 1 John 4:16], and that it is God’s love that regenerates human souls and may, by that process, transform the sinner into a saint.

“Maybe there are sinners who mistook his love for respect. He didn’t respect the sinner, but he loved him. I am sure that love found response in the hearts and lives of those whom he loved.”³

Teachings of George Albert Smith

The Spirit of the Lord is a spirit of kindness, not harshness and criticism.

I feel sad sometimes when I hear the unkind things that are spoken, not only of people in our Church, but of people in the world. Unkind things are not usually said under the inspiration of the Lord. The Spirit of the Lord is a spirit of kindness; it is a spirit of patience; it is a spirit of charity and love and forbearance and long suffering; and there are none of us who do not need all these virtues that are the result of the possession of the Spirit of our Heavenly Father.⁴

Every influence for peace ought to be exercised. Lucifer is exercising every means to destroy the souls of the human family. He is more active than he has ever been and he works in such an insidious way. I will not take time to enumerate the many ways he employs but there is one way in which he operates, and has operated from the beginning of the world, and that is to tempt one individual to destroy the reputation of another by saying unkind things of them.⁵

It is so easy to criticize someone else, so easy to find fault, and sometimes we speak harshly of our neighbors and friends. Now this is what our Heavenly Father gave us . . . :

“Judge not, that ye be not judged.

“For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

“And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

“Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?” [Matthew 7:1–4.]

As a people we are advised not to be critical, not to be unkind, not to speak harshly of those with whom we associate. We ought to be the greatest exemplars in all the world in that regard. Consider the criticism today. Pick up your newspapers and see the unkind things that are being said by individuals about others, and yet many times the individual who is criticizing has a beam in his own eye and does not see at all clearly, but he does think his brother has a mote in his eye.⁶ [See suggestion 2 on page 231.]

Aren’t we rather prone to see the limitations and the weaknesses of our neighbors? Yet that is contrary to the teachings of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is a class of people who find fault and criticize always in a destructive way. There is a difference in criticism. If we can criticize constructively under the influence of the Spirit of the Lord, we may change beneficially and properly some of the things that are being done. But if we have the spirit of fault finding, of pointing out the weaknesses and failings of others in a destructive manner, that never comes as a result of the companionship of the Spirit of our Heavenly Father and is always harmful.⁷

**We should look for the virtues in others
and offer sincere praise.**

I stand here tonight to speak of a man who has several years ago gone home. . . . I refer to Francis M. Lyman [of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles] and I want to say to you that that great man was

as tender as a baby, just as tender as a little child, and his desire to help and encourage was beautiful. I have heard him compliment his brethren many times when they have done something praiseworthy—one had delivered a fine address, another had borne a convincing testimony, another had done something else praiseworthy. I have seen him put his arm around them and say, “I am proud of you and the fine thing you have done.” Is not that a commendable way to live? That is the way to make ourselves happy. If, instead of being jealous, we see and appreciate and commend the virtues and abilities of our fellows, if we see the power for good in [others], how much better it will be.

Many of us live in such an atmosphere that we are almost dumb when it comes to praising somebody else. We seem unable to say the things that we might say . . . to the blessing of others. Let us look for the virtues of our associates and observing them make them happy by commending them.⁸

I plead with you my brethren and my sisters, let us be generous with one another. Let us be as patient with one another as we would like others to be with us. Let us see the virtues of our neighbors and our friends and speak of those virtues, not find fault and criticize. If we will do that we will radiate sunshine, and those who know us best will love us.⁹ [See suggestion 3 on page 231.]

**Kindness has the power to lead people
from their mistakes.**

There are those who will make mistakes. There are those among us today that have gone astray, but they are the children of our Lord and he loves them. He has given to you and to me the right to go to them in kindness and love and with patience and with a desire to bless, seek to win them from the mistakes that they are making. It is not my privilege to judge some of these that have made mistakes and are still making mistakes, unless I am so called by reason of the authority that may be conferred upon me. But it is my privilege, if I see them doing the wrong thing, to in some way, if possible, turn them back into the pathway that leads to eternal life in the Celestial kingdom.¹⁰

Let us not complain at our friends and our neighbors, because they do not do what we want them to do. Rather let us love them into doing the things that our Heavenly Father would have them do. We can do that, and we cannot win their confidence or their love in any other way.¹¹

What a joy, what a comfort, what a satisfaction can be added to the lives of our neighbors and friends through kindness. How I would like to write that word in capital letters and emblazon it in the air. Kindness is the power that God has given us to unlock hard hearts and subdue stubborn souls and bring them to an understanding of His purposes.¹² [See suggestion 4 on page 231.]

**Love and kindness in our homes can lead
our children to listen to our counsel.**

It is our duty—I should say it is our privilege as well as our duty to take sufficient time to surround our children with safeguards and to so love them and earn their love that they will be glad to listen to our advice and counsel.¹³

Live in such a way, in love and kindness, that peace and prayer and thanksgiving will be in your homes together. Do not let your homes just be a place to hang your hats at night and get your meals and then run off some place else but let your homes be the abiding place of the Spirit of the Lord.¹⁴

I pray that we may be filled with that spirit that comes from [the Lord], and that is a spirit of love, of kindness and helpfulness and of patience and forbearance. Then, if we keep that spirit with us in our homes, our boys and girls will grow up to be what we would like them to be.¹⁵

I remember a few years ago I was on a train going north. I saw sitting in the day coach of that train a woman that I had known. . . . She recognized me as I passed down the aisle of the car. She spoke to me, and I asked: “Where are you going?” She said: “I am going to Portland, [Oregon].” I knew that the family were not well-to-do. I knew that this woman was the mother of a large family of sons, so I said: “What takes you to Portland?” She said: “I have a son there in the hospital.”



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I was not aware that any of her children had moved away, so I questioned a little further, and then she opened her heart to me. She said: “My youngest boy, a few weeks ago, left home and did not tell us where he was going. We received no word from him, but he thought he would go out into the world no doubt and see it for himself, and the first intimation that we had of his whereabouts was when a telegram came from the Mercy hospital in Portland, stating that our boy was there sick in that hospital.” She said: “Of course the message shocked us very much. There was only one thing to do, and that was to raise means and go at once to that boy.”

. . . She was prepared to sit up during that long ride, day and night, not resentful of the unkindness and thoughtlessness of her boy, but only thinking that he was hers, that he belonged to her, that God gave him to her, and that our Heavenly Father expected her to use every possible means to enrich his life and prepare him for the opportunities that awaited him. So through the long hours of

the night, as the train rumbled over the rails, this good woman sat there, yearning for her boy, every mile taking her just a little nearer to that lodestone that was tugging at her heart. Finally when she arrived, quickly as she could, she made her way to the hospital. It so transpired that the place where I was to remain was not far from the hospital so I went over there to see what had occurred.

There was that sweet mother sitting by the bedside of her boy who had been seized with a serious attack of pneumonia, and he was lying there in pain. She was not scolding him because he had been unmindful of her; she was not resentful of his thoughtlessness and of his carelessness, she was just thankful to be with her boy that God had given to her. She was now trying to nurse back the child for whom she had entered into partnership with her Heavenly Father, to bring him into this world. He, by the way, was about 16 years of age, but her baby. She was trying to encourage him by telling him the things that would make him happy and contented, holding out to him the opportunities that would be his when he was well. In the place of distress and anguish that filled that room prior to her entrance there, there was a perfect halo of light and of peace and happiness spread over the countenance of that boy as he looked up into the face of her who had offered her life that he might be, and who on this occasion had come that long distance to sit by his side and nurse him back to life.

I wonder sometimes if these mothers realize how wonderful they are in the eyes of their children in a case like that. That boy had resolved before his mother had been there many minutes that never again would he be recreant to her, never again would he be unmindful of what she had given to him, but determined that the name which had been given to him in honor would be kept by him in honor so long as life should last.¹⁶ [See suggestion 5 on page 231.]

I pray that the love of the gospel of our Lord will burn in our souls and enrich our lives, that it will cause husbands to be kinder to wives, and wives to be kinder to husbands, parents to children, and children to parents because of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is a gospel of love and kindness.¹⁷

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Consider these ideas as you study the chapter or as you prepare to teach. For additional help, see pages v–vii.

1. Read the story about George Albert Smith preparing lemonade for weary workers (page 223). When have you seen an act of kindness soften someone’s heart? What are some problems that you think could be solved with “the spirit of love and kindness toward all”?
2. President Smith taught that “we ought to be the greatest exemplars in all the world” in avoiding harsh criticism (page 226). What are some situations in which we can set such an example? In your opinion, why are harsh criticism and fault-finding so harmful?
3. Read pages 226–27, where President Smith tells of Elder Francis M. Lyman complimenting his brethren. How have you been affected by someone giving you sincere praise? Take a moment to think of someone whom you should compliment.
4. President Smith taught that “kindness is the power that God has given us to unlock hard hearts” (page 228). What stories can you think of from the scriptures that illustrate this principle? (For some examples, see Matthew 9:10–13; Alma 20:1–27.)
5. Review the story about the mother visiting her son in the hospital (pages 228–30). When a child goes astray, why is it sometimes difficult to react the way the mother in the story did? Prayerfully ponder how a spirit of kindness and patience could improve your relationship with members of your family.

Related Scriptures: Proverbs 15:1; Matthew 18:15; John 8:2–11; Ephesians 4:29–32; 3 Nephi 12:22–24; Doctrine and Covenants 121:41–46

Teaching help: Discussions in small groups “give a large number of people the opportunity to participate in a lesson. Individuals who are usually hesitant to participate might share ideas in small groups that they would not express in front of the entire group” (*Teaching, No Greater Call*, 161).

Notes

1. In Conference Report, Apr. 1941, 28.
2. Martha Stewart Hatch, in Susan Arrington Madsen, *The Lord Needed a Prophet* (1990), 130–31.
3. Matthew Cowley, in Conference Report, Apr. 1951, 166–67.
4. In Conference Report, Apr. 1937, 34.
5. “To the Relief Society,” *Relief Society Magazine*, Dec. 1932, 704.
6. In Conference Report, Oct. 1949, 168–69.
7. In Conference Report, Oct. 1934, 50.
8. “To the Relief Society,” 707.
9. In Conference Report, Oct. 1934, 50.
10. In Conference Report, Apr. 1937, 34.
11. In Conference Report, Oct. 1945, 174.
12. “To the Relief Society,” 709.
13. In Conference Report, Apr. 1929, 33.
14. In Conference Report, Apr. 1948, 183.
15. In Conference Report, Oct. 1950, 9.
16. In *Deseret News*, May 15, 1926, section four, 6.
17. In Conference Report, Oct. 1948, 167.