

Cultivating Graciousness

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[0 : 00] Well, we're going through graciousness by John Kratz, Tempering Truth with Love. Today is chapter 6, which is entitled Cultivating Graciousness.

Cultivating graciousness in your heart. In the next few months, farmers are going to be starting up their equipment.

Gardeners are going to be firing up their rototillers. And even if all you do are the flowers outside of your house and your landscaping, I think probably most of us, in one way or the other, are going to be trying to cultivate something out of the ground.

We're going to try to grow something. We're going to try to see a full plant in bloom eventually. And so we'll dig, and we're going to plant, and we're going to weed, and we're going to fertilize.

I'm going to drag my hose from one side of the yard to the other, all to get something to grow. The weeds have no need of my help.

[1 : 08] The weeds don't need me to water them. The weeds don't need me to plant them. The weeds are going to grow just fine all by themselves. But anything else, anything that's not cursed, is going to take cultivation.

It's going to take work. Graciousness is exactly that. Graciousness is a flower that only grows in a gracious heart. Graciousness is a flower that can be easily overshadowed and wilt under sin.

Graciousness can be a delicate flower that finds it very difficult to thrive in trial and under the heat and when the thorns are starting to grow up.

And that's why graciousness takes cultivation. It takes work. It takes intentional effort. And that's what we're going to be talking about this morning.

We want to grow in this grace. I think over the last three or four weeks or whatever it's been, we have seen that graciousness is a beautiful virtue. It's something that I think a lot of us are saying, hey, I need to grow in that.

[2 : 29] It's not just going to happen, though. It's going to take cultivation. By the sweat of your brow, Adam, you'll get the food from the ground. Getting food to grow in a sinful world takes work.

Getting graciousness to grow in a sinful world and a sinful heart takes work. And so just as a farmer has a list of things to do in order to get corn or wheat or whatever he's growing to grow out of the field, we have several things to do.

There's plowing and there's watering and there's digging and there's however we can to coax this plant from the earth. And so that's what we're going to talk about today. How do we do that?

How do we actually grow in this grace of graciousness, of loving kindness, of patience, of a spirit that's welcoming and gentle, graceful?

What do we need to do? Well, just a number of main points. The first big main point is that we're going to have to root out harshness.

[3 : 40] We are going to have to root out harshness. Now, right away I think of pulling dandelion plants out of my yard.

You really need to go down all the way to the root to get those things to stop growing. You really do. We need to root out harshness. Harshness is a native plant to our hearts.

So, it's just like the weed. It doesn't need help to grow. It's going to do quite well all by itself. And so, if ever we're going to have a sweet, humble, gentle, kind, gracious, patient spirit, the graciousness that we're talking about, the winsomeness, the loveliness, loveliness, we're going to have to dig out harshness.

I kind of doubt that any of you just got out of bed in your pajamas and just put your clothes right on top of your pajamas. Maybe you did.

Before I put on my Sunday suit, I'm going to have to take off my pajama pants. I'm going to have to take off my shirt. I'm going to have to put something off in order to put something on.

[4 : 59] That's my point. And we're going to have to put off harshness if we are going to wear the garment of graciousness well. We're going to have to put that off if we're going to put on graciousness.

So, take your Bibles and turn to Ephesians 4, verse 22. This is the chapter that we are going to be in today, Ephesians 4, verse 22.

And we are going to use this passage to look at the putting off and the putting on. And first we have the putting off.

Ephesians 4, verse 22. And really, we could expand the reading, but this is the heart of it here for our purposes.

You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.

[6 : 03] You were taught with regard to your former way of life to put off your old self or your old man.

Who you are, who you were, I should say, in Adam. It's talking about your old humanity. Put off your old man, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, to be made new in the attitude of your minds and to put on the new man.

To put on the new self, the new humanity. That's who we are in Christ. Created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

So there's a putting off in a putting on. Putting off harshness. So before you can put on graciousness, you have to put off harshness. And it starts in the heart.

Above all else, guard your heart, for it's the wellspring of life. It's the fountain of life. Your life comes out of your hearts.

[7 : 06] So that's where your life and your words come from, the overflow of your heart. So we're talking about putting off things not on the outside, not merely behavior, not manners, or only manners, but what's on the inside.

I think it was Paul Tripp who used the illustration of someone trying to nail good fruit tree, good fruit, good apples, on a bad apple tree.

To hang them up there, to staple them on, or use paperclips or whatever. We're just hanging good fruit on a bad tree. We're not talking about that. We want to talk about something from your heart. Where does harsh speech come from? When you speak angrily, harshly, sarcastically, spitefully, vengefully, where does that come from?

The easiest thing to think and the most natural thing for us to think is that it's because of those circumstances out there.

[8 : 15] Now, you've been taught this time and time and time again, and yet I have to say here I am, still putting most of the blame on those other things and not on myself.

Harsh speech might happen in hard circumstances. It might be the sin of others. It might be the cruelty of others or whatever it is, but that's not where it comes from.

It comes from the hearts. Now, so whatever external triggers there might be, that's not where harshness comes from. Jesus was treated completely unfairly.

Jesus was treated extremely harshly. He was misunderstood. He was judged unjustly. He was crucified.

So they laid him down on a cross and nailed him to that cross and then hoisted that cross up all unfairly.

[9 : 17] And his body was wracked by pain and his soul was hurting. If external triggers demanded harshness, then here's surely a situation that you would expect and that would demand harshness coming out of him.

If external situation circumstances demanded harshness, then surely here's a place where it demanded harshness.

But what comes out of him is, Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing. I think there's a world of wisdom and graciousness in just that statement.

I want you to think about his heart. His disposition, his attitude towards these people that are hurting him. What comes out of him?

And saying to his mother, dear woman, here is your son. And to the disciple, here is your mother. Who is he thinking about?

[10:37] What's his attitude? What's his disposition? What is he being generous of spirit, open of heart? Or is he just closed minded and only thinking of himself? He said to the thief, today you will be with me in paradise.

Have you ever thought about how much comfort that gave that new believer? How much comfort and hope that gave to a man whose life is almost over and who has, looking back, has very little to be proud of.

And here he is, he's ready to die. And Jesus interrupts him in the path that he's on and gives him a word of hope. There's graciousness there.

So if we're ever going to put, the point here is this. If we're ever going to put off harshness, we have to quit blaming the hard circumstances, the people, the unfairness.

If we always go around blaming others and other people, other situations, then we will never get around to the business that needs to be done, which is dealing with our heart.

[11:54] So, digging it out means seeing it for what it is. Seeing it for what it is. It is not excusable. It might be a little understandable, we would say, but it's not excusable.

It is evil. It is un-God-like. If Jesus shows us what God is like, then we can say, when I am harsh, I am not being like God.

I am not being like him. God our Father is gentle. God our Father is kind. God our Father is merciful. God our Father is careful, respectful even, of people.

Harshness, then, is not God-like. Harshness is evil. And so, if we're ever going to deal with it, we have to see it for what it is. It's not excusable.

It is evil. Thomas Watson said, the eye is meant for seeing and for weeping. We must see our sin and then weep for it. And so, what we're going to do now is go underneath the surface of our hearts.

[12:59] We're going to go spelunking, if you were. We're going to go down to the cave and say, where does this harshness that is coming out of me come from? Where is this carelessness and unkindness?

Where is it coming from? So, let's look for it. Where does harshness come from?

It comes from anger, is one place. Anger. Anger for good or for bad is essentially an emotion that is, I'm not getting what I want.

I'm not getting what I want. Why are there fights and quarrels among you? James says. Doesn't it come?

Doesn't it come? From your desires that war in you? You want something and you don't get it. So, you kill and you covet and you quarrel and you fight.

[14:08] Anger. So, I'm not getting what I want and I'm upset and I'm angry. So, I can sharpen my tongue and I can load it with sarcasm and I can load it with spite and I can load it with hostility.

I'm not getting what I want and so I yell at my three-year-old in the grocery store. I'm not getting what I want. So, I load it up with sarcasm and spite.

Angry people are not gracious people. So, I want you to think the next time that you are ready to say something, you're ready to type something, you're ready to post something. Check yourself.

Are you angry? Angry? Is this an indication that you're just not getting what you want? And so, now you're going to let someone have it.

The anger of man does not bring about the righteousness that God desires. Man's sinful anger does not bring about righteousness in my life. It does not bring about the righteousness in other people's lives.

[15:21] It produces no good. So, anger is a heart sin that bubbles out in harshness.

Second is manipulation. Manipulation is the next heart sin. This is, and you're going to notice, there's these overlaps, these common bonds.

But I know how to get what I want. I'm not going to load my gun with spite and sarcasm and hostility. Instead, I'm going to be sneakier.

I'm going to twist and I'm going to turn and I'm going to use sinfully strong words or tones. I push buttons. I back people into corners. I don't try to get people to move toward me.

I try to manipulate them. I'm not interested in winning them to my side with kindness and graciousness and winsomeness. Instead, I'm going to sort of manipulate the circumstances.

[16:20] I'm going to throw a pity party. I'm going to tell them how hurt I am. Because I want to get them to do what I want them to do.

So I raise my voice or I intimidate them or I try to get them to feel sorry for me. But I say, well, it has to be done.

That's the only way they'll see. That's the only way they'll come around to the right opinion. Again, God will not look favorably on those kind of excuses.

You don't need to sin in order to win. Or if you do, it is just better to lose. The next dark cave is revenge.

Revenge. You hurt me. And now I'm going to hurt you. So now harshness isn't a tool to get what I want so much as a weapon to inflict damage on someone that's hurt me.

[17:31] I'm going to yell. I'm going to be rude. I'm going to be crude. I'm going to step on your toes and I'm going to say, I don't care how you feel. I don't care what's going on inside of you.

I don't care about the impact that I'm having. I want you to see how much you've hurt me and I want you to hurt right along with me. Again, the Bible says the person that does that is trying to play God. It's not a little thing. Trying to play God. Trying to do God's job for him. God has something that he says is his. That belongs to him.

That's his exclusive property. That when we put our hands on, it is wickedness. He says, it's mine to repay. It's mine.

Vengeance is mine. But we try to take it away from him. Romans 12. Do not repay evil for evil. Do not take revenge, my friends. But leave room for God's wrath.

[18:36] For it is written, it is mine to avenge. I will repay. Do you see again, where does harshness come from? It doesn't come from the circumstances. Not the people.

Not ultimately. Harshness comes from a heart that wants to be God. That wants to always get its own way. That is unhappy when it doesn't get its own way. That's not submissive to God.

It comes from a lack of love. Here's another dark cave. 1 Corinthians 13. Love is patient and love is kind and gentle.

It's not arrogant. It's not rude. It's not irritable. It's gracious. Yes. The opposite of loving others is selfishness.

It's just a love of self. So if you hear words that are leaking out of your mouth, that are harsh or unkind or condemning, you can know that those words are not about loving that person, whatever excuse you're saying to yourself.

[19:44] It's about loving yourself. You're not showing love to the person you're speaking to, and you need to ask, who am I loving in this moment?

Who am I indulging? Who am I trying to please and help? Maybe it's not a lack of love or revenge or manipulation. Perhaps it's something a little more, I'd say, benign, or at least not as malicious. Maybe it's just thoughtlessness. Thoughtlessness. I'm not excusing it. But just the point of, I didn't mean to be harsh.

I didn't set out to be harsh. That wasn't my intention. But rather, I just wasn't thinking. I wasn't thinking about how they would feel. I wasn't thinking about the impact those words would have on them.

I wasn't thinking about how I was talking or the words that I was using or how those words might come across to them. Remember, week one of this series was we need to make the distinction between intent and impact.

[20:50] Intent is what we are trying to do. Maybe we are just not trying to do anything. But impact is what we actually do.

So I don't mean to sound accusatory or harsh, but I am. I just, I thought I was doing what was good and right.

I was saying what I thought needed to be said. But I wasn't thinking about how it came across. That's where a lot of harshness comes from. You don't intend to do it.

But you're just not thinking about it. But the question is, does the accidental nature of it excuse it? Does the accidental nature of it make it less painful?

When I was in second grade, my best friend was hit by a car. It was an accident. He was very injured. The driver didn't mean to.

[21:55] But my friend was nevertheless still very hurt. Whether the driver meant to or not. Love says, I don't want to hurt people unnecessarily, even on accident.

Selfishness just says, well, I meant well. The rest is your problem. I meant well. It's your problem. You've got to deal with it. You shouldn't take it that way.

The last thing I want to mention is connected to really all of these things. It's the underlying all of it. And it's pride. Where does harshness come from? It comes from pride. What do all those things have in common? It's just, I'm self-absorbed.

Those who are harsh and judgmental just think they're right. They're certain they're right. There's no doubt. There's no quibbles. There's no other possibilities.

There's no nuance. There's no mitigating factors. There's no other side of the story. They are right. They have the facts. And only they have the facts. So they aren't curious.

[23 : 01] They aren't concerned. They aren't open to being wrong. They aren't open to learning. Why? Because they know everything they need to know. Our author says this.

Fools are filled with pride. I don't really care about you and what you think. The fool tells himself, it's my view or no view. It's Proverbs 18.2.

Fools do not delight in understanding, but in airing their own opinion. So pride is the soil of harshness. It's too proud to let God be God.

It's too proud to think about others. Too proud to think of others better than themselves. Too proud to love. And so cultivating graciousness means we have to get down into our hearts and put off these attitudes.

The self-love and this carelessness and this pride, the self-absorption. We can't let them keep growing. We can't let them keep growing.

[24 : 08] That's the way that we used to be, Ephesians says. That's the old man. That's who we are in Adam. That's the old humanity. That's how they act. That's just natural run-of-the-mill.

All those excuses, all that way of thinking. They're a normal part of the old man hating and being hated. That's how they live. But we didn't learn Christ that way, Ephesians says.

We didn't learn Christ that way. We learned him in righteousness and heart-level holiness. And so we start with digging out harshness.

That's where we begin. Digging out those attitudes, those sinful attitudes. But then we have to put something in its place. We have to grow graciousness.

It's not enough to weed. You have to plant. You have to cultivate. You have to water. Well, how do we do that? It comes from a real change of mind and heart.

[25 : 11] Just a fundamental change in how you're thinking. That's what repentance is. Repentance is a word in Greek that's metanoia.

It's a change of mind. A change of heart. Where does graciousness come from? It comes from just having a change of heart at a very deep level about things.

About who God is. Instead of the first priority being me, the first priority now is God. That's where graciousness comes from.

The harsh person has his whole life, whole worldview, and it's filled up with him or her. He, she is the star of the show.

He, she is the most important person. He, she determines how things are going. Or what we should do. But that's, that's where we have a, a metanoia. That's where we have a change of mind.

[26 : 15] A repentance. Now, God takes center stage. And we say, instead of, this is what I want. This is what I think I should do. This is what I deserve. We're asking a different question now. The question is, here I am in this situation. I know this is how I feel.

This is how I want to react. This is what I want to do. But the question is not what I want. The question is, is what does God want? What does God want from me?

And you know what? That's not, it's not hard to know. Because we have a book. And he tells us what to do in these circumstances. And so we want to look down at Ephesians chapter 4. Ephesians chapter 4.

And verse 31. So we had to put off. And now, well, we're going to get some more put off. And then we're going to put some put ons here.

[27 : 11] Verse 31. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger, brawling, and slander, along with every form of malice.

What does God want me to do? Be kind. Be kind, God says. Be kind.

That's what God expects of us. That's what he wants from us. Be kind. And compassionate. That means have mercy on people.

Be compassionate to one another. Forgiving each other. Oh, they've sinned against you. Forgive them. Forgive them.

Just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God. Oh, there's another command. What does God want from me in this situation? He says, be an imitator of God. Imitate God.

[28 : 13] You've seen what I do? Now you do it. You've seen how I act? Act that way. The concern is not what you think is best, but here's what you need to do. Be imitators of God.

Therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love. Live a life of love. Live a life of love with each other. Luke 6.

Love your enemies. Do good to them. Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great.

And you will be sons of the Most High because He is kind. He is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.

Be merciful. It's like Paul knew exactly Jesus' words. Be merciful just as your Father is merciful. That's how people in God's family are supposed to act.

[29 : 15] And I don't see any sort of like caveats for when it's going bad for you.

When it's hard for you. That's how God's family is supposed to act. So cultivating righteousness means owning that and believing and really embracing that God says, I should act this way.

I should talk this way. I should respond this way to provocation, to heartbreak, to disappointment, to injustice. God commands me to act like Him.

So I have a change of mind. Not me and mine. But what does He want? He tells me what He wants. But just a slight hiccup in all of this.

And that's this. God's law can't give me the strength to do it. I could tell you to be kind all day.

[30 : 22] I think I've said it eight times in the last three minutes. But you know what? It won't help you to be kind. It's good. It's the way to go.

But it doesn't give you the power to do it. John Bunyan, I think it was said, this. Run, John, run. The law commands. But gives us neither feet nor hands. Far better news the gospel brings. It bids us fly and gives us wings.

So God's law is good. We are to put off and put on. And it shows us the way. And it directs us in paths of righteousness. But the gospel gives us the power that the law lacks.

So if we try to fight harshness, which is simply the law. If we just go again and again to Ephesians and say, I've got to do this. I've got to do this.

[31 : 23] I'm not saying that you shouldn't do that. But if you do it simply like that, you're either going to be soon very depressed and very defeated. Or you are going to be a pretentious hypocrite.

Thinking that you are doing something when you're actually not. And so you see what Paul's motive. Forgiving each other. This is verse 32.

Be kind and compassionate to one another. Forgiving each other. That's how you're supposed to be kind and compassionate. You forgive each other. Just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore.

As dearly loved children. And live a life of love. Just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.

As a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. The gospel is the internal logic and the motivation.

In order to be kind and compassionate. It's a very simple question. What right do recently returned prodigal sons have of getting snippy with the servants?

[32 : 31] What right does the prodigal son, the day after he returns home and is welcomed back into the family, to start yelling at his brother? To start kicking the servants?

To start being impatient when his dad tells him to do something? What right do dearly loved children of God have to harshly deal with others when God, our father, has so gently dealt with us?

I just want you to think of the, what is the appropriate level of harshness that God could show us?

What is the appropriate level of harshness God has the right to show us?

Isaiah 66 has my number. Isaiah 66 has your number. And they will go out and they will look at the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me.

Their worms will not die nor their fire be quenched. And they will be loathsome to all mankind.

That's not even God being overly harsh.

[33 : 42] That's just right. That's justice. That's what rebellion deserves. You don't want God?

You're cut off from God.

You don't want life? Then you can die. Well, why am I not there? Why aren't you there?

Because God was gentle. Kind. He was gentle and kind to you. He made room for you. He gave you space and time. He moved you to seek him. He crushed his son for you. He forgave all of your sins through his blood. And now like a father who carries his children, he carries us. And he loves us. Even down to this day, he has never ever said to you, Enough. Get out of my sight.

[34 : 50] Get out of here. Don't come back. My father and my mother may forsake me, but the Lord will take me in. Because all of his wrath has been poured out on his son.

And so, brothers and sisters, where do you get motivation? Where do you get the heart to give to people what they don't deserve?

Well, it's from God. You think about how God thinks about you and feels about you and how he's treated you. He rejoices over you with singing.

He's a shepherd that carries you like a lamb. And you know, it takes me years and years to get things. Doesn't it take you years and years to get things?

You wake up after 20 years of the Christian life and you say, Wow, I never even saw that about myself. I can be a real oaf. Be a real dullard.

[35 : 50] Asaph said, I was like a brute beast before you. But I'm his child. I'm his child. And so, he bears with me. When I don't do everything right.

When I'm blind to myself and my sins. When I think too highly of myself. And he sees right through me. Isn't it hilarious? He just sees I'm here thinking I'm all dressed and I'm not.

He doesn't stop dealing lovingly with me. And so, he just keeps on pouring those promises into me. And saying, don't worry. Don't be anxious. Don't be afraid.

I'm with you. Don't be afraid. And he's full of grace. And we're meant to live in that. To live in his love.

And so then, I guess that's what I want to leave you with. Live in that grace. And then give that grace. Be imitators of God. Be imitators of God.

[36 : 50] Therefore, as dearly loved children. And live a life of love. We need both sides of those things. We need to hear, this is what I'm supposed to do. And we also need to hear, now this is how you can do it.

This is why you should do it. I love you. Well, we're dismissed. Thank God. Thank you. Thank you.