**Stop Being Nice: Be Kind**

Week 1 Preaching Resources

**Scripture Passage:** Ephesians 4:29-32

**Focus Statement:** Being nice is a human reaction. To be kind is a reflection of God’s action.

**Me:**

Share a story of a time when you had to be nice to someone, but you didn’t want to be. You put on the fake smile, but it was an inner battle. On the outside you were being “nice,” but on the inside you weren’t being happy or graceful.

**We:**

We’ve all felt this way. Maybe you go to work, school, or even church and have to just “be nice.” Part of our social etiquette and culture has told us that we have to be nice. Find the politically correct way to express yourself. We all wrestle with this, and yet – I believe that God is calling us to be more than nice.

**God:**

People in the Bible weren’t always treating each other well either. Paul gives a new vision of what new life looks like. To be Christ-like, we must get beyond being nice. As we look through the Bible, God wasn’t always nice. God wasn’t nice when David sinned. God wasn’t nice to the Israelites wandering in the desert. Jesus wasn’t nice to the woman at the well (he called her out). But God was kind.

1. Paul writes these words to people who weren’t getting along well.
2. We must put aside our human reactions: bitterness, anger, shouting, all kinds of evil.
3. Kindness helps bring others to a new level; it builds others up. (Jesus and the woman at the well)

**You:**

Here’s what this means for your life. God is calling you to put aside some human reactions. Christ didn’t call us to be nice people, he called us to be like Him. To be kind, your actions and words must be building others up. Internally we must choose to be kind before we can express kindness to one another.

**We:**

Let’s all ask ourselves together. Are we being nice people, or are we imitating Christ and being kind? God is calling our church to something greater than a nice response. Throughout this series, we’ll commit to being kind, joyful, peaceful and loving together. This week – commit to doing something kind for your neighbors.

**Stop Being Nice: Be Joyful**

Week 2 Preaching Resources

**Scripture Passage:** John 15:1-11

**Focus Statement:** Happiness is based on circumstances; joy is an assurance of God with us.

**Me:**

Invite the congregation to finish this sentence: “Happiness for me is…” Consider inviting several people to share their response. Pastor might share, “I thought my life would be complete if I just had \_\_\_\_\_” (share your personal example).

**We:**

Am I alone here? What was it that you thought would complete your life? Give a few more examples that speak to your community or neighborhood context. Also point to the ways in which your examples may have been momentary feelings of happiness, but that wears out. One key aspect of joy rather than happiness is that joy endures.

**God:**

Throughout the Bible God says a lot about joy. In John 15, Jesus says that joy comes from abiding in Christ and being pruned. Here are three points you can make:

1. Happiness is based on circumstances, joy is an assurance of God with us.
2. In the lowest of times we can still find joy through the assurance of God.
3. For all fruit of the spirit, we must abide in Christ (be tied into the vine).

**You:**

To see the fruit of the Spirit in your life, you must abide in Christ. For this joy to explode from deep within you, you have to be connected to the vine of God. As we begin this year together, as we stop being nice so that we can be joyful – we have to tie ourselves into the source. This is a great time of year to begin daily devotional practice. To feel more joy, you must be more connected to God.

**We:**

I can just see the amazing things that God is planning for our church and community this year as we root ourselves in God’s word and we are filled with joy. We know that the car, job or grade won’t complete our joy. Only Christ can do that. Today, together we’re going to have the opportunity to recommit to following Jesus. John 15:18 says, “My Father is glorified by this, that you will bear much fruit and become my disciples.” Whether it’s your first time to commit to being a disciple or you’ve committed your life hundreds of times, we are joyful with you.

**Stop Being Nice: Be Peaceful**

Week 3 Preaching Resources

**Scripture Passage:** Philippians 4:4-9

**Focus Statement:** Peace is not the absence of conflict, it is an action which requires us to seek justice and harmony.

**Opening Illustration (Me):**

Everyone stand up. Please say, “the peace of Christ be with you” altogether. Now, go and find 3 or 4 people standing around you and tell them – “the peace of Christ be with you.” What are we actually saying when we say that? What does it mean to have the peace of Christ with you? Biblical peace is rooted in shalom, community, wholeness. Peace is to have and share the mindset of Christ.

**We:**

This weekend we’re celebrating Martin Luther King Jr. a central figure in our history who was actively seeking peace. His dream was for a society which would not judge children, “by the color of our skin but by the content of their character.” King challenged us to take on the mind of Christ and put it into action. We’re all challenged to a new frame of reference for peace – a society of shalom and justice.

**God:**

God has a clear vision of peace. To say you are seeking peace throughout scripture means that you are seeking shalom – wholeness, community and belonging for all.

1. God’s peace looks like strength under control. (Verse 5 – gentleness. MLK: not returning violence for violence)
2. We will find peace when you fill your mind with the things of Christ. This is beyond our understanding. (Whatever is, whatever is, whatever is… verse 8)
3. Peace requires action – it is the mind of Christ in action (Verse 9 – put it into practice)

**You:**

God wants you to be a peacemaker. First, have the mind of Christ. Put it into practice and the peace of Christ will be with you. Peace is an action as we conform our minds to Christ and then act.

**We:**

This week, let’s commit to be peacemakers in our community. Consider adopting a project in the community and coordinating it beforehand, such as serving the soup kitchen, painting a local playground, or volunteering for a non-profit. As all our minds are conformed to Christ and we begin to act, the world around us will change. Peace doesn’t just change us, it brings shalom for all.

\* This week would be a great opportunity for a take-away. Consider making note cards or postcards that could be hung from refrigerators reminding your congregation to “put on the mind of Christ” first thing each day

**Stop Being Nice: Be Loving**

Week 4 Preaching Resources

**Scripture Passage:** 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

**Focus Statement:** We are called to do the hard work of sharing God’s love.

**Opening Illustration (Me):**

You could start a couple of different ways:

* Stop by Hallmark and buy a few sappy cards. Read your favorite lines from them.
* Or read a few lines from famous love songs (What’s Love Got to do With It – Tina Turner, Because You Loved Me – Celine Dion, I Will Always Love You – Whitney Houston, Can’t Help Falling in Love – Elvis. Pick songs which connect with your congregation). Is your congregation able to identify the song name or artist?

**We:**

We’re all getting ready for Valentine’s Day in a few weeks. The stores have hearts and lots of pink decorations. Society tells us that love is... (complete this sentence several different ways). But what does scripture tell us about love?

**God:**

The Bible has all kinds of different love passages. God is love. Love your neighbor. Love your enemy. 1st Corinthians 13 is one of the most famous wedding passages, but it goes much deeper than romantic love. Scripture uses 4 words for love.

* Philos is brotherly love.
* Eros is erotic love.
* Storge is a love between family members.
* Agape is the deepest love, defining God’s immeasurable love. Throughout 1st Corinthians 13, Paul describes and uses agape love.

**You:**

By now you’re probably getting the idea that we’re called to more than the sappy love on Hallmark cards or in your favorite movie soundtrack. Agape captures Christ’s love. How is your love becoming more like Christ’s and less like the world’s expressions of love?

**We:**

Paul introduces this whole passage by saying, “and now I will show you a more excellent way.” We are called to Stop Being Nice. God calls us to live in a more excellent way, to show our neighbors and world agape love. This love will cost us our time and energy. But imagine if we all worked together – to be kind, joyful, peaceful and loving. May we go out and share the agape love of God.

\* Pastors might consider identifying some of the most unloved people in the community and finding a way to love and serve them in the following week. You might take meals to the homeless, or pay for people’s clothes at the laundromat, or pay for the order behind us at the drive thru lane.