



*"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, **kindness**, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."*
—Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV)

With each passing day I'm becoming increasingly disturbed by the images of people screaming at each other on the steps of statehouses. One of the reasons this behavior continues is the absence of a unifying voice in this country. The pandemic has further polarized us rather than bringing us together. It's sad and terrifying.

Thankfully, I came across the story of a man named Tom Tait. Tom was a member of the city council in Anaheim when he started noticing a mysterious poster campaign on walls scattered around the city. Each poster read: **MAKE KINDNESS CONTAGIOUS**. Tom found out who was responsible for the posters and made an appointment to speak with him. His name was Dr. Jaievsky.

Dr. Jaievsky's family had escaped the Nazis and fled to Argentina, where he was raised until he eventually emigrated to the United States. He told Tom that years earlier, while on vacation, his family had a terrible accident that claimed the life of his six-year-old daughter, Natasha. He and the rest of the family were overcome with grief. But after they returned home, and began going through her belongings, they found a number of beautiful notes she had written about kindness. When other children were playing games, she would sit and write. And this is what she chose to write about.

Inspired by his daughter, Dr. Jaievsky began to think more deeply about the role of kindness in healing. He believed that in the same way healing in the body could be stimulated from within, cities, too, could heal from within through the power of kindness. So he launched the poster campaign.

Six years later, when Tom ran for mayor of Anaheim, he was still thinking about kindness. He made it a large part of his platform, and people resonated with it so strongly that Tom won by a substantial margin.

Tom would often say to his constituents that they were one day closer to the big earthquake, a terrorist attack, or some other disaster that may strike their community in the years ahead. He figured if a major event struck, it would take much more than the police and fire personnel to keep people safe. It would have to be people helping one another through acts of kindness.

One of Tom's many initiatives was to launch the *Million Acts of Kindness* program in the Anaheim Elementary School District. Each school set an ambitious goal for kind acts for the students to meet each semester, and when they met their milestone, the entire school celebrated with a school assembly, which Tom attended as mayor. By the time they hit their district-wide target of one million acts of kindness, bullying was radically reduced, and suspensions district-wide were cut in half.

Tom envisioned kindness as the connective tissue that would bring his city together. It informed all his work as mayor, from hiring and employee evaluations to decisions on program priorities and policies. He would step back and say, *How would a kind city respond to this problem?*

In his letter to the church in Galatia, Paul identified kindness as one of the fruits of the Spirit. In other words, people would be able to identify a follower of Jesus by acts of kindness which, in turn, had the power to transform people's lives.

I've seen many acts of kindness since the coronavirus forced itself into our communities and families. They have offset the unfortunate behavior I described at the beginning of this devotion. But we must keep at it. We must commit ourselves to loving our neighbors, helping those in need, lifting up the struggling, and reaching out to the lonely. A simple act of kindness can go a long way. For the sake of the risen Christ, and for the sake of the communities in which we live, we must forge on. What act of kindness will you perform today?

In Christ,

Pastor Chuck

Let us pray. Good and gracious God, through the kindness of your Son you teach us how much you love us. Let us return that kindness in acts of mercy toward our neighbors, so that all may be gathered into your family. Amen

Note: The story of Tom Tait was lifted from a new book by Vivek H. Murthy, MD, the 19th Surgeon General of the United States entitled *Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World* (Harper Collins, 2020). It's a fascinating read, especially during this time.