Bob: If people were describing you, how long would it take before the word, “kind,” showed up? Shaunti Feldhahn says she realized, recently, that even when she didn’t mean to be unkind, there were times—

Shaunti: I had not realized that—when my daughter procrastinated / didn’t do her homework—or my son / he’s 14 years old. He has learning issues. He’s a great kid / he works really hard; but we’ll work for an hour or two on some project, and then he’ll forget to turn it in. It’s like, “Buddy!” You know, my voice rises, and I have that exasperation: “How could you do that?!” I don’t realize that what I am saying, at that moment, is “You’re an idiot.”

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Friday, February 2nd. Our host is Dennis Rainey; I’m Bob Lepine. Are there times when you’re being unkind without even realizing it? We’ll talk about that today with Shaunti Feldhahn. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. As long as we’re spending time talking about kindness this week—and how we can become more kind in our marriages, and our relationships with our kids, and in extended family relationships—we thought it would be a good idea—not only to have Shaunti Feldhahn, who has written the book, The Kindness Challenge—but we also ought to add to the mix today our friend, Ron Deal; because one of the places where unkindness can emerge is in blended and stepfamily relationships.

Dennis: No doubt about it. Ron, welcome to the broadcast.

Ron: Thank you.

Dennis: You’re seeing some of that within blended families; aren’t you? It’s a natural setup to be unkind; isn’t it?

Ron: Well, anytime, you get frustrated—anytime, you feel set apart or pushed out, feel rejected, feel like you’re an outsider and you’re powerless—well, that’s just ripe for unkindness coming to the surface. Of course, we want to do the opposite of that; because unkindness always makes things worse, never better.
Dennis: And what many of our listeners don’t know is, at least, a third of all the new marriages and families that are being formed involve forming a blended family.

Ron: Right; exactly.

Dennis: So, these needs we’re talking about here, Shaunti, around your book are very, very practical.

Shaunti: Big deals; yes!

Dennis: And you’re helping folks be able to relate to each other within this formation of a relationship that has all kinds of dynamics. You’re giving people a challenge called the 30-Day Kindness Challenge. Explain what that is.

Shaunti: So, it’s basically—whether you’re a blended family, a stepfamily, or a nuclear family that’s still together—I mean, it’s a habit that needs to be built that we often don’t even realize we need to build, but it’s a very big deal.

The way that we do it is—this 30-Day Kindness Challenge is—you pick a person that you want a better relationship with. Now, maybe, in this case, it’s your stepdaughter; right? It’s the teenager in the house who has got the attitude; and you’re like, “Okay; I really want a better relationship with this person.” Maybe, it’s your spouse—maybe, you have a great relationship; you just want to make it better.

The challenge is for 30 days—is you do three things every day. First, you say nothing negative about them—either to them or about them to somebody else—nothing negative / nothing unkind. There is so much that we need to unpack about how much we can be negative and unkind without ever realizing it. We identified seven different patterns of unkindness that tend to come out pretty easily, but you withhold that for 30 days.

The second thing you do for 30 days is—you find something you can sincerely praise: “What’s something you can sincerely affirm about this teenage stepdaughter of yours who is driving you nuts?” There’s got to be something to affirm. Every day, you tell that person that thing; and you tell somebody else what it is that’s wonderful about them.

Then, the third thing—every day, for 30 days, is to do a small action of generosity / a small action of kindness. Like, maybe, your teenage daughter is complaining; but really, you sense she just needs somebody to listen to her for a few minutes. So, you take those few minutes out of that day—and you just sit and you listen; you engage, and you ask questions. Would you rather do something else?—yes; but it’s an action of generosity to do that.
What we found is—if you do those three things for 30 days—we found that 89 percent of those relationships improved, which is huge. The main reason for that is because you’re not really changing the other person as much as you are changing you.

Ron: And who doesn’t respond well to kindness? I mean, let’s say you have that frustrating relationship with a spouse or a stepdaughter—or whoever it might be—and you go out of your way to do this over, and over, and over, and over. It’s the old phrase, “Kill them with kindness”; you know? It does—

Shaunti: Who’s not going to respond well to that; you know?

Ron: Grace is attractive. We’ve said that on this broadcast many times before. Grace is attractive. You move toward it; you know? If I am that stepdaughter, and I’m having a hard time with my stepparent, over a period of time, it’s hard to deny their kindness toward me. That just softens my heart.

Bob: I want to go back—because you kind of rushed past it—the seven different patterns of negativity.

Shaunti: Yes.

Bob: What are those?

Shaunti: Each of us has, at least, one pattern that just tends to come up in our lives in different ways.

Bob: Some of us might have more than one? [Laughter]

Ron: I was going to say—

Shaunti: I was just going to say—yes. [Laughter]

Ron: “What happens if I have more than one?” [Laughter]

Shaunti: I recognized, at least, two / maybe, three of these in myself—

Bob: Okay.

Shaunti: —I have to confess. It’s really, really crucial for us to identify our pattern of negativity so we can withhold it / so we can catch it when it happens. Then—like I did this with my, at the time, 16-year-old daughter. I had no idea how often I got exasperated with her. That is my pattern of negativity; so for example, exasperation, irritation, pointing out mistakes. I had not realized that—when my daughter procrastinated / didn’t do her homework—or my son / he’s 14 years old. He has learning issues. He’s a great kid / he works really hard; but we’ll work for an hour or two on some
project; and then he’ll forget to turn it in. It’s like, “Buddy!” You know, my voice rises, and I have that exasperation: “How could you do that?!” I don’t realize that what I’m saying, at that moment, is “You’re an idiot.”

Now, would I ever, ever, use those actual words with my sweet, sensitive 14-year-old son? Of course, not; but that’s what I’m saying when I get exasperated.

**Ron:** This reminds me of the time when my kids were young. My wife came to me and said, “Ron, you’re a great dad, and you follow through really well; but when you’re punishing our children, you should see your face.” My face said what your tone said, “You’re an idiot.”

**Shaunti:** Yes.

**Ron:** I was really hurting my children, and I had no idea; but it was in my eyes / it was in my expression. I hated that day that she pointed that out to me, and I loved that day because I needed to know that about myself.

**Bob:** Exasperation. What else?

**Shaunti:** So, another one is sarcasm. [Laughter]

**Ron:** That’s my spiritual gift, by the way. [Laughter]

**Shaunti:** I was just going to say—you raised your hand.

Actually, I was doing a pastoral interview with a pastor of a major church. That’s a common thing—where I’ll go in, and Sunday mornings, they’ll interview me as the sermon time. He says in front of his whole congregation—which they thought was hilarious because they knew what he was like—“Sarcasm is my spiritual gift”; you know? [Laughter]

And let me tell you—this is one of those things where it’s fun / it’s funny—you know, everybody likes joking. What we don’t realize is that—for people, where it’s actually a bit of a pattern / like it’s kind of a thing—we don’t realize that what we’ve built in the heart of the people around us is this little [nervous laughter]: “Was he serious? Did he—is there a little bit of truth under that?” What happens is—that person starts to build a bit of a wall.

Now, what we found is—that if everybody in the room, listening to the sarcasm—if everybody / the person who is the target and everybody listening—knows that there is 100 percent goodwill between everybody, then, it’s just funny; but if it happens too much, then, that starts to introduce that question. Then, if there is not 100 percent goodwill, that’s when the little question occurs.
**Dennis:** Well, I want you to finish your list of seven.

**Shaunti:** I don’t have to get to all of them—but yes.

**Dennis:** Yes; I don’t have a problem with sarcasm, but I want to find out which one is Bob’s. [Laughter]

**Ron:** That's a great illustration of sarcasm. [Laughter]

**Bob:** I think he was just being sarcastic. [Laughter]

What’s number three?

**Dennis:** Yes; give us the others. I really want to—I want to evaluate: “If we all have a pattern,—

**Bob:** Yes.

**Dennis:** —“let’s talk about it.”

**Shaunti:** So, another one—this is a big deal in our culture today. We were talking about why our culture has gotten so mean and so unkind. Another big one is catastrophizing. I didn’t even know that was a word before; but catastrophizing is basically thinking to one’s self: “Oh my goodness, if this happens…” or “…if this doesn’t happen, it’s going to be a catastrophe.”

What happens is—you, on social media: “Oh my goodness, if this person gets elected, it’s going to be a catastrophe”; “Oh my goodness, if my daughter goes to prom with that boy, it’s going to be a catastrophe”; “Oh, my goodness…”—and you know what? Maybe, it is going to be a catastrophe. The problem is—confronting that—we often become remarkably unkind as we try to confront something; because we’re so passionate about it as opposed to: “You know what? I might disagree,” or “I might have to keep an eye on my daughter. I might have to install an app on her phone; but you know what? It’s okay. I’ll be on top of it. Call me.”

**Bob:** When everything becomes a hill to die on, all of a sudden, unkindness will go up; right?

**Shaunti:** Totally up.

**Bob:** Yes.

**Shaunti:** This right here is one of the main reasons why you see on your Facebook feeds and your social media—this is why you see these amazing, wonderful, Christ-following people say things that are remarkably unkind, cruel, harsh toward someone
they disagree with, like: “I cannot believe you just said that!”; “I cannot believe you just posted that really mean meme”; or “I can’t—how did that come out of you?”

This is where the body of Christ has to recognize Jesus does not give us an out in our ability to be kind. As a matter of fact—just as a quick note—as I was looking at—you know, The Golden Rule; right?—“Do unto others as you’d have them do unto you.” We all teach our kids this. All over the world, people talk about The Golden Rule.

Well, you know what? Where Jesus says this—this is the Sermon on the Mount, where He is actively talking about a situation just like this one, where there is active—say, injustice—toward you, or somebody is being mean, or there’s something really wrong happening; and it’s really unfair. That’s the exact situation He’s talking about. When He says those words, in context, it means, “I want you to take that person, who is being unjust, unkind, mean, cruel to you—I want you to treat them in the kind, and generous, and grace-filled way you wish they were treating you.”

Ron: That is so powerful. That is so powerful.

Yes; of course, this happens in all aspects of life; but I’m thinking specifically of a discouraged stepparent—who is feeling rejected, and feeling pushed out, and powerless—and how easy it is for them to withdraw into unkindness rather than love the way they would want someone to love them. And I’m thinking of ex-spouses who are co-parenting children together—

Shaunti: Yes.

Ron: —and you do have a negative history there. It is so easy to catastrophize everything that other household does into, “Here we go again,”—more negativity.

From time to time, I get to intervene in those situations. I am constantly reminded how hard it is for people to stop thinking poorly of the other home and to consider that—maybe / just maybe, they are trying and, maybe, they are making an effort to improve—“No, I don’t want to give them that. I don’t want to give credence to that. I need to stand on guard.” But kindness says: “Drop that guard!

Shaunti: Absolutely.

Ron: —“Kill them with kindness,”—if you will—“and watch and see if the relationship doesn’t improve.”

Bob: Well, Ron, in a stepfamily, the network of significant, meaningful relationships is larger than it is in an intact family. We care about what more people think about us and how they interact with us. That’s why there is more potential for conflict to occur.
Ron: Right. It’s like—that you put a pin on a board, and you have strings attached to it that go in a hundred different directions. You have to attend to all of those different relational strings. It’s taxing / it’s difficult; but if kindness—if you just made that your one effort toward everybody that you are connected to—eventually, those ripple into influencing those other people.

Here’s the thing—I want people to catch about what Shaunti is saying. Kindness is your influence over people—

Shaunti: Exactly.

Ron: —you can control. You really can change who they are, in the long run, just by overwhelming them with kindness.

Dennis: One of the things Jesus talked about was loving your enemy.

Ron: There you go!

Dennis: I mean, every person listening to this broadcast has an enemy. You may not have spotted him or her yet; but you are in a relationship—it may not be a blended family / it may not be a divorce that has caused your blended family—but you know somebody who has been unjust, unfair, hurt or wounded you deeply; and you’ve got to choose how you’re going to respond to them over a long haul.

I know, when I was preparing for these interviews with you, Shaunti, I was looking at your book. God just convicted me of a relationship that is present tense. I thought, “You know, this morning when I get up…”—and I got up early—I sent that person a kind email, thanking them for something. I have no idea how it was received, but I know I felt better because—

Shaunti: Exactly.

Dennis: —I didn’t hurt the other person. I wasn’t trying to wound them back or hurt them in return.

Bob: You know, we can sign you up for a whole 30-day challenge—[Laughter]—where, every day, you’ll get an email that prompts you on how to respond.

Dennis: Anger management? Is that what you’re talking about, Bob?

Bob: No; the Kindness Challenge—we’ve got this 30-day challenge going on. Shaunti has put this together. People can go to FamilyLifeToday.com. They can sign up; and every day, they’ll get an email that prompts them with an action point on how they can demonstrate kindness / how they can think kindly about the person that they select—a spouse, a child, a friend. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com and enroll. We’ve got a lot of
people who are enrolling in this because I think there are a lot of us who are recognizing, “This is an area where I could grow / where I could develop.”

**Dennis:** And Shaunti, as human beings, when we get hurt, we have one of two responses—either we retreat and withdraw or we erupt like a volcano. No one enjoys sitting at the base of a volcano with hot lava being spewed all over them. Kindness puts out the hot lava; doesn’t it?

**Shaunti:** Oh, completely. You know, it’s interesting—another thing that kindness does—we sort of joke—but it’s a super power. Like it’s literally like, you know, the Marvel movies—you know, with the super power. Kindness really does all these supernatural things—put out lava. It completely changes the temperature of an awkward, tense, hostile situation.

That is just as miraculous—the ability to soften someone else’s heart, for example—is just as miraculous as—if you think about it—the Israelites walking out into the desert and finding breakfast in the morning. Like we don’t think of it as a miracle, because we’re not seeing blind eyes being opened or whatever; but it is—it is a miracle of the heart.

**Ron:** You cannot change somebody else, but you can make it harder for them to stay the way they are. Kindness—

**Shaunti:** Oh gosh, that’s a great line! [Laughter]

**Ron:** Kindness just helps—makes it more difficult for them to stay spewing lava.

**Shaunti:** We actually found—and this is something that is so applicable, not just to nuclear families / biological families, but is so applicable in stepfamily relationships. We actually found that one of the common things that has happened, when someone has erected a bit of a wall around their heart—which I know is the case in some of the stepfamily relationships I’m aware of, especially with the kids—there is often a wall up against the stepparent, for example, or even the biological parent.

What happens with this targeted kindness—**targeted**/**targeted**—you know, being kind and not just withholding the negativity, but also saying the positive and saying the affirmation / doing the little action of generosity—what happens is—it literally melts through that wall. It makes it—now, they can put those bricks back up and brick that hole up again and put those defenses back in place; but then, kindness melts through it again. Their heart is touched / they didn’t want it to be—that's just the power of kindness.

Pretty soon, at some point, most people—now, not all—it wasn’t 100 percent / it was 89 percent—but most people, at some point, just let that wall drop; because it’s too much trouble to keep it back in place.
**Bob:** Well, the reason there is a wall, in the first place, is because we’ve got to build protection; and if what you’re getting is kindness, regularly, you start to go, “I don’t want to be protected from kindness.”

**Ron:** There is more emotional safety there—risking becomes easier / trusting the other person becomes easier.

**Bob:** Right.

**Shaunti:** Then, that means you kind of have to go beyond the 30 days. You have to be true to what you’ve, now, built as an expectation to them.

**Bob:** That’s right.

**Dennis:** Yes.

**Bob:** Yes; I think we need to say, “If you go through the 30-day challenge, and you go, ‘Well, that’s done; now, I can go back to the regular way of treating somebody,’ it’s probably not going to help your relationship.” [Laughter]

**Dennis:** Well, what we’re talking about here is enjoying life the way God designed it to be enjoyed. First Peter, Chapter 3, is a passage that we open, Bob, at the Weekend to Remember® marriage getaway, especially in the conflict message that we give to couples; and in that, we quote this passage. Listen to what it says here: “Whoever desires to love life and see good days—

**Ron:** “I’m in for that.”

**Dennis:** I am too.

**Ron:** “I want some of that.”

**Dennis:** I’ll second that motion.

**Ron:** “Tell me how to get there.”

**Dennis:** —“let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good,”—there’s the kindness—“Let him seek peace and pursue it.” Then, it concludes, “For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and His ears are open to their prayer; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

**Bob:** And I think you bring up a great point there. When we are being kind—when the Holy Spirit is producing the fruit of kindness in us, because it is a spiritual fruit—we are on God’s agenda, at that point. We are moving in the direction of the Spirit. God’s Spirit
joins us in that, and empowers that, and expands that. We’re not in opposition to what
God is doing, at that point / we’re in concert with what God is doing, and there is power
in that.

Shaunti: Think about, as a parent—whether in a stepfamily or any other type of
relationship—think about the power of teaching your children to enter into what God is
doing in that way and have them try doing this as well with their siblings—instead of
squabbling, for example—and watch as they build that skill set.

It really is—I hate to say—it is a skill set. We think we are already kind; we’re not. We
need to build a new skill set. As they do—and they see how God moves in their heart
and the heart of their siblings, for example. I mean, there is almost nothing better that
you can teach your kids, from a practical standpoint.

Bob: So, you know that there are parents, listening, who are going, “My six-year-old
doesn’t have an email address yet, but can I sign them up for the 30-Day Kindness…”
[Laughter] Seriously, is this—

Shaunti: No; I’m not kidding; yes.

Bob: —something teenagers can do?—12-year-olds can do?

Shaunti: We have found it does work as young as five. Now, obviously, they’re not
reading the emails. You are getting the emails, and you are adapting. Whatever that
example is of the day—because it’s all about doing these three things every day for 30
days: “Don’t say anything negative…” So, it’s all about adapting.

So, it’s, you know: “What? I heard you call your sister the ‘S’-word. How about, we,
instead, find something good about your sister?” You’re going to have to adapt it, but
you know what? Somebody—who’s about 10, 11, 12—they can totally do it without
hardly even adapting it at all.

Bob: Some parents are going, “I’m not signing up, but I am signing every one of my
teenagers up for this thing today.” [Laughter]

Shaunti: That’s exactly right.

Dennis: I just want our listeners to know—we’re not talking about a random act of
kindness. God stepped out of eternity—

Bob: Yes.

Dennis: —to perform a random act of kindness, but the ultimate loving kindness in
sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to prove His lovingkindess for us. This is all about the
nature and character of God and what ought to be in every family that professes to follow Christ in their families.

Bob: Well, we all need help and coaching when it comes to kindness. That’s where the FamilyLife 30-Day Kindness Challenge comes in. We are sending out emails over the next 30 days; and if you sign up today, we’ll start you with Day 1 of the kindness challenge. It will go for the next 30 days for you. Those of you who signed up a couple of days ago—you’re on Day3 of the kindness challenge.

Every day, you’ll get an email from us that will prompt you on how you can demonstrate kindness today. The challenge is do this for 30 days and see if it doesn’t have an impact in your marriage, in your relationship with your teenager, with a coworker—I mean, it can apply anywhere—but I’m thinking about strained relationships with in-laws or with extended family members. Take the 30-Day Kindness Challenge, put it to work, and see what happens.

Go to FamilyLifeToday.com to sign up to get the daily email for the next 30 days, and join us on this challenge. You can also get a copy of Shaunti’s book, The Kindness Challenge: 30 Days to Improve Any Relationship. Order from FamilyLifeToday.com, or call to order—1-800-FL-TODAY / 1-800-358-6329.

One more thing—we have our first Weekend to Remember marriage getaway of this season happening this weekend in Napa Valley, California. It’s a sold-out event. Lots of couples are getting together this weekend for the first of more than 50 getaways we’ll be hosting this spring. Would you pray for these couples as they spend a weekend focusing on their marriage in Northern California? If you’d like more information about upcoming getaways, go to FamilyLifeToday.com.

Now, I hope you have a great weekend. I hope you and your family are able to worship together in your local church this weekend. On Monday, Barbara Rainey will join us, and we’ll talk about the days that lead up to Easter. Why is that so much different than the days leading up to Christmas, and what can we do to make Easter more significant in our homes? I hope you can be with us for it.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I’m Bob Lepine. Have a great weekend. We will see you Monday for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

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