

- I. I love that this passage falls on the day where we bless backpacks and prepare to send our children and youth back to school tomorrow, and we have had the wonderful opportunity to hear our youth share their Montreat experiences. Too often the world, and the church, want to push children and youth to the side because we're still preparing them to be leaders and Christians. We feel that they're not ready yet, but will be at some point in the unidentified future, and then they'll have their shot, then they'll have an opportunity to speak up and out. We lift up Paul's word concerning children in First Corinthians: "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways." We denounce our childish ways, decrying them as immature, which in some cases they are, but in others we see the purity of love and care that God intended us to carry throughout our lives, and I think that is where Paul is drawing our attention.
- II. What I think is great about this passage and this day is that Paul tells the Christians in Ephesus to be 'imitators of God, as beloved children.' In this passage for a different group Paul encourages them that by living into your inner child you are imitating God. And so that's what I want us to do this morning. Think back to when you were a child. You had parents, teachers, church members, and coaches instructing you, attempting to mold you into the best son or daughter, student, Christian, and player. What were some of the character traits they tried to instill within you?
- III. In Ephesians, Paul lists some great character traits, some being easier to follow than others: speak truth, be angry but do not sin, work honestly so as to have something to share with the needy, let no evil come out of your mouths so that your words may give grace, put away all bitterness, wrath, anger, wrangling, slander, and malice INSTEAD be kind, tenderhearted, forgive as God has forgiven you, live in love.
- IV. All of these are character traits we were taught by good-hearted adults in our lives when we were growing up. They wanted to impart upon us the importance of embodying these traits whether it was to be a good teammate, student, or Christ follower.
- V. I'm pretty pumped about this week for Bryan. Tomorrow is his first day of kindergarten. We did pre-K last year, but in mind this is the first step of big-kid school. After our whirlwind week, I don't think we've really stopped to fully appreciate all of the implications of tomorrow, but maybe that's for the best. After all...tomorrow is another day. But almost as important and what has me the most excited is he begins Cub Scouts on Thursday here at the church. I started my scouting journey in 1st grade so in preparation for this week I had my mom look through the house to find all my pins, merit badges, books, and other scouting stuff I earned when I was in Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts so I could show him. Bryan is really motivated by earning stickers, so I'm assuming all the stuff you earn in scouting will be a big plus early on in his scouting journey.
- VI. For me scouting was another one of the places that helped mold me into the person I am. We learned the oath, and motto: do a good turn daily. And there was also the Scout Law which sort of highlights character traits like Paul does in this section of Ephesians. A

scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent. You can hear some of the echoes to Paul in this Law.

- VII. Here is what the Boy Scout Handbook says about being kind: “A scout knows there is strength in being gentle. He treats others as he wants to be treated. Without good reason, he does not harm or kill any living thing. Kindness is a sign of true strength. To be kind you must look beyond yourself and try to understand the needs of others. Take time to listen to people and imagine being in their place. It should never be difficult to show kindness to those in need and those who cannot defend themselves. What can be harder is being kind to people you don’t know or with whom you disagree. We live in a world that has more than its share of anger, fear, and war. Extending kindness to those around you and having compassion for all people is a powerful antidote to the poisons of hatred and violence.”¹
- VIII. What would the world be like if we adults did a better job practicing what we preached to our children, grandchildren, and students? What if we expected the same out of one another that we expect from those who are looking up to us to show them how to live out kindness, love, and grace?
- IX. In our current political climate it can be extremely difficult to be kind. Two weeks ago we were told that Facebook had taken down 32 groups that belonged to hackers with ties to Russia, these are in addition to the 273 that were banned earlier this year. These individuals sought to play the edges of our political spectrum against one another to create chaos, further divisions and heighten tensions within our country. Now numbers may not sound like a lot but they were shared and liked and followed hundreds of thousands of times. They have fed off our slights toward one another, and will not stop until we are at one another’s throats. These are not the actions of those called to be imitators of God.
- X. One year ago today, a young woman, Heather Heir, was killed by a Nazi on the streets of Charlottesville, VA. An American citizen died at the hands of a Nazi in the United States in 2017. But in the midst of the hatred and violence that day one man had his life changed for the better. Ken Parker was a member of the KKK, but the group was not militant enough for him so he joined the neo-Nazis.² He lives in Jacksonville, but said he felt it was important he was there that day to help protect the ‘whiteness of the country.’ He went there in anticipation of the event becoming violent. After the events of the tragic day he was headed back to his car when he fell over, probably because he was dehydrated from wearing his black robes all day. He is laying there on the ground and of all the people to come and help him Deeyah Khan, a Sunni Muslim from Norway, showed him kindness and came to check on him and make sure he was okay. This small action sowed a seed of doubt within Ken that eventually led to the break down of the hatred that he had built up towards those who looked different than him. Months after the tragic day he came across Pastor William McKinnon III who was grilling with friends

¹ P. 50, *The Boy Scout Handbook*, 11th edition, 1998.

² <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/ex-kkk-member-denounces-hate-groups-one-year-after-rallying-n899326>

at his apartment complex. What began as questions that day, that to Ken attending Pastor McKinnon's church service on Easter Sunday. Months after Charlottesville, and six years after he joined the Klan, Ken wore a different sort of robe and was baptized in the waters of the Atlantic.

- XI. What would the world be like if we were imitators of God as dear children? How many lives could be transformed if we chose kindness over hate, lived in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us?
- XII. Tomorrow we send our children and youth out to begin a new school year. We expect them to share their toys, be respectful of their teachers and fellow students, listen when others are speaking, forgive when we are wronged, and say I'm sorry when something is our fault. I hope we will follow the words we tell them. Only then will we change the trajectory of our political discourse, only then will we be imitators of God.