



Kindness and Joy



*Kind hearts are the gardens,
Kind thoughts are the roots,
Kind words are the flowers,
Kind deeds are the fruits.*

*Take care of your garden,
And keep out the weeds.*

*Fill it with sunshine,
Kind words and kind deeds.*

—HENRY W. LONGFELLOW

Kindness and Joy

Expressing the Gentle Love

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To my wife, Charmin Marie Koenig



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Introduction

Saying kind words that are truthful and sincere and putting those words into action is a sure way to experience joy. What kindness is, how to act kindly, and the emotional and spiritual benefits of kindness are the subject of this book. If you have specific people in your life toward whom you want to be kinder, or if you simply wish to be kinder in general to those around you and are having trouble doing that consistently, then this book is for you.

As a medical physician and psychiatrist for several decades, I have taken care of a lot of people who are suffering and in great need. As a result, I have had many opportunities to practice being kind, some of which I have responded to and



others to which I have not. I am an emotionally sensitive person myself, and that has often been a benefit, especially when trying to understand others' feelings. I believe it has made me a better doctor and counselor. Being emotionally sensitive, though, has also been a source of much pain for me. That experience with emotional pain allows me to speak with authority on a topic like kindness. Finally, I am a Christian, and the Bible I read calls me to be kind toward others. I want to be more consistently faithful to that calling.

When I have acted with kindness, out of genuine interest in the welfare of others, I have experienced joy and fulfillment. That may be why I enjoy my work so much, because I have so many chances to be kind to people in desperate circumstances. Despite knowing the joy that kindness brings, I am not always kind. I am impatient, easily frustrated, and often temperamental. Many times I have acted in an unkind manner to patients, friends, colleagues, and family members. During these



times, I have experienced an emotion quite different from joy. It is a feeling I don't like, one that is rooted in hurt, disappointment, anger, pride, and fearful self-concern. It signals to me that I am not at my best.

One reason I decided to write this book was that somehow I felt it might help me become a kinder person. When I am kind, I not only feel better, but the people around me are nicer and easier to get along with. And indeed, just writing about kindness has given me a greater sense of joy, since it has motivated me to be kinder. I suspect that many of you who are reading this book are in a similar predicament. The struggle over whether to focus on one's own needs or on those of others is indeed one of the greatest challenges we all face. Over time, hopefully, we learn to be less obsessively concerned about ourselves. We realize that God will take care of us if we seek to care for his other children, who are often much worse off than we are. I suspect that this is what it really means to grow in maturity.



Please join me in this exciting journey to seek a better understanding of kindness, joy, how they are related, and how to become more habitual in acts of kindness, in the experience of joy and, even when joy is lacking, in becoming the kind of people we were created to be.



*When you carry out acts of kindness you get
a wonderful feeling inside. It is as though
something inside your body responds and says,
yes, this is how I ought to feel.*

—HAROLD KUSHNER



*Trust in the LORD, and do good . . .
and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.*

—PSALM 37:3, 4