

THE OBSERVATION SERIES

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Observation 2 – Solid Ground

Construction engineers agree that a project is not worth building unless it stands on solid ground. I began my journey as an artist with a commitment to draw “in the footsteps of masters.” Those footsteps are the craftsmanship of great Renaissance traditions by artists whose names are familiar to everyone: Michelangelo, da Vinci, Rembrandt, Rubens, Dürer, etc.

To apply the same metaphor to spirituality, I build my life on solid spiritual ground in the traditions of the apostles and freedom of the Spirit. I have chosen to walk in the footsteps of *the* Master, the Christ, as have men and women throughout the ages whose names may not be familiar to everyone: Chesterton, Lewis, Gill, Ellul, Mumford, and of course Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, Paul *et al.*

It was on solid ground where I began my conversation with God and on that ground I wrote down my observations. And it began with the choice of my words.

A choice of words: Words comprise our language as we place words in sentences and sentences into paragraphs. It’s how we communicate. Humankind has come a long way from the grunt, yet miscommunication is common because of the wrong choice of words. A teacher once told me, “Clarify the words you use, because not everyone will think the same as you do or agree with you.” Therefore, what follows is a clarification of the words I use. Three of these are: Theology, Kindness, and Emergent Faith. And there are more words as my observations continue.

Theology: I use the word theology only in its broadest context as meaning my inquiry into God, with Spirit-led listening as the essential practice of my inquiry.

Kindness: I use the word *kindness* and not the word *love* because kindness is an act or practice of love. Love is an attribute of human and divine value and virtue, an *essence of being* that must be practiced as kindness in order to bear fruit (Gal.5:22-25).

Hence, as God is love, He practices kindness towards us.

Therefore, “love is” the practice of kindness (1 Cor.13: 4-8).

Some may choose the word grace instead of kindness.

And as He commands us to love Him (Matth.22:37-40), He teaches us the practice of kindness which we must show towards Him.

To begin is to level the playing field with an accurate meaning of kindness.

The Greek words for love all declare a hybrid of goodness, goodwill (will to do good out of love), graciousness, goodness of heart (attitude), gentleness (practice of the heart), loving people (philanthropy: philos/loving; anthrospos/people), kindness of duty or covenantal promise and agreement. So far so good.

Even Google got it right: “*Kindness is a behavior marked by ethical characteristics, a pleasant disposition, and concern and consideration for others. It is considered a virtue, and is recognized as a value in many cultures and religions; the quality of being friendly, generous, and considerate.*” Synonyms are: *kindliness, kind-*

heartedness, warm-heartedness, tender-heartedness, goodwill, affection, warmth, gentleness, tenderness, concern, and care.

In the Old Testament, kindness is expressed as “Hesed” which means lovingkindness and faithfulness. Hesed goes deeper than physical and emotional kindness which in practice is usually conditionally based on changing feelings, circumstances, events, and often the lack of real commitment in a relationship.

Therefore random acts of kindness or human kindness, as wonderful and timely as these are, they will more often in the short run than over a long time, run out of energy and expire.

Hesed, however, means unconditional kindness as love that is oath-bound, forever committed, always unselfish, and unlimited in time and effort - eternal. It is a kindness that can only be extended among humans with the grace and power of the Spirit of God, because its solid ground is the Hesed kindness of God.

Embedded in kindness is the possibility of an emergent faith.

Emergent Faith: I use the word emergent as steps of the practice of faith (living by faith) towards embracing God’s love with obedience to the governance of His Kingdom. This governance embodies the very essence of our relationship with the King of that kingdom, who is Christ.

Such governance is essential to the practice of kindness from the King to us and from us to the King and to teach (disciple) others. Emergent faith compels us to embrace our mutual King-son-daughter, relationship as an actual lived-experience and not an abstract or mere intellectual understanding. The evidence such transformation has begun in our hearts is a kindness that looks for ways to express love.

It’s a kindness that overflows with goodness and gentleness, with a free-will to do good by living (practicing) unconditional love. It has been called by another name as well – benevolence.

Kindness is benevolence (Latin. *benevolentia* / *bene*-well and *volo*-to will and wish). These *benevolentia* or kindnesses are fruit of the human spirit (Matt.7:9-11;12:35) and the Spirit of God (Gal.5:22-25).

Even Webster’s concurs (1899): Benevolence or goodwill is that temper or disposition which delights in contributing to the happiness of others and which is exercised cheerfully. *Kindness ever accompanies love.*

To conclude: if the evidence of my journey of faith is solid ground and that solid ground is a theology better known as an inquiry into kindness with as an outcome an emergent faith, which despite my human shortcomings has become a river of living water manifest in creative freedom, inspiration, and delight, would it not be worth to others to accept the invitation to walk in those footsteps? Not to be confused with bogus spirituality.