

## **At-Home Sunday School For Sunday, February 11, 2024**

### ***In Defense of Kindness, by Bruce Reyes-Chow: Week 24***

We have come to the halfway point for this series of lessons. In defense of Kindness by Bruce Reyes-Chin is the book these lessons are coming from. The chapters have been condensed into lessons for you to reflect on and to address how we choose to be kind in our everyday lives. You can use these lessons or purchase the book for the full text. Please feel free to discuss the topics with friends or to journal your own thoughts as you continue your own journey on your faith path.

#### **Kindness and the Impossible**

Choosing a life of kindness can be overwhelming, and at times that's because kindness does not necessarily make an immediate impact or is overwhelmingly difficult because of the very situation that has created the need for kindness in the world. For example: some bear the weight of institutional and generational racism, homophobia, ableism, misogyny, and so on, others have lived with lifelong violence and abuse in relationships that have become accepted ways of living, and still others have such physical or mental health issues that the idea of "choosing" cannot be done without significant emotional, spiritual, or medical support.

These situations have created natural and understandable conditions where distinctly unkind actions are far more accessible choices: self-sabotaging behavior, violent resistance, or other ways of acting that do not honor the humanity of anyone involved. There should be understanding for acting out in pain or violence from a lifetime of struggle and there should be consequences for those who are perpetrators or abusers. Choosing to be kind in the world is not easy.

Choosing a life of kindness is exhausting. Choosing a life of kindness can also feel impossible, because sometimes it is. It is not a tactical switch that we turn on and off at our convenience. It must be a way of life that we completely absorb in body, mind, heart, and spirit. Kindness defaults to actions that value the life and human dignity of all involved. It means hard choices.

Violence is never an act of kindness regardless of the circumstances. Self-defense can be justified, uprisings against systematic oppression are understandable. Violence toward another is not an act of kindness. Bruce considers violent acts to not be grounded in kindness and a sense of human dignity, even though they might be understandable or justifiable.

Again, while some acts are not kind, Bruce does believe that they are understandable, and it is this perspective that allows and challenges us to be kind even when it would be justifiable not to be so. He would never encourage violence as a response to unkind acts but can understand how one can get to that point. Rage or trauma can get the best

of people and cause loss of control. Uncharacteristic behaviors arise. Anyone who has had a loved one hurt or killed, has been confronted with a life-threatening situation, or has gotten to the point where life's stresses and conditions have transformed into trauma knows that acts of kindness are not always within reach physically, emotionally, or spiritually.

How can we avoid adding to the pain with our own judgement, our privilege, or our ambivalence? How can we be part of the healing process? Bruce says that his kindness compels him to think about why these things are happening, the people who are part of the events, and to extend a posture of human dignity to all involved. He thinks about the complexities of each person, each situation, and whether they are there by choice or circumstance. Valuing human dignity pushes us to do the challenging work that it takes to be part of movements focused on changing institutions and situations that force people to take unkind measures. Kindness is not a pill or magic spell that makes it easier to be in the world. Given the many situations that generate destruction, now more than ever kindness is appropriate.

**For Reflection:** When was the last time you passed judgment on the “unkind” acts of another person without examining the complexities of why they might have acted in a certain way? How might you participate in a movement to change situations in which people have little choice but to act in unkind ways?

**Try This:** Examine a current political uprising that might be perceived as non peaceful and parse out the complexities of why this might be happening.