

How Loving Kindness Wiped Out Pagan Religion

Wow. Wow is waiting another year to do this. It is a so pleasing, so pleasant, so good. So right. So needed. And I am so happy to be here. And more than that, so glad you're here, because this is not just a conference.—this is a campaign, a revival. It's a project that we're all together working on. And it is, as Bev said, it represents the hope for this world; and hope for this world is spelled love . . . God's love flowing through us. That's what it's all about. And that's what we're here to ignite and refresh and recharge and renew in you; and hoping and confident that you'll take it back, wherever you're going.

Some people ask me about the book, **The Miracle Of Kindness**. Are we giving it away again this year? (Last year we gave everyone a free copy because somebody gave us enough money. They thought everybody should have it.) But the answer is no. But the best part of the book . . . you could probably just get over there and read some of these short little examples. Those are the best part. And I am the author, so I can say that, uh, not the author of those little examples. Some of my favorites are Glenn DeMaster waving to his neighbor, and how she ended up waiting on the curb 'til he passed in the morning—just for a wave.

And Jan opening the cracker package in her mother's nursing home; and this little lady for whom she opened that cracker package, glowed for an hour and a half. It was love. Those little acts are love. She got a touch of God.

And one of my favorites, of course there is Marilyn Monroe; some you don't even know who she is, she was. She was a pinup girl, movie star, and she grew up in foster homes, and someone asked her once, *“Did you ever experience love and all those foster homes you went to?”* And she said, she thought for a minute, and she said, *“Yes. Once my foster mother was putting on her makeup and I was sitting on the bathroom counter and my foster mother took her powder puff and puffed my nose. That was love.”*

And that is it. That has become like a metaphor for us, how simple it is to give God to friends and strangers and even enemies. And that's what we're about—letting the love of Jesus flow through us in those little simple ways. And also the big ways. There's a lot in there about the hard ways. There's those two dimensions. The hard ways to do it, where you go to visit someone. That beautiful story in there of Marilyn, who went down the street to visit to her neighbor who she learned, her son had taken his own life and she knew she had to go. And she just showed up, and it was God right there.

So the book is available, both in the back and at the bookstore, and we hope you will get it and spread it and use it in small groups. And one of the best stories is small groups using it, and they study the study material. And then they go out, and when they meet again in a couple of weeks, they share the stories of how they did some examples of simple acts of kindness. Those are exciting to share with each other.

I've been thinking of this as a love school. You came to love school this week, because that's what it's about. And we've heard people talk about the conference title, Care and Kindness, and they say, *“Well, I'm kind, I care for people.”* And therefore they say, *“I don't think I need to go to learn how to be kind and caring.”*

But, uh, the fact is this is our agenda as followers of Jesus — all of our life to keep growing and learning and adding and finding new ways to deliver loving kindness to the people in our lives and to find new new aspects and new insights. So we, we never can get to the point where, yeah, I'm a kind person. I know how to do it, because loving people is pretty complex, and it does require continued growth and insights and knowledge and exposure, exposure to the subjects . . . some of the difficult topics. And our souls are very complicated things. They are, our souls are where our loving emotions struggle to remain,

to maintain equanimity and uh, to stay positive. And the world as, as we all know, is so full of anger and terror and fear and anxiety and resentment and envy and all those things, all these negatives things that just keep percolating in our souls. And we as followers of Jesus, Jesus said, you are the light of the world. We are obliged to be antidotes to that kind of stuff that's sitting in everybody's hearts— to bring them a little bit of God, to bring them hope, bring them encouragement and all of that positive stuff. Even if it's a powder puff on the nose is an antidote to that heavy, dismal stuff that's in our hearts. And that is our agenda.

I read somewhere recently, um, Steven Post, he is the uh, he has a huge project, um, funded by the Templeton Foundation, and his project is uh, doing research on unlimited love and that's the name of his project. It's about unlimited love. Well, the only unlimited love that there is, and he is a Christian, he admits, is agape— the love of God, but he said in his book, he said what the church is about. You can argue . . . this is arguable, maybe. He says the church's first mandate is to be the organizer and deliverer of love, and we really, this conference really is existence because we believe that. There's a lot more to to the church, ofcourse . . . it has lots of shades, but the bottom line: we are here to deliver God's love, the love of Jesus Christ, and we can do it so naturally, so easily, but we need to keep learning how to do it in those hard places and that's what our lives are about. That's what it means to be a Christian, to grow and deliver loving kindness in this world.

The most stunning book I've read this year is a history book on early Christianity, and that's the piece that I wanted to really share with you this morning. This book was a, it's a book on Church history and the author is Rodney Stark, and he has several books. He is a, he is now a Christian, but I was told that when he started his studies, he was not a Christian, and the name of the book, (you can get it inexpensive inexpensively on Amazon.com. The Rise Of Christianity. Well, what Rodney Stark did was take issue with some of the traditional church history studies, which failed to account adequately, in his opinion, about how this little band of Christians managed to grow into a world phenomena. And Paganism, which was a world phenomena, disappeared. It absolutely disappeared. I don't think there's any paganism left, is there. I mean, there's some bad religion, but I don't think that there is, there isn't any paganism in which they worship the gods and find the new God of the week.

And, and they are so, they were so busy. The, the heart of pagan religion was the priests finding ways for the people to try to appease the gods. That's what pagan religion basically was about. How to appease and please the gods. And there were millions of pagans. I mean, pagan was not a bad word back then. (Now it's a bad word.) There were millions of people in the Roman empire of that religion. That was the religion. And slowly this little band of Christians began to grow.

There were little, little handfuls and Rome and Ephesus and Antioch and Alexandria and places like that, and most of them were Jews. Most of the early Christians were Jews, there were Gentiles, too. And they began to grow. Well, what Rodney Stark did, he's a sociologist as well as a historian and from a sociological point of view, he started to look at things that had not been looked at. And the main thing he looked at was the fact that epidemics swept through the Roman empire. On two occasions, there were big epidemics, and in each case, the people of the pagan religion, did nothing but die. They died in Rome at the rate of 5,000 a day, and in the families and in the neighborhoods, when someone was near death, they just dumped them in the road.

Well, then there were these little pockets of Christians and they got sick, too. Smallpox and measles, they believe. But among the Christians, there was this strong, strong mandate from Jesus, repeated by the Apostle Paul, and Peter ,and the disciples about loving one another. Inasmuch as you do it for the least of one of these, you do it for me. There was a strong mandate to care for each other. And among these Christians, they practiced that. And lo and behold, the survival rate of Christians was higher than among

the pagans because as we all know, even a little bit of care, when you're dehydrated and dying, even a little bit of tender care, a little bit of water, a little bit of food, a little bit of love, is spiritual food that nourishes the body. And so the Christians had a higher rate of survival. So there you have a little change in percentage, more Christians survive. Ah, but at the same time they started reaching out to the Pagans and the pagans for whom they cared survived at higher rates. So there was the change: more Christians were surviving, and the Pagans who were cared for were surviving, and they began to be attracted to this strange new group called Christians.

And that is one of the main, main things according to this author that really accounted for the slow but positive shift in the percentages of pagans downward and Christians upward. It is surprising to us because today, care and kindness, loving kindness is kind of generic. It is. It is beyond the church. I believe that is all, I believe it is all the love of Jesus Christ that is in our society, whether people know it or not. I think that is where it came from, and it is in people who never even heard of Jesus Christ. But in those days, the pagan philosophers, the pagan religion had no doctrine of care. They had no doctrine of care. The doctors headed for the countryside, for the countryside. One of the famous doctor, he's famous to this day, Galen, G. A. L. E. N. He himself ran from the city to a retreat in the country. That was his only, only hope for survival. The pagan religion had no doctrine for care. In fact, among the philosophers they, they despised in scorn emotions like compassion and sympathy. They scorned those as weaknesses.

And of course also among the pagan religion, the, uh, little girls didn't count for anything. If you had a little girl, it was perfectly all right when she was born to set her outside and leave her to the animals or a stranger or somebody else. And little girls were regarded as discardable. And the same if you, if a little boy had a handicap of some sort, you could set them outside. There was, this is the way the doctrine of the pagan religion acted.

And of course the Christians were horrified by this, and were busy taking in as many as they could have these, of these discarded babies. And the other thing that happened of course, was that pretty soon there, there was a shortage of women in the, in the pagan society. And there started to be intermarriage of Christian women with pagan men. And as you all know, the women brought them in into the church. They, they know how to do that. That was really, that is really another feature in how the church, the church grew and paganism decreased because of that, that kind of intermarriage.

Well, this is so astounding because I think it just gives so much weight to what we are doing. This is the essence of what Jesus came to change, how Jesus came to change the world. He said, your sins are forgiven. Now let's, let's stop being preoccupied with all that sin stuff. You know all that sacrifice—it was in Judaism — to get rid of that. We have work to do by “kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.” That's what Jesus came to do, not for us to be hung up and spend all this time on the sacrifices and all of this making sure that we're right with God. Your sins are forgiven. Jesus. That's his name. Now we have an agenda to work at building the kingdom and the kingdom is within us. The Kingdom of Heaven is within you, and it is in the form of love, loving kindness. The Holy Spirit, the spirit of it, God coming through us, and that's what Jesus wants us to do.

So that's in a nutshell, briefly, how paganism died before a long, early Christian. The Christian Church was far bigger than, than paganism because of loving kindness. It's astounding. Many of you never have heard that. I had never realized that. I thought it was, you know, stories about miracles, or Constantine, or something like that, and this author says Constantine didn't bring people in the church, he just joined the cause. The church was growing so fast, he just, he just sanctioned it. It was not a significant, a big boost to the, to the growth of the church. The church was growing and loving kindness was a primary feature of this little group of people. And it should be today.

That's what we are working for. That's what this campaign is about, that they will know we are Christians by our love. We sing that. Now we have to realize it and actualize it. And that's what we're here for, and that's why we're so glad you're here, and we hope that you will see this and carry it home and follow Jesus in that way. Thank you very much.