

Kindness

Kindness is action targeting the well-being of others. Examples abound. I help an elderly lady find her way to the post office. I rescue a homeless dog and take him home with me, to give him a meal of dog food. I buy a bag of rice for an immigrant family, and leave it on their door step. Notions like friendship or love thrive around kindness but lack the gentleness or practicality which are trademarks of kindness. I may love my neighbor as myself but that love may be irrelevant to helping a lady find the post office. I may be ever so friendly to the new guy in town, but will that help him find the best deal on new tires?

I stress the practicality of kindness, yet even this point needs refining. There is a gentleness in helping others work through immediate life difficulties, like those of the lady looking for the post office. This is kindness. But there is also the kindness of gratuitous sharing. An example might be the health and welfare services of a large modern government, in which no particular individual serves as donor but 'the will of the people,' through their taxes, provides the necessary contribution. It is customary to discount the element of kindness, in such a large scale bureaucratic operation, but the kindness is there; those of us of a certain age will remember the practical kindness that showed its power in the early British welfare state. Clement Attlee was the paragon of a kind dry bureaucrat.