

**Sermon Notes:** February 20, 2022

**Theme:** Part 3 of Kind, Curious, Flexible: Flexible

[Lectionary](#)

### **Kindness, Curiosity and Flexibility**

We have explored kindness to give yourself (and others) a “pass” from unkind thoughts two weeks ago. Last week, curiosity was on tap, where we worked to see people with “new” eyes. Today is flexibility. Flexibility is not something you can force. With practice, you can have less white-knuckle-forcing to become a good person. Flexibility flows from the paired practices of kindness and curiosity.

**Dancing** Flexibility looks like spiritual dancing. I am a truly terrible dancer unless you count jerky gyrations and out-of-time stomping as good dancing. Still, I love to watch excellent dancers perform. I get choked up watching some of the best “So You Think You Can Dance” performances on TV. When we lived in Austin, Kimberly and I went to a dance class for a date night. In the class, we had to switch partners after every song. Halfway through the class, I paired with one person who responded effortlessly to every poorly timed gyration I did.

I remember feeling, for the first time, like a good dancer (I was and am not). She embodied flexibility and responsiveness. By her flexibility (not stretchiness), she helped me become more responsive and in sync with the music. Come to find out, she danced every weekend, yet never once made me feel like the hack that I was.

**Canoeing** A related story comes from Houston. I went with a buddy using a two-person canoe for a Saturday morning expedition. We launched and paddled along the Armand Bayou (southeast of Houston) for several hours.

I was the ‘back’ paddler. So, it was my job to match the front person’s strokes and keep the boat going where he was leading. I matched his stroke in speed and direction by using the opposite side of the boat. As an aside, when it comes to group sport and leisure activities, I tend to get way up in my head and anxious. I worry if I am doing it right because I hate feeling like a fool. That day, I cared more about the dance of canoeing than if I was doing it ‘right’. Tuning in and being flexible to the lead canoer was a lot of fun, and I got to dance like no one was watching.

I think that is a huge part of spiritual flexibility. It is not about being pushed past your limit or bravely enduring. It is certainly not about being a spiritual doormat. Nor is flexibility meek agreeableness. Flexibility is about being fluid to avoid the preconception about how things ‘should’ go. When you are your best, flexibility is something that people remember in their encounters with you, at least I have.

**Water as metaphor** I want to jump from canoeing to actual water. Water is one of the most powerful forces on the planet. It has carved out the Grand Canyon and glides over your skin in the shower. You can punch water as hard as you can, and it remains the same. You can freeze it, boil it, stir it, but it will keep flowing down the riverbank to slice out canyons and will flow through our bodies sustaining us.

**Flexibility /water practice** By now, I pray you are giving yourself a pass on self-recrimination, and you are seeing people with new eyes. Part of flexibility is learning to avoid stuff that does not need to be done. Flexibility is responding with what is needed, not what your backstory or previous experience demands that you do. Flexibility is like being spiritual water.

The Tao says, “When nothing is done, nothing is left undone.” Water ‘does’ nothing, yet it can break boulders and clean an infant’s tender skin.

At my most inflexible, past experiences guide my actions. I remember not holding a baseball bat right at 5 years old, and my parent was so humiliated he never talked to me about baseball again. I tend to bring that insecurity forward. I am not like water when it comes to baseball. However, at my best I use the experience to help me remember to be fluid when I find myself in challenging situations. That 46-year-old memory is still with me, but if I had let it warp my experience canoeing, I would not have enjoyed paddling down Armand Bayou as much.

**Word of the Day: Bend.** Bend don’t break. Your head is by now clearer and giving “passes.” You see people with “new” eyes. Those two words have enough impact for a year’s worth of spiritual practice. But if you want more, here is the third word to practice, and it can be particularly helpful in challenging situations. The word *bend* can remind you to mute the old stories and traumas that roll around inside of you. Bend is a gentle reset word to help you from unnecessarily arguing with someone who has provoked you.

So, you have a bad interaction. You can say to yourself, “Bend, don’t break” or just “bend.” Just the mental reminder taps into the expansive part of your mind. You are less likely to get hijacked by the aggressive, reactive, and reptilian part of your brain. You will be more likely to find the flexibility that you are naturally born with. You will find new ways to stretch yourself and maybe respond in a fresh, unexpected, and graceful way.

I am not promising some superhuman ability to effortlessly defeat your adversary. You likely won’t get the perfectly worded retort and may still feel the desire to fight inside. But, you will be less likely to pull a spiritual muscle from fighting unnecessary fights. Bending without breaking gives you a half second of breathing room to respond with kindness and curiosity and flexibility.

You might, like water, get boiled, frozen, or stirred, but your basic goodness and core identity never changes. Knowing you are created by God and that your goodness is non-negotiable gives you a flexible grace. **Todd**