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Metro Lutheran
Positive Parenting
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UNEXPECTED KINDNESS

We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.

Sir Winston Churchill

In December, we often celebrate a season of obligatory gift giving. We give gifts to those who give gifts to us or fit into a category in which they expect a gift from us. You know who I am talking about - family, friends, service providers. Now, in February, we buy valentines for those we already love and want to honor, or our teacher tells us that we must give one to every child in the class. Gifts and valentines are still fun to give and to receive, but they are not unexpected kindness.

But that is not the way God operates. God gives because God has chosen to love us, chosen to give us the very best. God gave us Jesus, God's only son, our messiah and our savior, not because we have been very well behaved all year or kept all of the commandments, because God loves us, even when we are spectacularly unworthy.

I want the children in my life to celebrate God's unexpected kindnesses to them, to all of us, and to love God back by doing the same thing. But where do we begin to teach this love for those who are sometimes hard for us to love, this generosity to those who are unworthy?

Let me begin by sharing two stories from this past Christmas season and a third much older story. One was picked up by a national news network. A man, shopping at a discount store, stepped forward and paid the \$120 bill of the woman ahead of him in line, a single mom, with a cart full of Christmas gifts, with little in her wallet. He followed her to the parking lot, where he gave her \$200 in cash for her family. Unexpected kindness.

In my congregation, many were touched by the generosity of a seven-year old little girl, who participated in bringing and wrapping gifts for a family in need, adopted by her Sunday school class. In the process, she lost her brand new dress shoes and neither she nor her parents could find them. Before bed that night, she confessed to her parents that she did know where her shoes were. She had wrapped them up for a little girl her age who had received no Christmas presents. Unexpected kindness.

More than three decades ago, my family was sitting down for lunch after church at McDonald's, when my husband suddenly got up and returned to the food counter. Bearing a tray loaded with hamburgers and cartons of milk, he passed our table and delivered the tray to a homeless man, sitting in a remote booth. Muttering to himself, he held one cup of coffee, surrounded by dozens of little creamers. Les leaned over the startled man and said, "Buddy, it is cold outside and that coffee will burn a hole in your stomach. Eat some food and take the rest with you. God cares about you and we will pray for you." When he returned to our table, the kids asked, "Dad, do you know that guy? Why did you give him food?" Les responded, "He is a hungry, homeless child of God and it is up to us to feed him." I have never heard "Give US this day our daily bread" in the same way. This is a story that lives in our family as an example of how we are called to live our faith. Jesus did tell us that when we feed, clothe, visit, or care for any in his family, we do it for him. Unexpected kindness.

So, how will you help those children you love learn to practice unexpected kindness? I am guessing that you already model that as a way of life. Tell those stories. Invite your children to be spontaneously generous and giving. Celebrate these opportunities to, in Churchill's words, "make a life by what we give." And here are a few more ideas.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. What do your kids see you doing for others that you do not already know and love? What is one thing you would like them to observe and learn from you as a role model?
2. Catch your kids doing something unexpected and kind. Affirm them. Tell that story to others, when your child can overhear you. Make it a core family story.
3. Tell a story about a time that someone did something unexpected, kind, and special for you.
4. Support your child's generosity.
5. Make extra valentines this season and give them to people who do not expect them.