

# good manners

Word Power Challenge

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I recently watched on the Today Show a heartwarming story of a young high school boy who decided to use the power of kind words to change the world. Jeremiah Anthony, a junior in the state of Iowa, began tweeting kind and encouraging messages to classmates, friends, and teachers. Yes, even his teachers! He looked for the nice things in people rather than the negative. He began building up instead of tearing down. Soon it caught on. Jeremiah and two other friends, better known as the West High Bros, have tweeted thousands of positive messages.

We often think of February as the month of love. In fact, Hallmark reports that Valentine's Day ranks second in card sales, only to be topped by Christmas. Apparently we love to hear kind words even if it's in a pre-printed card. Since love is already on the calendar, why not make a conscientious decision this month to encourage, to inspire, to comfort, to build others up through kind words. Can you just imagine? Really...sit back and imagine what could happen.

It's no secret that there's a lot of rude and downright mean behavior happening in our schools, at the mall, on the roads, and even in our own homes. Stories of kids being bullied seem to be on the news every week. That's why stories like Jeremiah Anthony are so touching. So needed. So hopeful.

It's so easy to find fault in others. Somehow, maybe it makes us feel better about ourselves. However, studies have shown that spreading kindness is not only contagious but beneficial to our health.

So, here's the challenge:

Let's see what happens if, for the remainder of this month, we look for the good in our family, friends, neighbors, and even strangers just by building them up with kind words. There are tons of ways to communicate to others, whether they live close by or far away. We can verbally communicate, send letters, or use social media. Simply find the positive and overlook the negative. It's as simple as that.

My family made a decision this month. We decided to refrain from saying anything negative about anybody for the entire month. We decided to look for the positive in each other, in friends, in colleagues, in neighbors, and even strangers we meet throughout the day. Basically, everyone we come in contact with.

It's going to be hard. We will probably catch ourselves and each other in mid-sentence saying something negative. But, the point is to try. It will be interesting, and even exciting, to observe the power our kind words will have on those we come in contact with each day. It will also be

interesting to see the changes that take place in our own lives. And, it will be fun to share our stories with each other.

We sometimes have no clue what others are going through. We may not always know or understand why others are grumpy, sarcastic, or rude. Did the bagger at the grocery store have a car accident on his way to work this morning? Did the boss just find out his son dropped out of college? Is the waiter having a hard time paying her bills? Did a neighbor lose his job? Is the school teacher dealing with cancer? Did the UPS man have a terrible argument with his wife last night? Is the lady who sits in the back pew at church lonely? Is your daughter, son, wife, husband, mother, father feeling stressed, sick, frustrated, worried, etc.

You see, there's lots of stuff going on that we don't know about. Stuff is going on that we may not have control over. It's when that stuff happens that others may not be very likable. But, it's when that stuff happens that they need a kind word the most.

The one thing we do have control over is how we respond to others, no matter how they act or feel. We have opportunities each and every day to be a Jeremiah. We have the ability through kind words to encourage, inspire, build up, and comfort.

Take the challenge. Change a day. Change a life. "Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless." —Mother Teresa

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