

Random Acts of Kindness

Small acts that make a big difference for ourselves and others

This lesson can be presented over 1-2 sessions. Instructors should feel free to use whichever discussion questions and activities you think best for your class or group. We advise giving students the sheet with the definitions of the virtues before each session.

Lesson Goals

Help students:

- understand the fullness of kindness and how it incorporates empathy, compassion and generosity
- learn the value of helping others, and how it benefits not only others but themselves as well
- be inspired to live out random acts of kindness in their own lives
- understand that kindness is something we get better at with practice
- see how we can transform negative experiences into positive attitudes and endeavors
- know that challenges don't have to prevent us from striving for goodness in our own unique way
- understand solidarity and to see how we can live out solidarity with others

Primary Virtues / Character Traits

Caring: to help others; a caring person lives with empathy in trying to understand another person's situation, compassion in desiring to help others, and then with generosity in acting to help (please encourage discussion of these virtues in discussing caring)

Empathy: trying to understand another person's situation, entering into the feeling or spirit of others and imagining yourself in another person's situation

Compassion: feeling of sympathy for the distress of others, with the desire to help

Generosity: giving freely of our own possessions, time and /or talent

Solidarity: unity from a shared common purpose and / or interest; active loyalty within a group; mutual support within a group; being present with others

Secondary Virtues / Character Traits

Love: to freely give of ourselves for the betterment of another person, without expecting anything in return

Hero: a person who is regarded as a model due to his/her acts of courage, or nobility of purpose and noble qualities

Wisdom: ability to apply knowledge, experience, understanding in ways that are effective and good; the ability to discern or judge what is true, right, or lasting

Leader Introduction

Imagine saying “Yes!” to everything anyone wanted you to do that could help them in a good and positive way – chores around your house, helping a friend with school work, an elderly neighbor who may need help... It might sound like a lot of work, and it is, but today’s story is about a man who does exactly that.

For the past four years, Jon Potter from Pittsburg, Pennsylvania has been making a big difference within his community by helping whoever he can, so long as, “it’s legal and didn’t harm anyone else.” Let’s read about the man who has taken random acts of kindness to a legendary level.

Reading on Jon Potter

(Leader can read the text, students can read silently, or leader can call on students to read the separate document titled “Acts of Kindness Reading”)

Leader transition from the text to the video

John Potter learned the hard way not to turn down the opportunity to help someone, but fortunately he took his regret and turned it into a positive and personal mission that now inspires people throughout his community. Potter has also learned that helping others not only benefits them, but also helps him in learning to work with his autism by pushing outside of his comfort zone and learning how to better trust and interact with others. Now let’s watch a quick video about another inspiring random act of kindness from two grade school students that also helps us understand Autism better and is a terrific example of solidarity.

Video Clip:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BdtiW2UDfD0&feature=youtu.be>

Leader Summary

Much like Jon Potter, Christian Moore who helped the crying boy at his school shows us how a small act of kindness can have a large impact on others. These two grade schoolers and their mothers have also given us a beautiful example of solidarity that we can consider following in our own lives.

Discussion Question Options *(discussion prompts / answers are in parentheses or bullet points if needed)*

Before beginning our discussion, let’s read over the virtues and their definitions - included within the online lesson as a separate document.

1. Potter is viewed as a **hero** in his community. Do you think he is a hero, and if yes, how? (Potter has the courage to go through a serious surgery and donate a kidney to save someone else’s life. He is a model in how he gives of his time, talent and money in helping others. Encourage students to share specific examples from the story.)

What virtues do you think Potter lived out in coming to the decision to donate one of his kidneys? (**empathy, compassion, generosity** – encourage a discussion of each)

2. What first motivated Potter to begin his mission of random acts of kindness? (regret from not helping the woman who asked for a ride to a woman’s shelter.)

What does this part of the story teach us?

(that we can learn from negative events and turn them into a new positive attitude, a better approach to our lives and even a new mission within our lives.)

In doing this, what virtue are we living out? (**wisdom**)

3. Potter could have done one or several acts of kindness to make up for not helping the woman but he instead continues to engage in many acts of kindness. What do you think motivates him to continue with his mission of kindness?

(provides him with a sense of purpose in life and a sense of fulfillment)

When we engage in acts of kindness, what emotions and realizations do we experience?

(same as above and possibly also a sense of gratitude for what we have, and a better sense of perspective (**empathy**) for what others are experiencing)

4. Let's dig into the virtue of **wisdom** a little more as it relates to this story. Do you think it is wise for Potter to loan or give people money he doesn't know? Potter said, "It's worth the risk of getting scammed, compared to the possibility of helping someone."²

Let's read over the definition of wisdom and discuss the arguments for and against giving or loaning money to people who say they are in need but we aren't certain that they do have a need. Even if they do have a need, is lending or giving money a wise course of action?

(Encourage an open-ended discussion of different scenarios with arguments on both sides.)

5. What disorder does Potter have that makes it very difficult for people to communicate and interact with others, especially strangers?

(Autism and Anxiety)

His random acts of kindness weren't easy for him to start, but he kept doing it even if he felt uncomfortable or didn't naturally want to. His **caring** for other people has helped him to better deal with his fears about socializing. He said, "Even with all these hindrances. . . I can still **love** people, and you can too."¹

We may not have autism, but do you think helping others at times pushes us out of our comfort zone and is this good for us?

5. Christian Moore, the boy from the video, had no idea that his new classmate, Connor Crites, was autistic. He just saw someone hurting and wanted to help him. What is similar about Moore and Potter's actions?

(They both practice **caring in being empathetic, compassionate and generous**)

How was Connor impacted by Christian's kind actions?

6. (Can also be a journal writing option) Michael Moore, the man who received Potter's kidney said, "I think he has come to realize, it's the little things in life that you can do for somebody that can make some of the largest differences."¹ And Christian's mom in the CBS video said, "One act of kindness can change someone's life."

As we go into this new school year, what are some of the ways, little and big, that we can reach out to make a big difference in a classmate's life?

7. The CBS reporter who interviewed the two grade school boys, Christian and Connor said that Christian "didn't see Connor as different," and Connor's mother commented "It doesn't matter you know color, it doesn't matter gender, it doesn't matter disability. . . . just be kind, open your heart and that's what we need in the world." How does Christian's act of kindness in helping Connor, and Connor's mom's statement reflect the virtue of solidarity?

(The boys and their mothers are unified around a common purpose of giving and receiving kindness and being there for each other as friends, and to not let differences such as race or ability get in the way of simply being kind.)

(Can also be an extended activity) Our society is often focused on what separates us from each other, instead of what can serve to unite us. Let's first discuss whether our school and / or local community has different groups of kids that don't interact with each other as much as we should, and if yes, what are these separate groups?

Now let's discuss what specific things can we do in our school and / or community to build a greater sense of solidarity among different groups?

(Some ideas to consider: on a regular basis sitting with a group of students at lunch who you normally wouldn't sit with; inviting someone you normally don't hang out with to do something outside of school; organize a unity lunch or dinner at school and invite kids from different groups to come together and sit next to each other to discuss agreed upon topics as a group, organize a fun athletic activity such as kick ball where teams are made up of kids from groups)

Journal Writing Options

1. Jon Potter regretted not helping the battered woman who asked him for help, but he turned that negative into a positive by vowing to help others with many random acts of kindness. Write about a time that you or someone you know has transformed a negative experience into a new constructive outlook or attitude on life, or into a specific positive action or endeavor.

2. Think of someone in your life who you think is going through a tough time. Write about how you can live out kindness with that person, first in being more empathetic in trying to place yourself in his/her situation, then in how you can be more compassionate and generous in taking action to help and to establish a sense of solidarity with that person.

Extended Activities:

1. Group students into small groups of 3-5 and have them discuss ways they can "practice" kindness in their everyday lives. Explain to students how like all other skills, when we "practice" kindness we get better at it and it comes easier. Have them share their ideas on how they can personally "practice" kindness as a student, a friend, a family member, a member of their local community, as a teammate etc.

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Consider enacting one to two of the student proposals.

¹ <https://abcnews.go.com/GMA/Living/man-asks/story?id=65076041>

² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2019/08/22/this-man-became-legend-committing-extreme-acts-kindness-then-he-gave-stranger-kidney/?noredirect=on>

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