

The Power of Choosing Kind Braxton Schieler

As I was browsing the web the other day I came across a picture that featured about thirty children climbing on a giant pipe that was floating in the water of a beach. Next to it read a sign that said, "Do not climb, play on, and around the pipe." The caption next to the picture read "human nature summed up in one picture." While this was a humorous meme the reality is that it absolutely defines human nature. When a baby is born the responsibility of the parent is to teach the child right. When you hear about "the terrible twos" you never hear a story about how the toddler ate all her dinner, played quietly in her room, and then went straight to bed. Why? Because no one has to be taught to do wrong. Humans must be taught to do right, but no one ever has to teach anyone how to do wrong.

All we have to do to see the wrong in the world is flip on the news. Somebody has always done something, and far too often it feels like nothing can be done about it. There's not that much that can really be done to stop the evil in the world. After all, a species that is naturally evil is just going to go on being evil. So then the question arises: "what can I do?"

Perhaps in the big picture, I can't do a thing. However, while I may be powerless in the present to do anything about the evil that dominates the whole world, there's plenty that can be done about *my* world. What if the next time I saw a boy shove a girl to the ground, I confronted instead of laughing, "Why did you do that? She didn't do anything to you. That was rude and heartless," and then helped the girl up? What if the next time the teacher punished the wrong kid I stepped in and accepted responsibility for my choices, and then apologized? What if I gave the teacher that everyone hates an apple or the boy that forgets his lunch half of my sandwich? What if I encouraged every beaten, dejected, doleful person that crossed my path with a smile that spoke and an ear that listens? While I may never be able to fully grasp the power of a smile, a pat on the back, or even just a listening ear, I know that these simple everyday things are powerful tools that we can use to change the world.

How? The answer is simple. Whether we know it or not everything we do, every single choice we make affects people other than us. When I smile at someone I may be the one person to ever do that for them. We never know the results of our actions. The simple smile may save the stranger from suicide, alcoholism, depression, the list goes on and on. Even more powerful than that is the pay it forward reality. The father that beats his son was probably beaten first. Similarly, the father that loves his boy with a love deeper than words can express was probably loved with the same kind of love. Humans are naturally creatures of repetition. When I make the choice to be nice, then others around me will also choose kindness. Like the pebble drawn into an expansive sea creates an expansive ripple, so will the choice to be kind.

Unfortunately, the opposite is true. When we make the choice to be evil that choice can have a far more contagious ripple. Everything we do has either a positive or negative effect on those around us. Even the choice to do nothing is ultimately a negative one. When we aren't pouring into the lives of others around us, I believe we are wasting a precious opportunity to change the lives of others around us.

So today I chose not to be mean, not to do nothing, but to be kind. Today I chose to be the pebble in the murky blue waters of life, and by making that choice I am confident that others around me will do the same. While the number of people that my actions affect directly may be small, the full ripple of my choices has no end in sight.