

Respect

By Matthew Darling

There are many praiseworthy traits found within the human heart. Concepts such as responsibility, humility, and courage all stand out, prevailing over the everyday gloom with beautiful acts of kindness. These simple actions often brighten the world around us, showing that behind the greed and cruelty so often emphasized by the media are people that care for one another, people who value your life as much as they do theirs. They respect who you are and the decisions you make. This feeling of respect is possibly the best and most gratifying display that one can give or receive. It builds you up, making you feel valuable and of importance, and should the feeling be passed on, it may start something bigger and better than ever previously conceived. Respect is such a powerful feeling because it allows a precious bond to form, one that can progress into unimaginable accomplishments.

Respect is often a strong force in our lives, whether we notice it or not. The word itself is often watered down by dictionaries or other books when being defined, stating it only as a feeling of admiration for someone as a result of their abilities or qualifications. The fact is, this simpleminded definition does no justice to the true power of respect. Teachers, for example, stand in front of their new students on the first day of school often with little to no prior knowledge of the group, and yet they treat every person that walks into their room with the same kindness they would pay to one they've known for years. Local businesses scattered throughout the area respect their customers deeply, assisting them in any way possible. One might argue and say it is part of their line of work, but then again, do they act that way solely because it's in their job description? In my perspective, it is actually because of the appreciation they have for each one of us as individuals. They respect that you had the motivation to attend school or walk into that store, and show it by their kindness and willingness to help. They celebrate meeting for the first time by treating you as if you've met many times before and became good friends. The sudden admiration isn't because of some quality you display when you walk in the door, but a natural feeling of goodwill towards one you've yet to know. I've often been the recipient of such a warm welcome in our town, whether from a neighbor, friend, or other friendly face. It provokes an immediate sense of gratitude on the sender's behalf, and creates a warm feeling inside that makes you realize that others around you are thankful for your presence and that you happened to cross paths with them. It is one of the best feelings to know you are respected by others, and replicating such an action only increases the feeling. Eventually, if respect is passed on from person to person, a community-wide net of intertwined relationships form. This net, strengthened by the kindness and positive interactions between members, can fuel some amazing things. If one man falls, ten will be there to help him up, and if one man's house falls, the rest of the town will come together and help rebuild it. This kind of mentality, having respect for one another and supporting them through anything, has built incredible things in communities around the world. It increases what we can do as a species, and more importantly, as a global family. It may seem far-fetched with all the greed and selfishness in the world today, but it really can and does happen if you look close enough. Notice the neighbor trimming your hedges while they were doing theirs, the person in the coffee shop letting you pass by them to the counter because they were searching for their wallet, or even as simple as being given a complement by a stranger. It proves that we all share this quality if we dig deep enough, and that respect is more than a simple definition under the letter "R" in the dictionary. Basic in nature and yet extremely powerful, respect, the ultimate sign of admiration, can form something truly beautiful almost everywhere you go.

The word respect, when written, is unfairly devalued. It has not just a definition or a one-sided meaning, but a feeling attached to it, something that expands wider than anything that could be typed on a page. It is the feelings of kindness, humility, caring, and many others wrapped up and placed in your heart as you hold the door open for the person behind you. While many regard it as basic courtesy, it is in fact much more, for one act of respect towards another sends the subconscious message that you're inviting them in, taking them from the cold winds of isolation and sheltering them. It certainly has made my life brighter knowing someone out there subconsciously has my back and will help me in times of need. An act of respect doesn't need to be grand and majestic, or even heroic because life or some other items are in danger; an act of respect can be as simple as a little "How are you?" to be enough to start the spread of a virus of kindness. This virus, beautifully contagious, could push respect from a simple and subtle idea into the forefront of our minds and, hopefully, our actions towards one another.