

Every morning at 7 AM, my lifelong friend Linda, who lives in upstate NY, calls me so that we can begin our day by jointly solving the daily Wordle puzzle and reading one of Oprah's Daily Inspiration Cards.

One card we read a few months ago featured a famous quote from Archbishop Desmond Tutu, "Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world."

Those words caught my attention, and I found myself thinking about them quite often.

Then, a few weeks ago, I was perusing Netflix and came across a documentary filmed in 2015 when Archbishop Tutu traveled to visit the Dali Llama, called "Mission Joy-Finding Happiness in Troubled Times."

I took that as an omen to think about kindness more deeply and use that as the basis of my sermon this morning.

As President Obama said, "Amid tear gas and dogs, Desmond Tutu led a people against apartheid." Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a Nobel Prize laureate who helped end apartheid in South Africa, died at age 90 in 2021.

Apartheid in South Africa, from 1948 to 1994, was a brutal segregation regime that relegated the majority black population to substandard housing, jobs and suffering in favor of the white minority.

In the documentary, Archbishop Tutu tells the Dali Llama, "You have not said, 'Well how can I be happy?' You've said, 'How can I help to spread compassion and love?'"

Dr Sonja Lyubomirsky at the U. Of California, Riverside, has done studies on the science of happiness. "In one typical study, we found that people who did act of kindness for others became happier and actually stayed happier for about two to four weeks after the study was over. People who did acts of kindness for themselves felt good while they were doing it, but that didn't change their happiness. So what was really important about kindness was that you're connecting with another person, and that it might actually have effects on the body. So we collected blood and we found that those who did acts of kindness for others showed changes in their DNA gene expression, in the blood, that were associated with a healthier immune profile."

According to scientist Richard Davidson, "Well-being is a skill. Well-being can actually be learned, it can be nurtured, and it's a skill that can enable us to live a happier life."

How can we be kind to improve our lives and the lives of others?

1. Treat yourself mentally and physically with kindness. One of the most important ways I do that is to control what my mind focuses on. As a former journalist, I was a news

junkie. Since 2016, I've decreased my news consumption by 95% and increased my spiritual well-being by 100%. Instead of fretting about politics, climate change and mass shootings, I focus on positive interactions with the people around me, and I inundate myself with uplifting messages, stories, movies and books.

2. Look for kindness opportunities. As mentioned earlier, being kind to others can be beneficial to our physical health. I would add that doing acts of kindness for others can also do wonders for our mental health. When I focus on helping others, I don't have time to wallow in my own self pity, worries or problems.
3. Acts of kindness toward others can be as small as offering a friendly smile to folks you meet on a daily basis: your pharmacist, your doctor, your neighbor, an elderly friend, a small child. When I was a door-to-door saleswoman, I greeted everyone who came to the door with a big smile while inwardly saying, "I love you." Someone who came to the door irritated or mad, was more often than not, disarmed by my smile and my unspoken offering of love, and was more open to what I was offering. Try it. Many people haven't had a kind greeting or word directed toward them in a long time. It can make all the difference to them-and you.

A few weeks ago, I was at the health club, and I treated myself to a dip in the hot tub. I smiled and said hello to the only other woman in the hot tub, a woman around my age. After a few minutes, I broke the silence by saying, "A few minutes in the hot tub really relaxes my muscles." She smiled back and said, "Yes. It's good to take a break from caring for my mother, who's just had a stroke."

I took a few minutes to emphasize with her situation and tell her that she was doing a great job, and that her mom was lucky to have such a caring daughter. She smiled back and said, "I think God brought you here today. I feel so much better."

You never know how much a small act of kindness can change someone's day-or life for the better.

4. When I notice I'm feeling anxious or depressed, the easiest way to get out of my own mind is to pick up the phone and offer a cheerful greeting to a family member or friend, including my Channing family.
  - a. My husband Doug is the most kind and compassionate person I know. He's always on the lookout to help others. He picks up trash in the neighborhood. He helps neighbors jump-start their car or carry in their groceries. A small boy who lives in our condo building has been going through a rough time. Doug dropped off an inexpensive toy for him to lift his spirits. The boy and his mother came to our door later that day to thank Doug. The boy was smiling from ear-to-ear.

- b. Take the 7 day kindness challenge with me. Do one small act of kindness for someone everyday this week. Call, email or write someone to cheer them up. Greet everyone with a smile. Be creative.

As Archbishop Desmond Tutu said at the end of the documentary, "When you are kind to someone else, you end up joyful. But why? Because we realize that we are made for goodness."

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