

Integration Twelve

ACTS OF SERVICE OR KINDNESS

“I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples.”

- St. Teresa of Calcutta

The process of self-discovery is a complex and life-long experience, but it can slip into self-indulgence if it is not coupled with a bias to action and a commitment to help others. We also need to connect who we are with the needs of our world, especially those on the margins. Indeed, often it is only by giving ourselves away that we can find our true selves.

This week's Integration is to perform acts of service (if possible) or kindness. **Volunteer once this week and/or consciously perform five acts of kindness beyond what you normally do in a single day.** These do not have to be super-intense or extraordinary actions, but they should have a real impact on another person.

Examples

- Volunteer for a community organization, including [food banks](#), [Meals on Wheels](#), and any of the [Center for Social Concern's Community Partners](#).
 - If you have the time and opportunity to volunteer, we really recommend that you do!
 - Try to find a time and place that your small group and/or other classmates can volunteer at together.
 - In this time of COVID-19, take inspiration from the work of other students from [ND](#), [Yale](#), and [other universities](#).
- Volunteer for a community organization, including food banks, Meals on Wheels, and any of the Center for Social Concern's Community Partners.
- Send an [email](#) or text to praise or just chat with someone in your social support network.
- Donate blood.
- Check in with a friend whom you know is having a hard time.
- Tip your delivery drivers generously.
- Surprise your friends or roommates by cleaning up, cooking a meal, or baking a dessert.
- Donate time or money to a cause you believe in.¹

¹ Pro-tip: It is almost always [better to donate money directly](#) (instead of in-kind canned food drives) to organizations like food banks, since they know what they need and have discounted wholesale rates with suppliers.

“For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.’
... And the King will say, ‘I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!’”

[Matthew 25:35-40](#)

Examples (continued)

- Write a thank you note, text, or email to someone you have never thanked (or just deserves another one).
- Send a surprise care package or [postcard](#) to a friend or family member.
- After reading or watching something that reminds you of someone, send them the link and tell them it made you think of them.
- And whatever else you can creatively think up!

Acts of Service or Kindness Tips

- **Variety:** Research shows that the more personal and varied you make acts of kindness, the more intense and long-lasting the effects will be.²
- **Intensity:** Extended acts of service or [multiple acts of kindness a day](#) are more effective than doing one a day because we tend to get used to these acts.³
- **Just Do It:** Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good here. Consciously do some nice things, and then reflect on it at the end of the day. Your act of kindness does not have to save the world - just help one person's world that day.⁴
- **Ripple Effects:** You may never know [the impact a small act of kindness](#) has on someone. And that's ok! But research shows that [your actions impact people three degrees of separation](#) away on an everyday basis.⁵

² Sheldon, Kennon M., et al., “[Variety Is the Spice of Happiness: The Hedonic Adaptation Prevention Model](#)”, Oxford Handbooks Online, 2013.

³ Lyubomirsky, Sonja, et al., “[Pursuing Happiness: The Architecture of Sustainable Change](#)”, *Review of General Psychology*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2005, pp. 111–131.

⁴ But as the Qur'an (5:32) says “... And whoever saves one. It is as if he has saved mankind entirely.”

⁵ Fowler, J. H. and N. A. Christakis, “[Dynamic Spread of Happiness in a Large Social Network: Longitudinal Analysis over 20 Years in the Framingham Heart Study](#)”, *British Medical Journal (BMJ)*, vol. 337, Dec. 04 2, 2008.

“What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, ‘Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well’—but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? **So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.**”

[James 2:14-17](#)

Scientific Foundations

- **Positivity:** Random acts of kindness (and writing them down) make you happier and healthier, probably due to an increased awareness of positive social interactions.⁶
- **Money Can Make You Happy:** Spending money on others (prosocial spending) is a universal activity that creates greater emotional positivity than spending it on yourself.⁷
- **Connection:** Volunteering with acts of service increases well-being and social connection.⁸
- **Anthropology:** Humans evolved to find joy in helping others because cooperation increased the chances of survival.⁹

“Love for others, and in the first place, love for the poor, in whom the Church sees Christ himself, is made concrete in the promotion of justice.”

- St. John Paul II

⁶ Lyubomirsky, Sonja, et al.

⁷ Dunn, E. W., et al., “[Spending Money on Others Promotes Happiness](#)”, *Science*, vol. 319, no. 5870, 2008, pp. 1687–1688. For the evidence on universality, see [this study](#).

⁸ Yeung, Jerf W K, et al., “[Volunteering and Health Benefits in General Adults: Cumulative Effects and Forms](#)”, *BMC Public Health*, BioMed Central, 11 July 2017.

⁹ Dunn, Elizabeth, “[Helping Others Makes Us Happier -- but It Matters How We Do It](#)”, *TED: Ideas Worth Spreading*, 2019.