

Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
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Pay It Forward

Practicing Random Acts of Kindness
by Paul Asay

What Happened

It was a pretty ordinary Wednesday morning at the Tyrone Boulevard Starbucks in St. Petersburg, Florida. Customers would order their coffees and cappuccinos, pick them up at the drive-through window and go about their day.

Then, shortly after 7 a.m., a customer paid for not only her iced coffee, but for the customer behind her and his caramel macchiato.

This small act of generosity spurred another. Then another. For the next 10 hours, the Starbucks' customers' orders were paid for by the person ahead of them. Each one—457 in all—opted to pay it forward, buying the order for the person or people behind them.

Like all good things, this one had to end. Around 6 p.m., a woman in a Jeep Commander received a free iced coffee, thanks to the person in front of her. However, she declined to pay for the person behind her. “I don’t think she understood the concept of pay it forward,” Starbucks manager Celeste Guzman told *Good Morning America*.

No matter: The next morning, the cycle began anew, when one of the first customers of the day bought a \$40 gift certificate for the person in the car behind her.

Talk About It

The concept pay it forward has been around for a while, but perhaps it most recently was popularized by the 2000 movie *Pay It Forward*. In the movie, a boy (played by Haley Joel Osment) is challenged by a teacher to change the world. He decides to launch a movement encouraging people to be insanely kind and generous to others needing help. When those helped ask how they can pay back these do-gooders, they’re simply asked to pay it forward—be kind and generous to someone else in return.

Certainly paying for someone’s Starbucks order isn’t going to change the world. Yet acts of unexpected generosity can impact our lives in the best of ways—whether we’re the giver or the receiver.

Have you ever been given something unexpected? A gift that meant a lot to you? A piece of advice? A little grace when you did something wrong? How did that kindness impact you? Have you ever thanked the responsible party for it?

Have you ever given something of yourself to someone in need? Something you weren’t asked to give or do? If so, how did it feel? If you do something nice for someone, how important is it to you that he or she express gratitude or return the favor?

What the Bible Says

When you think about these acts of unexpected kindness and generosity, the biggest was given to all of us 2,000 years ago: Jesus died for it, even though we never asked Him to and we certainly didn’t deserve it. Throughout the Bible, we see how important it is to give of ourselves—including to people who never will be able to pay us back.

“In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35).

“But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?” (1 John 3:17).

“As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good” (2 Thess. 3:13).

“One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want. Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered” (Prov. 11:24-25).

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