

The Power of Words

By *Topher Mehlhoff*

Never underestimate the power of a kind word.

I have Crohn's Disease, which is a condition where my immune system fights against my bowels (and usually wins). What that means for me is chronic stomach pain, problems with fatigue, and some bathroom issues that are not fit to print in a church newsletter.

Usually, Crohn's Disease and I can coexist peacefully. I'm one the lucky patients that doesn't have to have multiple surgeries or make sure to be within 10 feet a bathroom at all times (I can stray up to 20-25 feet away). Mostly, I can live a normal life.

But for the past several months, it's been worse than usual and has interfered with my job as a youth minister. And I've had to miss a lot of Youth Group meetings because of it. Luckily, I have a great team of adults who can handle things when I'm sick. But it still really sucks to miss the two hours out of my week when I actually get to BE with the people I do my work for.

The other week I came down with a case of embarrassing bathroom issues on a youth group night and realized I had to call my team and tell them, yet again, that I'd be missing youth tonight. I hate doing this. Even though it's obviously not my fault that I'm sick, there's a nasty little voice inside me that always takes the opportunity to say, "Quitting again? Boy, everybody must think you're taking the day off to play video games..."

So I called one of our team members, Pam, to tell her. I apologized profusely, saying that I really hate having to do this all the

time. She said, "Topher—it's okay. You're sick!"

I said, "Yeah, I know," but went on to explain about my little voice who hates me. "Yep," said Pam, "I know—I have that little voice too. But no one actually thinks of you that way."

"**No one actually thinks of you that way**" was a revelation to me. It sounds stupid, but I can't express how much that statement meant to me! Although my brain was aware of it, my heart definitely wasn't. Honestly, it was just too hard to believe on my own that taking time off for being sick was okay. I had been letting the little voice push me around, and Pam's simple words knocked some sense into me.

So don't let your little voice push you around when you see an opportunity to speak kindly to someone! It may say, "They'll think you're being too personal," or "Who are you to give them a compliment?" But that's its job as a little annoying voice in your head. Just ignore it. Because your words might mean a lot more to that person than you know.

Now my little voice is saying, "That last sentence is *such* a cliché."

What a jerk.

Topher Mehlhoff is Director of Youth Ministry at Holladay United Church of Christ. To show your little voice who's in charge, share your revelations in a Reflections article by emailing Kathy@rmucc.org.



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