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## Second Thoughts and Second Chances

A little while ago, I was told to write an essay describing the “Four-Way Test.” Now, when this task was first assigned, I had not even a remote idea as to what the test even *was*, let alone *how to use it*. And, after it was explained to me, I’ll admit, I thought it was entirely unreasonable. I mean, I’m supposed to think through *every* decision I’ll ever make with these four questions? No, I’m sorry, but that’s not how the brain of a fifteen-year-old girl works. I make too many decisions based on how I’m feeling in that very moment to ask myself every time: Is it truth; is it fair to all concerned; will it build goodwill and better friendships; and will it be beneficial to all concerned? I didn’t even know what situation this test could possibly apply to in my everyday life. Obviously, it wouldn’t help me decide on what my dinner would be...how could French fries and chicken nuggets be truthful and fair to all concerned? How does beginning a new book at two in the morning build goodwill and better friendships? And why does it matter if typing that text be beneficial to all concern—

Wait.

Now it’s starting to make sense.

I realized fairly quickly that I make a lot of decisions each and every day, and I have a tendency not to give much thought to 99% of them. They’re not that important, I tell myself, they won’t matter in a few hours. But then I thought about all of those potentially major decisions that I, along with everyone else, makes every day and my heart seemed to plummet down into the pit of my stomach.

That text that you almost sent could’ve broken your best friend’s heart.

That one comment that you left on Facebook sent his reputation spinning down the toilet.

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That picture that you're spreading around school is the reason why she's afraid to walk home alone.

That comment that you and your buddies made in front of her is the reason why she hates her body, and that one little sentence that bubbled up from your friend's throat is the reason why she's shoving pills down hers.

Here in America, bullying has become an epidemic. While I have never been a victim of it myself, I know all too well of those who have. We say things that we don't mean, thinking that we can take them back, but we can't. We type nasty words on the screen, thinking that the fact that they don't know us makes up for it. We tease that boy who sits alone at lunch because, well, everyone is doing it. We pretend not to notice the girl who bravely comes up to our table asking for a seat, because she's *weird*, not knowing that even though she has no one here, school is her safe haven. We watch the new girl being outright bullied and laugh along, because what else are we supposed to do?

These are all decisions that at least one person has made in the last few minutes.

I may be the only one who thinks this way, but it seems to me that if we all stopped to think about our decisions when it concerns bringing down another person, sending a potentially risky text, or posting a mean comment on the internet, we could help to pull some kind of plug on bullying. If we all took a moment to think about the words forming in our brains before they trail down and out of our lips, we could help to lessen the blow of bullying, making it weaker. This is where the Four-Way Test comes into play. Really, it's as simple as this:

We have a thirteen-year-old girl sitting at home on the computer. She's scrolling through Facebook when she comes across a status that several of her close friends have commented on.

Without even batting an eyelash, she begins to type up a comment of her own, siding immediately with the friends she's known for years. With her finger hovering on the mouse, ready to click 'send,' she actually reads the status and the words that her friends have typed, suddenly wary of hers.

That little nagging voice at the back of her mind begins voicing its opinions. *This isn't a smart thing to do.* She swallows and sits back.

*Is it truth?*

She reads the comment over and over again. None of her words have any underlying truth to them. But in her defense, her friends' comments all sound just like hers.

*Is it fair to all concerned?*

Again, she reads it, realizing that none of them really even know this girl.

*Will it build goodwill and better friendships?*

She bites down on her lip, chewing thoughtfully. If someone left comments like these on her status, she wouldn't want to be friends with them. She certainly wouldn't even want to make eye contact with them.

*Will it be beneficial to all?*

Again, she finds herself with an answer of 'no.' Sitting back in her chair, she carefully deletes the hateful words she typed and logs out of Facebook, shutting the computer down. By using the Four-Way Test, this girl was able to avoid what could have possibly been a very bad situation by making the decision to stay out.

So as you can see, the Four-Way Test may not help me decide what it is I should eat for dinner, or whether or not I start a book when my eyes are stinging with sleepiness, and I know

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that I'm not going to use it with every life decision I *ever* make. Like I said before, I'm a teenager, and teenager brains just don't quite work that way. There are decisions that I'm going to make that I'll regret because I didn't think them through. But with the test, bigger decisions can be evaluated more easily, and, maybe, life can be made a little bit better for those who that evaluated decision may have affected.