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I have a friend. He attends my church. Each Sunday my friend greets me with a warm smile, gives me a fist bump, and asks how I have been. He asks because he really wants to know, not because it is socially a polite thing to do. He asks because he cares about me, who I am. You see, my friend has an intellectual disability, but it is important to look past what you see on the outside and focus on the man inside.

Can you imagine what it would be like to be called dumb or stupid? Maybe you have. Maybe a friend has joked with you and called you a “retard”. Did you believe they meant it? Most of us can relate to this, but very few of us understand deep down the feelings of humiliation and embarrassment that are attached to that word. It is an everyday burden that some people must experience and tolerate.

I want to put an end to the power of this word. I want to be a part of change. I want others to know what I know. People with intellectual disabilities have names, families who love them, jobs, hobbies, friends and feelings. Putting them down will never make you a better person, but only prove to others your lack of character. What are you afraid of?

Thus, stand tall and do your part to end the humiliation. Tell others that you will not tolerate the “r-word” and they should not either. Together we can unite a force that is impossible to break apart. Be vocal. Be strong. Spread the word because it matters. It matters to all of us.

You see, I have a friend. He is my friend and yours and he matters. It is because of him that I want to help others like him. Join me in spreading the word. And also join me in doing things around the world to help with the little things our friends enjoy.