

Making a Difference

David Flatt

Are you making a difference? We teach our children to make a difference. We want them to impact the world positively. As adults, we can feel as though making a difference is just an overly idealistic wish. Maybe we have tried to influence people around us in the past but did not yield the desired results. Making a difference is a lost cause. We are content to focus on our lives and ignore everyone else.

Regardless of our perspective, Jesus calls us to make a difference in the world. Jesus taught, “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:13-16).

Making a difference is an essential tenant of the kingdom. This is how we expand the kingdom in the world. If we think making a difference is ineffectual, we must reevaluate our attitude. Jesus expects us to be influential. How, then, can we make a difference in the world?

How to Make a Difference...

1. Making a difference begins with me. Before we look to making a difference in the world, we must first look at ourselves. There is an old cliché which states, “Be the change you want to see in the world.” This may sound trite, but the saying is true. If we want others to make their lives right with God, we must first make our lives right with God. If we want others to be kind, we must be kind to others. If we want others to get along, we must pursue peace.

To put it another way, making a difference is about setting the right example. Paul wrote Timothy, “Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). Setting the right example gives credibility to our influence. Our conduct demonstrates to others that we are genuine about our faith.

2. Making a difference by prayer. Prayer is an often under-appreciated means of making a difference. Some petition divine intervention only when “there’s nothing left to do.” Yet, prayer is to be part of what saints use to make a difference in the lives of people.

In one of the most practical books of the Bible, James wrote about prayer in the context of suffering and coping with sin: experiences which test our faith. His summation is this: “...The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working” (Jas. 5:16).

3. Making a difference through our families. We can make an incredible difference in the world through our families. Certainly, our families are to be beacons of light in the world. However, consider a closer look at this function.

There are many problems in the world. Sin manifests itself in many forms. Our families are exposed to the many faces of sin almost daily. Parents who are trying to make a difference in their own lives become equipped to make a difference in the lives of their children. As parents, we must discuss sin in ways that are relatable to our children. Training our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord is how we instill moral intelligence in their children (Eph. 6:4).

All things being equal (even though they are not), our children will out-live us. They will become adults, marry, and have children of their own. The difference we did or did not make in their lives will be our legacy. This is why the short time we have them in our care is so pivotal. Our influence occurs whether we give thought to it or not. The point is that we must give thought to it and go to work!

4. Making a difference with our words. The power of language cannot be overstated. Positively or negatively, words are greatly influential. Thoughtful words can be used to calm a tense situation: “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver” (Prov. 25:11). Angry words can be like fire that burns bridges in our relationships: “And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell” (Jas. 3:6).

As someone who writes and speaks for a living, I am particularly sensitive to the influence of language. As Christians, we are to use our language to persuade. According to Paul, gentle persuasion can bring someone to their senses (2 Tim. 2:24-26). Graceful words demonstrate genuine love towards those we are seeking to influence (Col. 4:6). Nothing makes a difference like words motivated by self-giving love.

Conclusion

Making a difference is not a cliché or an unattainable goal. We all have the potential to make a difference in the world. Paul wrote, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). God designed us to make a difference by pouring goodness into the world.

We can make a difference through self-examination and correction. We can make a difference by praying for someone suffering. We can make a difference by talking to our children around the dinner table. We can make a difference by teaching a friend the Gospel.

The kind of difference-making we do will not likely bring much notoriety. Praying in secret or serving the least among us will not bring fame and fortune. We probably won't get elected to anything or get a bronze statue. However, the people we help will be blessed, we will have a fulfilling life, and our Creator will be glorified.