

CAN ONE PERSON MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Can One Person Make a Difference?

2 Chronicles 16:9; Ezekiel 22:23–30



LET'S BEGIN HERE

By now in our study, if you're like me, you want to believe that you can make a difference in the world, but a voice inside keeps protesting, "Be realistic! The river of history is too wide, and the current of evil is too strong. One person can't possibly change the course of the world."

A quick glance at the evening news seems to reinforce that message. Our inner cities have become war zones, our judicial system is a tangle of legal games, and our families are unraveling at the seams. It takes just one step into society's icy waters to feel sin's swift current. The idea of making a difference sounds nice, but for those trying to keep from drowning, is it possible?

From the vortex of pressing problems swirling around us, the task looks too difficult to even try. We need to get to high, dry ground, a place of perspective so we can see that our struggles are not unique but have occurred through the ages. And they've been squarely challenged by difference-making people. There we'll draw hope and strength from some of these individuals who did the impossible — who changed the direction of the world. So, if your seat belts are fastened, let's go!



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. Difference-Makers in History

- Martin Luther sparked the Protestant Reformation.
- Leonardo da Vinci opened the age of the Renaissance.
- William Shakespeare was a playwright for the ages.
- John Bunyan guided the progress of countless pilgrims.
- Alexander Pope's intellectual investments still profit today's thinkers.
- Benjamin Franklin invented bifocals.
- Thomas Edison brought us out of darkness with the electric light.
- Henry Ford's Model T broadened the borders to the butcher across town or the grandchildren across the country.



Quotable

*I've noticed only
rarely does
God choose to
do something
on this earth
without us.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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2. Difference-Makers in the Bible

Many times, God *prefers* to use only one person. For example, during the days of Ezekiel, Israel had become a nation of liars, oppressors, and thieves. What plan did the Lord have in mind for rescuing His people from sin's murky depths? To spare Israel from destruction, all He needed was *one* person willing to stand for what was right.

Let's take a look at some of those ordinary people God used—people who “stood in the gap” and made a difference in their world.

- **Noah:** Without his faithfulness to God and willingness to build an ark, none of us would be here today.
- **Abraham:** He is the father of the nation of Israel. Through him, all the families of the earth are blessed.
- **Joseph:** He was a captive sold by his jealous brothers and became the prime minister of Egypt. He saved his family from famine and kept God's people alive.
- **Moses:** After Egyptian pharaohs forgot about Joseph, enslaving God's people, God selected Moses to live first in pharaoh's house, then in exile as a shepherd, and finally, as the deliverer of the Hebrews.
- **Joshua:** When Moses died, Joshua took over as the general to lead the Hebrews in their conquest of Canaan.
- **The Judges:** Israel, in its affluence, became increasingly indifferent toward God's laws after they possessed the Promised Land. God gave them into the hands of their enemies. Then when Israel repented, He raised up individual judges to deliver them.
- **Samuel:** He ministered as a judge and prophet during a unique period of transition in Israel's history, when the twelve autonomous tribes unified under a central monarchy.
- **Saul, David, and Solomon:** Saul was Israel's first king, preceding David and Solomon. They each impacted the nation, both for good and bad. Overall, their reigns were the golden age of Israel's united kingdom.
- **The Prophets:** After Solomon's death, his kingdom divided into northern and southern factions. God raised up prophets to confront the nations with His truth and model obedience to His words. The writing prophets are accounted in the books of Isaiah through Malachi.
- **Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah:** Despite God's warnings, both kingdoms fell to invaders—the Assyrians captured the north, while Babylon captured the south. After a time in captivity, Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah led the Jews home to Jerusalem in three expeditions. These men had the vision and faith to rebuild the temple, the city walls, and most important, the spirit of the people.



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- **John the Baptist:** During the 400-year gap between the Old and New Testaments, no prophets appeared until John the Baptist stormed in from the wilderness, preparing the way for Messiah.
- **Jesus Christ:** More than any other, the life of Jesus Christ epitomizes the power of one person to change lives. Philip Schaff eloquently describes the difference Jesus has made in history:

This Jesus of Nazareth, without money and arms, conquered more millions than Alexander, Caesar, Mohammed, and Napoleon; without science and learning, he shed more light on things human and divine than all philosophers and scholars combined; without the eloquence of schools, he spoke such words of life as were never spoken before or since and produced effects which lie beyond the reach of any orator or poet; without writing a single line, he set more pens in motion, and furnished themes for more sermons, orations, discussions, learned volumes, works of art, and songs of praise, than the whole army of great men of ancient and modern times.¹

- **Peter, Stephen, and Paul:** Jesus changed scores of others into difference-makers, who then flowed into the world like ripples in a pond. Three of the earliest were Peter, the disciple who denied Christ but later became His chief spokesman; Stephen, the first person in the Bible to be martyred for his faith; and Paul, the former persecutor of Christians who became the early church's greatest champion of the gospel.



LET'S LIVE IT

Can One Person Make a Difference?

Based on the precedent of the past, the answer is an overwhelming yes! One person *can* change the world—in fact, this is the way God works. He's still searching for that one man or woman “whose heart is completely His” whom He can use to achieve his purposes (2 Chronicles 16:9). If your heart is His, you can take part in His vision. With Him, you can make all the difference in the world.

Name some difference-makers in your life. What did these people say and do that had such a tremendous impact on your life?

ENDNOTE

1. Philip Schaff, *The Person of Christ: The Miracle of History* (New York: Charles Scribner and American Tract Society, 1865), 48–49, accessed on Google Books, Feb. 13, 2015.



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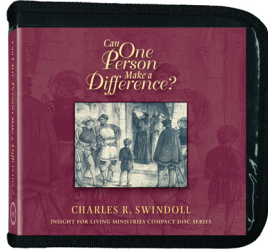
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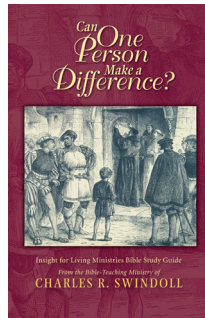


Tools for Digging Deeper



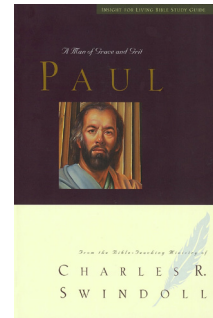
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