

MAKING A DIFFERENCE—PASTOR'S BLOG / MARCH 2017

"I have one life and one chance to make it count for something... My faith demands that I do whatever I can, wherever I am, whenever I can, for as long as I can, with whatever I have to try to make a difference." — Former President Jimmy Carter

Complaining is easy, but deciding to do something to make a difference can be difficult, timely, costly and even overwhelming. In our busy and sometimes chaotic lives, we have a tendency to play 'Monday morning quarterback.' We point fingers and talk about what 'would've', could've, should've been done, but only a few of us lift a hand to make a difference.

We need only look at the recent (*and, for some, painful*) Presidential election as a case in point. The United States Elections Project reports that of the 231,556,622 Americans eligible to vote, some 40 percent did not exercise this right and privilege. And, without giving a history lesson on the Electoral College process, it operates on a '*winner take all premise*.'" The mismatch numbers between the electoral and popular votes came about when Trump won several large states (e.g., Florida, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin) by very narrow margins, gaining all their electoral votes in the process, even as Clinton claimed other large states (e.g., California, Illinois and New York) by much wider margins. Trump's share of the popular vote, in fact, was the seventh smallest winning percentage since 1828.

That said, we can and should make a difference as we look to the future, not just on the political front, but also in our neighborhoods—*our backyard*—and in our churches. For example, the media reports that since the beginning of the year, more than 250 homicides have occurred in Chicago. This is a daunting reality for any community. It is also a problem that can't be fixed with a band-aid or by sending in federal troops. Black-on-Black crime and disregard for human life is a systematic problem. It didn't happen overnight and it won't be solved overnight. However, if one person would take one other person under his or her wings, talk with individual, spend time with that person, it can change one life.

A national mentoring organization (www.mentoring.org) reports that young adults who were at-risk for falling off track, but had a mentor are:

- 55% more likely to enroll in college
- 78% more likely to volunteer regularly
- 90% are interested in becoming mentors
- 130% more likely to hold leadership positions.

Most of us who are positive and productive contributors to society can name at least ONE individual who made a significant difference in our lives—who mentored, encouraged, supported or prayed for us. Perhaps—*if it wasn't our parents*—it was a neighbor, a sibling, a favorite aunt, uncle, teacher, counselor, or coach. We owe it to those individuals to pay it forward. So how are you making a difference in someone's life?

You may not be able or prepared to make a *monumental* difference. It may not be your God-given assignment or purpose to become well known or famous for your contribution, but I encourage you to seek God to find out what your assignment is and pursue it. Each of us has one. If we can't be there in person for someone, perhaps our assignment is to support and encourage those who can, give resources to a cause or agency, or donate equipment. Only YOU know what you can do to make a difference and, if you are unsure, ASK God! Seeking a response or confirmation from Him may not come by whispering a quick prayer every now and then; it may require fervent prayer. It may also require you to spend more time with God so that when He speaks, you recognize that it is His voice and not you setting your own agenda.

Whether you support him or not, one of the most poignant charges former President Barack Obama issued in his farewell address was this: “... *whether you're young or young at heart, I do have one final ask of you as your President ...I am asking you to believe. Not in my ability to bring about change – but in yours.*” Each of us has the ability and capacity to make a difference in our lives and the lives of others, if we

choose to do so. It's a *choice*; a conscious decision and, when you pray about it, it may become your assignment.

We are living in challenging times and, in many ways, it appears our country is going backwards instead of forward. The marches and protests of the 60s and 70s may soon become critical to fostering change and making a difference. Rather than sitting back and hoping things turn out alright, we may be called upon to get up, get out and make our voices heard—in the streets *and at the polls*. When our children's education and their future are at stake, we can no longer afford to sit on the sidelines and hope for the best, or pray for *someone* to come along, save the day and change things. Each of us has the power to make a difference—economically, socially and spiritually. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, "*The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people but the silence over that by the good people.*"

We must speak truth to power! We must find ways to make a positive difference in our homes, on our block, and in our churches, community and our country. We must exercise the power of one. In Ezekiel 22:30 God says, "*I looked for someone who might rebuild the wall of righteousness that guards the land. I searched for someone to stand in the gap in the wall so I wouldn't have to destroy the land, but I found no one*" (NLT). God is looking for one who can make his or her mark; who will stand up for righteousness, and who can make a difference. Be the ONE!

Peace and power,

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