
MAKING YOUR LIFE COUNT

Steve Douglass

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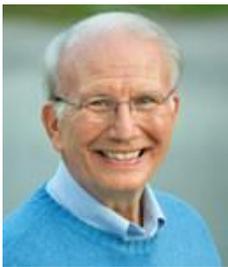
Do you want your life to count for something lasting and worthwhile? Most people do. Listen to eulogies at memorial services. Family and friends feature the good qualities of the person being honored, fondly remembering the positive impact the person made.

Most people today want more from their lives than just being successful in their profession or making money. Followers of Christ, in particular, want to have meaningful, lasting relationships that in some way benefit people around them and beyond. We have seen, for instance, how people show up by the thousands to help those afflicted by natural disasters or in support of some other worthy cause.

No doubt you do want to make a difference. But you might wonder how to do that, and especially for the long haul. How can you make your life count for eternity? That may seem very difficult, if not impossible. But with God's guidance and power, you can make your life count forever!

As you continue reading, you will see examples of how followers of Jesus were used in amazing ways to make a difference for Him. You will note how to live your life and to love people, which will overcome barriers that often keep people from coming to know God. And you will learn how to launch and to grow spiritual movements that last and multiply.

You can do it—if you follow God's plan and operate in His power!



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WHAT KIND OF DIFFERENCE?

There are many ways to make a difference in people's lives. But none is more significant than helping people establish a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. That changes their eternal destiny and gives them purpose for their lives. Yes, Jesus changes lives.

My dad was an alcoholic. He was married and divorced three times. He lost several jobs and many friends—mostly due to his addiction to alcohol. When he finally hit bottom, he knew what to do because he had heard from me and others the good news of new life in Jesus Christ. He prayed and asked Christ into his life.

I then personally saw how Jesus transformed his life. My dad was able to stay sober and hold down a job. He worked for Cru and got involved with many people at our headquarters. He even participated in singing, skits and other “up front” activities during our weekly chapel services.

Five years after receiving Christ, he died. Over 600 people attended his memorial service. I doubt if even six people would have attended his service five years earlier. In a powerful way, Jesus changed my dad's life! And I was privileged to play a part in that.

God promises that His presence in our lives can cause us to experience love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Yes, God can dramatically alter people's lives on earth as well as alter their eternal destinies. And believers in Christ typically play key roles in that.

SO, YOU CAN MAKE AN IMPACT ON PEOPLE'S LIVES

God uses His people to touch lives. Each day I pray that I will have that privilege. Some days God answers my prayer quickly.

One morning I was about to check out of a hotel in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and drive to the airport. I had my personal devotions and asked God for the opportunity to touch a life that day. There was barely enough time for me to stop by the club room of the hotel and grab a little breakfast. It was 6:30 a.m., and the room had just opened. Mindy, the worker there, was the only other person present. We struck up a conversation as I was eating my cereal and yogurt. With just a few questions, I found out she was a single mom who was raising three children without the father's financial support. Mindy worked full-time during the week at another job. Then, on weekends, she got up early and opened the hotel club room as a second job.

I could tell she was tired and stressed both from her job schedule and from trying to raise three children by herself. I asked if I could give her a book on how to live above everyday circumstances. "Oh yes, I would love that!" she said. So I went back to my room, grabbed my bags, came back to the club room and gave Mindy the book.

I asked if I could pray for her before I left. Again she said yes. I prayed for her situation and for God's strength for her as a Christian. When I looked up after praying, tears were flowing down her cheeks. "Thank you so much," she said. "I think God sent you to me today." That was, indeed, a fast answer to prayer! But why should I be surprised? God wants to use us, if only we will be available.

So how can you see that and much more happen in your life? Let me unpack a few important steps for you:

STEP ONE 
WALK with God

One of the most important means to a life of spiritual influence is to love God and obey what He says to do. In Matthew 22:37-38, Jesus says the greatest commandment is to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” He goes on to say in John 14:23, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him.”

Think about what you just read! If you love God wholeheartedly, you will obey His teachings and God will dwell powerfully within you. Over time, you will begin to grow to be more and more like Jesus. As that happens, people around you will notice the change.

Take Colin as an example. He is an influential person in his fraternity on his campus. When he met with two Christians one day, he said, “I need to change my life.” After discussing for an hour concerning what it means to have a relationship with Jesus, Colin said he wanted to pray and ask Christ into his life. Within moments of doing so, he said, “I feel totally different.”

A few weeks later Colin’s life had visibly changed. Some of his fraternity brothers had taken note of the differences in his attitude and in his behaviors. Curious about Colin’s experience, they were beginning to ask questions of him about the Christian life.

So the foundation for a life of impact is a life-changing walk with God.

STEP TWO



PRAY for God's supernatural involvement

You may say, "I can't do all this. I don't have the knowledge or the skills necessary." That's true! *You* don't, but *God* does! In Ephesians 3:20, we read that God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to the power that is at work within us.

Where does that power come from? Look back at Ephesians 3:16 and you see that the power comes from God's Spirit who dwells within us. We must be filled with God's Spirit (Ephesians 5:18) in order to walk with God and do what He would like for us to do.

That certainly has been my experience. When I first came to Christ, I did not know how to appropriate God's power, available through His Holy Spirit. Living the Christian life and sharing my faith with people seemed overwhelming. Then I went to a conference where I heard how to be filled with God's Spirit and tap into God's supernatural power. I learned how to deal with sin in my life by confessing and appropriating, or experiencing, God's forgiveness. I learned how to keep my walk with God fresh, talking to Him regularly and listening for His responses just the same.

Things began to change after that. While I was at the conference, I went out to share my faith. I was a bit fearful since I hadn't shared my faith before. So I prayed that God would give me courage and wisdom. The very first person I shared the gospel with said he was very interested and prayed and received Christ. God made that happen and let me be a part of it!

A few months after my experience at the conference I described above, I took my first exam in graduate school. I remember walking back to my room experiencing considerable anxiety. I asked God for peace of heart and mind. Within minutes I experienced a deep peace. I realized in a new way that my relationship with God was very tangible. With His power I could walk with Him and do whatever He asked me to do.

Making Your Life Count

You see, it is crucial that we stay in constant touch with God, appropriating the power, wisdom and many other things we need to live our lives well and make them count. We need to listen to what God seems to be saying to us and express to Him our concerns. We need to thank Him for who He is—the all-powerful, good and loving God. One word for that kind of conversation is “prayer.”

And as we stay in constant connection and communication with Him, He makes things happen which we could not have done on our own. He enables us to make our lives count beyond what we could imagine doing without Him.

STEP THREE

CARE for others

Perhaps the most visible aspect of a walk with God is the demonstration of genuine loving care.

The second great commandment is to “love your neighbor as yourself.” Part of the “magnetic attraction” people should feel toward true followers of Jesus Christ is the love and acceptance they sense. Jesus cared deeply for people, manifesting His compassion by healing people and pointing them to the forgiveness and mercy of God.

True care is a powerful witness, especially when evidenced by words of kindness and acts of service—an active love.

Consider an example from a country of in Europe. Many students in that country struggle with the transition from high school to college and flunk out their first year. A professor noticed this trend and sought help from his friend Hrvoje, a Cru staff member.

“This was one of those divine appointments we all pray about,” says Hrvoje.

Hrvoje told the professor that he had a study-skills seminar which could help. Because the professor had seen how Hrvoje had shown genuine care and love for the students, he was willing to allow Hrvoje and seven other staff members to instruct students in how to organize their time better and improve their study habits. Now there is a growing cooperation to offer the seminar to all the 500-plus freshmen.

The care that Hrvoje and his team provide extends beyond the academic to the spiritual as well. They initiate follow-up appointments to mentor students individually. As relationships grow, it is natural to explain to students how they can have a personal relationship with God.

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Many Christians do not show care easily. But, they can ask God for care for people by faith. Love is, after all, the first part of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22, 23. It is just as possible to trust God for love as it is to trust Him for peace.

Jesus said to his disciples, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34, 35). In order for spiritual movements to spread readily, people must be able to sense the love of Christ in His disciples.

STEP FOUR

SHARE what God has shown you

It is great for the people around you to sense your walk with God and experience your love. But if you don't explain to them how that happened to you, they won't know how to see that happen in their lives.

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus commanded His disciples (and in turn us) to "Go and make disciples." Central to God's plan is believers sharing their lives and faith with others. And that requires intentional effort.

So you need to learn how to connect with people concerning spiritual truths and show them how to come to a point of putting their faith in Christ and then growing to be more like Him.

Let me illustrate this for you with the story of a young woman I'll call Anna. Growing up in Africa, Anna had been repeatedly sexually abused. She sought advice and comfort from a leader she respected, but received no satisfying answers.

About that time she passed by a house with a small sign that said, "Jesus is love." She was curious, but didn't pursue it just then. Shortly after that, Anna failed a critical test at school and had thoughts of suicide. With nowhere else to turn, she cried out, "Reveal Yourself to me, 'Jesus of love.'"

Well, Jesus did appear to her in a dream and said to Anna: "Accept Me as your Lord and Savior." She immediately went back to the home with the sign about Jesus. They gave her a DVD called *Magdalena*. *Magdalena* presents the story of Jesus through the lenses of women. Anna watched it three times, responded to Christ, and couldn't stop crying for two days.

Transformed, she led her mother and sister to the Lord. She played the DVD for her fellow students, and in just one week 25 students came to Christ.

She then became a university student and led a group of 30 women on her campus. These women also began to boldly tell others that Jesus is love.

As you can see, Anna learned to share her life and faith with others.

Like Anna, you need to teach others around you to walk, pray, care and share. Think about it, the Church would have become extinct in the first century had Christians not learned to multiply. Paul exhorts Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.”

You have just read about the need to walk with God and to love others. As you do that, your light shines into the lives of others around you. You are then in a good position to share with them what you have learned. As you do that, you are making your life count by multiplying spiritually.

In other words, you don't just need to learn how to win people to Christ and build them up in their faith. You need to learn how to “send” them to do the same with others.

An example of someone doing this is Andres. Some years ago he was a university student in Colombia. At a conference he became motivated to try to multiply spiritually. He started a “movement group” on his campus, and it started to grow. Then he started another, similar group on a nearby university campus.

In order to expand more, he turned over the first group to his friend, Freddy. Then Andres went to a third campus and started a new movement group there. Freddy saw this and turned over the first group to a member of the group named Diego. Freddy then started another group on a fourth campus. At this point more than 160 groups had been launched on 80 campuses. Andres made his life count by multiplying spiritually far beyond what he could do by himself.

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

I imagine that as you have been reading about what you must do to make a difference in people's lives, you have recognized the need for further help in understanding and implementing this. You are right! Each topic warrants a fair amount of explanation. It would also be good to see models of how this works in practice. If you know someone who seems to be following Jesus well, a good way for you to take the next steps is to learn from him or her.

But it is also good for you to take some time to explore through the MakingYourLifeCount.org site. There you can:

- Sign up for an interactive coaching email series
- Gain access to the private Reflect & Evaluate Link tools
- Listen to programs about others making their lives count
- Read stories of people like you making a difference in their worlds
- Have access to a team of people willing to advise you

DREAM OF WHAT COULD BE!

Can you imagine what would happen in your world if you could do what I have described to you? People will want to know how they can experience what you have. You will lead them to come to know God personally and see their lives changed. You will show them how they can do the same with their friends, family or colleagues.

Before long, you will have launched a spiritual movement that will spread out from you in all directions. You will be making a huge difference and leaving a powerful legacy.

You will be making your life count!

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