

SEVEN PRINCIPLES FOR ACHIEVING SUCCESS IN MINISTRY

*The*  
**DIFFERENCE  
MAKER**

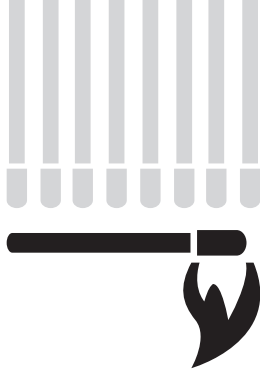


INCLUDES WORKBOOK  
FOR SELF OR GROUP STUDY

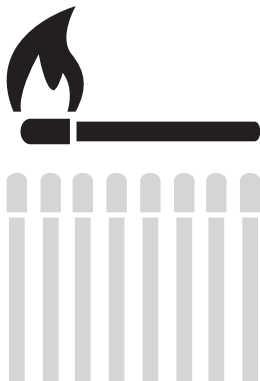
**EUGENE T. WILSON**

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**CALLED TO  
MAKE A  
DIFFERENCE**



The Bible is filled with stories of people who made a difference. Some are well known; others, not so much. But that doesn't matter. To be known is not the goal; making a difference is.

Consider the characters in the story of Naaman found in II Kings 5. Naaman was a Syrian military commander. He was also a leper. Naaman's wife had a handmaiden, a Jewish girl, who told Naaman about a prophet in Israel, a man by the name of Elisha. The prophet had a reputation of performing great miracles, so she suggested that Naaman should visit him.

Naaman heeded her advice and went to see the prophet, expecting to receive a miracle. The prophet, however, didn't even address him. Instead, he sent his servant to deliver a message to Naaman instructing him to dip into the Jordan River seven times. Naaman felt slighted that the prophet sent his servant to deliver the message as opposed to coming himself. *Doesn't he know who I am? I am a man of great importance and deserve to be treated as such*, thought Naaman. *And why the Jordan River? Why not a clean river?* he mused.

Naaman's pride almost cost him his miracle. He had no intention of dipping in the Jordan River. His servants, however, remarked, "If the prophet had asked you to do something big, you would have done it. But all he has asked of you is to do something small." Naaman turned, did as he was told, and dipped seven times in the Jordan River. And after the seventh time, he rose with his healing.

Both Naaman and Elisha were well-known at the time the story unfolded, and both are still well-known today. However, we don't know the names of the servants who persuaded Naaman to follow the prophet's instructions. And the young Jewish servant girl, what was her name? We

don't know. Her role in the story is intriguing. If anyone had an excuse not to get involved, it would have been the young servant girl. Naaman was probably the one who was responsible for her abduction. At best, her parents had been captured and enslaved—or worse, killed. Yet the young servant girl extended grace, and in doing so, Naaman's story has influenced countless people for generations.

Likewise, your life's narrative could influence generations. But are you content with being a difference maker who remains shrouded in obscurity? Are you okay with experiencing misfortune and merely enduring pain? Or are you willing to extend grace to others and help others to shine while you stay hidden in the shadows? If so, you are ready to become a difference maker.

If, on the other hand, you are mostly interested in personal comfort and achieving notoriety, you will struggle to align with God's plan and purpose for your life. God does not share His glory with others; it is God's and God's alone. (See Isaiah 42:8.) Thus, whatever lot you have been given, whatever role you are to play, it should be done with humility. After all, it isn't about you; it is ultimately, and always, about Him.

Difference makers are people who have aligned themselves with God's plan and purpose for their lives. God's agenda is central in all they do. Difference makers do not seek glory. They are not striving to stand out. They have no interest in making a name for themselves. Difference makers are most often ordinary people who are driven to be faithful to God's plan and purpose and remain steadfast despite extraordinary obstacles.

### **Trudy's Kids**

I met Trudy in the mid-2000s. Her brother and I attended church together. Although Trudy lived a few hours away,

she visited our church occasionally when in town to see her brother. Trudy was in her thirties at the time I met her but had the intellectual capacity of a child. She was a bundle of joy. And when I say “joy,” I am not exaggerating. She touched the lives of everyone she came in contact with, whether at church, Walmart, a restaurant, or the close friends whom she called every week just to check up on.

Trudy had an electric personality. It wasn’t unusual for children at Walmart to reach for her. Toddlers would want her to pick them up. It didn’t matter if they had known her or not; strangers were drawn to her.

The magnetism wasn’t one-sided, as Trudy was drawn to others as well. She would go to Walmart with her mother, but not make it much farther than the entrance. She might start a conversation with a stranger by commenting on a person’s outfit, saying things like, “Oh, I love that dress on you. What a pretty color.” Upon seeing her mom, she would tell her, “Oh, mom, she is so nice and beautiful. Oh so beautiful!” even when some people might have thought otherwise.

One day, while her mom was feeling sorry for herself and Trudy, she asked the Lord, “Lord, why couldn’t You have made Trudy normal like the rest of us?” to which the Lord replied, “What makes you think I shouldn’t have made the rest of you like Trudy?”

Trudy never gossiped. She never lost her temper. At church, she would hug everyone and tell them she loved them. She displayed the fruit of the Spirit, the entire list of which she had memorized, in ways that most never do.

She passed away at fifty years of age. By that time I had moved away, but I heard about it. It was a difficult time for

the family, friends, even business people in the community, all of whom loved Trudy.

One day her mom was praying, asking God what she could do for a memorial to Trudy. Having visited Haiti on many occasions and always being moved by the orphans, it was as though the Lord spoke to her: “Do something for the children.” So she did. Today there is an orphanage in Haiti built on the property paid for by people who loved Trudy. They call it “Trudy’s Kids.”

Trudy’s gravesite is located in Lexington, Tennessee. On her tombstone are the words, “Let her works praise her at the gates.” It is impossible to grade Trudy’s impact on the world because it is still growing. If you visit the Pentecostal church Trudy attended, you probably will hear her name mentioned. On most Sundays, during a meet-and-greet with one another, the service leader will say, “Give them a Trudy hug and tell them you are glad they’re here.”

### **Everyone Has a Purpose**

You have a purpose. You have been called by God to make a difference. How do I know this to be true? The Bible tells me so. The apostle Peter wrote:

But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. And above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins.” Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in

all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (I Peter 4:7–11)

We can derive the following from Peter's writings: (1) everyone has received a gift, (2) the gift is to be used in ministering to others, and (3) the ability to exercise the gift comes from God. Hence, not only does God call us, God empowers us for the work He has called us to do.

Last, our alignment with God's plan and purpose gives God glory. Our fulfilling what we are called to do is worship. Based on Peter's writings, people who are not aligned with God's plan and purpose are lacking in their worship. Worship is far greater than mere participation in a worship set during a Sunday service; it involves our active participation in exercising the gifts God has given us.

The apostle Paul offered a similar exhortation in Romans 12:1–8:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many,



are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Notice Paul's teaching: we are to offer ourselves as living (as opposed to dead) sacrifices to God; we have different gifts according to God's grace; we are to discover—rather than be ignorant of—our gift(s), and we are to use our gift(s) not in arrogance toward others, but soberly and in the measure of faith God has given to us.

In I Corinthians 12:4–11, Paul wrote:

There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

According to Paul's insights, our gift is given for the common good. It is not to be used to divide or weaken the body of Christ, but to show love and concern for each person. It should be exercised in a fitting, orderly, and submissive way. And the usefulness of the gift is directly related to the degree we use it in love.

These are just a few passages that highlight biblical instruction concerning the use of our God-given gifts. There are more references throughout the Bible.

In summary, Scripture teaches that we have a purpose or calling, and the underlying purpose of that calling is not for personal gain, but to worship God. Thus an excellent question to ask oneself is, "Who benefits from my use of this gift?" If the beneficiary is self, call it something other than a gift that comes from God. God does not bestow gifts for personal gain; He gives gifts for the purpose of giving to others.

### **Different Shapes and Sizes**

Difference makers come in many shapes and sizes. Consider Andrew. Scripture barely mentions his name, so we know little about him. However, we do know he was a difference maker. It appears his role was that of a connector, as it was Andrew who introduced his brother to Jesus. And it was his brother, the apostle Peter, a difference maker of a different kind, who preached on the Day of Pentecost. It is possible there never would have been an apostle Peter without an Andrew, someone who could look into the future and see the possibilities of what might happen by connecting the right people.

Difference makers have always existed. You probably know of such people, perhaps a relative, a friend, an acquaintance, someone from your past or present who served a purpose, people who aligned themselves with God's plan for their lives. You could probably create a list of people who,

although not widely known, were difference makers nonetheless. Such people offer a message of hope to countless others.

Not everyone will become a household name. Most will fulfill God's plan and purpose with little fanfare, but that doesn't mean such people haven't made a difference. When all is said and done, God will reward unheralded people who align themselves with His plan and purpose by saying, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

Perhaps you will be an Andrew, someone who doesn't receive accolades but makes a difference. Then again, God may call you to the forefront just as He did Esther "for such a time as this." Or David "for this cause." If so, there is a good possibility you are in the process of being equipped for that moment. Why do I say this? Because, despite appearances, difference makers don't just happen to make a difference. Difference makers are people who want to be used by God, who want to be aligned with His plan and purpose, and, perhaps most important, difference makers understand the value of growth, of becoming the person God wants them to be. Becoming the person God wants you to be precedes what you do that makes a difference.

You may currently be experiencing difficulties, troubles, things you never thought you would go through. If so, much of it likely is outside of your control. Perhaps others have done things that have harmed you. If so, understand your bear and lion (see David's story) may be preparing you for a special moment. God will never fail to empower you for the work He sets before you. If you are facing or have faced great difficulties, know that God has a great purpose for you. His plan is not to harm you; His plan is to grow you. His plan is that you will fulfill His call on your life, that you will influence the lives of others, and in doing so, give Him glory.

### **Stick with God's Plan**

Unfortunately, many fail to align themselves with God's plan and purpose for their lives. Such people, regardless of whatever amount of worldly success they may achieve, never reach their full potential. Some have aligned with God's plan and purpose but struggle to do so. Some of these struggles come from a lack of knowledge. People don't know what to do, how to proceed, and how to start moving in the right direction. They know God has a purpose for them, but they don't fully understand it. Thus, they remain in stagnation, unable or unwilling to move forward. Others are so eager to achieve His plan and purpose that they get ahead of His timing. Moses was such a person. Abraham and Sarah were too. And yet God's purpose was fulfilled in their lives despite their impatience. If you have taken unwanted action because of impatience, know that God will be faithful in achieving His plan and purpose in your life.

The journey to fulfilling one's call begins with alignment to God's plan and purpose and the courage to stay the course regardless of what the journey may bring your way. Don't underestimate the power of fortitude. You may have a higher intellectual capacity than Trudy, but do you have her level of compassion, love, and zeal for life? Are you willing to stay on the journey despite the obstacles? Are you fully committed to God's plan and purpose?