

Life is all about choices. Everyday, we make choices. We make choices about big things and little things. When I used to work in youth ministry, ages ago, I loved to pull out a little book called "Would you Rather. . ."

It offers choices. Someone give me a number between 1 and 250. Great. (Read the number) Take several more along the way.

Life is about choices. We might laugh at some of the ridiculous choices that have just been given to us. But every day we live, we face choices. We face choices about how we will treat others, our family and co-workers. We face choices about how intentional we will live our faith, or not. Each day we face choices.

We are in the midst of a sermon series called *Finding a Place to Belong*. Today, we are going to talk about how we can Make a Difference.

I believe that we can make a difference for God in this world. It is a choice we can choose. We don't have to make that choice. But I believe that if we are going to *Find a Place to Belong*, in the community of faith, in the church. At some point we have to believe that we can make a difference for God. How can we make a difference for God?

**It begins, when we hear God's call in our life.** Listen to this passage from Luke, *After this, the Lord chose others and sent them out in pairs ahead of him to every town and place where he planned to go. He said to them, "There are a great many people to harvest, but there are only a few workers. So pray to God, who owns the harvest, that God will send more workers to help gather this harvest. Go no, but listen! I am sending you out like sheep among wolves, don't carry a purse or a bag, or sandals and don't get side-tracked by greeting people on the road.*

Jesus understood that if his mission was going to be successful in this world. He needed to involve others in that mission. So he called others, people who had already been following him to make a difference. To go out into the world and prepare the world for his coming.

Jesus is honest about how tough this might be. He says, I am sending you like sheep among wolves. What happens when sheep are surrounded by wolves? That's right, it is dangerous.

We are called into a world that is dangerous, at times, to help prepare the way for God. Randy Stonehill has a song that was written a number of years ago that says it well. It is called Cry for the Children and the first verse and refrain go like this.

"Cry for all the innocent ones. Born into a world that's lost its heart. For those who never learn to dream. Because their hopes are crushed before they can start. And we shake our fist at the air, and say if God is love, how can this be fair . . .

"But we are his hands, we are his heart, we are the ones, who must make a start, and if it isn't now, tell me when. If it isn't you, then tell me who will save the children."

Our faith, and this scripture, reminds us that God is calling us, to go into the world as the hands and feet of God, to make a difference. Are you willing to do so?

If we are going to make a difference for God, it begins with hearing God's call in our life. **It is enhanced by knowing we are not alone in this journey.**

Jesus is real clear, you are being sent out in pairs. Because this is such a tough challenge. I heard a friend recently say that when he was a door to door salesman of books, whenever one of the sales force started to struggle. They were immediately paired up with someone older and more experienced.

That way they could be encouraged as they learned together, more effective ways of making sales.

In the church, we have each other to help us connect with God and grow in faith. If we take advantage of it. If not, if you come to worship and isolate yourself from other members of the church. If you come to worship

and choose not to get involved with others, when the difficulties of life draw close, you will be tempted, because you feel alone, to quite coming to worship.

One of the reasons we tell new members to get involved in some type of small group, some type of ministry, some type of opportunity in the church, is because we know that when you choose to walk with others in faith, it will help you in good times and in difficult times. The absolute great thing about the church is that you don't have to walk alone.

We will walk with you, on the journey to God. Are you willing to let others walk with you?

If we are going to make a difference for God, we need to not only hear the call of God, walk with others on this journey for God. **But we also need to remain faithful to the mission, which is to share the life and hope God offers us.** Jesus put it this way, *When you enter a town and the people welcome you, eat what they give you and heal the sick who live there and tell them, "The Kingdom of God is near you." When you enter a town and they don't welcome you . . . say, "Remember the kingdom of God is near."*

Jesus is clear that sometimes even our best efforts to live faithfully and share our faith may or may not be received well. But the point is to stay faithful. It is to share the life and hope that God offers. It is to reach out to the oppressed and the hurting.

You can make a difference, even if it is in the life of one person. Are you willing to make a difference?

Rebecca Smathers is a high school junior. She dances, walks and runs. Which is no big deal for most of us. But for Rebecca those abilities prove God's power and the difference other people can make.

You see, in her freshman year, Rebecca felt her muscles slowly becoming numb. She started avoiding golf and softball practices. Play rehearsals caused excruciating pain. Her mother finally took her to a doctor, and Rebecca was admitted to the hospital that same day.

A spinal tap confirmed she had Guillain Barr Syndrome, a rare condition in which a virus attacks the nervous system, causing paralysis in all

of the motor functions. Although she began various drug and physical treatments, Rebecca's condition worsened. "The syndrome spread, and I could no longer sit upright in bed by myself," she recalls.

Doctors gave her little chance for recovery. However, Rebecca believes the care and prayers of others made the difference. "My spirits have been strengthened because of the love from family and friends," Rebecca says. "Daily I received phone calls, cards and flowers. My room was crowded with friends every day. IT was a time for fellowship and support, not only for me, but also for my family and friends.

The doctors continued treatment, and Rebecca slowly recovered.

"Some people say the Lord doesn't give us answers we can see or touch, yet we all see and touch our family and friends," Rebecca says. "The Lord answered my prayers with a family who stroked my hair and sat next to me day and night when I lay motionless. The Lord brought me friends who told me, 'you will get better, because I love you and I am praying for you.' I thank God for the answers God has given me. They are all around me.

Rebecca has learned how much people can make a difference for others, in the name of God. So can you. Are you willing to do so? The choice is yours.

May God help us to hear the call of God. May God help us walk with others and encourage each other on this journey. May God help us remain faithful to the mission of God.

Amen