

“STEPHEN”

Acts 6:3—8:3

Michael Jordan changed the game of basketball. **Steve Jobs** changed the cell phone industry. **Sir Isaac Newton** changed the scientific world. They were all difference-makers.

A *"difference-maker"* is an individual who creates positive and significant change in the lives of others through extraordinary actions and a commitment to excellence.

It's God's will that every born-again believer make a mark on this world for the good of other people and for the glory of God. . .

Matthew 5:13–16... “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty *again*? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. **14** “You are the light of the world. A

city set on a hill cannot be hidden; **15** nor does *anyone* light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. **16** "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

Ephesians 2:8–10... For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; **9** not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. **10** For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

The Bible highlights many difference-makers. Think of Noah, Moses, Joshua, David, Esther, Daniel, Peter, James, John, and many others. Today I want to draw your attention to a difference-maker in the days of the early church. His name is **Stephen, the first Christian martyr**.

Open your Bible to Acts 6. By this time, Satan has already tried to destroy the church through

external persecution and through internal corruption (Ananias and Sapphira). Now the enemy uses another tactic—*dissension between the widows who had lived in Israel and the widows who had lived in the Greek world*. What the apostles did to remedy the situation was brilliant. They asked the church to select some men to serve as deacons (**Acts 6:2-6**). They were responsible for making sure that each group of widows was treated fairly in the provision of food. Stephen was one of those men. In every sense of the word, he was a difference-maker. Here’s the truth you must take to heart. . .

YOU CAN BE A DIFFERENCE-MAKER!

Even small actions can create significant impact. You may be wondering, “*What can I do to make a difference?*” In the last week, we’ve had over 100 members serve in 8 projects across Collierville and Memphis. (See Note)

Taking Stephen’s life as an example, I want to lay out for you the characteristics of a genuine difference-maker. . .

1. SPIRITUAL AUTHENTICITY

The Lord Jesus made a huge difference in Stephen’s life. Only then could Stephen make a difference in the life of others. Has Jesus made a significant difference in your life? It’s interesting how Luke used the word “full” to describe Stephen’s spiritual life. This word refers to total saturation and domination.

HE WAS FULL OF THE SPIRIT (6:3,5,8)

This godly man was Spirit-filled. He died to Himself and surrendered to the control of the Holy Spirit. This kind of life was not a novelty to him; it was a necessity!

HE WAS FULL OF WISDOM (6:3)

Wisdom is the ability to properly apply knowledge in a given situation. Stephen was dominated by God’s wisdom, not the world’s wisdom. He

regularly went to the synagogue where Hellenistic Jews gathered to study the Old Testament and he spoke to them concerning Jesus the Messiah as revealed in the Old Testament. In all likelihood Saul of Tarsus was in this synagogue when Stephen spoke. Notice what the Bible says in verse 10...

Acts 6:10... But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.

This story reminds us that we can't always see how the decisions we make today will impact our family, our friends, our co-workers, and our neighbors in the future.

HE WAS FULL OF FAITH (6:5)

This godly man was dominated by a strong and vibrant faith. He believed. . .

- in God's Word (chapter 7)
- in God's faithfulness
- in God's sovereignty

- in the ministry of the Holy Spirit
- in the atoning death & resurrection of Jesus
- in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah
- in the ascension of Jesus
- in heaven

HE WAS FULL OF GRACE (6:8)

Stephen was saved by the sheer grace of God just like every other Christian. However, he was so dominated by God’s grace that it produced a graciousness in his life that overflowed to other people—even *people who were stoning him to death*.

HE WAS FULL OF POWER (6:8)

Acts 6:8... And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people.

Because he was full of the Holy Spirit, he was full of spiritual power. He was even given the

supernatural ability to perform great wonders and signs. Stephen was totally devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ. No wonder he exerted such a powerful influence over everyone he encountered.

When people look at your life, do they see your commitment to the Lord Jesus? What fills your heart?

- Is it materialism?
- Is it popularity?
- Is it sports or music?
- Is it pleasure?
- Is it convenience?
- Is it your career?

BE A DIFFERENCE-MAKER!

Listen, your ability to be a difference-maker is directly related to your *spiritual authenticity* and secondly to your. . .

2. BIBLICAL INSIGHT

Stephen was a man with deep convictions based upon His study of God’s Word. Stephen launched into a marvelous sermon. Remember the accusations they leveled at Stephen...

- **That he spoke against Moses and God**
- **That he spoke against the temple**
- **That he spoke against the Law**
- **That Jesus was changing everything**

A careful analysis of this message reveals several distinct sections...

ABRAHAM AND THE PATRIARCHS (2-8)

Notice how he emphasized that *God appeared to Abraham while he was in Mesopotamia.*

Acts 7:2–3... And he said, “Hear me, brethren and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, 3 and said to him, ‘LEAVE YOUR COUNTRY AND YOUR RELATIVES, AND COME INTO THE LAND THAT I WILL SHOW YOU.’

The Jewish leaders wanted to put God in a box. He was to them a Jewish God and not a God for the whole world. Stephen blasted their false belief.

JOSEPH AND THE EGYPTIAN EXILE (9-19)

Once again Stephen strengthened his emphasis upon God’s concern for the whole world.

Acts 7:9–10... “The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt. Yet God was with him, 10 and rescued him from all his afflictions, and granted him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he made him governor over Egypt and all his household.

Where did God grant favor to Joseph? It was when he was in Egypt and God even used him to save the Jewish people from starving to death during a famine.

MOSES AND THE EXODUS (20-44)

Stephen knew more about the Old Testament than the Jewish priests and the religious leaders!

He showed how God’s covenant people had resisted Him and disobeyed Him.

Acts 7:38–40... “This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and *who was* with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you. 39 “Our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him, but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt, 40 SAYING TO AARON, ‘MAKE FOR US GODS WHO WILL GO BEFORE US; FOR THIS MOSES WHO LED US OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT—WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM.’

God appeared to Moses in Midian and not in Israel. Stephen’s convictions were rooted in the Bible, not his opinions.

DAVID AND SOLOMON (44-53)

Stephen ramped up his challenge to a fever pitch. The temple that they viewed as holy could not contain the Creator God. Remember, Jesus accused them of making it a den of thieves when

He took a whip and ran the money changers and those who were selling animals out.

Acts 7:46–49... “David found favor in God’s sight, and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. 47 “But it was Solomon who built a house for Him. 48 “However, the Most High does not dwell in *houses* made by *human* hands; as the prophet says: 49 ‘HEAVEN IS MY THRONE, AND EARTH IS THE FOOTSTOOL OF MY FEET; WHAT KIND OF HOUSE WILL YOU BUILD FOR ME?’ says the Lord, ‘OR WHAT PLACE IS THERE FOR MY REPOSE?

These hypocritical religious leaders had no answer for his biblical insight and wisdom. Do you know who was there that day—Saul of Tarsus, the Pharisee who would become the greatest missionary in the history of the church. Stephen was a godly man who had biblical insight and deep convictions that were non-negotiable. No wonder he was a difference-maker!

BE A DIFFERENCE-MAKER!

Listen, your ability to be a difference-maker is directly related to your spiritual authenticity and to your biblical insight. There’s one more characteristic I want to point out to you.

3. PERSONAL COURAGE

No one will be positively influenced for the glory of Jesus by a person who is not deeply committed to Jesus, who has no solid biblical convictions, and who does not have the personal courage to stand for Jesus when it costs them something. Just look at what happened next...

NOTICE WHAT STEPHEN SAW

Acts 7:54–56... Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they *began* gnashing their teeth at him. 55 But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; 56 and he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

He saw Jesus *standing at the right hand of God*. Jesus was standing ready to provide the courage and strength Stephen needed, and He was ready to receive the first Christian martyr. I think it pictures our Lord’s role as our advocate before the Father. I can just hear Jesus saying to the God the Father, “*Father, that’s Stephen. He’s mine!*”

Next, I want you to...

NOTICE WHAT STEPHEN SAID

Acts 7:57–60... But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse. **58** When they had driven him out of the city, they *began stoning him*; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. **59** They went on stoning Stephen as he called on *the Lord* and said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” **60** Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” Having said this, he fell asleep.

Stephen asked Jesus to receive his spirit and to forgive those who were stoning him. That is the

response of a *difference-maker!* By the way, Saul was there that day. In fact, those who stoned him laid their robes at his feet **(7:58)** and he fully supported the stoning of Stephen **(8:1)**. He never forgot Stephen's *spiritual authenticity*, *biblical insight*, and *personal courage*.

CONCLUSION

BE A DIFFERENCE-MAKER!

Listen, your ability to be a difference-maker is directly related to your *spiritual authenticity*, to your *biblical insight*, and to your *personal courage*.

Examine your heart today. Are these characteristics prevalent in your life? Come to the altar today and pray for the Lord to make your influence powerful and pervasive. Your spouse, your kids, your friends, your co-workers, your school, and your neighbors desperately need for you to be a difference-maker.

Quotes on being a difference-maker emphasize that Key themes include the power of individual action, the importance of changing oneself to change the world, and the ripple effect of positive deeds.

On individual impact and starting small

"Regardless of whatever I do, I know what my purpose is: to make a difference in people's lives." — Tim Tebow

"If your presence doesn't make an impact, your absence won't make a difference." — Trey Smith

- "Act as if what you do makes a difference, it does." — William James
- "In this life we cannot always do great things. But we can do small things with great love." — Mother Teresa
- "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change

the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." — [Margaret Mead](#)

- "Even the largest avalanche is triggered by small things." — [Vernor Vinge](#)
- "If your presence doesn't make an impact, your absence won't make a difference."
— [Good Good Good News](#)

On changing oneself and one's perspective

- "Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise, so I am changing myself." — [Rumi](#)
- "You must be the change you wish to see in the world." — Mahatma Gandhi
- "If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change." — Wayne Dyer

On the mindset of a difference-maker

- "The people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do." — Rob Siltanen
- "What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make." — Jane Goodall
- "The biggest difference between you and your competitors is your commitment to making a difference." — thisisadultlife.com
- "You don't have to be a billionaire to believe you can make a difference." — Germany Kent
- 61 Best Quotes About Making a Difference in the World

Jul 22, 2022 — "You may find that making a difference for others makes the biggest difference in you." — Brian Williams. "Regardless