

# What a Difference You've Made in My Life

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[ 0 : 00 ] How many of you know Ronnie Millsap's song, number one, many years ago, What a Difference You've Made in My Life?

Raise your hand. Most people here. Most people here. He recorded that song to be what most people would call a secular song.

What a Difference You've Made in My Life. You could sing it or play it for just about anybody who had made a difference in your life.

That's probably why it was him. He did a great job with it, but it was such a good song that had a good message. What a Difference You. You could sing it to your spouse.

You could sing it to anybody who had made a difference in your life. Well, a few years later, B.J. Thomas recorded that song.

[ 0 : 59 ] It went way up in the chart on gospel stations. And B.J. Thomas sang it as a Christian song.

And when he was singing What a Difference You've Made in My Life, everyone knew. He emphasized, he was talking about the difference that Jesus made in his life.

That song was written by Archie Jordan. Archie's a Christian, but he's not really what you would call a writer of Christian songs.

He wrote that song because of something that happened at a small group Bible study he attended. He tells the story.

You can look it up. He was at a Bible study with his wife. And the man was there who gave his testimony. And the man's testimony was that not too many years before that, he had everything in life that a person could desire.

[ 2 : 03 ] He had a beautiful wife and just a great family. He had a dream job. And he made a lot of money. But he couldn't handle the success.

And he started drinking a lot. He started using recreational drugs. And before he knew it, he lost his wife and children.

He lost his job. He went through all of his money. He was broke. And in that Bible study with that small group, he said, it took me losing everything to come to the place in my life where I knew I needed a relationship with Christ.

And the last thing he said in giving his testimony was, what a difference Jesus has made in my life. Well, Archie Jordan, he was moved by that story.

He couldn't get it off his mind. And the next morning, he got up and he wrote or started writing the song, what a difference you've made in my life.

[ 3 : 23 ] And he was writing about the difference Jesus makes in people's life. Now, I want us to apply this personally.

There's two lines from that song I'm going to put on the screen. The title of it, what a difference you've made in my life. And then, what a change you have made in my heart.

Could you sing that song? Maybe not out loud, but could you sing that song as it was originally intended to describe the difference that Jesus has and is making in your life?

Could you recite those words and mean it this morning? Just talking about Jesus. What a change you have and are making in my life.

Can you sing that song and mean it because it's your testimony? Last Sunday, we celebrated the most important event that has ever taken place in history, the resurrection of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

[ 4 : 42 ] We looked at some of the details about the resurrection in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, and I want you to turn back with me to that chapter today and look at the last verse with me in a moment.

But I want to quickly summarize one of the main points of last week's message like this. The resurrection of Christ should comfort us as we face death.

The resurrection should give every Christian comfort as we think about our own death. Death will not be the final winner in any believer's life.

Paul says in verse 54, death is swallowed up in victory. That describes how Christ won the victory over death by his resurrection.

If you have a real relationship with Christ, you should not fear death. His resurrection guarantees yours.

[ 5 : 44 ] We will die, but the Lord will give us a new body one day. We'll live eternally with him one day.

The death and resurrection of Jesus has removed what Paul called the sting from death. Look at the statement he made about that in verse 55.

It's as if he is taunting death after the resurrection. He says, oh death, where is your victory? Oh death, where is your sting?

If we are truly Christians, death is like a yellow jacket without a stinger. We may not like it.

I'd still spray that sucker with spectricide, wasp and hornet killer. But it couldn't hurt us without a stinger.

[ 6 : 44 ] Christ has removed the sting of death. So we need to think of death today. It's not something you, you know, you get excited about, but we should think of death not with fear, but with confidence.

It's just going to be the process we go through to get from this life into the presence of Jesus in paradise where we'll live forever.

The resurrection of Christ means that we should not fear death. Our sins are forgiven. We are children of God. We have eternal life. And that is so very important, isn't it?

But it's not everything. The resurrection means more than that. It means something about the way we live, as Michael so beautifully sang a moment ago.

I want you to look in verse 58 now and see that the resurrection of Christ should make a difference in how we live today. The resurrection that so many people came here and went to churches last week to celebrate, as important as it is, it's not everything.

[ 7 : 58 ] It should make a difference in the way that you and I live each day. I want you to look at verse 58. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

The word therefore, you know that's an important word in anything you read. It's recalling what has just been said and in some ways going to apply it or elaborate on it in the words that follow.

That's what Paul does. It calls us to recall what has just been said about the Lord's victory, his triumph over death and sin.

We certainly need to remember what the Lord has done for us but not stop there. We need to think about what the Lord has done for us.

He loved us so much that he gave his life. That it motivates us to live now in a way that demonstrates our love for him and our gratitude to him for what he's done for us.

[ 9 : 09 ] Paul points out some of the ways we can and should do that in the rest of this verse. He uses three words to describe how we need to live. Look at them. Be steadfast, be immovable, abound in the work of the Lord.

Look at the first two first. They sort of go together. Steadfast means to be steady as you move forward. Keep on going. Don't quit.

Don't stop and start. Start and stop. Steadfast. Firm. Strong. Moving.

And then the word immovable is similar but it's stronger. He's talking about standing strong and not being moved like a tree that has deep roots that go way down and hold it strong and secure in the bad winds that come.

Never gets blown down. That's what he tells us. This is how we should live as Christians. We should be people who are steadfast. We're not up and down, on and off as living the Christian life and we don't let things just sway us the winds of adversity that we all have to experience.

[ 10 : 31 ] You know, these two words recalls what Paul said in the same chapter verses one and two. If you've got your Bible open to 1 Corinthians 15, look up verses one and two.

It'll be on the screen as well. He says, Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you.

Unless you believed in vain, it's possible to believe in vain. You know, there's a lot of people who make a profession of faith, even become baptized.

They just don't continue in the faith. They don't act like anything happened and what Paul is saying here, nothing did.

It was in vain. We're, we are as Christians. We are to hold to the truth of God's word, especially the truth of the gospel, firmly.

[ 11 : 47 ] The reason he says that is because some people don't. We're all tempted not to, but we all know people who started out like what I just described a moment ago.

We all know people, maybe it's people you grew up with, went to church with, were baptized with, went to Sunday school with. Maybe some people that you work with. At one point in their life, they confessed faith.

At one point in their life, they would talk about the things of God. But after a period of time, it just seems that they didn't care. They didn't continue because they had no desire to continue.

Their life never changed. They appear to have believed in vain, is what we're talking about. We're talking about people who are easily blown over when difficulty comes in life.

Now, you're here this morning if you say, I'm a firm believer. I've gone through a lot in life and I've never wavered.

[ 12 : 59 ] Good. That's a sign of God's hand on you and you've cooperated with Him. That's good and great, but don't be prideful. All of us are tempted to give up at times and all of us do give in to the temptation at times.

All of us, all of us fail the Lord at times in our lives. and I want you to be honest with God about it, honest with yourself.

There are no super saints in this room. There's no one in this room who doesn't know what it's like to be tempted and to give in to that temptation and to fall flat on your face before God in guilt and shame.

Even Peter, the leader of the Lord's disciples, the apostle Peter, he failed the Lord miserably on more than one occasion.

But Peter always came back. Sometimes he was down, but he was never out. That's the sign of a true Christian. The sign of a true Christian is never they live flawless lives.

[ 14 : 22 ] They never fail. The sign of a true Christian is how they respond after they failed by getting back up. When a true child of God falls or stumbles into sin, sooner or later they're going to be convicted of their sin.

They're going to be made aware of it. The Spirit of God living within them will do that. Understand what we're talking about here. If you're a true Christian, let's say, if we, I don't know what you think, just you, all of us, if we're true Christians, we can fail the Lord miserably.

We can bring shame to ourselves and our families. We can do harm to the name of Christ by some of the things that we say as well as some of the things that we do.

But sooner or later, if the Spirit of God lives within us, and the Bible says the Spirit of God lives within every Christian, sooner or later, we're going to feel the guilt and the shame.

And as children of God being disciplined by God, we're going to confess it. We're going to say, yes, Lord, it's true. We're going to change our, we're going to repent of it. We're going to change our mind about it.

[ 15 : 38 ] We're going to turn from it. We're going to come back to Christ in faith, trusting Him that He's paid the penalty for our sins. We're right with God through faith in Him. That's what's going to happen if you're a true Christian when you fail, when you fall into sin sooner or later.

That's why, for an example, John describes the importance of Christians admitting and confessing their sins. Look at it in 1 John 1 verses 8 and 9.

We've looked at verse 9 a lot. Let's look at verse 8 to begin with. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. Stop for a moment. I know there would be very few people who could possibly be here who would deny that, but every now and then I have come across a Christian who just really doesn't want to admit, deal with the reality that they sin.

It may be an attitude, it may be words, it may be actions, it may be something small. But every now and then I run across someone who gives the appearance or acts like they're a little bit above others, a little bit condescending toward less faithful Christians.

If you don't understand the seriousness of your sin as a Christian, look at that verse. If you say we have no sin, you take it lightly even.

[17:08] You're deceiving yourself and the truth is not in you. But read on. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

That's the good news about when God disciplines us, when he breaks us, when he humbles us. It's all for the purpose of making us come back to him and this is the way back.

This is not all John said. There was a verse 10 that we're going to skip. Then I want you look at chapter 2 verses 1 and 2. He writes, my little children.

He likes to write that way to the church. My little children, I'm writing these things to you so that you may not sin. That's the goal. I'm emphasizing we all do.

But we shouldn't accept that in ourselves. We should seek to obey God, not disobey him. We should seek to live a holy life, not an unholy life. I'm writing these things to you so that you may not sin.

[18:16] But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins.

Some translations say he's the sacrifice of atonement. What that means, he's the propitiation for our sin. He's the one who stands between God and us. He takes the blow.

He absorbs the wrath of the righteous wrath of God against sin so that we don't have to. He is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

A true Christian will never overcome all sin in this world, but we should see progress. We should see signs that the Lord is making a difference in our lives.

So let's just pause here and you make it personal. Do you see some signs? Can you sing what a difference he's made in my life, what a change he's made in my heart?

[19:29] Because you see it, well now in your mind I want you to list it. What are some specific differences that the Lord has and is making in your life?

What are some specific changes that he has and is making in your life? If you can't list some, there's a problem.

If you can't see that there's progress being made, maybe you've been a Christian for 20 years, maybe you've been a Christian for only 20 months. If the Spirit of God lives in you, which the Bible says he lives in every Christian, he comes to live within us when we're converted.

If you can't see signs of what he's doing in your life, you're not perfect, but you are growing, you are maturing, you're overcoming some sinful habits, you're developing some new godly character qualities, that is a sign of being a Christian.

And there's something terribly wrong if we can't identify and list some changes that the Lord has and is making in us. I want you to look at the next phrase in verse 58.

[20:52] Abounding in the work of the Lord. Look at it together. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

Abound means to overflow with. It means to do things that count for Christ and do a lot of them.

What are you doing that counts for Christ?

How are you abounding in the work of the Lord? I want to emphasize something here that I failed to emphasize in the early service. Just about everything we do in life, just about everything we can do and actually do can be done in a way that brings glory to honor and brings glory to God.

You can do your job in a way that brings glory to God, that honors Him by your attitude, the way you treat people, by what you do on your job.

If you can't, you ought to change jobs tomorrow and I'm serious. We can glorify God by the way we treat our spouse, our children. We can glorify God by the way we act at a wreck.

[22:04] Some people lose their mind at the Y and the wreck and other children's sports events. Act like pure fools in front of everybody.

I forgot who the conversation was with. It was somebody in the church. What we talked about years ago, there was someone that used to sit in the stands down here at Bruceville for football games.

Oh, known, active Christians, all I'm going to say. Some of you, whoever we talked about this, you were grinning because you know who I'm talking about. This person yelled and screamed at

officials in such a way he destroyed his witness every single JV and varsity football game that I was sitting in the stands with him.

It matters how we live. It matters. And we can do anything and everything we should be doing in a way that pleases God, that honors God, that's a good witness, that impacts people's lives in a great way.

And we all need to be doing that first in our homes, with our family members, and where we work, where we play, where we do anything. It all matters.

[ 23 : 34 ] But now let's come down to this. How are you abounding in the work of the Lord in some aspect of what I'm going to call gospel ministry?

Making disciples, as Jesus told us in the Great Commission. That doesn't mean by any means everybody's got to be a missionary or a preacher or a Sunday school teacher. It takes all kinds of people using their gifts and talents and abilities to serve God's purpose.

Some people are out front. They're preaching. They're teaching. They're singing. They're doing something. And they're seen. There's a lot of people who are involved in the worthwhile, meaningful ministry of the church privately, behind the scenes.

For years, we had a group of men and women sometimes that worked in the kitchen on Friday mornings preparing breakfast for Pickens High School FCA students.

Most people in the church didn't know who they were. Most of the kids that came through the line and got the pancakes and bacon. Most of them didn't pay attention to who was back there unless they knew some of them.

[ 24 : 46 ] They prepared that breakfast. They prepared that environment for those high school students to come. And somebody taught the Bible, shared the gospel every Friday morning.

And for some of those students, that was the only exposure they got to the gospel or to biblical teaching. A lot of people would know who was out front, who the speakers were, who the singers were.

But we wouldn't have had an FCA breakfast for all those many years without those men in the kitchen, men and women in the kitchen, cooking, working early in the morning.

And that just applies to just about every single thing we do as a church. Every Christian is called, we're all called to be involved in ministry according to the way God has gifted us, opportunities given us, the abilities that we have developed.

They can all be used in some way. So let me ask you, how are you helping us as Pickens First Baptists to be well, to be a worshiping, evangelizing, learning and loving family of faith for the glory of God?

[ 25 : 57 ] How are you doing it? What are you involved in? Name it. It doesn't have to be a lot.

It doesn't have to be where people see it. How are you involved? What are you giving? What are you doing for the glory of God and the good of others, the promotion of the gospel, helping Christians to grow?

What are you doing behind the scenes? What are you doing that makes things that are more visible happen? Now, if you are involved, don't be smug.

Don't pat yourself on the back and ask another question. Are you doing it willingly, lovingly, for the glory of God and the good of others?

You know, sometimes we could just do something because it's sort of expected of us. We could do something because we like to be seen.

[ 27 : 03 ] We like the attention. Are you doing what you're doing out of a sense of, this is what I know God wants me to do because I can do it.

He's given me what I need to do it and I'm doing it. It's hard work. It takes time away from doing some things that I would sort of like to do. But the Lord gave his life for me.

I'm going to give something to him. If you're doing the right ministry for the right reason, the right heart, it'll be rewarding even if it's hard, even if it's tiring, even if it's taking more time than some days you want to give to it.

Our Lord is worthy of us giving of ourselves, of our time, our energy, our money, our whatever to serve him.

You know, we've got a problem in this country and it's not just in the church, not just among Christians, but it's among us too. We are basically a selfish people who are entertaining ourselves to death with all kinds of technological toys, hobbies, or what some people would call leisure

activities.

[ 28 : 21 ] I want you to look at something John MacArthur said along this line. It's eye-opening, convicting. Look at it. Leisure and relaxation are two great modern idols to which many Christians seem quite willing to bow down to.

In proper proportion, recreation and diversions can help restore our energy and increase our effectiveness. I want to stop there. If you're a workaholic who takes pride in the fact that you never take time off, never take a day off, never take a vacation, you are not commended.

You are not wise. And God is not honored. Everybody needs rest, recreation, socialization.

The bow needs to be unstrung sometimes for every human being. It's important. Go on a vacation. Take time off. Play with your kids. Do something that doesn't make you money. Do something fun. Having said that, don't make that what you major on.

[ 29 : 46 ] Look at what he says. But they also can easily become ends in themselves, demanding more and more of our attention, concern, time, and energy.

More than one believer has relaxed and hobbyed himself completely out of the work of the Lord. Could that be describing you?

Have you allowed your hobbies, your leisure, your technological toys to take all of your attention, your attention, your concentration, your time?

And it's preventing you from serving the Lord in any kind of meaningful and consistent way. Most Christians need to get more serious about giving to themselves, as he says, fully to the Lord's work. It's worth it. The day's coming when we'll see that serving the Lord is worth it in a big way. I want you to look at something Jesus said at the end of the book of Revelation, the last chapter.

[ 30 : 58 ] Behold, I am coming soon. My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. What kind of reward will that be for you?

If the Lord comes today, or you die today, and you stand before him, what kind of reward do you expect to receive based on your faithfulness?

Now, you're not going to misunderstand this. Salvation, everything about our relationship with God is based on his grace. We don't earn it. We can't deserve it. It's all a matter of grace.

Salvation is by the grace of God through faith in Jesus, period, plus nothing. But the Bible tells us over and over again in various kinds of ways, the faith that saves changes us, purifies us.

The faith that saves continues. It produces good fruit. God's not calling any of us to burn out in serving him.

[ 32 : 16 ] But at the same time, he is calling us to be active, to be involved in some aspect of gospel ministry.

What difference has Christ made in your life? What difference is he continuing to make?

What would be on your list in terms of character development? What do you need to grow at? What do you need to develop more? What would be on your list in terms of ministry involvement?

Could there be some things that you need to add to that? There could be something you need to take away from that. What I want us to hear is 1 Corinthians 15.

The Lord gave his life for us. He arose triumphantly over sin and death and the devil. Look at the last verse one more time.

[ 33 : 17 ] Let's pray together.

Let's pray together. Father, show us all how we should respond this morning. If there are people in this room that you have shown that while they profess faith, there's no evidence that you have done a work of grace in them.

There's no evidence of the Holy Spirit's action in them. If that's true, Father, convict them of their sin, of their fact that they're not Christians, and call them right now to be honest with you, to forsake their selfish way of living, and to put their faith and trust in Jesus wholeheartedly, and call upon him to save them.

Help them do that right now. Father, if there are Christians here that they see evidence, but it's not recent.

Father, if there are Christians in this room who know you have made a difference in their life, but you are not making a difference now like you once did, because they're disobedient.

[ 34 : 47 ] They're rebelling. They're indifferent. Lord, wake them up and call them back to you. Call them to get serious about being sensitive to and obedient to the leadership of the Holy Spirit in their life, about developing Christian character, about serving you in meaningful ministry in and through

this church.

Father, I pray for Christians in this room who do see not just the difference you have but are making in their life. There is a list, and it's real.

It's genuine. Father, affirm them. Bless them. Help them to hear, well done, my good and faithful servant.

But Lord, help them not to become complacent. Help them not to quit regardless of their age. Help them to be faithful as you give them the ability and the opportunity to be faithful.

And just in an attitude of prayer, you listen to the Lord and you obey Him. Whatever it is He's calling you to do, to start, to stop, then you do that as we pray.

[ 36 : 08 ] And if I could pray with you during the time, this time here at the front, I'd be happy to do that. I'll be right here at the front of this podium here. Thank you. Thank you.