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- I. My Notes... WWC message 8/11 (Becky's b-day)
- II. Series: Active Faith
 - a. Title: An Active Faith Makes a Difference
 - b. Text: Heb. 10: 23-25 NLT2
 - c. Quote: You were born to make a difference, to contribute and to share your gifts with the world. Darren Hardy (Author, Publisher)
- III. Introduction
 - a. I read a lot, I'm sure I've commented on this before. I read a variety of things – books, articles, commentaries, sermons, etc. One thing I have noticed is that my approach is somewhat different than most of the other things I read. I suppose that makes sense in some ways. The message I consistently share with you is that our faith, our lives, must serve – love – touch others in a practical way. God's love reaches man on real, tangible, levels. And our “ministry” (acts of service) must do the same. So, if I preach that way, I probably write and think that way. Practical messages that reveal the Lord God in ways we can relate to.
 - b. I'm sure that you have heard (or even been involved in), discussions about quantity vs. quality. One of my favorite quotes about this subject is, “Life is not about the quantity of friends you have. It is about the quality of friends that you have.” (I'm not sure who said it). I remember, as a young man, wanting to be friends with everyone. Truth is, that just doesn't work. There are going to be those who make choices that go against what you believe or what you stand for. This isn't an issue of compassion or respecting others. it is an issue of being around those who can support – encourage – strengthen. Agreement isn't a requirement of compassion but agreement

(or at least understanding and acceptance) makes relationships easier – especially when challenges arise.

- c. Think about someone who has made a difference in your life. What were the characteristics or qualities they exhibited that touched you? Have you been able to do something similar for someone else? "Paying it forward" is something that honors what was done for you. It's the reason that believers are challenged to give. God freely gives to man {that's us} all kinds of things (see John 3:16; Matt. 7:11; James 1:5; Rom. 8:32). And if we, believers, follow the example set before us we will be givers too. Too often, people jump right to the "money" thing – making the assumption that this is about giving more to the ministry. Can we use more money? Absolutely. There are many that need help, that need to experience God's love in a practical and reasonable manner. Money is the tool to accomplish those kinds of things. The reason most people have a problem giving or supporting churches is because what they really worship is money. But giving isn't only about money – it's time... investing in relationships takes time and effort. It is a choice of patience and willingness to help others grow in grace. Giving is about sharing the blessings you have and making a difference. Often, making choices to give – to serve – to share, touches others that you may never even meet.
- d. In my life, Cancer has been a gift. There is a myriad of reasons, for me, that I can make this statement. The point that I'd like to make here is this... because of my experience with this tough disease I can relate to those that are enduring similar experiences. I have been able to talk to and pray with those struggling and suffering in a gas station in Fresno, in grocery stores, in hospital entrances. I still get calls to go to be with others in hospital rooms or at homes, when people don't know what to do or say. The privileges I continue to have far outweigh the pain, fear, and struggles I encountered in my battle with Cancer.

- e. I'd like to think at one time I was a bit of an athlete. I competed in many different sports and had some successes. There are many life metaphors that can be found in the arena of sports. Let me share the viewpoint of a very successful athlete. Mike Singletary was a phenomenal linebacker for the Chicago Bears and was known as "The Heart of the Defense" for the 'Monsters of the Midway' in the mid-1980s. Listen to his words... "The first thing in my life by far and the reason I do everything is my love for Jesus Christ. Number two is my family—being there for them and making sure I'm not missing time that I can't get back. Number three is my work, speaking to corporations about teamwork, leadership, and cultural diversity and trying to help people come together.

I don't care where I'm at or what I'm doing, the thing I want to do now in my life is make a difference and serve with a capital S. Serve in my home. Serve in my relationship with my wife. And serve my fellow man.... For me, it's a matter of "What am I doing to make a difference? What am I doing except making money." There are a lot of people out there who are hurting." (www.preachingtoday.com)

- f. It's time for us, believers – the Church, to become difference makers. In our precious country, today, we are torn apart and divided. People are looking for any excuse to inflict pain and suffering on others because they are hurting or scared or doubting or.... We can change that. "*God has made us what we are. In Christ Jesus, God made us new people so that we would spend our lives doing the good things he had already planned for us to do.*" (**Eph. 2:10 ERV**). You have heard me say that "God has a plan for your life". He does! And His purpose for you was created a long time ago. He knew you and what you would be facing, right at this very moment. He has used the circumstances that life has brought you to make you the person He intends you to be. [This is a very hard statement for me to make. See, I struggle with that idea. Life can bring some very difficult challenges – there are things that just don't make much sense.] Now, let me try to be clear on

this... works are not a requirement for salvation. You can't be good enough or do enough good things to earn heaven. And "good" means different things to different people. Works, our behaviors – the things we do, are evidence of the transformation that occurs when a person accepts Jesus as Lord of their life. Our effort is a response to the unconditional love and acceptance we have come to know. The things we do are a result of the life we have experienced, as believers.

IV. Text

a. Let's look at a few ways that we can live in a way that makes a difference. Remember, today's premise is... **An Active Faith Makes a Difference**

b. **Hebrews 10:23-25 (NLT2)**

Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

c. Hebrews was penned to a group of people (Jewish Christians) that we are trying to live their faith in the face of persecution.

d. It is a message about living in a way where behaviors model beliefs

e. We often talk (and teach) about persevering in the face of persecution. I believe that we (believers, Christ-followers) can choose and learn to thrive

f. In Scripture, we are told how the world will view believers

g. **John 15:18-19 (CSB)**

"If the world hates you, understand that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. However, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of it, the world hates you."

- h. Because we (believers) aren't understood or agreed with, we are going to be judged and disliked (to put it mildly)
- i. Isn't it cool... we get to learn to live our faith, to walk with the Lord, in the face of incredible difficulties or unimaginable happenings
- j. Behaviors that reflect one's faith are actions that honor God and speak to others in real ways – pointing them to Him

V. Have Hope

a. In this passage, the first thing we see the writer of Hebrews tell us is to hold on to the hope we have. To stay focused and trust that God has us in His hand and has a purpose in our lives

b. Without hope we become filled with despair, desperate for relief

c. **Proverbs 13:12 (ESV)**

Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life

d. If you have hope, you share it

e. It brings joy to difficulty; it results in the ability to be patient and understanding

f. **Ephesians 1:18 (CSB)**

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints

g. Our hope – the trust and assurance we have is because of our calling

h. Yes, we are called. And because of that we can have hope

i. Trusting results in being trusted. As we trust the Lord and live according to His principles, we become trustworthy in the opinions of others

j. Our choices, our actions, reveal who we trust.

VI. Be Encouraging

a. The next thing the writer points to is encouragement (reassurance, inspiration, praise). He tells us, find ways to be that source of encouragement – to help others see that they can impact others with grace and kindness.

b. **Proverbs 12:25 (NJB)**

Worry makes a heart heavy, a kindly word makes it glad.

c. The right word, at the proper time can change everything. It can bring help and hope, it can provide healing and strength, and compassion shapes one's viewpoint

d. Getting encouragement changes perspective

e. **Proverbs 30:5 (ESV)**

Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.

f. God encourages His family. He shows love and compassion. He can be trusted to bring about what is best for His children

g. If I trust my words – my actions, then I might not have the best intentions

h. Remember when we talked about being united in the Holy Spirit? That He gave us gifts and abilities to serve others and point them to the Lord?

i. Trusting God and His words brings hope and brings protection

j. Being an encourager helps others in their moments of doubt and desperation

- k. Anyone who's been through it knows that middle school can be tough. At Harriman Middle School in Tennessee, a group of students took it upon themselves to make sure that everyone feels loved and included.

They started leaving positive notes, written in brightly colored highlighter, around school hallways and in bathrooms. The notes are simple, but powerful. "If you realize it or not, someone loves you," one note read. A "Never give up," note was taped to a mirror. Another said, "Stay strong." So far, the group of students has left 100 encouraging notes with more to come.

Nicole True is an 8th grade student at Harriman, is a member of the group that came up with the idea to leave the notes. "I think it makes all the difference in the world," True said. "Considering the fact that all of us have had someone come up to us and say, 'that really affected us in a major way.' It's a small act that just makes everyone's day a little bit happier."

VII. Hang Out

a. **1 Peter 4:9**

Be hospitable to one another without complaint.

- b. Get together, hang out, talk about life – about things that interest you – find ways to do life. And do it without tearing one another down. In fact, be encouraging and supportive
- c. Here's the challenge. Many people default to withdrawing, to isolating... especially when there are problems or challenges
- d. We've been judged and criticized, it's no fun. In fact, it hurts
- e. So, when difficulties arise the protective response might be to withdraw. But then, that hurts too. Being alone stinks
- f. We are called to be together.

g. **Ephesians 4:3 (NCV)**

You are joined together with peace through the Spirit, so make every effort to continue together in this way.

- h. Fellowship – koinonia... we are called to fellowship; it's our privilege – our duty - to be involved with one another.
- i. There is strength and blessing in unity
- j. I was reminded about alloys in a conversation I was having this week. An alloy combines 2 or more metallic elements to create a stronger or more durable or more flexible item. It has greater resistance to deterioration and corrosion
- k. What a great explanation of who we should be, as believers. We have been given different talents and gifts to serve, to help, to show love and compassion. And those gifts, brought together, encourage and strengthen... we can help each other stand strong in the face of adversity
- l. That is why the writer of Hebrews said, not to “neglect” getting together and to be encouraging to one another

VIII. Last Words

- a. It's time for us, believers – members of the community – people, to stand united, to come together and show love and compassion
- b. We are so much better together. We can find answers to the challenges and issues before us. The Lord God has given us the ability. Together we can encourage, listen, support, and strengthen each other
- c. Together, we honor the Lord, we bring Him the praise and glory He is due.
- d. By having an Active Faith, we truly will make a difference
- e. Let's pray

- f. May the Lord guide you to the one who needs Him the most in your journey. May peace and joy be the identifying characteristics of your journey, each day. And as we stand together, may you find the strength you need to face the challenges each day brings.
- g. Grace first, grace always
- h. Live simple, live practical, love eternally