

THE TREE THAT MADE A DIFFERENCE

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I learned recently about a pine tree which a man named Epimaco Amancio planted some thirty-five years ago in Dalaguete, Cebu, Philippines. This tree played a crucial role recently in preventing a bus from falling off a cliff. The bus was filled with thirty-seven people, mostly students. The pine tree's presence helped stop the bus and saved the people. Epimaco had his picture made in front of the bus as it rested against the tree. Epimaco was smiling very big!

Years ago, singer John Denver wrote a song for a commercial for Trees For America. "Plant a tree for your tomorrow, It's your tree that clears the air. Plant a tree, trees for America, Plant a tree today for all the world to share." Occasionally I pass by acres of trees outside Yorkville, TN that were planted by Trees For America. What a blessing it was that Epimaco Amancio decided to plant that pine tree some thirty-five years ago.

The things we do and the words we say can have a far greater impact than we can ever imagine. Jude 1:22-23 says, "And of some have compassion, *making a difference*: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." What are we doing to make a difference in the lives of others? Are we willing to do something for God everyday?

The inspired James writes in James 1:22, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." Doing the things of God is not only our obligation and privilege, it is also a powerful means of keeping us faithful. Paul exhorted the Galatians to remember the importance of doing something for God by doing something for their fellowman. "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:9-10). We must never underestimate the difference our deeds can make in the lives of others.

One morning, an elderly man walking with a cane, went down to the beach. Another gentleman on the beach watched as the elderly man looked at the part of the beach left exposed by the receding tide. Every now and then the elderly man would bend down, pick up something, and toss it into the ocean. The other gentleman finally realized that the man was looking for starfish. Every time he saw one lying helpless in the sand, unable to get back to the ocean on his own, he would lovingly pick it up and toss it gently back into the sea. The younger man approached him. As he arrived, the elderly man explained, "the starfish are left behind after the tide goes out. If they don't get back into the ocean they will dry up and die beneath the hot summer sun." The younger man replied, "But there are endless miles of beach and there must be millions of starfish. Surely you don't think you can save them all. What difference can your efforts possibly make?" Slowly the old man bent over and picked up another starfish. As he tossed it into the ocean, he looked up at the young man and said, "*It makes a difference to that one.*" It is so easy to become discouraged when we see the sheer magnitude of the task that Christ has given to His church. We must not forget to focus on the value of a word fitly spoken, and a deed kindly performed on behalf of even one soul. We are called to be faithful in scanning the "beaches" and in making a difference to others in the name of Christ. We just never know what a card, a tract, a conversation, or a Bible Correspondence Course can have upon others.

On the morning this article is written, a lovely receptionist at a nursing home in Kennett, Missouri recognized me and said, "Every time I see you, I want to tell you how much I enjoy

watching *A Bible Answer*. I watch it every Sunday morning as I am getting ready.” Such is music to our ears! We pray that what we are doing is making an impact, making a difference.

James reminds us in James 5:19-20, "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." James did not teach the impossibility of apostasy. He knew that one of his brethren could err from the truth. He had seen his own brethren stumble (Gal. 2:11-13). To him the danger of falling was very real, and it still is today. James says brethren have a duty toward those in error. The erring one can be converted again, or brought back by a spiritually minded brother in Christ. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:1-2). If you succeed in converting or restoring an erring one, you save a soul from eternal death. Through God's second law of pardon, a person can be reclaimed. As Peter told Simon, "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee" (Acts 8:22). When a soul is brought back, we realize that just one soul is worth more than all the world (Mt. 16:26). When a soul is saved, we realize that the angels are rejoicing with us. "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance" (Lk. 15:7).

So many are close to falling off the cliff into perdition. Have you planted a tree spiritually? Have you sought to make a difference? Have you saved a soul from eternal death? Then you can smile big like Epimaco Amancio who lived to see the tree he planted save the lives of thirty-seven people some thirty-five years later.