

Leaving your mark

My wife told me to write this. I think she's trying to make a point.

Our path through life is somewhat transitory in nature. We move from place to place, friendship to friendship, challenge to challenge.

We move through life from one thing to another, and as we grow older, we look backwards, and wonder if we've made a difference along the way.

The truth is that most of the time we'll never know what a difference we made -- or could have made.

I was in a church meeting a few years ago, when I suddenly heard the speaker quoting me. It had been years since I had lived there -- and I don't think he knew I was in the audience. But here he was, quoting something I had said. It surprised me; I hadn't any idea that person had ever listened to me at all, let alone enough to quote me. But there it was -- evidence that at least for that slight moment in time, I had made a slight difference in how someone thought. I was startled -- shocked, even.

No matter who you are, there are people who watch us, who listen to us, and then judge us. If we are found wanting, we fall into the "cast-off" pile -- not to be listened to, not to be followed, not to make a difference. If we fall into the "listen to" pile, they'll pay attention to us -- at least part of the time. We actually make a difference in someone's life.

This is one of the marks of a true leader -- true leaders leave their mark on the people and world around them. For good or evil, a true leader makes people around her or him change -- for good or evil, they do make a difference in the lives of those around them.

If people are watching you -- and they are -- then we should be working to leave a positive mark on those around us. We should work to influence the people around us -- family, friends, co-workers, etc., -- by our efforts, our example, and our words.

We should actively try to leave a mark. We should actively try to make a difference in our life. We should work so we leave the world better because we were in it.

As I pointed out, our life is transitory, much like a path we would follow. Did you know that many of the apple groves in America could actually be traced back to the person who called himself "Johnny Appleseed?" Do you know that you travel on freeways that follow paths originally blazed by pioneers? Did you ever stop to think that many of the trees you see around you were planted by people who are long since dead? We may not know their names, but our lives are impacted by the things that others have done before us.

My sister has lilac bushes that were taken from the lilac bushes my mother raised. Those bushes were planted by her mother, who took the starts from her lilac trees.

In the same way, our lives are influenced by those who have left a mark before us -- it's up to us to leave a mark now, and plant for the future.

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