

MAIN POINT

God calls us to invest our resources and go where needs exist in our everyday patterns of life.

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever gone on a mission trip or been given the opportunity to meet physical and spiritual needs through a ministry?

Where did you go and what did you do?

What was that experience like?

In 2017, a catastrophic category 5 hurricane hit the Houston area. Hurricane Harvey tied Hurricane Katrina for the costliest storm in United States history, with more than one hundred billion dollars worth of damage. Hundreds of homes were flooded. But in the days and weeks after the storm, God provided opportunities to give and to go on mission.

This week we'll consider the mission of being a **"Difference Maker"** ([1 John 3:17, 18](#)). When you become a follower of Jesus, you automatically become a Difference Maker so that others can see and receive His gifts through you, ultimately bringing them to our Jesus.

I was made for more than watching. I have a history-changing, difference-making, life-giving, Spirit-empowered legacy to leave and/or give. Jesus, I ask You to work deeply in me and clearly through me as I pray, give, and go in Your love. I am a difference maker.

Being used by God doesn't happen in isolated moments. We don't have to travel the world or meet needs after a natural disaster to be used on mission. God also calls us to invest our resources and even go to places where needs exist in our everyday patterns of life.

UNDERSTANDING

Many Christians came together to minister during Hurricane Harvey in 2017.

Why do think these kinds of experiences (natural disasters, wars, etc.) tend to mobilize the church for action?

Disasters call us to action because the need is unavoidable. During those times, it's easy to engage in mission because there are many tangible places to get involved. God uses those situations to shape our hearts and catalyze His difference-making purposes in our lives. During a time of hardship in the history of Israel, God called a difference maker named Ezra to give and to go on mission.

READ [EZRA 1:1-6](#).

Difference makers give and go. What drove the people of God to go in these verses?

What are we missing if we believe mission is only for a select group of specially called people, instead of the church's collective responsibility?

Ezra and the other exiles were going back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple of the Lord, which the Babylonians had destroyed. We may quickly pass over this event in Scripture, but the faith required to go and the amount of work involved were significant. Similarly, God will call you to go. It might be down the hall or across the street, it might be around the world. All that's required of us is to be faithful to respond to God's urging and go where He calls. God is able to take our ordinary faithfulness and do more with it than we could ever ask or imagine. We never know what God is going to do.

READ [ISAIAH 58:10](#).

What might it look like for you to meet needs as a neighbor, parent, coworker, or as a sponsor for a child from Ecuador?

REREAD [EZRA 1:1-6](#).

What drove these people to give their resources to the work in Jerusalem?

Jesus said what we do with our money reflects our hearts ([Matthew 6:21](#)). The exiles gave "a freewill offering" ([Ezra 1:6](#)). They didn't give with a burden but with the joyful desire to see God's work continue and His glory return to His temple. Their motivation was the glory of God.

**Do you think about giving to the Lord as something God wants for you or from you?
What's the difference between those two attitudes in our hearts?**

Difference makers live for the glory of God in the world. They see their resources as belonging to God, and they see themselves as His stewards. They serve God's mission as they give to others and go.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How can you create margin in your life for generosity and giving for the Lord's work?

Would you be willing to skip a meal or a family activity once a month in order to see God's work flourish?

When you invest your resources and meet needs that exist in everyday life, how do you imagine that might impact other people, like your children, for example?

**Do you regularly ask Jesus to work in you and through you?
What does your prayer life reveal about your mission?**

PRAYER

Thank You, God, for giving us all we need to live on mission with You. As we give and go, we ask You to multiply our efforts and do more through our offerings than we could ever have dreamed on our own. Help us make a difference as we go on mission with You.

COMMENTARY

EZRA 1:1-6

1:1. The first year of Cyrus refers to the first year of his rule over Babylonia (538 b.c.) and not the first year of his reign in Persia that began in 559 b.c. and continued until 530 b.c. Spoken through Jeremiah may allude to Jeremiah's prophecy of the 70 years of captivity ([Jeremiah 29:10-14](#)). More likely it is a reference to [Jeremiah 51:11](#), "The Lord has put it into the mind of the kings of the Medes." The same vocabulary occurs here in [Ezra 1:1](#) where the Lord put it into the mind (lit "stirred up the spirit"; cp. [Jeremiah 51:1](#)) of King Cyrus.

1:2-3. The "proclamation" (v. 1), often referred to as the "Edict of Cyrus," reflects Cyrus's policy to allow the exiles to return to their homeland. The edict, from the closing words of 2 Chronicles ([2 Chronicles 36:23](#)), appears in two versions in the book of Ezra: here in Hebrew, reflecting a strong Jewish perspective, and in 6:3-5 written in Aramaic (the language of diplomacy in the Persian Empire), which appears to be an official court memorandum. Some scholars question whether a Persian king would refer to God as The Lord, the God of heaven. Possibly this reflects a paraphrase provided by the Jewish leaders in Babylon. One of Cyrus's tasks was to build a house at Jerusalem in Judah. House often refers to the temple, the house of the Lord. The Babylonians had destroyed Solomon's temple in 586 b.c.

1:4. It is not clear if the men of that region refer to Jewish men or the entire population. If it refers to all the people, there may be a parallel here to the "spoiling of the Egyptians" ([Exodus 3; 11; 12](#)). As the birth of the nation began with the spoils of the Gentiles, so the new beginning of God's people began with the silver and gold of their former oppressors.

1:5. The kingdom of Judah, conquered by the Babylonians in 586 b.c., consisted primarily of the region of Judah and Benjamin. Thus the exiles who returned represented three tribal groups: Judah, Benjamin, and Levi (the priests and Levites).