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Gleanings

Can One Person Make a Difference?

There seems to be something in people that makes them yearn to make their lives count — to make the world a better place because he or she lived. But in a world with billions of people, can one person really make a difference?

According to the Population Research Institute, the world population reached seven billion on October 31, 2011 (<http://www.christiannewswire.com/news/2632818048.html>). Among the seven billion people, there are wide diversities of ethnic groups and cultures. By some estimates, there are nearly seven thousand languages in the world. The numbers and diversity of people are so overwhelming that it is difficult to see how any one person could make a difference. So is it really possible for any one person could to make a difference?

As a premise for this article, consider Ecclesiastes 12:13:

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. (NIV)

In the book of Ecclesiastes, King Solomon approached life from a human perspective seeking meaning and purpose. He had the resources and time to explore the options in life as few others ever have. His conclusion was that all human effort is vain except the effort to obey God. In other words, in a universe created and controlled by God, the only way to make a difference is to obey God. To obey God is to live according to a biblical worldview.

Let's consider some of the salient principles of the universe, from a biblical worldview, that will enable a person to make a difference. And as a case study, we will consider the late Steve Jobs. Since his death on October 5, 2011, there have been many tributes extolling the contributions of his life. I think it is fair to say that this man made a difference — that his presence on earth positively impacted many people.

But before we launch into the discussion, I need to make a comment about the spiritual condition of Steve Jobs and the biblical doctrine of common grace.

Steve Jobs was raised Lutheran but as an adult claimed to be a Buddhist. Though I have not found evidence that he professed to know Christ, perhaps he was shaped by his biblical heritage more than anyone realizes. In Proverbs 22:6, Solomon stated that seeds sown in children will bear fruit in adult life.

My theory is that the biblical seeds sown in Steve during his childhood bore fruit in his adult life and that through the principle of common grace he was able to bless many.

Grace is "the divine enablement to accomplish something." Common grace refers to the empowerment of God that is common to all men, both saved and unsaved, that enables them to obey some truth on a rudimentary level.

Steve Jobs is an example of a person who, with some biblical knowledge and operating under common grace, did make a difference. Now let's consider some of the key biblical principles that helped him, and will help you, make a difference.

Work in alignment with God's meta-narrative.

Scripture gives abundant testimony to the reality that God is executing His plan and purpose for His universe (e.g., Isaiah 46:10 and Ephesians 1:11). This is known as the meta-narrative. The mandate given to man in the Creation account was to master God's universe (Genesis 1:26–28). Therefore for a person's life to make a difference, he or she must work at mastering God's universe in alignment with God's meta-narrative.

Steve Jobs worked, though probably unwittingly, with vision to master the universe. He thought beyond



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himself — and the seeming limitations of life — to pioneer the use of electronic technology as a tool to help man.

Work in accordance with your passion.

One of God's gifts to man is the gift of passion. God inspires men to the work that He commands them to do (e.g., Psalms 37:4; Colossians 3:23). This makes work enjoyable and enables men to better fulfill the Creation mandate.

Steve Jobs was a man who loved his work. He recognized that passion was a critical element to success and was determined to pay any price to find the work that he loved.

Work relationally.

The biblical account of Creation notes the importance of inner dependence (Genesis 2:17). Man was not created to live alone. God chose to give each person certain gifts. No one has all the gifts and/or the knowledge. No one works well alone; therefore we need each other (e.g., 1 Corinthians 12).

Steve Jobs understood the importance of relationships. He found people who complemented him and set up a context within which to work with them, recognizing that a diverse community of people is far more effective than any one person.

Work strategically.

In God's universe, there is no wisdom, insight, or plan that will succeed against the Lord (Proverbs 21:30; James 4:13–17). Therefore, the only plans that will work, over the long term, are those aligned with God. Jesus lived strategically doing and speaking only as directed by the Father (John 5:19; 12:49). This means that Jesus said no, either verbally or nonverbally, to many opportunities. Jesus chose the great (obedience to the will and ways of God) over the good (things that needed to be done, but were not assigned to Him).

Steve Jobs was strategically focused. He had many opportunities and could have pursued a large number of those opportunities. But he chose not to be distracted by good opportunities, instead he sought the great opportunities and pursued them with world-class excellence.

Work as a servant.

In God's universe, the greatest position is that of a servant (Matthew 23:11). A servant's role is to always do the will of the master (Luke 17:5–10; 19:11–27). The master's will is that work should be performed with excellence (Colossians 3:17, 23).

Steve Jobs sought to serve people by making technology simple, intuitive, and helpful. The perceived human needs of his customers did not limit his thinking; he recognized how technology could help people before they understood it. He even made it easier to get support and service.

Work to communicate clearly, cogently, and compellingly.

God created the universe through the power of the spoken word (Genesis 1). Specifically, He brought order out of chaos. Man was created in God's image and given the ability to speak and, therefore, on a limited scale, the ability to creatively bring order out of chaos. To help people move from chaos to order, one must be able to communicate clearly, cogently, and compellingly.

Steve Jobs was a masterful communicator. He was able to make complexity seem simple and, therefore, able to cast vision for how people could use technology to improve their lives.

To make a difference in God's universe, we must align with God's will and God's ways. God's will is His specific purpose for each person and God's ways are the principles of Scripture that God designed to define how to live. (I refer to the latter as living according to a biblical worldview.)

The principles listed above are simply a few of the principles that enable a person to live a meaningful and fulfilling life.

Steve Jobs made a difference because, by virtue of common grace, he faithfully followed a number of biblical principles. The key for anyone to enjoy blessings associated with common grace is to align with the will and ways of God.

Because of common grace, Steve Jobs may have fulfilled, at least on a rudimentary level, his role in the meta-narrative. However, common grace is not efficacious for salvation; hence, anyone living solely based on common grace does not know Christ and is therefore not saved.

The final condition of Steve Jobs relative to Christ is unknown to me. Was he in a relationship with Christ? Did he accept Christ before he died? Was he a Christian living in a carnal state (1 Corinthians 3:1–3)? Whatever the

case, I think it is fair to say that on some level Steve Jobs made a difference. He used his God-given gifting, probably as well as anyone could with little to no relationship with Christ, to advance technology as a tool for mankind to obey the Creation mandate. He thought beyond himself to the good of the whole. But did he reach the fullness of the potential intended by God?

If a person does not know Christ, then there will be unrealized potential in his or her life. If Steve Jobs did not know Christ, then he did not realize his full potential. For only in Christ can you fulfill your potential and truly fulfill your purpose on earth.

May God grant you the grace to live beyond common grace; may you live in the grace that is in Christ and therefore fully and completely find and fulfill your life purpose (1 John 2:5; Philippians 1:9–11). This is the way that you will realize the fullness of your potential and make the difference that God designed for you to make in His meta-narrative.

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