

Her world is a dark and windowless cell. Imprisoned in this blackness, she is alone, cut off from all forms of communication. Above all there is a reigning silence which no sound ever breaks.

This was the whole existence of blind and deaf Helen Keller. It would take something tremendous to turn her around and connect her with the universe around her. It took a person by the name of Annie Sullivan, her teacher, who at last broke through the communication barriers and freed Helen from her prison.

Helen did not need a small difference in her life; she needed a radical transformation. Her story of hope has inspired thousands of people because of the impact Annie Sullivan had on her life. When looking at the question, “If you could choose to make a small difference in the world at large or a big difference in one person’s life, which would you choose and why?” I believe largely impacting one person would be more beneficial than changing the entire world minutely for several reasons.

Firstly, influencing one person is far more practical. Rather than focusing on humanity in the abstract, we should focus on the people God has put around us and how we can show His love to them. The truth is very few people will be able to drastically change the whole world and, too often, these are limited to celebrities and politicians. However, everyone impacts the people closest to them, whether they are aware of it or not. When we recognize this and attempt to make that impact positive and godly, lives are changed.

Impersonal attempts to slightly change the world are not effective. Walt Whitman’s poem “I Sit and Look Out” discusses the problems of the world. He writes, “I sit and look out upon all the sorrows of the world, and upon all oppression and shame... /

All the meanness and agony without end, I sitting, look out upon / see, hear, and am silent.” Whitman realized that there were many problems in the world he could do nothing to solve. In this poem, he considers it hopeless and ends up doing nothing at all.

Contrast this with another poet’s view. In the poem “This is to Have Succeeded,” Ralph Waldo Emerson pens the inspiring words, “To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived / this is to have succeeded.” Emerson hit the nail on the head. No one person can truly change the world, but we can change those closest to us, who can in turn influence those closest to them, and the circle will go on. An example of this can be seen in the little-known figure of Robert Moffat. He was a missionary to Africa in the late 1700’s who, for six years, worked hard, but saw no results. Eventually, he broke through the culture barrier and reached the African people. As he lived out his faith through everything he went through, one person watched it all and decided to devote his life to missions. This person was Robert Moffat’s son-in-law and one of the most famous missionaries in history, David Livingston. Here one man’s influence is shown to go far beyond himself because he largely influenced one person.

To make a large difference in one person’s life is preferable to making a small difference in the world because it is more practical and because our influence does not stop with just ourselves. Helen Keller was not in need of someone who could make the world just a little better. She needed someone willing to give of themselves completely, to attempt methods that had never been tried before, and to love her even when she did not deserve it. She needed Annie Sullivan who, by making one large difference in Helen’s life, was able to inspire the world. As Helen herself said, “Once I knew only darkness and stillness... but a little word from the fingers of another fell into my hand that

clutched at emptiness and my heart leaped to the rapture of living.” Only when we largely influence one person, can we ever hope to truly change the world.