

# Wisdom from the sea: Lessons learned about making a difference from the starfish parable



*Photo by Marissa Elion of SouthFloridaPaddle*

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For many years I worked with young people as their Campus Minister at John Carroll, encouraging them to make a difference in the world. It's a theme that I repeat often in my talks, my prayers and invocations, and my writings.

*"A single, ordinary person still can make a difference - and single, ordinary people are doing precisely that every day."*

— Chris Bohjalian, author

Do you ever ask yourself if what you do makes a difference?



*Photo by Marissa Elion of SouthFloridaPaddle*

## **Summer in South Florida:**

Since we retired last year, my husband and I find ourselves spending more and more time in South Florida at our home on Singer Island. When you are surrounded by the waters of the Atlantic Ocean and the Intracoastal Lake Worth Lagoon, you learn a lot about life just by observing the ebb and flow of the tides.

There truly is much wisdom to be gained from the sea.



*Photo by Marissa Elion of SouthFloridaPaddle*

## **The parable of the starfish:**

Loren Eiseley, a respected ecologist, writer and poet who died in 1977, penned a short reflection to address this very question: Even if you have heard his story before, it will still strike a note in your heart, I'm sure.

He wrote:

*"Once upon a time, there was a wise man who used to go to the ocean to do his writing. He had a habit of walking on the beach before he began his work. One day, as he was walking along the shore, he looked down the beach and saw a human figure moving like a dancer. He smiled to himself at the thought of someone who would dance to the day, and so, he walked faster to catch up. As he got closer, he noticed that the figure was that of a young man, and that what he was doing was not dancing at all. The young man was reaching down to the shore, picking up small objects, and throwing them into the ocean. He came closer still and called out "Good morning! May I ask what it is that you are doing?"*

*The young man paused, looked up, and replied "Throwing starfish into the ocean." "I must ask, then, why are you throwing starfish into the ocean?" asked the somewhat startled wise man.*

*To this, the young man replied, "The sun is up and the tide is going out. If I don't throw them in, they'll die."*

*Upon hearing this, the wise man commented, "But, young man, do you not realize that there are miles and miles of beach and there are starfish all along every mile? You can't possibly make a difference!"*

*At this, the young man bent down, picked up yet another starfish, and threw it into the ocean. As it met the water, he said, "It made a difference for that one."*