

Church for a Change Part Two

Ecclesiastes 4:3; Romans 12:1-2

1. More than spare change.

- *Hebrews 10:10, 18, 13:15; Colossians 3:17; Romans 8:32, 28; 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Romans 12:15*

2. Change your worship style.

- *1 Corinthians 3:16; Hebrews 13:15*

3. Inside-out change.

- *Galatians 1:4; 1 John 2:15-17; 2 Corinthians 5:17, 3:18*

4. You are a change agent.

- *Romans 12:2; John 17:15-21*

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Church for a Change Part Two

Life is full of changes. We cannot live this life for even a few minutes without having to deal with some kind of change. We can avoid it, or we can accept it. We can deny it, or we can drive it. We can complain about it, or we can capture it. We can ignore it, or we can embrace it. The question is not, "How can I avoid change?" The question becomes, "How can I benefit and grow from change, for my sake and the sake of others?" And even more, "How do *I* need to change in order to become all God wants me to be?" Change is inevitable, it's what we do with it and why we do it that matters. It is true in our individual lives as Christians, and it is true for us collectively as the church.

All of life involves changes. So we are in this sermon series designed to help us understand and deal with change. We are doing it from the manual on change: the Bible. The Bible is *all* about change. The Bible *starts* with change. The third word in the Hebrew account of Genesis is a change word: created. Change from nothingness to creation. Change from being alone to having a mate. Change from husband and wife to having a family. The Bible is filled with stories of change from cursed to blessed. Change from not being a people to being the people of God, then of rejecting God, then to changing their community to return to God. Change from death to life. Change from dark to light. Change from sinner to saint, of life transformation. Change from a broken-down world to a brand new eternal world. The Bible is a book entirely about an unchanging God who *always* uses change for the better for us, so honestly, *anytime* I preach it is about change – if I am preaching from the Bible.

We come to church for a change: for our lives to change to become more and more like Jesus. For our church to change to become more and more the Kingdom of God.

Right now you, as you sit here, we are in the midst of change as a church – that's why we are in this series. That's because we are ramping up our plans to accomplish our vision: to be a church that is multicultural: one church with two languages, with two morning worship services – one in each language – and yet remain one body, one family, one church. Now, I realize that there are some of us who don't know what that means. And there are others who think it means something that it does not. So to help us as we move further into that direction, we're going to look at the nature of change and get our direction from the Bible itself, so we have the right understanding and context for change. There are some things we must not change – and other things we must. We are rooted in truth but ready for change.

I think it's fascinating how we don't like change, and yet God is a God of change. If you call yourself a Christian (that means you have accepted Christ's death in your place for your sin, and you are now living in active relationship with God Himself), if you are a Christian, it is solely because *God has changed you*. He changed your circumstances, he changed your direction, he changed your character, and he changed your destiny. He has *changed* you. And he doesn't stop doing that. He keeps changing us to be more and more like His Son. So it's ironic, isn't it, that we struggle with and often reject change in life.

Research shows that there are typically two ways that we resist change: actively or passively. Change resisters act in one or both of those ways. Active resisters will try to find fault with change by complaining. The more people they can get to listen to them, or worse yet agree with them, the more empowered they feel to resist change. They will often manipulate people in their effort to build control of the situation and resist the change. They will sometimes rally support from others, creating an "us against them" mentality in the group. They might even get involved with gossip or slander or outright malicious attacks against the change agent or perceived threat. At best they are subversive, and at worst they sabotage.

Passive resisters will also avoid acceptance of the change, but passively, saying things like "no one told me," or "I never said I'd agree with the change." Or they will remain quiet around others and *pretend* they agree with some kind of change, but ultimately not follow through or support the change. Then, when the change gets hard, they'll come out against it. They tend to be passive-aggressive, talking *like* they agree with change, but at the same time throw in veiled personal attacks or opinions in the middle of their conversations. They will stubbornly resist change by continuing to do things "the way we've always done it."

Do any of those change resisters sound familiar? They are everywhere – sometimes we can be them, depending on how open we are to whatever change we're facing. Churches are notorious for behaving in the ways I just described. So when a program or a method or a style changes, or even a color of the carpet or paint changes, people in churches can be active or passive resisters. Do you know what I mean?

But the Bible gives us a different approach to change. It says:

"Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace." (Ephesians 4:3, nlt)

We don't have to always agree, but we do have to always stay united. Think back on a church experience you've had in which there was disagreement about some kind of change. Was *that* Scripture practiced?

It can be hard. Change is often emotional—that's because we feel strongly about whatever it is that is changing. That's okay—we are passionate. We might have pretty heated discussion about some change. That's okay. But if the outcome of a church's struggle with change is division, or one "wins" and another "loses," or if someone leaves the church because they don't like the change or are mad, that is

going against the Scriptural command to make *every* effort to keep the unity in the Spirit, bound *together* in peace.

So how do we avoid being change resisters and become change champions? How do we grow from change for ourselves and the sake of those around us?

Let's learn the answer from the New Testament. It's the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in Rome, and it's just two verses but it's packed with power for us:

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God--this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.”
(Romans 12:1-2, niv)

Whenever you see the word “therefore” in the Bible, you have to stop and ask yourself, “What's it there for?” So what is the therefore there for? The reason the therefore is there for is that at this point in the book of Romans there is a major shift. Up until chapter twelve in Romans, Paul has been teaching some very heavy duty, very important theology. Paul was brilliant and filled with the Spirit. His mind could sweep across eternity, and he would speak or teach some amazingly heavenly truths but still stayed practical. Whatever he taught, it had to have a practical application to it. For Paul, theology didn't do any good if it didn't result in a changed life and changed action. And that's what the “therefore” is there for: it's like a hinge on a door between a room full of deep spiritual truths and a room filled with practical application of all that truth. So what we are looking at is going to help us apply truth to our lives about dealing with change. I might add, though, that if you are motivated, you should go back and read the first eleven chapters of Romans—it will help you put this message into a greater context.

So let's see what it has for us: first, we're talking about...

1. More than spare change.

If we want to be able to grow from God's change in our lives, it's not going to involve small amounts of change. It's going to take a full and complete commitment to Christ. Paul makes this point by first talking about presenting ourselves to God. It's not like “here”. It's like “here here here”. The word “present” doesn't mean to give once; it is a nonstop presenting of yourself to God.

So we are to continually give our entire selves as, what he calls, “living sacrifices.” To understand that, I need to share a bit of what I shared with you this summer when we were talking about total commitment.

In Jewish worship at the Temple, there were two main types of offerings. One type was the kind that led to reconciliation. In other words, you disobeyed God, so you had to sacrifice for it. To atone for that sin, a bull or a lamb or a dove or some grain

or perfume or whatever had to be sacrificed—given up—to pay for that sin, and that allowed the relationship with God to be reconciled. That's the first type of sacrifice.

The second kind of sacrifice happened *after* the first, and it was a celebration—to celebrate the restoration of relationship with God, or to celebrate some great thing that God had done. Do you follow that?

So for us as Christians, the first kind of sacrifice has *already* been made for us by Jesus Christ, once for all. We don't have to make the sacrifice of reconciliation with God ever again. That's why the Bible says:

“For God's will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time.” (Hebrews 10:10, nlt)

And again:

“When sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices.” (Hebrews 10:18, nlt)

So since Jesus is the first sacrifice for reconciliation, Paul is *not* telling us make ourselves a sacrifice for *that*. We don't have to pay for our sins; we accept his sacrifice of himself in our place so that we don't have to. So what's left then is the sacrifice of celebration, or praise. That's what our lives are to be. That's why the Bible says:

“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise (*that's the second one*)--the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.” (Hebrews 13:15, nlt)

The *fruit* – so our lives are to be lived as a constant sacrifice of praise to God through Jesus Christ and what he's done for us and our lips and lives should profess it! In fact, we are told to present our *bodies*; that means that our entire beings, even what we do in this body we live in, should be giving praise to God. Everything we do all the time everywhere we go is to be done as praise to Jesus. That's why the Bible says:

“Everything you do or say, then, should be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, as you give thanks through him to God the Father.” (Colossians 3:17, gnb)

Well, that's all great, you might say, but how does that help us deal with change? Here's how: when we live our every day, every moment lives in praise to the God who sacrificed his Son for us, first it puts things into perspective, doesn't it? If God loves me that much, is there anything else he won't do for me? No! Is there anything I can't handle in him? No! That's why the Bible says:

“God did not keep back his own Son, but he gave him for us. If God did this, won't he freely give us everything else?” (Romans 8:32, gnb)

In fact, God is happy to not only help me deal with change; he will always use the change to help me grow:

“And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them.”
(Romans 8:28, nlt)

So instead of stressing over change when it comes into my life, I can praise God. The Bible says:

“Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.” (1 Thessalonians 5:18, nlt)

Do you see how that helps you deal with change? From grumbling to gratitude! Paul says that giving your life as a constant praise to God is the reasonable thing to do when you consider what Jesus has done for you; it just makes sense. In fact, Paul says *that* is what worship is.

In essence, he says...

2. Change your worship style.

Remember that Paul says that giving your entire life as a way to praise God is “your true and proper worship.” Do you understand what that means? It means that your worship style has nothing to do with music; it has everything to do with your life-style. You worship God with your LIFE, not with your song. Your song is just one expression of your life. In fact, the song means nothing without your life-style. And your life gives meaning to the song style. *We* make worship about the song style. But GOD says that worship is about life-style; worship is how we live our lives for him. So for us at WVC, that means we will sing in the language we are most comfortable with – one church worshipping in two languages.

I think that makes sense to you, but let me tell you it's not an easy thing to do. We have to continually give ourselves to God. I like what one preacher said one time about being living sacrifices: “The problem with a living sacrifice is that it keeps climbing down off the altar!” What makes it difficult is that we live in a world that is constantly trying to squeeze us into its mold, which is completely counter to a Christ-like lifestyle of worship.

There's a professional journal called *Aggressive Behavior* that did a study, and here's their conclusion: Watching TV programs about mean people can make you a mean person. The study focused on 250 college women who viewed clips depicting different forms of aggression, from violent fighting to gossiping and excluding others.

But here's the scary part to the study:

Aggressive reactions are more automatic and less conscious than most people assume. ... That means nobody deliberately decides to imitate a *Real Housewife*; the connection is more subtle and unintentional. ... One of the authors points out that even TV shows depicting friends putting each other down in the name of a joke has its effects, too.

Watching a clip of two girls fighting over a boyfriend causes the same kind of brain reaction that watching a murderous scene would. This leads to a higher chance of engaging in aggressive behavior because the stimuli “primes” your brain for aggression.

So, anyone know of a show where everyone treats each other respectfully?¹ If you ever hear of a show like that, be sure to watch it! Or, read your Bible and join a Life Group!

But that’s just one study of one type of behavior of one type of show. That doesn’t include all the studies that are coming out on the impact of TicToc, Instagram, X, and so many other social media and gaming platforms. It’s no wonder we struggle.

That’s why Paul gives us the next part of those verses: *“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”* He says allow...

3. Inside-out change in your life.

If we want to deal with change in a healthy way that allows us to grow, then this is the key. Our Scripture for today tells us, “Don’t let the world change you by conforming you to it – you change it by allowing God to transform you.” This culture we live in and the influences that are constantly swirling around us are hell-bent on conforming us (and I mean that literally). The Bible makes it clear that this is an evil world. That’s why it says:

“Jesus gave His life for our sins, just as God our Father planned, in order to rescue us from this evil world in which we live.” (Galatians 1:4, nlt)

Change is going to happen in your life my friend; it’s just a question of who is doing the changing. You can be conformed or transformed. So will it be the world or the Lord? We are warned in 1 John:

“Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever.” (1 John 2:15-17, nlt)

The word the Bible uses for “transform” is the same word that we get “metamorphosis” from. It means *a profound and complete change from one thing to an entirely different thing*. The kind of change we need to have happen is not a change of mind or perspective or behavior; it’s a complete change of person. That’s why the Bible says:

¹ Source: Aylin Zafar, “Watching Mean People On TV Might Turn You Into One,” *Time* (3-10-12)

“This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!” (2 Corinthians 5:17, nlt)

God changes us from the inside out. He changes everything—the way you think, the way you act, your motives, your ambitions, your perspectives. You look at people the way he does—with love, compassion, and grace. You look at the world differently and your role in it. That’s what the Holy Spirit does in us when we surrender and offer our lives completely and continually as a sacrifice to God.

Notice that it says, “be transformed,” not “you are transformed.” There’s a difference; that’s because the change in us is ongoing. It means *keep being* transformed. We never stop growing. The Bible says:

“So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.” (2 Corinthians 3:18, nlt)

I like how one translation says that:

“We are being changed to become more like him so that we have more and more glory. And the glory comes from the Lord, who is the Holy Spirit.” (2 Corinthians 3:18, nirv)

Here’s where this gets really cool when it comes to dealing with change: when you give your life to Christ and you let God keep on working in your life like this, you move from dealing *with* change to being a dealer *of* change...

4. You are a change agent!

Instead of having to deal with change, you allow God to change you so that he can use you to change the world for Him! The last part of that passage says:

“Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.” (Romans 12:2, nlt)

When God transforms your life, you become a transformer; when God changes you, he uses you to change the world. So your life literally *proves* the will or purpose of God, because, for one thing, you are living for God every moment, but secondly you are working in the world to carry out his purpose—to accomplish it.

Jesus himself prayed this for you and me. It’s recorded in John 17. Would you stand with me as I read this? This is what Jesus prayed to the Father for us:

“I’m not asking You to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. (*He’s asking we not be conformed.*) They do not belong to this world any more than I do. Make them holy (*or be transformed to have the character or nature of God, set apart for God’s purposes – make them holy*) by Your truth; teach them Your word, which is truth. Just as You sent Me into the world, I am sending them into the world. (*There it is—we are to carry out his*

purpose or will!) And I give Myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy (*set apart for God's purposes*) by Your truth. I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in Me through their message. (*That's us!*) I pray that they will all be one, just as You and I are one—as You are in Me, Father, and I am in You. And may they be in Us so that the world will believe You sent Me.” (John 17:15-21, nlt)

Thanks for standing. Did you see that—we are to be change agents in this world for the purposes of God to be accomplished so that others will know God and be transformed into new creations like we are, so that *they* can have this abundant, Kingdom life too. So they can be fulfilled and not be conformers but be transformers too. To not have to constantly deal with change but be dealers of change.

My friends, you don't have to deal with change anymore. In Christ you can be a dealer of change. Be a change agent. That is how a Christian deals with change.

Prayer

By the way; the instruction from Romans 12:1-2 is *plural*—it is written to the whole church at once; it's for all of us. It means we are in this together!

One of the ways we are doing that – a change we are in the midst of – is that we are becoming one church with two languages. I'm sure you've noticed that our slides on the screen are bilingual. I'm sure you've noticed that, most of the time, the folks on the platform are leading us in English, but sometimes they do so in Spanish. I'm sure you've noticed that we have in-ear live translation of the sermon into Spanish, so that folks who speak Spanish more easily than English can hear the message too. I'm sure you've noticed that more and more of our communications are bilingual, and that we have folks worshiping together that are all shades of skin. This is a picture of the Kingdom of God (don't believe me? Read Revelation 5:9-10, Revelation 7:9-10, and Revelation 14:6)! Eventually, we will have two worship services on Sunday mornings – one in each language, but we will do intentional things to make sure we are one church (regular combined services, intentional fellowship and classes, and more as the Lord leads).

But we realize that change can be difficult, and maybe some of you are wondering just what exactly this change will mean to you. So we need to hear from you – please! We've created a way for you to share your questions or concerns. You can scan the QR code and it will take you to a form that you can fill out. You can answer some or all of the questions. Your responses are completely anonymous so you can be honest (unless you want to tell us who you are). If you'd prefer, you can fill this out on a card – the ushers will have them at the doors (ask for it in either English or Spanish), and you can return your forms at the boxes at the doors.



In two weeks, part of the worship service will include our pastors in a panel discussion, and we'll do our best to respond to your questions and comments.

West Valley Church is a cultural change agent. God wants us to change our community by being a church that is united across cultural barriers. So let's change our world. Let's change this corner. And through this corner, let's change West Valley. And through West Valley, Yakima. And through Yakima, the valley, and even the world!

Benediction

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God--this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will."
(Romans 12:1-2, niv)