

Church for a Change

Part Three

1. The world is changing.

2. God does not change.

- *Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8-9a; Revelation 22:13; Hebrews 13:8*

3. The message does not change.

- *John 1:1-3; 1 Peter 1:23-25; Matthew 5:17-18*

4. The methods must change.

- *1 Corinthians 9:22-23; Isaiah 42:9-10, 65:17-18; Jeremiah 31:31; Lamentations 3:22-23; Ezekiel 11:19, 36:26; Isaiah 43:18-19*

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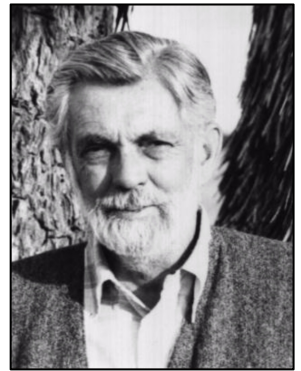
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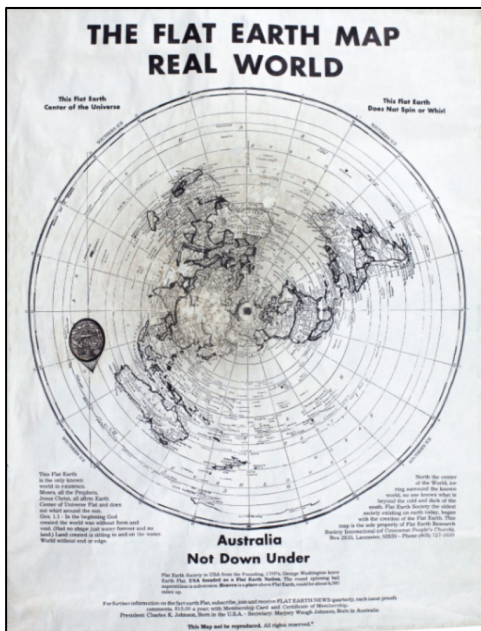
West Valley Church
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Michael W. O'Neill

Church for a Change Part Three

Change in life. We can avoid change or we can accept change. We can complain about it, or we can capture it. We can deny it, or we can drive it. We can ignore it, or we can embrace it. Change in life is inevitable. So the question we are asking in this series is, "How can we benefit and grow from change, for our sake and the sake of others?" Better yet, "God, how can you use me to be a change agent in this world?" But truth be told, change is hard. Nobody likes change, especially when the change involves letting go of something we've known or held onto for a long time. Let me give you an example of someone who refused to accept change: Meet Mr. Charles K. Johnson. He lived from 1924-2001, and he famously said, "The facts are simple: the earth is flat." Johnson was founding president of the IFERS: the International Flat Earth Society. He said, "Nobody knows anything about the true shape of the world. The known, inhabited world is flat. Just as a guess, I'd say that the dome of heaven is about 4,000 miles away, and the stars are about as far as San Francisco is from Boston."



Here's a map that Johnson made and published to show the known world is as circular and as flat as a phonograph record. The North Pole



is at the center. At the outer edge lies the southern ice, which he said is a wall 150 feet high; no one has ever crossed it, and therefore what lies beyond is unknown. The sun and moon, in Johnson's version, are only about 32 miles in diameter. They circle above the earth in the vicinity of the equator, and what looks like their rising and setting are tricks of perspective, like railroad tracks that look like they meet in the distance. The moon shines by its own internal light.

Ironically, up until Johnson died, he lived near Edwards Air Force Base – which is where the space shuttles used to land. Well...according to Mr. Johnson, NASA *claimed* there were space shuttles. He said, "The space shuttle is a joke—and a very ludicrous joke, because you can't orbit a flat earth." He believed the space program is a lie created to prop up the dying myth that the earth is a globe.

It is amazing how far we will go sometimes to hang on to something no matter how outdated it might be. No matter what the facts may be. Just to avoid change.

The truth is that we live in an ever-changing world, and as things change around us, sometimes the church acts like the flat-earth society, hanging on to archaic ministries and methods. How do we manage to maintain our mission while the world changes all around us? That's what we are going to look at today. We are in the third part of our sermon series designed to help us understand and deal with life-change, and we are going to do it from a book all about change, called the Bible. I defy you to read anywhere in the Bible for ten minutes without coming across some kind of change. So today we want to look at why we as a church must deal with change.

To do that, we need to start by seeing that...

1. The world is changing.

I know clothing styles, music and popular culture all change. We used to wear bell-bottom jeans in high school! I mean huge bell bottoms. But that's not the kind of change I'm talking about. What I mean is that we in the Western World are in the middle of a change in world view. For nearly 500 years, western society viewed the world through a lens called the "Modern Age," or "modernity." The modern age has been based on *knowledge*—what we can learn, what we can gain, and what we can understand. Modernity defines a way of thinking and looking at the world and how we understand it. It started in the Renaissance in the 14th century. That led to what philosophers call the "Age of Enlightenment." Next came the "Age of Reason," and these birthed the Modern age. For those who are 50 years old or older, we are a product of the modern age. For us, scientific research and empirical evidence decide what the facts are going to be. In other words, what we know and believe has been proven to be true by reason and research. So therefore, the more we know, the better we become. Modernity is the idea that through knowledge, we can gain greater control of our environment, our circumstances, and our world and thus improve it and ourselves. By discovering nature's secrets, we can exercise power over both physical and human nature. And the greater power we have, the more safe, civilized, and controlled our society can be.

Why am I telling you all this? Because all that I just described is undergoing major change. The method of understanding ourselves and the world we live in, at least for Western Civilization, is changing from modern to what is being called "Post Modern," and from Post Modern to Metamodern.

I know this is a lesson in philosophy, but this is extremely significant, so please stay with me. First, how do we define Postmodernism? It's multi-dimensional, but "post-modern" is just what it says—it is a system of thought *after* modernism. At its extremes are what's called "deconstructionism" or worse yet, "anarchy" – the thinking that we need to destroy all systems related to modernism and start over; whether social, governmental, mental, religious—whatever. That would result in

chaos, but the idea is that we could then start completely over. That's why Marxism and socialism are becoming so popular, and why antifa is growing. That's an extreme. Postmodernism tends to be very cynical and distrusting. The newer line of thought in postmodernism is "metamodernism," and it is less cynical and more trusting of people. Where Postmoderns want to deconstruct, metamoderns want to reconstruct. Metamoderns are more open to spiritual things and the reality of God. That's why, if you've been watching the news, you've seen a significant response to God by young people in the wake of the assassination of Charlie Kirk. These young metamoderns are turning to Jesus Christ because they saw such blatant evil that they realize there *must* be a good God. Postmoderns would just cynically give in to evil; metamoderns are seeing evil and turning to God. In fact, when they saw Charlie's memorial service, and they saw Erika Kirk forgive her husband's killer, they want that kind of faith, too. Let me give you just *a couple of* examples of the hundreds. This comes from a young Muslim woman: "I listened to Erika Kirk's full speech at the memorial, and I want to share a few thoughts that came to me while live streaming the event. This is not political. First, I should say that I grew up as a Muslim in a Muslim country. I don't know enough about Christianity to say if what I witnessed is rooted in faith or culture. But what struck me most was how, even though death is heavy and this was by nature a sad occasion, the entire event carried a celebratory spirit that honored life. That contrast hit me deeply. In Islam, even though we believe that good people go to heaven, the relationship with God is taught through fear. Funerals are overwhelmingly sad, often filled with warnings of the terrifying first night in the grave. Growing up hearing that, and then witnessing people celebrate life, speak of God's love, and remember someone through the impact he had on others; it felt so refreshing, so positive. Second, I was profoundly moved by @MrsErikaKirk's words. I cannot fathom the strength it takes to stand and deliver such a meaningful speech after losing the love of your life. But even more than that, the grace it takes to forgive the very person who destroyed your world. I cannot imagine myself standing on a stage, sending love to those who cheered your husband's murder, or inviting others to spread God's love in response because, as she said, "we do not respond to hate with hate." That is powerful beyond words. Again, I am ignorant when it comes to Christianity, but if this is what it truly embodies, then I am envious of those who get to experience that feeling. May you be received in the loving and merciful arms of Jesus Christ." (@injaneb96)

Another non-Christian who watched Charlie Kirk's memorial wrote this on X: "I remain Jesus-Curious, but I want to be real for a minute and say some things: I was shocked by the music before it began, it was so beautiful. I didn't know that people looked like that when they sang along; like so connected to something. I cried a lot during the music and don't know why. I knew that Charlie was a Christian, but I didn't know that he did all of this for Jesus...." (@ashfarms)

And another: "I went to a church service for the first time last weekend, along with two vigils for Charlie Kirk. I was raised secular and I'm an atheist, but when he was killed, I felt a strong desire to be around people like I never had before. At the service, the appeal became clear. What must it feel like to go through life never truly alone — to feel connected to someone who loves you and to believe you serve a

higher purpose? It hit me then just how alone I have been my entire life.”
(@buttonslives)

Things are changing folks – and in some ways for the better. That’s because the good news is that...

2. God does not change.

The world has gone through all kinds of changes through all kinds of ages, generations, centuries and millennia. But through it all, God remains unchanged. He says:

“I am the LORD. I do not change.” (Malachi 3:6, niv)

Our God is an unchanging God! What God *is* for us, he has always been and will always be. He does not change. That means that Jesus Christ, God’s Son, doesn’t change either. The Bible says:

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” It goes on to say, “Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings.”
(Hebrews 13:8-9a, niv)

We will *always* be able to count on what God has revealed to us in Christ; he is unchanging. This is how Jesus describes himself:

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.” (Revelation 22:13, niv)

There is great comfort, hope, and encouragement for us to know that we have a never-changing God. No matter what happens around us, God’s character, his plans, his justice, his mercy, his grace, and his love for us are dependable, enduring, unchanging, and will always be. We can count on God being all that we need, in the past, for right now, and forever.

I like that. It reminds me that among the things in life that can be changed to suit my taste, one remains tamper-resistant--I can’t change Jesus. When life is unsettled, I gain great comfort from the Bible’s affirmation that:

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8)

Praise God that His Word and His love are perfect and unchanging. And praise Him too that in His love He is working to change me and you for the better.

Now if God does not change, then neither do His promises...

3. The Message does not change.

Jesus *is* the message from God—Jesus is the embodiment of the Word of God and the fulfillment of all the promises of God. That’s why the Bible says:

“In the beginning the Word already existed. (That’s Jesus) The Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He existed in the beginning with God.
God created everything through him,
and nothing was created except through him.” (John 1:1-3, nlt)

Jesus doesn’t change, and Jesus is the Word, so the Word doesn’t change. The Word is both the promise and the fulfillment, the message and the means. God has a message for men and women; it has always been the same over-riding message from the very beginning: that he loves us and longs to be in relationship with us. He is *for* us, not against us, and he wants us to reach our highest and greatest potential that he created us to be. And he spared no expense to make that life available to us, even though it cost him the life of his One and Only Son.

When you accept that message and enter that relationship with God, then your life will change forever – to enjoy peace, rest, joy, and at the same time have a quality of life here that you never had before, and will one day live at the highest level of living, forever in heaven. You are now on a course for eternity. That’s why the Bible says this to those who respond to the message:

“For you have been born again, but not to a life that will quickly end. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living word of God. As the Scriptures say,

“People are like grass;
their beauty is like a flower in the field.
The grass withers and the flower fades.
But the word of the Lord remains forever.”

And that word is the Good News that was preached to you.”
(1 Peter 1:23-25, nlt)

This message will endure until every single word, even every punctuation mark in the Bible, has accomplished its purpose. Jesus said this about the message:

“Don’t misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God’s law will disappear until its purpose is achieved.”
(Matthew 5:17-18, niv)

God’s unchanging message will change lives in every generation, every age, every culture—modern, post-modern, metamodern, and whatever comes next if Jesus tarries. *While the world is changing, God does not, nor does his life-changing message for every person. And the church’s job is to constantly communicate that life-changing Good News to our ever-changing world. (repeat)* But – to effectively continue doing that...

4. The methods must change.

If this church is going to be effective in giving this unchanging message to others and accomplish our purpose in this community, if we are going to effectively introduce

people to Jesus, it will require us to be willing to change. Until Jesus comes back, the church manifests itself in every era and every place that responds to the social norms and structures of the culture it's in. Does that make sense? The methods and structures that the church uses to function reflect the culture and time that the church finds itself in.

Here's the point: the church has been given the task of communicating the unchanging message about the unchanging God to a changing culture. And the method is the way we do that, the way we carry out the work of the church. We use changing methods to communicate an unchanging message that changes lives. When a culture changes, and the church *doesn't* change its methods to reach that culture, then the church is no longer effective.

The problem is, we tend to think the methods should be unchanging—so we sometimes mistake the *method* for the Message. Let me give an example. Over fifty years ago, kids' Sunday School used a method called "flannel graph." Paper cut-outs of people were stuck to a felt background to tell Bible stories. Now we use video and computers. What if we said, "Flannel graphs worked for me, they can work for kids today too." But we would have made the method sacred instead of the message. Too often we've confused the method for the message. And when that happens, we are no longer effectively reaching our culture.

We get comfortable with our methods because it's what we are familiar with, but increasingly we fail to see that the world is changing, and those ways are no longer effective. So we resist change. Face it—no one likes change! Mark Twain once said that no one likes change, except a baby. Take it from me: we had three boys, and they didn't like change all that much. Here we were trying to help them get out of those messy diapers and they fought us. I've changed many diapers, and *I* didn't like it that much either.

Have you seen those motivational posters that businesses sometimes use – things about "greatness" and "achievement." Well, there's one that says: "Change. Sometimes it's really needed, but it's not always pretty." Every parent here can appreciate the truth of that. Shall I leave that up, or "change" it? We don't like change—it can be messy! But change is necessary if we are going to effectively deliver the message to this culture. Our attitude must be like the Apostle Paul's: he was willing to make any changes necessary to reach people:

"To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings." (1 Corinthians 9:22-23, nlt)



Change: Sometimes it's really needed, but it's not always pretty

Your Leadership Team and your pastors are committed to doing everything necessary so we can introduce people to Jesus Christ, equip people with a faith that works, and live as people with purpose. That's our mission! And to accomplish it, if it's necessary to change some methods, so be it. Because we are here to make sure this church is loving others, sharing the Good News, and growing in and living out our faith – that our church is a change agent.

Fifteen years ago I made this statement to our church when I first got here: "Please understand: sooner or later change is inevitable. There will be changes in how this church does things. There will be changes in who this church reaches, how and when they are reached. There will be things required of us to do so. *No one* will be spared this change: not even the pastors and leaders. We must be willing to do whatever is necessary to carry out our mission. Listen, we will *never* change things just for change's sake...When (we make) changes here, it's so we can more effectively reach and grow people with the Good News."¹

Over the years we've made changes – some worked, some didn't. We learned and grew and got better. But not everyone liked it.

Do we like change? No; it's uncomfortable and scary. Some of us won't like it, and some will leave because they don't like it. But let me ask you this: if we make changes in order to reach lost people and grow found people, and someone in church doesn't like *those* changes, what's the worst that will happen? They might leave our church and go to another church. Are they still Christians? Yes. Are they still in the Kingdom and going to heaven? Yes. But if we DON'T make changes in order to reach unchurched people, what is the worst that will happen? Unchurched people in West Valley could never know the love of God; could die and spend eternity in Hell, apart from God. Which is the greater risk? Which SHOULD we do? If we're not willing to change, then we will be as relevant as the flat earth society (as far as the unchurched in West Valley are concerned).

Change is God's business. Change is inherent in our theology. It should be our *nature*, because it is the character and nature of God to create, to constantly do new things for new times and new people. God didn't stop creating after the first six days. He's never stopped doing new things. Listen to just a handful of examples of all the change God does, from these Scriptures:

"See, the former things have taken place, and *new* things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you." Sing to the LORD a *new* song, his praise from the ends of the earth, you who go down to the sea, and all that is in it, you islands, and all who live in them." (Isaiah 42:9-10, niv)

See, I will create
new heavens and a new earth.
The former things will not be remembered,
nor will they come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever

¹ Michael O'Neill, *Life's Ahead: Embrace it!* West Valley Church, 9/25/2011

in what I will create,
for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight
and its people a joy. (Isaiah 65:17-18, niv)

"The days are coming," announces the Lord.
"I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel. I will also make it with
the people of Judah." (Jeremiah 31:31, niv)

"Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions
never fail. They are *new every morning*; great is your faithfulness."
(Lamentations 3:22-23, niv)

I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will
remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.
(Ezekiel 11:19, niv)

Again Ezekiel says:

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from
you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 36:26, niv)

"Forget the former things;
do not dwell on the past.
See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland. (Isaiah 43:18-19, niv)

Folks, God is in the change business. He changes a dark void of nothing into created something. He changes an evil world into a water world. He changes dirt into humans. He changes an infertile elderly couple into the fertile father of a nation. He changes those who are not a people into those who are his people. He changes the youngest son in a family into the greatest servant in Egypt. He changes an exiled orphan into the Exodus Deliverer. He changes a rock into a spring of water; he changes the desert into a dining hall. He changes enemy occupied real estate into the promised land of milk and honey. He changes a slave girl into a saving Queen. He changes a shepherd boy into a giant slayer into a mighty king. He changes an illegitimate son of adultery into the insightfully wisest king of Israel. He changes a backwater village in Bethlehem into the birthplace of the King of Kings. He changes a baby into the embodiment of God, the stuff of man into the savior of men, who changed water into wine, blind eyes to sight, poor to rich and slave to free. He changes the misshapen to marathon runners, sinners to saints, he changes a grave stone into a doorway, he changes **death to life** . . . and he changes you and me, transforming us into the very character and nature of Christ. Through us at this church God will change West Valley. He changes lives. He changes the world. Folks, **God is in the change business**; change is necessary, and change is coming for you and me, and for this church, so that change can come to this city! Let's be agents of change for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. West Valley Church, let's change the world!

Prayer

West Valley Church was established in 1956. At that time, the population in the entire Yakima Valley was about 142,000. Of that, approximately 8,800 were Hispanic – or about 6%. Relatively few Hispanics lived in West Valley; most were in the lower valley. So most likely, when West Valley Church started, the Hispanic population was less than 2%.

When our founders started this church on this corner, we were a clearing in a pear orchard across from Wide Hollow Elementary. That was about it out here. They never would have imagined back then that we'd be smack in the middle of West Valley with so much around us. They also never would have imagined that seventy years later the community around us would now be over 45% Hispanic.

So we can't pretend that isn't the case and stick our heads in a bucket of anglo sand. Instead, let's hold our heads high and accomplish the purpose for which God put us on this corner nearly 70 years ago – for such a time as this. This is a time of amazing Kingdom opportunity for West Valley church to become a beacon and example of the multicultural Gospel at West Valley Church. But it means we must continue to embrace change.

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 on the screen 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.

Next week, 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

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.
(Ephesians 3:20-21)