

Healthy Attitude Toward Change • 2 Corinthians 5:17

Scandinavians used to drive on the left side of the road like the English and the Japanese. Then one day everybody switched over to the right side of the road. I can't imagine what that was like. Road signs had to be changed. Intersections were reversed. It is amazing that every car did not end up in a crash. But, eventually, everyone got used to the idea and now right side driving is considered normal.

Americans did not do quite so well when it came to switching to the metric system. A generation ago there was a massive government effort to bring the United States into common practice with most of the rest of the world using kilometers instead of miles and Celsius instead of Fahrenheit. Millions of dollars were spent, but we stuck to our old ways. We didn't budge a single centimeter (or an inch!). Canadians changed, but Americans didn't. Let's face it: change comes more easily to some than it does to others.

Perhaps no other generation in history has experienced as many changes as we have. In the past 100 years the United States has changed from an agricultural economy to an industrial economy to an information and services economy. We have changed from a second tier world power to become the only remaining super power of the world. Life expectancy has increased. Diseases like polio, measles and smallpox are seldom or never seen. Travel across the world has been reduced from months to hours. Population has grown from less than two billion people a hundred years ago to more than six billion people today. Empires have fallen. Nations have multiplied. We routinely use inventions that we would never even have imagined twenty-five years ago—fax machines; medical imaging; mobile phones; personal computers; airbags.

There are days when I want to stop all the change. I would like everything to settle down

and de-stress. Stop the change and let me catch up! I prefer to be comfortable; but too much comfort has its dangers as well.

Researchers at the University of California-Berkeley placed an amoeba in a perfect stress-free unchanging environment with just the right temperature, food and moisture. There were no changes with which the amoeba had to deal. Perfect temperature. Perfect moisture. Sufficient food. No stress. It died! So, apparently we need some stress in order for life to continue.

Some of us are terrified by change. We fear and we fight. We fear that change will make our world and our lives worse than they already are. We fight to keep everything the way it used to be. Some people almost pray that next year will be 1954. Popular author Howard Hendricks says that in a typical church 16% of the people will never change. Mark Twain said, "The only person who likes change is a wet baby."

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Some of us actually embrace change. We like everything that is new and different. We are quick to adopt new ideas and methods. We are glad the past is over and we have hope for a better tomorrow.

Whether or not we like change, it is inevitable. The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus taught that change is the only constant in our world. He focused on two metaphors for the essence of reality—rivers and fire. Rivers are constantly changing. If you step into a river and then step out you can never step back into the same river again because it has moved on and is different. Fire never holds still. The flames are always dancing, moving and changing.

Let's each make a personal customized list of the changes happening right now in our own lives: family; job; school; marriage; parents; children; money; health; residence; church; car; friends; politics. Once you have focused on one

or a few changes currently happening in your life, quickly classify those changes as good or bad. Maybe, both!

A healthy Christian attitude toward change acknowledges that change is constant, change is inevitable and change will always be part of life. Every one of us experiences change every day. It will never stop. It cannot be stopped. The issue can never be the existence of change but the choices we make in the changes we face.

Change is at the very center of Christianity. God created a perfect world but it was changed by sin. God would not accept that as a permanent condition so he sought to intervene by sending his one and only Son. God's Son stepped down from heaven to earth and became a man named Jesus. In his 33 years on our earth Jesus changed blind people to sighted people, disabled people to walkers, hungry people to full, ignorant people to informed and sinners to saints.

Jesus himself changed. He changed from life to death when he was crucified and from death back to life when he was raised from the dead at Easter. And the great offer of Jesus is that he will change us to be like him. That is a process that begins at the moment we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and continues until we are like Jesus in heaven forever.

Even heaven will not be static. It will include change as well. All of these wonderful changes are described in the Bible, but perhaps nowhere more than in II Corinthians 5:17 where we read, ". . . if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old is gone, the new has come!"

Those with a healthy attitude toward change are constantly deciding which changes are good, which changes are bad, which changes should be pursued and which changes should be resisted. We must decide which changes we can do something about and which changes are beyond our control.

Richard Halvorsen was Chaplain of the United States Senate. I once heard him tell about a prizefighter whose manager turned down an invitation to a boxing match. When asked why the manager said, "My fighter only has so many fights in him and we are not going to use one up

on this opponent." The same goes for our attitude toward change. There are only so many changes we can fight.

Let's consider some examples:

- Your cable TV provider offers free access to a pornography channel. (That is a bad change. Resist it.)
- You can get out of debt by shaping a budget and sticking to it. (That is a good change. Pursue it.)
- Your company is going to change its logo and you prefer the old one. Your spouse wants to repaint the family room and you don't like the color. Your car just turned over 30,000 miles and you prefer lower mileage. (Most of these are not very important changes and probably don't make much difference. Don't focus life on the unimportant and neglect the more important.)

In 1914, the Bayer Pharmaceutical Company started putting cotton in the top of every bottle of aspirin. But in 1999 Chris Allen, Bayer's vice president of technical operations, announced that there would be no more cotton in the bottles. He said, "We concluded there really wasn't any reason to keep the cotton except tradition. Besides, it's hard to get out."

Lots of things we do really are not important at all!

All changes are not equal. Some are important and some are not important. We need to focus our limited attention and energy on the changes that really matter. If you have been diagnosed with a permanent and incurable health problem, this is a change beyond personal control that will have to be accepted.

Those with a healthy attitude toward change refuse to see change as the enemy. They recognize that God regularly uses change for good. The Bible is full of calls to change. Jesus said in Matthew 18:3-4, "*I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*"

One thing about children, they are resilient

in their ability to change. But as we get older we become increasingly resistant to change. That is a serious problem if we are going to have a healthy attitude toward change. You see, often it has nothing to do with the change itself. We just become set in our ways and are against all change. That is not healthy

That is the way it became for Merhan Karini Nasserri when he was expelled from his native Iran in 1988. He flew to Paris and was refused entry by the French government. He tried Belgium. He flew to London and was sent back to Paris. Without passport or papers he became a man without a country.

Nasserri lived in the Paris airport for eleven years. He washed in the public restrooms, received handouts from airport employees and every day he sat at a table and bench and wrote in his diary. His home was Terminal One.

In September of 1999 the French government finally gave in and issued to him an international travel card and a French residency permit. He tucked it in his pocket, went back to his bench, wrote in his diary and refused to leave Terminal One. He was free to go anywhere in the world but he decided to stay in Terminal One where he was comfortable.

Don't refuse to change. You may not be stuck in an airport terminal but you may be stuck in some habitual sin, a bad attitude, a dysfunctional relationship or a lousy job. It is unhealthy to refuse to change or blame others and stay stuck where God does not want you to be. As we get older, let us get wiser, not resistant to change.

Some questions might be helpful. What would God like to change in your life? What would you like to change in your life? What are you going to do about the changes you and God would like to see happen?

Everything so far is pretty much just common sense. It applies to just about everyone. But we are looking for something more than pop psychology. We want to have a healthy Christian at-

titude toward change. Philippians 2:5 says, "*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.*"

A healthy Christian attitude toward change has confidence in God. Like Jesus did! We can see that in several biblical teachings. In Philippians 1:6 we read, ". . . *being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*" God is working inside every Christian to change us for good!

You know those roadside signs that say "Men At Work"? Imagine there is a sign around your neck that says "God at Work". There could be. God is changing our lives and we should welcome those changes.

Some of us are tougher to change than others. Some of us welcome God's changes and others of us fight every change. Either way, God never gives up on us. God never quits. He works and works

and works to change us.

II Corinthians 3:18 explains that we "*are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*" God is transforming us to be like Jesus. That transformation is easier for some than others. Some of us are like clay that needs to be gently molded. Some of us are like rocks that need to be beaten with a hammer. The point is that the Holy Spirit of God is absolutely determined to do whatever it takes to change us to be like Jesus.

Romans 8:28 says, ". . . *we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*" This teaching has to be one of the most quoted lines in the Bible; yet it is often misunderstood. It does not promise that every detail of our lives will work out the way WE want them to work out. Rather, God promises to do whatever he needs to do in order to accomplish his good purpose in our lives. God will work through pain and pleasure, through poverty and prosperity, through marriage and divorce, through health and

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sickness and even life and death. God will work all of these changes together to fulfill his purpose in our lives.

One of the most powerful statements in the New Testament about God and change and confidence came from a non-Christian. In Acts 5 a Jewish Pharisee named Gamaliel said that if God is NOT in the change it is doomed to failure. If God IS in the change it cannot be stopped. Gamaliel had the confidence in God that we should all have—convinced that God will do good.

I was in the Indian holy city of Veranasi on the Ganges River with friends. There we visited a Hindu temple to the god Shiva, the god of destruction. We visited the “holy of holies” where the idol is in the center. Worshipers brought offerings, prayed prayers, gave money and poured water over the idol to cool it down because Shiva gets hot with anger and does awful things to people. I thought to myself: What a contrast to the God of the Bible who loves us and blesses us and seeks to do good in our lives. Our God does not need to be changed to be more like us; we need to become more like him.

A healthy attitude toward change says that change is inevitable, change may be hard, change can be good, change means trust in a God who is changing you.

“ . . . *being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*” (Philippians 1:6)

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