

GOD'S CHANGE IN YOUR LIFE

If you haven't noticed, our world is all about change. Technology is changing at lightning speed, and the more it changes, the more capacity it has to change more. In addition, many people spend most of their life trying to change something. People want to change their appearance. Some want to lose weight, and others want to gain weight. Some want to have a different hair color or a different hair style. Some just want to have hair. People want to change the kind of car they drive, the kind of house they live in, and some want to have a change in their job situation. And what is one of the most often things spoken about by political candidates? The answer-it is time for a change.

The good news is that Christianity is all about change but it is not the kind of superficial changes that most people think of. Christianity promises a change in your lifestyle that that begins on the inside and works its way out so that you become a different kind of person. I have seen many people trapped in an undesirable lifestyle who have been drastically changed by the grace of god. If you are a Christian, you are setup for change. The question is, "how much change do you really want?" How Christ-like do you really want to become? Today we're going to look at some principles that will help you to experience change in your life.

Truth about change

1. The biggest change possible is to receive Jesus Christ

We have all known the lord for different lengths of time. Some have known Christ only a few years, and some have known him for decades. What really happened when we received Christ as our savior?

a) God chose me

When I was in high school, I had a friend whose grandfather bought him the first Ford mustang in the town that I lived in. It was a 641/2, and when we drove that car down the street, everyone looked to see this strange new car. It was special. But all the mustangs in the world are not even close to being as special as one Christian. If you're a Christian, you're one of God's chosen people.

1 Peter 1:1-2 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

Every Christian is described as God's "*elect . . . who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.*" The word "foreknowledge means to "see before."

When the doctor gives a prognosis, he is telling you what he is saying what he sees for your condition in the future. The doctor may not always be right, but God is. He knows exactly what is going to happen in the future. What that means is when He chose you, He did so with a perfect knowledge of everything you would ever do in the future. He knew every time you would fail Him. He knew every “mess up” you would ever make, and He chose you anyway! God chose you off the showroom floor of all human models.

There is something about being chosen that is good. Do you remember when you were a little kid about to play in a game of kick ball, baseball or something else? The first step was for the two team leaders to choose players for their teams. One after one, people were lining up on those 2 teams, and if you were still among the “unchosen” when most had already been chosen, you were probably getting pretty stressed out. Finally, if you are the last one to be chosen, there is really no choice. And the message that brought to your heart was that you were really not wanted. On the other hand, if you know someone is choosing you because they really want you, that’s a different story all together. The Bible informs us that if you are a Christian, you are one because you have been chosen by the Father. And, he knew what he was getting into when he decided he wanted you to be His child.

b) God brought me into his family

1 Peter 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

In 1 Pet 1:23, Peter says, “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.”

The words “born again” could be translated as “born from above.” That is because the Greek word that is used for born again can mean either. We have been born into God’s family, and the source of that birth comes from above.

Being “born again” is the imparting of spiritual life to our inner man so that we can have a relationship with God who is a Spirit. It is a spiritual resurrection.

c) God has committed himself to changing my life

When someone receives Jesus Christ as his personal lord and savior, that person’s sins are forgiven, and he is given eternal life. That is, he will one day upon leaving this life enter into the presence of God and that live there forever. And that salvation is as complete as it can be. There are no upgrades available. But there is an aspect of salvation that goes beyond having our sins forgiven so that we may enter heaven when we die. Jesus has not only saved us FROM something in the future. He also saved us FOR something in the here and now. Unlike us, God always finish is when he starts. Have you ever started something with all good intentions of finishing it but never did? God is not like that. He never starts anything that he does not finish.

Philippians 1:6, “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.”

Sometimes I have read the classic car ads in the classified section of the newspaper. Many times I have thought about how neat it would be to buy an old car and clean it up. One of the problems with buying one of those old cars is that they cost too much and they need too much work done on them. If the ad says the car “needs work,” what it is really saying is that it would take \$30,000 and the next 30 years of my life to make that old car the way you would want it to be.

When God looks at us, sees our problems and sins and the damage we’ve done to our lives and wants us anyway. He commits to change our lives for the rest of our lives. The apostle Peter is a great example of this truth. Peter was not always the most stable individual around. He was impulsive and often spoke and acted before his brain went into gear. He is the only disciple who openly denied Christ after the crucifixion, but God delights in changing the lives of people. Jesus changed Peter’s life so much that he became a rock and lived to the end of his life being faithful to God. One of the blessings you have as a Christian is the fact that God intends to change your life. He has already changed it, and He will continue to do so until the day you die.

What is my responsibility in the process of change?

It is my responsibility to cooperate with God in my life change.

Philippians 2-12-13, “Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”

The words “work out” is the same word the Roman historian STRABO, used when he wrote of the silver mines of Spain. Strabo wrote of WORKING OUT these mines, meaning that the owners were to operate the mines in a manner that would get the most from them. This same Greek word was used in Paul’s day to refer to a farmer working out his field in order to reap the greatest harvest possible.

Paul is saying that as Christians we must seek to get as much out of our Christian lives as possible. We are to become all we can be for God. True discipleship is not a one time commitment. It is an ongoing walk. So Paul urges us to constantly seek to grow and mature and be more and more like Christ. Oliver Cromwell, once wrote this motto in the front of His Bible: He who ceases to be better, ceases to be good. We must all strive to be better and better and better as we WORK OUT our salvation.

Monitoring change

When someone is very sick, doctors want to monitor that person's physical condition very carefully. It is important to know whether that person's temperature is rising or falling. There are blood tests which indicate improvement or decline, and many times the change is gradual. So it is with the spiritual life. You don't get up one day a spiritual giant and get up the next day as a spiritual dwarf. Change normally happens gradually, and you need to know which way you're headed in your spiritual life.

Hebrews 2:1, "We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away."

1. How hungry am I for God's word?

When someone doesn't want to eat, you become concerned about that person because a lack of appetite is a sign of poor health. People who are physically healthy have a good appetite.

1 Peter 2:2, "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation."

The word translated, "crave" speaks of the deepest desire or longing that someone can have. For a computer geek, that would mean the latest and greatest in technology. For the Houston rockets, it would mean a championship. For a prisoner, it would mean release. For the Christian, the great is desires we have should be to develop our relationship with Christ through His word.

Michael Billester once gave a Bible to a humble villager in eastern Poland. Returning a few years later, he learned that 200 people had become believers through the use of that one Bible. When this group of believers gathered to hear him preach, he suggested that before he spoke he would like each person to quote some verses of Scripture. One man rose and said, "Perhaps, Brother, we've misunderstood you. Did you mean verses or chapters?" Billester was astonished. "Are you saying there are people here who could recite complete chapters of the Bible?" That was precisely the case. In fact, 13 of them knew half of Genesis and the books of Matthew and Luke. Another had committed all of the Psalms to memory. Combined, these 200 people knew virtually the entire Bible by memory. Those people were spiritually healthy.

2. How real is my Christian experience?

One of the greatest challenges in keeping spiritually healthy is that you don't allow yourself to drift into religious routine. We have the tendency to allow things to lose their freshness. For example, have you ever decided that you are going to go on an exercise program? Maybe you purchased a treadmill or a stationary bicycle or some other kind of equipment. In the beginning, you were pumped. You were excited about what you were going to accomplish, but before long what started out to be exciting became nothing more

than hard work. If you continued with it at all, you did it because you made yourself do it. The same thing can happen on a new job. You started with enthusiasm and ended with boredom. Unfortunately, the same thing can happen in your relationship with God. What starts out with a love relationship between you and the Lord can end up being a set of rules that you keep. Paul knew that scenario all too well because that is what he experienced as a Pharisee.

Philippians 3:2-6, "Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless."

Paul said if anyone could please God by doing the right things in a routine way, he would have been able to do so because of the kind of strict life he lived before he was saved. Paul learn what we must all learn. He learned that Christianity is a relationship not a routine. When it begins to be a routine, we have lost the power of what it is all about.

Some time ago, Billy Graham was interviewed by Joseph Stowell. Stowell asked Billy Graham what he had valued most in his many years of ministry. You might think he would have cited his times with and influence on presidents and heads of state over five decades or perhaps his preaching the gospel to great throngs around the world. But Graham said with a determined softness in his voice, "Beyond a doubt it has been my fellowship with the Lord. To be able to talk with Him, to hear from Him, and to have His guidance and presence in my life has been my greatest joy." That is relationship not religion.

In the gospel of John, the Lord Jesus uses a metaphor to give us a picture or a description of what it means to have a relationship with Him. In John 10, Jesus describes his relationship with us is that of a shepherd with his sheep. Shepherds in those days had a very intimate relationship with their sheep. The shepherd knew each of his sheep intimately and by name, and the sheep recognized the shepherd's voice. If you have a relationship with God, there's an intimacy between you and him. He speaks to you, and you recognize his voice. And you speak to him, and he hears and deals with you as an individual that he loves.

When you are working out your salvation, ask yourself the question, "is God becoming more real to me? Am I learning to listen to his voice?" If you are just going through the motions of routine, I want to assure you that there's much, much more to the Christian life than that. The old song says, "Every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before. Every day with Jesus I love him more and more."

3. Am I bearing fruit?

In John 15, the apostle gives another analogy of our salvation experience when he talks about a vine and its branches. The result of the life of the vine flowing through the branches is fruit.

When it comes to our Christianity, health is seen in the same way. Healthy Christians bring forth fruit. What is fruit? For it can be divided into two categories. There is an attitude fruit (the fruit of the spirit), and there is action fruit. Action fruit is what happens for you and the lives of other people, and Paul mentions both of them in the book of Philippians.

Philippians 1:9-11, "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God. Attitude fruit causes you to happen more godly attitude, and it is a mark of growth."

In the same way, action fruit shows that Jesus Christ is working through your life and the lives of other people.

Paul said in Philippians 1:22, "If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me."

When you are monitoring your growth, ask yourself the question, "is God using me in the lives of other people?"

Many of the changes that take place in our life are not wanted changes. Their changes that we wish would not have happened. But there's one thing that we can be sure of. There will never be a change in your life that you allow God to make that you will not be glad for later. The more you cooperate with the changes he wants to make, the more blessed your life will become. Ask yourself the question, "am I living a more godly life today than I was six months ago? How much am I willing to be changed by God and what am I willing to do for that to happen?"

The ultimate change

In the early days of the Christian church, the expectation of the lord's return gave joy and power to the early Christians. As they lay in prison, suffering and tormented and often near death, they looked for His coming.

Philippians 3:20-21, "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."

Fellowship Bible Church

Pastor: Don Griffin

Things will not always be as they are now. There's coming a time when all the suffering, disappointments and reversals will be over, and we will live forever in a perfect place with perfect people. That is worth waiting for!

Philippians 3:20-21, "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."

Things will not always be as they are now. There's coming a time when all the suffering, disappointments and reversals will be over, and we will live forever in a perfect place with perfect people. That is worth waiting for!

Last week, Beth took my 7 year-old granddaughter shopping. She did something in 2 stores that was surprising. When they got to the "checkout" counter on both occasions, this little 7-year old girl looked up at the cashier and said, "I am a Christian, and it is the most wonderful thing in the world!"

It is, isn't it?