

Changes in Life

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Let's be honest. Many of us as Christians find it difficult to accept change. The story is told about a doctor who told a man to give up red meat. The man wanted to obey the doctor's advice, so he stopped putting ketchup on his hamburgers. He gave up "red" meat!



If we are like most people – we do not like changes. This is especially true as we get older. However, change is part of our everyday lives. Everyone faces unwanted changes and the challenges that go along with change at specific times of their lives. Our health can change. Our surroundings can change. We might move to a new area and find a

new church. Our circumstances can change. Our job and location may change. Our age changes, our body changes, our waistline changes! Our financial status or levels of income often change. Our country and government changes. Our lives certainly change when we lose a spouse or some loved one close to us.

We are creatures of habit, so when it comes to change, we sometimes are not ready for it and it is often hard to accept. However, change is part of the Christian life. We all experience change. Our lives pass through change and our children change as they grow into adulthood. Our church can change as we continue to grow together. I'm not talking about worldly changes in music and worship but the blessing that can come through outreach and growth. Change can be difficult at times; however, it can also be a blessing when we accept it from God. What should be our attitude in life's changes? How should we respond to change? This is what we want to discover in this study.

Change is a normal part of the Christian life. There are two ways to respond to change.

I. A negative Response

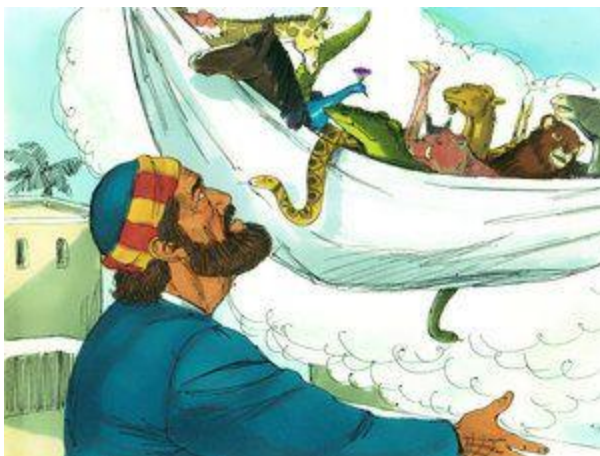
Four examples are given of responding negatively to change.

A. We can resist change like Peter.

Acts 10:9-16

“On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice *spake* unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, *that* call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.”

- The new vision is given (10 – 12)



Sometimes we resist change like Peter did. God was seeking to do something new and exciting (build the Church through saving Gentiles). The change in diet symbolized the change God was seeking to bring about in the new dispensational outreach among the Gentiles. God was now building His church and saving Gentile humanity. The unclean foods (representing the unclean Gentiles) were no longer unclean since

God was now saving and accepting the Gentile masses and bringing them into a new body called the Church. The Gospel was to be preached throughout the earth!

God was not only changing Peter’s diet; He was changing Peter’s program. Peter needed to get with the new program – what God was seeking to do. In a similar way, we sometimes need to realize that God wants to do some new things in our

lives, personal ministry, and family. We also need to get with the program and stop living in the past! Change calls for new things and creates new excitement and zeal as we see God work in new ways. Therefore, we should welcome the change that God wants to bring into our lives and local churches, even when at first, it seems too radical.

Remember that not all change is bad! We are not talking about worldly changes but changes that can glorify God and allow God's purpose to come to pass in our personal lives and church. God gave Peter a new vision and as a result he eventually recognized the need for change! When we have a new and fresh vision from God, we will be ready to change our living, service, and ministry to meet God's new requirement and standard. We must catch God's vision for our lives and church ministry, and when we do, we will be ready to change, so we can fulfill the new plan that God has for our lives and ministry.

I think God has been doing some wonderful things during the Covid-19 pandemic we are facing. In fact, God is doing other things despite the difficult times we are facing in our personal lives and churches.

I was talking to a friend of mine who recently had a funeral service. There were many Hispanics in the service that needed to be saved, among other people. At the end he gave an invitation and asked for those who prayed the prayer of salvation to look up at him. He told me that thirty people focused their eyes on him. He was moved beyond measure. Near the end of our conversation, he said this to me. "God is doing different things during this pandemic." I wholeheartedly agree with him. So, change is not always bad. It sometimes allows us to have great Gospel outreach and see God do things we have not seen Him to before.

Peter rejected the change that God had for his life and ministry at first but eventually came around. For many today within the church, it's "business as usual" but this type of mentality can cripple our outreach and ministry. We need to open our hearts to God and allow Him to give us a fresh vision for souls, outreach, and the needed personal changes that we must make in our lives. I believe that exciting days are ahead for the Church and our personal lives if we see the vision God has for us – what He wants to do in our lives and church ministry.

We should not live in the “good-old-days” but long for the new days that God has for us. We need vision. At first, Peter lacked the vision and change that God required in order to bring about a great blessing. Don’t be like Peter. If God wants to change your life in some specific way, then allow Him to make those changes and take your life in a new and exciting direction.

Warren Wiersbe reminds us:

“Over the years I have seen churches . . . flounder and almost destroy themselves in futile attempts to embalm the past and escape the future. Their theme song was, ‘As it was in the beginning, so shall it ever be, world without end, Amen.’ Often I’ve prayed with and for godly Christian leaders who were criticized, persecuted, and attacked simply because, like Joshua, that had a divine commission to lead a ministry into new fields of conquest; but the people would not follow. More than one pastor has been offered as a sacrificial lamb because he dared to suggest that the church make some changes.”

➤ The negative response is witnessed (13-14)

Do we say “not so, Lord” to the changes God wants to make in our own personal lives? We sometimes use the words “No” and “Lord” separately, but we can never join them together and say “No, Lord” since this contradicts the very truth of Christ’s mastery over our lives. If we are not careful, we can often ignore what God is trying to do in our lives and in reality, we often say as Peter did, “Not so, Lord.” Have you been saying “no” to something that God wants to change in your life? Perhaps it’s some new direction that God wants you to take – some new decision that needs to be made. Don’t say “no” to the positive changes God wants to make in your life. Changes can grow us and bring glory to God. Don’t neglect the necessary changes that God wants to bring into your life and some new direction He wants to take you.

Someone said:

“Beware of shifting into neutral and possess the disease of sanctified paralysis.”

Do not resist God’s changes for your life since it’s through these changes we can experience spiritual growth. The right kind of change can be very positive and for our spiritual profit and good. It can also be a blessing to others when we allow God to change us, remold us, and reignite us for His service.

Randy was unsure about his choice of clothes for church so he sought some counsel from his wife. He asked, “Do you think I should change?” She took advantage of the opportunity and replied, “It depends—are you talking about changing your shirt or making a wholesale change as a human being?”

- The necessary repetition is spoken (15-16)

God had to speak to Peter a “second time” and ultimately “thrice” (three times). How many times must God impress upon your heart to do something before you will do it? If God is speaking to your heart about something, then we ought to listen to Him and do it. If God repeatedly impresses on our heart to do something new or make some changes in our life, we should get the hint that He wants us to take action! God wants us to change for His glory. His plans should become our plans. His goals should become our goals. Are you ready to change or are you bucking against the change that God wants to make in your life?

2 Corinthians 5:17

“Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

The “new” things ultimately involve spiritual changes in our lives that stem from our new union and position in Christ which will honor God and allow us to be more fruitful and productive in life. Are you ready for the new things that God wants to do with your life, in your life, and through your life?

- The needful surrender is realized (17-28).

We cannot study all of these verses. However, Peter finally came around. Acts 10:20 says he no longer doubted or resisted what God wanted to do (“doubting nothing”) and verse 28 reveals Peter’s positive response: “God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.” Peter finally got to the place where he accepted the change, but it took him some time. God wants to bring us to a place of acceptance regarding the changes that He is making with our lives. The words “doubting nothing” reveal that Peter was now surrendered to God’s will and purpose for his life. He went from doubting to believing. He went from rejecting the vision to wanting to understand it and follow it. The lesson is clear. We must let God show us the path that He has for us and be ready to follow it.

We need to surrender to God's will and purpose for our lives and stop doubting it and trying to avoid it. It's a wonderful thing to just say, "Yes, I'll do it, Lord." If we are always second-guessing God's will, then we will live in defeat. Peter should have immediately accepted the change that God was bringing into his life, but instead, He tried to fight against it and take the easy road. Don't do this. Do not resist the changes that God is wanting to make in your own heart and life and ministry.

I have rubber exercise bands that I sometimes use while exercising. They are used as a form of resistance so your muscles can be worked properly. If we are not careful, we can become like these rubber bands. We can find ourselves trying to resist the changes that God wants to bring into our lives for His glory. If we resist the changes He wants to make, we can miss the blessings that He wants to bring into our lives.

When the railroads were first introduced to the U.S., some folks feared that they'd be the downfall of the nation! Here's an excerpt from a letter to then President Jackson dated January 31, 1829: "As you may know, Mr. President, 'railroad' carriages are pulled at the enormous speed of 15 miles per hour by 'engines' which, in addition to endangering life and limb of passengers, roar and snort their way through the countryside, setting fire to crops, scaring the livestock and frightening women and children. The Almighty certainly never intended that people should travel at such breakneck speed."

Although we sometimes resist physical, monetary, and even necessary spiritual changes in our lives, they are designed for our spiritual growth and advancement in the Christian life. We need to accept the changes and move forward in our Christian experience and walk with the Lord.

- ✓ What does God want to change in your heart and life?
- ✓ Have you been resisting certain changes?
- ✓ How many times has God spoken to your own heart about making some changes?
- ✓ When are you going to change?

B. We can lack the faith to change like Sarai.

Sarai lacked faith in God's promise that she would bring forth a child in her old age, a child that would become heir to the promise that God gave to Abraham regarding multitudes of descendants that would stem from his own loins, including the promised Messiah (Gen. 12:1-3). Abram and Sarai were too old to have children so she could not believe that God could change the barrenness of her womb and give her a child. Sarah is an example of someone who lacked faith in the changes that God wanted to bring into her life and what God could do as the Almighty God.

In Genesis 15:2-6, God gave this promise to Abram:

“And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house *is* this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. And, behold, the word of the LORD *came* unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.”

Being childless, Abram feared that their servant, Eliezer of Damascus, would become their heir, since that was the law at that time. But God promised him a son and descendants as numerous as the stars. Humanly speaking this was impossible. This was because Sarai had passed the time when she could bear a child. But Abram believed God's promise and at this particular point in his life declared him to be righteous (Rom. 4:3).

In Genesis 16:1-4 we see Sarai's response to God's promise:

“Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name *was* Hagar. And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the LORD hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai (*the man following the wife*). And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife (*the woman following a legal practice of the day – but not a Biblical practice*). And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived

(*the man following his sin nature*): and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes” (*the following conflict that comes with marital infidelity*).

Of course, it would be good to never follow any of these practices! They are unbelieving, immoral, and despicable before God. What brought Sarai and Abram to commit these unholy and forbidden practices? It was Sarai’s unbelief in God’s promise and Abram’s inability to lead his wife in the promise God had given to him. It’s very clear that Sarai did not believe God could change her womb and give her a son even though God said He would bless them with a son. She lacked faith in the plan and purpose of God for her life. So, she took matters into her own hands. She tried to force God’s promise to happen in another way by bringing a son into this world through Hagar.

Genesis 17:17 records Abraham’s response to God’s promise:

“Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall *a child* be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?”

Abraham apparently laughed in joyful wonder and amazement. He did not laugh in unbelief. This was the laugh that results from believing in God’s power and promises. The Bible records that Abram’s faith did not waver (“he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief” - Rom. 4:18-21). However, the Bible teaches that Sarai laughed in unbelief. She did not have faith in God’s promise. She lacked faith in the new and amazing thing that God wanted to do through her life. In essence, she said, “You cannot change the womb of a 90-year-old woman. It’s impossible.” So, in essence, she laughed at the change that God wanted to bring upon her life, or what God wanted to do through her life.

Genesis 18:12-15 records Sarah’s response: “Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also? And the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? Is any thing too hard for



the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son. Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh.”

Abraham was saying, “Sarah, you cannot wiggle out of this one. You did laugh. You did not believe in God’s promise. You laughed in unbelief, but God will give us a son from your own womb.”

Genesis 21:5-6 goes on to record: “And Abraham (father of multitudes) was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac (laughter) was born unto him. And Sarah (princess) said, God hath made me to laugh, *so that* all that hear will laugh with me.”

It’s interesting that Sarai’s laughter of unbelief was changed into the laughter of rejoicing in the blessing of God upon her life. She too laughed in amazement and wonder at what God could do. God not only rejuvenated Sarah’s body so she could bear a child, but also so she could nurse the newborn baby. We should learn to laugh with amazement when God does great things. Sarah’s laughter of unbelief was turned into the laughter of amazement and wonder.

There are plenty of practical lessons we learn from this Biblical episode with Sarah. Have you ever laughed at God’s plan for your life? Have you doubted what God can do through you? Sarah laughed because of her condition. She was 90 years old (Gen. 17:17). Why did God wait so long before bringing about the promised blessing and child of promise? The age for Sarah’s fruitfulness was past and she considered her womb to be dead.

It should be observed that Sarai lacked faith in God’s plan but had more faith in her own plan. We must be careful that we don’t lack faith in the changes and new plans and directions that God wants to bring into our lives. In the case of Sarai, the change involved giving birth to a baby at an older age.

Sarah laughed and doubted what God said and wanted to do it her own way. Instead of following plan A (God’s plan) she followed plan B (her way). Plan B never works nearly as good as plan A. Do you know why? It’s because plan B is your plan and not Gods. When we go ahead of the Lord, we will eventually reap what we sow and the two reaped conflict in their marriage.

Galatians 6:8

“For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.”

Even though God had a glorious plan to give this couple a son, and He made a gracious promise to them, it seemed that God was doing nothing about it. Abraham and Sarah were getting older and time was running out. So, Sarah invented her own plan and it flopped. One of the basic lessons in what we often call “the school of faith” is this: God’s will must be fulfilled in God’s way and in God’s time!

We must remember that God’s plan is always best. What He says is always right! So, do not second guess His plan for your life. We sometimes try to deceive ourselves into thinking that what we are doing is right, when in reality, it’s wrong and directly opposite of what God wants to do. Sarai thought she was doing right but she was actually moving away from God’s plan for her life. Beware of this type of deception. Don’t deceive yourself and live in a fool’s paradise. Accept God’s plan. Don’t investigate it – do it! Don’t doubt it – follow it!

Someone has said:

“When the outlook is bleak, try the uplook.”

Abraham had been looking around as he tried to solve his problem, but the answer to his problem was to keep looking up at the stars and the promise that God originally gave to him about his future progeny.

Genesis 15:5

“And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.”

Someone remarked:

“Even when life is dark, you can still see the stars.”

Beloved, we must believe in God’s promise and allow Him to bring about the changes He wants to make in our lives. About 30,000 stars are listed in the General Catalog used by astronomers, but it is estimated that there are 100 billion

more! God did not say that Abraham would have that many descendants but that, like the stars, there would be too many to count. If we stick with God's promises, we can be sure that they will come to pass in our hearts and lives, but when we take matters into our own hands, we create problems. Reject the promise and create a problem. That is normally what happens in real life. It's what happened with Sarai.

Hebrews 3:13 reminds us how sin can deceive us and keep us from following God's promises and the specific changes that He wants to bring into our lives. "But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Sin can be very deceptive. If we are not careful, our judgment can become clouded by sin and as a result we avoid the promise that God has given to us in His Word and the changes He wants to bring into our lives.

Once again, Sarai did not believe God could change her womb and give her a son. She lacked faith in the change that God wanted to bring into her life. How about you? What changes does God want to bring into your own personal life? Maybe it's a new job, position, move, or some specific service He wants you to do for Him. Are you ready to walk by faith and accept the changes that God wants to bring into your life and move ahead in the plan of God? Faith is still victory! Faith will make your load lighter and keep the way brighter!

"His power can make you what you ought to be;
His blood can cleanse your heart and make you free;
His love can fill your soul, and you will see
'Twas best for Him to have His way with thee."

- ✓ What needful changes and new direction has God impressed upon your heart?
- ✓ Are you willing to allow God to make these changes without running ahead of His will?
- ✓ Are you resting in God's promises in the midst of your change?
- ✓ Have you been living in a fool's paradise by creating your own plan?
- ✓ Have you been looking up to God to meet your spiritual needs and get you through the changes that you are facing in your life?

Until 1800 the top speed was twenty miles an hour as people traveled on horseback. With the arrival of the railroad train, almost overnight we jumped to 100 miles per hour. By 1952 the first passenger jet could travel 500 miles an hour. By 1979 the Concorde cruised at more than 1,200 miles an hour. But even back in 1961 the astronauts were orbiting the earth at 16,000 miles per hour. These are all changes, some of them very drastic, which occurred over a short period of time. Sometimes life is like this. We pass through changes, some of them are big and they seem threatening to us. However, God wants us to accept them and realize that whatever He allows to come into our lives will fulfill His ultimate purpose for us (Rom. 8:28) and take us into another phase of our lives.

C. We can complain about change like Israel.



The children of Israel sent spies into the land to discover the peoples and obstacles that they would face when entering the land of promise. However, the message that the spies reported to the people was one of unbelief in God's plan and the new changes and adventures that He wanted them to experience in their lives.

Numbers 13:32-33 records the words of unbelief that came from the spies:
"And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, *is* a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it *are* men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, *which come* of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight."

God wanted to do some wonderful things for His people. He wanted to bring them into the land of promise. However, the people did not believe in the new direction and changes that God wanted to bring into their lives. Instead of being obedient and following God's directional change for their lives, their hearts were overcome

with fear and unbelief. They believed in man's report instead of God's promise. Because of their lack of faith, they began to murmur and complain about the change and new journey that God had for their lives.

Numbers 14:1-2

"And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness!"

The children of Israel murmured or complained about the giants in the land and their inability to possess the land. They murmured against their leaders. They murmured about leaving Egypt. Ultimately, they murmured against God.

In Numbers 14:27, God says:

"How long *shall I bear with* this evil congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me."

Ultimately, we complain against God and His will for our lives when we refuse to accept the new directional changes He wants to bring into our lives. The practical lesson we learn is this: do not murmur or complain against the changes that God wants to bring into your life. If God wants to do something with your life, then allow Him to do it. Let Him bring the necessary changes that He wants to make with your life. You will be much better off for accepting God's changes than grumbling about them and trying to avoid them.

Philippians 2:14 reminds us:

"Do all things without murmurings (grumbings) and disputing" (arguing).

- ✓ Have you been complaining about some of the changes God has allowed to come into your life?
- ✓ Are you willing and ready to accept the changes that God wants to do in your own heart and personal life?
- ✓ Are you ready to say to God, "Take me, I'm Yours" instead of complaining, "Take me back to Egypt?"

“Surrender to the perfect will of God
I dare not give Him less;
Though He should lead my steps from here abroad;
I want His will – my life to bless.
Whatever He wants for me--
His will, His will I must know;
Wherever He wants to send me--
His way, His way I must go.
If He but speaks I'll obey at His voice,
I've already decided His will is my choice;
Whatever He wants for me,
His will, His will I must do.”

God wanted the children of Israel to go in and possess the land that He promised them. God had promised He would be with them. This was a new and exciting change for God's people. However, they murmured when they heard about all of the giants and their enemies in the land. As a result, they rebelled against what God wanted them to do. Beware of murmuring against God when He wants you to do something new and exciting with your life, or when He wants to change the direction and course of your life in some way. Remember that murmuring precedes rebellion and missing God's will for your life.

1 Corinthians 10:10 reminds us of this spiritual lesson:

“Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.”

Stop murmuring and start moving! This is what the Christian life is all about. Stop complaining and start obeying! God wants to take our lives into the promised land of blessing. We simply need to obey Him. God sometimes wants to bring some special blessings into our personal lives and church ministries, but this might require changes on our part. It's not negative change that leads to worldliness but positive or good change that results in God's true blessing. The change might involve new opportunities to reach people for Christ, new adventures of faith, and new directional choices that we must make for our personal lives and families.

To accept God's changes requires faith and obedience. For some of us, it is time to change. It's time for men to change and begin leading their families. It's time for

the ladies to change and begin following their husbands. It's time for children to change and obey their parents in all things. It's time for you to change and do what God wants you to do, instead of murmuring and complaining about God's will. Don't complain about what God wants you to do, accept the changes He wants to bring into your life, and then rest in His plan and launch out in faith.

D. We can run from change like Jonah.

Jonah appears on the pages of Scripture as an individual who ran from change. Don't be so critical of this man. There is a little Jonah in all of us!

Jonah 1:1-3 records:

“Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.”

The lesson we learn from Jonah's life is simple. Do not run from change! Do not run from God! Remember that Jonah discovered that it's much better to follow the changes that God wants to make in your life than to run from them!



Jonah 1:17

“Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.”

The Lord wanted to do something different in and through Jonah's life. God had some specific change of ministry and new direction for him. He had something new for him to do. But what did Jonah do? He ran away from it! We can do the same thing if we are not careful. We can run away from some of the specific changes that God wants to bring into our lives. Sometimes they are new opportunities of ministry and outreach that God brings before us. God wants us to

launch out in faith. But instead, we run away from what God wants us to do and where He wants us to go.

Like Jonah, we sometimes want to stay in our same mold and pattern of living. We want to remain in our safety zone instead of reaching out to do something new and exciting for God. Instead of going to the next step that God has for us we step back like Jonah did. We run away from the changes that God wants to bring into our lives, personal ministries, and hearts. When we do, God cannot fulfill His purpose for our individual lives.

In Jonah's case, he was running away from God's will which was to preach judgment and repentance to the city of Nineveh. This was no small task. But how often have we missed opportunities of Gospel witness? Nevertheless, we discover that Jonah was not ready for this change and was not willing to follow God's plan and purpose for his life. God may be speaking to your own heart today about making some necessary changes in your life, but maybe you have been ignoring Him. Like Jonah, you have been running away from the Lord's plan. You might be scared and stubborn like Jonah and not willing to make the necessary changes. If so, you need to recognize your disobedience and start down the new path that God has set before you. It might be a path that involves spiritual changes and new outreach opportunities. Whatever the case might be, welcome and embrace the change wholeheartedly and without reservation. Revelation 3:8 says, "I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it."

It is time to change! It's time to do what we know God wants us to do. Do not run from change - accept it. When we resist God's purpose and will for our life, Satan will pave the way for us as he did for Jonah who "found a ship going to Tarshish." Furthermore, when we resist God's will and change, there is only one place to go - down ("down to Joppa"). Beloved, we cannot go up and down at the same time! If we are resisting the necessary changes that God wants to bring into our lives, we are going down from a spiritual perspective.

Instead of running from the change that God wants to bring into our lives, we should follow the course that He has outlined for us. Don't try and run away from change! Follow the will of God. We must remember that change is often the way God brings His plans and purposes to fruition in our lives. It's the way He grows us

and takes us to the next spiritual plateau. Be submissive to change – not disobedient to it.

- ✓ Have you been running from the changes that God wants to make in your life?
- ✓ Have you been swallowed by the whale of God’s disciplinary judgment for avoiding the changes He wants to make in your life?
- ✓ What will it take for you to change?
- ✓ Why not take a step of faith and begin to change right now?

We have seen in our first point that we should not react negatively to change. This means we should not be like Peter who resisted God’s change, Sarai who lacked faith to change, the children of Israel who complained about change, or Jonah who ran from change.

Washington Irving G. Collins wrote:

“There is a certain relief in change, even though it be from bad to worse; as I have found in traveling in a stage-coach, that it is often a comfort to shift one's position and be bruised in a new place.”

Grady Nut once said:

“Some marriages are ruttid and rather dreary because either or both partners have yielded to the tyranny of the inevitable, ‘what has been will still be.’ Stay open to newness. Stay open to change.”

Charlie Smith was 23 years old when the Civil War ended; 61 when the Wright Brothers first flew. In 1977 he was recognized as the oldest living American of all time. When asked about his secret for longevity he said: "I ain't got no special secret for how I live so long. I just live." Smith avoided exercise. "I don't do much now. I just sit here, and when I get tired of sitting I get up, and when I get tired of that, I sit down." This does not sound like an overly exciting life! However, when we are in tune with God’s changes in our lives, He will bring before us new adventures and spiritual plateaus to reach. Life is all about change and transformation which ultimately makes us more like Jesus and glorifies God. It often involves getting rid of the older things and striving for newer things (2 Cor. 5:17).

II. A Positive Response

Instead of reacting negatively to change, God would want us to react in a positive way to the things that He wants to do in and through our lives. In the next part, we want to study some Bible characters that were open to God's change. They did not resist it, lack faith in it, complain about, and run from it. Instead, these people willingly accepted the changes that God had for their lives.

There are four examples of accepting change.

A. We must surrender to change like Mary.

Luke 1:30-38

“And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.”

Like Mary, we must surrender to God's change that He wants to bring into our life. Mary accepted the change that God had for her which was to bring forth the Messiah. She was ready to change by accepting and following God's will for her life. The Lord's plan will always be accompanied by God's power (“For with God nothing shall be impossible”).

The old adage is true:

“The will of God will never lead you where the grace of God cannot keep you.”

After hearing of God's plan and power, Mary immediately surrendered to God's purpose for her life by exclaiming: "be it unto me according to thy word." Are we willing to say this when God wants to change something in our lives? Are we ready to bow the knee to God's purpose for our life, whatever it might be? Maybe it's to get rid of some questionable habit in our life, to make some new commitments in life, or to go where God wants us to go and do what He wants us to do?



Be it unto me! This is surrender! It is surrender to the changes that God wants to make in our hearts and lives. Remember, nothing is impossible with God! Since this is true, we must let God have His way with us. We must accept His will, bow the knee to the King, and follow His plan for our life.

- ✓ Have you been obedient to God's Word and are you willing to follow the changes that He wants to make in your life?
- ✓ Do you realize that God may want to do some new and exciting work through your life?
- ✓ Are you ready to let go and let God bring about some changes that seem impossible from a human perspective?

"What a privilege to come into God's presence
Just to linger with the One who set me free,
As I lift my eyes and see His awesome glory
I remember who He is and bow the knee.

Bow the knee, bow the knee,
He is King of all the ages, bow the knee.
God alone, on His throne.
See Him high and lifted up and bow the knee
Kneel before Him, All adore Him,
As you live to love Him more, bow the knee."

Isaiah 6:5 says, "mine eyes have seen the king." When you have a fresh vision of God, you will bow the knee to the changes He wants to make in your life. We will

never be happy ignoring God’s will. Mary is a good example of someone who was ready to accept the changes and new direction that God had for her life.

B. We must see God’s providence in change like Joseph.

Genesis 50:15-20

“And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him. And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying, So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him. And his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we *be* thy servants. And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for *am* I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; *but* God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as *it is* this day, to save much people alive.”

In spite of what Joseph’s brothers did to him, he saw God’s providence in all of it. This is revealed in what Joseph said. He was in the *place of God* (vs. 19 – “Fear not: for *am* I in the place of God?”) and he therefore knew that he was guided by the *providence of God* (vs. 20 – “God meant it unto good”). In



this case, the place of God was a pit! However, like Joseph, we should see God’s providence (oversight) working in connection with the changes that we are facing in life. Many times, God’s purpose is brought to pass through changes. The change that occurred in Joseph’s life brought God’s perfect plan to fruition. Joseph realized that the difficult experience and change that he faced was actually a good thing. Here is the practical point. When we see God’s providence in the changes that we are passing through in life, we will also recognize that God is trying to do something that is actually good for us – not something that is designed to hurt us.

An insurance salesman once said to me that “Things just happen.” He was referring to how accidents occur in our lives by chance or fate. However, things don’t just happen by chance; they happen by providence (God’s superintendence

over our lives). God in His providence is taking us through change, which might include trials, to build up our lives in some new way, to do something new and exciting in our hearts, to create more Christian character and Christlikeness in our lives, to increase our faith, to enable us to experience new heights of spiritual growth. Remember that Joseph was thrown into a pit by his brothers and he was left there to die, but God in His providence used these circumstances to eventually bring him to the place of power and blessing. God turned around a tragedy and made it into something that brought spiritual blessing and profit into Joseph's life.



It often takes change to bring God's will and purpose to pass in our lives. Sometimes the changes are not easy. Joseph did not have a walk in the park. He found himself in a pit and a place where he could very easily die. Changes in our health, wealth, work, our position, and place of service are not easy changes to go through, but God will often use changes like this to bring

His perfect will to pass in our lives. What happened to Joseph does happen to us. In fact, God must sometimes take us down into the pits to bring us into a place of great blessing. Like Joseph, we must see God's providential hand in all the trials and changes that He allows into our lives.

Genesis 50:20 is the Old Testament Romans 8:28: "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose." Changes work together to bring about God's greater purposes for our lives which ultimately include to make us more like Christ. Like Joseph, we must say "yes" to change, when that change is meant for our good and God's glory. When we accept change, God's providential changes for our lives, we will be blessed by God like Joseph, realizing that everything was working together for our good. Also, like Joseph, we will experience the Lord's spiritual blessings in our lives such as peace, joy, rest, and contentment.

Many years ago, I was talking to a man that was hurting deeply. His son was paralyzed in an automobile accident. His heart was crushed and broken. And yet,

he was willing to share with me that he knew God was bringing His providential purpose to pass for his son and family. It was exceedingly difficult for him and the family to pass through, but this Christian man knew that God was working in some special way through this difficult time.

- ✓ Have you been willing to accept the changes that God has providentially allowed to come into your own life?
- ✓ What is your reaction to a present change that God has brought into your life?
- ✓ How can you see the Lord's providence working in the midst of your change?

God's providential changes are not always easy, but we can accept them by faith, as Joseph did, and experience God's sufficiency and blessing in our lives.

"I've had many tears and sorrows,
I've had questions for tomorrow,
There've been times I didn't know right from wrong:
But in every situation God gave blessed consolation
That my trials come to only make me strong.

I thank God for the mountains,
And I thank Him for the valleys,
I thank Him for the storms
He brought me through;
For if I'd never had a problem
I wouldn't know that He could solve them,
I'd never know what faith in God could do.

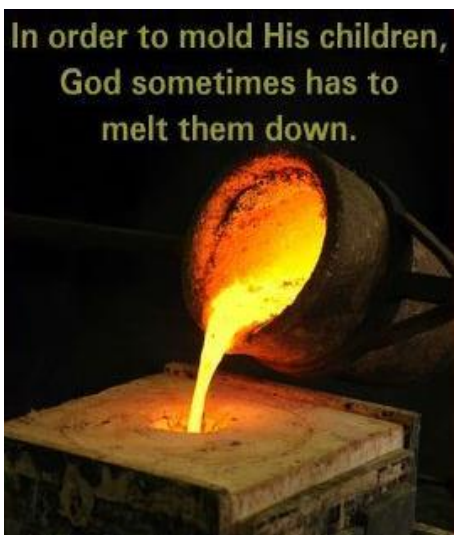
Through it all, through it all,
I've learned to trust in Jesus,
I've learned to trust in God;
Through it all, through it all,
I've learned to depend upon His Word."

C. We must recognize God's purpose in change like Job.

Job realized God had a purpose behind all the changes that He experienced in his life. This purpose was to help him grow spiritually and become a better person. We should not lose sight of what God wants to accomplish in our lives through the changes that He allows us to pass through.

Job 23:10

“But he knoweth the way that I take: *when* he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”



The fact that God “knoweth the way” or path that we pass through in life means that He has ordained it to occur. The trials and changes we face in life are not an afterthought with God. Change is necessary to produce growth and godliness in our lives. We must remember that God’s purpose will often involve change. Job recognized that God wants to purify our lives through the trials and changes we face. Job lost his health, wealth, and family. In spite of these great losses, he realized that God had a purpose in all of it.

The illustration that Job gives is of gold passing through the purification fire. The dross is burned off and only a pure product remains. Today, before gold is sold on the market, it must pass through a purification process. The process is quite complex. It needs to be done under the right circumstances and with the utmost care in safety precautions, since it involves using different chemicals. One thing is certain, when gold passes through this process it comes forth as a pure product.

In a spiritual sense, to be “purified” (“I shall come forth as gold”) means that God wants to make us holier, more mature, fruitful, and faithful to Him. God wants to build Christians character in our lives. We learn from Job’s experience that God always has a purpose and plan for our lives and change is part of it. Change for the better is change that will purify our lives! It will bring spiritual growth and maturity in our lives (1 Pet. 1:7). Beloved, let us never forget that the Lord always

has the underlying purpose of our spiritual growth in His mind, when difficulty and tragedy strike our lives. God brings change into our lives to grow us and make us more like His Son, Jesus Christ. Change should result in us becoming a better Christian that is purified and fit for the Master's use.

- ✓ Have you been willing to pass through the purifying and purging stage of change?
- ✓ Are you allowing the fiery trials to produce greater sanctification and spiritual transformation in your life?
- ✓ In what ways have you become a better Christians through the changes that you have gone through?

“The Refiner’s fire
Has now become my souls desire;
Purged and cleansed and purified
That the Lord be glorified.
He is consuming my soul
Refining me, making me whole.
No matter what I may lose
I choose the Refiner’s fire.”

We must learn to gracefully live with life's changes. In fact, we should grow in our Christian character and virtues through experiencing change. There are many changes that we encounter such as dealing with physical decline, coping with a vocational and financial disappointment, adjusting to family changes, adopting to retirement, preparing and the coping with the death of your spouse, and losing your independence. In the midst of all the changes that we must pass through in life, we must remember that God is still on the throne and that He never makes mistakes when allowing us to experience the various changes associated with life.

Psalm 103:19

“The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.”

Psalm 115:3

“But our God *is* in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.”

“God never moves without purpose or plan.
When trying His servant and molding a man.
Give thanks to the LORD, though your testing seems long.
In darkness, He giveth a song.

O rejoice in the Lord,
He makes no mistake.
He knoweth the end of each path that I take!
For when I am tried and purified,
I shall come forth as gold.”

D. We must find contentment in change like Paul.

Philippians 4:11-13

“Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, *therewith* to be content. I know both how to be abased (*have the bare necessities of life*), and I know how to abound (*have more given to him at a particular time than his immediate needs required*): every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”

Paul passed through many different changes in life. Sometimes he had only the bare necessities of life and was hungry while at other times he had plenty of food and more than he needed. No matter what changes Paul passed through, he was confident that he was in the will of God. He knew that



wherever he was, or in whatever circumstances he found himself, he was there by divine appointment. As a result, he found real contentment in life. Contentment speaks of satisfaction, ease of mind and heart.

Paul’s contentment did not come through will power or the power of positive thinking. It came through Jesus Christ. The word “content” literally means “self-sufficient.”

Hawthorne says:

“The secret of Paul’s independence was his dependence upon Another. His self-sufficiency in reality came from being in vital union with One who is all-sufficient.”

As believers we can possess true inner contentment and peace during the changing seasons of our lives. We do not have to struggle and be overcome with fear and anxiety as we face the changes that God ordains to come into our lives, whether they are physical changes, financial changes, personal changes, job changes, or relationship changes. When we depend upon Christ’s strength and peace during change, we can find contentment in God’s will and purpose for our lives. Changes will come whether we like them or not, but it’s wonderful to know that we can experience God’s inner contentment and peace in the midst of these providential changes.

The secret of contentment is to rest in God’s sovereignty and providence over our lives. The providence of God working in relation to our life and the strength of Jesus Christ is the true source of contentment.

- ✓ What changes have you been experiencing in your own personal life?
- ✓ Can you honestly say that you have been experiencing God’s inner contentment and peace through your changes?
- ✓ Are you ready to rest in God’s providence over your life and find Christ’s peace during your difficult trial and change?

Beloved, it’s time to accept the changes that God wants to make in your personal life, believe that God is in control of the changes that you are facing right now, and be ready to change for God’s glory.

The old prayer is true:

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.”

What do you need to change in your life? What difficult changes are you presently passing through? What does God want to do for you and in you as you pass through these changes? Are you ready to accept these changes by faith and trust in the Lord?

Proverbs 3:5-6

“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”

Remember that change is a normal part of the Christian life. The leaves change colors and the seasons change. In a similar way, we pass through seasonal changes in our own lives. How we respond to change, our attitude during times of change, and what we gain through change is very important. Let us not forget God’s unfailing purpose in change which is to make our lives more like His Son (2 Cor. 3:18). Changes are designed to make us better – not bitter!

Change is part of the Christian experience. Our circumstances change, our wealth changes, our health changes, our friends change, but praise the Lord, He never changes! Malachi 3:6 declares: “For I am the Lord, I change not.” Remember that the unchanging God is in control of our changing circumstances. In the midst all of life's changes, we can place our faith in the truth that our almighty, all-knowing, and ever-present God never changes! This means that He is always filled with wisdom in allowing certain change to come into our lives (Col. 2:3). God’s unchangeableness in character also means that He will always expresses love, mercy, and grace to help us through our times of change.

Hebrews 4:16

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

This means we can trust in God’s constant wisdom and strengthening grace during the difficult phases of our lives. We can know that His will is best for our lives, even when it involves change, and that His purpose will come to pass in our lives. Do not fall into distraction, disillusionment, or despair when facing change. Instead, experience God’s sufficiency through His unchanging character and promises. When reflecting on God’s unchangeable character and how He relates to our lives as we encounter change, we can conclude by saying: “Praise the Lord, He never changes!”

“Life is moving faster than it ever has before
What tomorrow brings us isn’t certain anymore.

So many paths from which to choose, don’t know which way to run
Cause every road leads to nowhere, every road except for one.

Friends and faces come and go like ashes in the wind
Attitudes arise that I don't fully understand.
The things that you can count upon grow fewer every day
But when their number gets to One, that One will show the way.

Praise the Lord, He never changes
I come to Him, He's always there.
He comforts me on every level
Takes the burden that I bear
Praise the Lord, He never changes
He's never any other way.
And He'll be the same tomorrow as He was and is today."