

## PART 1 – EMBRACING CHANGE

This morning we begin a new study that I have called “Embracing Change”, and today will just be a kind of over-arching Introduction to the idea of spiritual change in our lives. So, as we go through this, just remember that it is only an Introduction into how I am going to teach this series and what you can expect from it. This is not a deep Bible study this morning, but a look at why I have chosen to teach on this area, and then eventually, how it will probably impact you personally. What I want to do is to get up at the 38,000-foot level for just a little bit and try to look at the big picture of what does the idea of “embracing change” really mean for us personally. What we know is that once someone has been saved, that after that moment in their life that their personal spiritual growth becomes paramount to that initial salvation experience. It would be silly to think that at that point in their Christian experience that the new believer could just be turned over to their own wisdom and to their own resources. They are barely a baby in Christ, and sin is still their enemy, the world will still influence them greatly, and the devil certainly has other plans for their life. So, beyond that initial moment of salvation in their life, their need for divine help is imperative – and it comes in the form of what the Bible calls “**sanctification**”.

The actual New Testament term “**sanctification**” simply refers to the process of change that is going to happen in every believer’s life. However, what is important about that word is that it never speaks of change in terms of something that happens quickly, or even instantly for that matter. Whereas the moment of salvation is an event that does happen instantly, “**sanctification**” never happens instantly. When the word “**sanctification**” is used in the New Testament it is always identified as a **process of change** that takes place over a period of time. So, changing and uprooting those areas of our life that need to change can be a really difficult struggle for even the strongest of Christians, **so we have to be patient with the process.**

When you sense that God is working in someone else’s life, you as a believer **MUST** be patient with the “process” that is happening in their life. It could be your wife, your husband, your children, your friends, anyone. For me, it can easily be with my students. So, why is it so important that you become very patient during this process. It is because we all have this innate, indwelling proclivity and inclination to become spiritually complacent, spiritually satisfied with where we are – and when that happens, we lose our desire to really change anything. This is the normal struggle that everyone has with their flesh. The natural inclination is always to do what we want to do rather than what God wants us to do, so we have to understand that that reality will not change overnight. For the believer, there is nothing in the Scriptures about instant spiritual change, so please do not get discouraged with either yourself or with others when they are struggling with changing.

- Be patient with them.
- Give them the freedom to fail.
- Give them the grace to learn from the trials they may be facing.
- Give them the encouragement that they need to not give up when something seems really difficult and overly challenging to them.

So, I want us to think of this work of sanctification in our life in three very simple terms – **learning, changing, and growing.** There are truths and principles that we simply have to learn so that we can change areas of our life that need to change, and when we make those changes, it is then and only then

that we are actually growing in our Christian life. **Until areas of our life are changing for the better, we simply are not growing.** However, having said that, I am so thankful for the spiritual reality that God allows me time to adjust to what He is trying to both show me and do in my life. If you are like me, I just do not get it the first time that God tries to show something to me. I want to, but I just do not get it, and even when I later figure out what God may want me to change in my life, I do not always know how to make those changes. Some areas may be really simple, but generally I have not always found that to be the case. So, what I find myself struggling with is not so much with “what” God wants me to change, but “how” does He actually want me to change it. This study will deal with both issues of what do I change and then how do I change it.

So, when it comes to sanctification, if someone is teaching in you such a way as to “**demand immediate results**”, then in all likelihood they have very little understanding about the idea of sanctification. What they will drift off into is teaching that is focused on just changing your behavior. Change this, change that, do this better. However, from my perspective as your pastor, I do not want to push you into change, and especially not to subtly demand that you have to change. As your pastor, here is what I sincerely want and am praying for you as we go through this series. My desire is that you will begin to clearly see what God wants you to change, and then because of your own desires and understanding of what God wants you to do, you will determine how you are going to make the changes which you believe that God is leading you to make. I am actually trying to develop a realistic and practical way that you can measure if you are actually making progress.

**My simple goal in this series is to encourage you to make the changes in your life that you probably already know that God wants you to make.**

Now, what we clearly understand is that there are only so many areas of your life that you can be changing at any one time – and God knows that, He understands that reality. So, from my 38,000-foot perspective as your pastor, there are three critical areas that I believe are necessary to actually help you change.

1. **First, there has to be a genuine desire to change.** No matter how strong I may teach, I know that I cannot give you that desire. People come to church week after week and month after month and year after year, and they never change – no matter how good or how strong or how encouraging the teaching and preaching may actually be. So, if there is an area of your life that God wants you to change, then somewhere and somehow, there has to be something that supernaturally stimulates you to want to make those changes in your life. God is not going to give you a list of 158 things that He wants you to change, and then tell you to go make it happen. He knows that you cannot focus on making all of those changes in your life. So, here is a key principle related to what creates desire for change.

**It is the Word of God that creates the desire for change.**

God may use someone else to bring that word to you, but still, it is God’s Word that is the actual instrument that makes the deepest impact on your desire to change. I love what [Psalm 37:4](#) says, **Ps 37:4 (NKJV) Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.**

What this verse is saying is that the more that you delight yourself in what God wants for your life, the stronger will become your desire to do what He wants you do. Think of it this way. God Himself will actually give you the right desires and the right longings to please Him. He cares about you so much that He is going to work on your heart and give you the right desires.

2. Secondly, not only do we need an actual desire to change, but **we need to have a faith in God where we actually believe that He will give us the power to change.** If I thought that I had to live the Christian life in my own will-power and personal strength, I would really be discouraged. So, what I really want to happen is that you will develop a strong deep-seated confidence in the power of God to both help you and sustain you in changing what you know He wants you to change. I want you to think of it as a journey of trusting God and watching Him work in your life. It is a journey where you see God giving you the power and the desire to do His will. [Philippians 4:13](#) is such an encouragement because it says,

**Php 4:13 (NKJV) I (we) can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (us).**

[2 Corinthians 12:9](#) says,

**2Co 12:9 (NKJV) And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.**

The words “**made perfect**” are in the present tense, indicative mood, passive voice. What all of that means in very simple terms is that God is the one that is always giving you strength when you are weak. If you feel weak about certain things in your life, then join the crowd. We all feel that way at times. I certainly do, but I know that God is always perfecting something, accomplishing something, improving something, sharpening something in my life and He is doing the same in your life. I just have to actually believe that He is so that I can trust Him to give me the power to change what He wants me to change.

3. Thirdly, because we actually have a desire to change and because we have faith that God will actually give us the power to change, **we simply ask Him to help us to change.** Because the words “**made perfect**” are in the passive voice, which means that someone else or something else is acting on our life, we know that He will help us. He is not asking us to do everything on our own, even when He gives us commands.

In some ways we could say that the change that God wants to help us with is **progressive and gradual.** We learn something, we apply it to our life over time, and we are changed. I think of it as someone who has been involved in an accident and so they go to physical therapy to help them be restored back to their normal health. Every Christian needs to make changes in their life – every Christian. So, here is what we know about meaningful change, so listen carefully.

**If you are not changing, you are not growing, and if you are not growing, it is probably because you are resisting God’s best for your life.**

The Christian life is always about making godly changes in our life. For instance, let us just assume that I have a quick temper. What I will find in Scripture is that God simply wants to change that area of my life. There is no debate about what God wants or what the Scriptures say on a simple subject like this.

I have something in my life that I know displeases God, and the only thing that He wants me to do is change it and get rid of it in my life. Having a quick temper is never God's best and it will never yield the fruit in my life that God wants it to yield, so Scripture will compel and command me to change. This is not "*Let go and let God*". I know that sounds very spiritual, but it really is very unbiblical.

**What God desires is that I recognize what it is in my life that grieves Him, and then start the "process" of changing that area of my life.**