

# Change

By Paul Penner

## **Empowered for change...**

Everybody needs to change... even babies. Shortly before I married Sharon, my grandfather gave me some advice – he said, ‘Don’t count on changing your wife and don’t be discouraged if change doesn’t come quickly.’ I think he was telling me that change is slow and even time on its own won’t guarantee change.

What is change? How does one change? How come change can be so difficult? How come we can be on the journey of life for so long and still be tempted by some of the same things we were tempted by when we started?

Is it change when we conform to external pressures?... or have different reasons to submit to authority we used to rebel against (*like minimizing consequences if we don’t*)?... or dropping old habits like chewing our finger nails?... what about finally agreeing to see a marriage counsellor and doing some exercises?... or like being home on time to meet curfew because I got into trouble last time?... or quitting smoking?... or going on a diet and losing 10 lbs?... or moving on after a break up? These are pretty common so called ‘changes’ that people could feel good about. Is that what change looks like?

What about if we quit engaging in a behavior but we still feel like doing it? Is this the kind of change that alters a life? How does God evaluate change? The value of any action rises no higher than the motivations behind it. It is not just our actions that are important, but also our motives.

Celebrating progress, even in small increments, makes sense. It would be **a huge disincentive** if we didn’t. Everybody needs a cheering section! However when it comes to celebrating, we should draw a distinction between temporal vs. enduring changes. For example, a new addition to the family is a big change. This calls for more celebration. Small changes are external and temporal in value whereas big changes are internal and have an enduring relational impact. Changes that have little impact for good on ourselves or others are less important.

What people call change is often cosmetic... that is, temporal and just rearranging externals. For substantial change, behaviors must (*to begin with*) reflect new motivations and be sustained. For more substantial change, we need to deal with the heart – that is, our

desires - which provides the basis for our motivations. Some of our desires are God-made relational desires that never end. They are created to be eternal – these desires are called **thirsts**. Change that impresses God has a relational ‘thirst’ component and therefore has an eternal / spiritual dimension. Change is insufficient if it pertains only to this life. We need to effectively address both temporal **and** spiritual needs to be successful as change agents.

Failing to change in a matter that has only temporal value can be serious, but failing to redirect thirst back to that which leads to ‘life’ in the eternal dimension can be ‘suicidal’ if persisted. That’s why Jesus said, “What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his own soul?” Change is really about redirecting desires to be consistent with what is really needed and how to meet those needs effectively. Change is rearranging dependence that manifests in new behaviors. It is wise to redirect relational thirst back to God-ordained sources from that which was never meant to satisfy. In theological terms we call this *repentance*. Real change (changing paths that lead to ‘death’ and back to ‘life’) is so difficult that we can’t do it without outside help. I have identified six elements that are needed to facilitate and sustain meaningful change, whether that change be for oneself or for others, for the temporal / material or relational / eternal. We need all six. Sometimes missing one or more of these can be a critical reason for failing to create change.

**Firstly**, we need **dynamic truth** (*the Bible calls it understanding*). The word dynamic is the word from which we get dynamite – it means power. When we have cause and effect understanding of how things work together, it is empowering. We need this for both temporal and eternal change objectives. If we don’t start with an accurate premise, no matter how good our logic, we won’t arrive at an accurate conclusion. If we don’t start with a true bank balance, no matter how many times we calculate the entries, it won’t yield an accurate total. No matter how many times we memorize a lie it will never be true. We need to build our lives on accurate understanding of how things work in every area of endeavour.

**Secondly**, we need **dynamic skill sets** to be able to use what we know in order to achieve desired effects. We can have information catalysts in our possession but not know how to use them to influence and/or control desired effects or outcomes. Dynamic knowledge is gained through a cognitive process, whereas dynamic skills are gained through experience and practice. An athlete might know the rules of a game but he needs to become skilled in using his knowledge to hit the ball, run the bases and score a run. Skills are developed by using dynamic knowledge.

**Thirdly**, we need the **motivation** to actually use developed skills sets in combination with knowledge we have gained to achieve desired outcomes. To be motivated we need... 1. to want something enough that we will defer (or invest) time, energy, and/ or resources to achieve it; 2. to have hope that what we want is achievable; 3. to believe that the cost to achieve what we want is worth it.

**Fourthly**, we need **conditions of opportunity**. There is a right time for everything under the sun. We don’t sow barley to get \$3.00 per bushel back when the market is paying \$10.00 for wheat if our goal is to make a profit.

**Fifthly**, we need to **persevere** so that conditions of opportunity have the possibility of intersecting with actions needed to achieve desired outcomes. The soil that produced a harvest in Luke 8 included 'perseverance'.

**Sixth** and **finally**, we need to **humble** ourselves where we are dependent on resources over which others have authority. Humility acknowledges where we are dependent. Humility appropriates God's grace & often man's favor. We are empowered to act or change when we have the capacity and resources to act on our own behalf or on behalf of others. A person is **disempowered** when resources that are needed in order to act on behalf of one's needs or legitimate expectations of others are withheld or denied. **To empower** is to create the conditions, which enable someone to act on their own behalf.

It is my personal **life mission** to value people whom God has given me a role in serving, enough to invest my time, energy, resources and even my life in order to energize and enliven their God-given capacities and empower them to fulfill their God-given purposes. I aspire to this. And as I walk with God, I trust that I will become better at this. I hope you join me in empowering ourselves & others with knowledge, skills, awakened motivation, perseverance, discernment of the moment and humility.