

Real Change



This is the big picture reality of change. Change happens if there is constant interaction between us and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Recognizing that can help us to take the steps that they are prodding us towards.

You may have to watch the video several times. It isn't a complex picture but it does need to be well understood before it is taught to others. I have preached this message all over the world. In my preparation for a specific church and setting I always ask the Lord which of the six areas is the stumbling block for this particular congregation and why. In his love for them, he guides me towards the obstacle that is holding them back.

In most settings it is one or two areas that are weak. When I preach, I spend extra time on those areas to make sure that people understand and can respond appropriately. At the conclusion of the message I often have them walk up on the platform of the sanctuary in accordance with the illustration. Each step up to the platform equals one of the steps going into God's presence. Each step down corresponds to the steps back out into the daily arena of life.

Your group may be stronger in one area than another or it may lack completely in just one area. You can't facilitate successful change if any of them aren't functioning. You will find that some students may receive Christ as a part of this message. Others will see what is holding them back and take the next step. Most will need the help you and your staff will give.

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The Holy Spirit and Conviction

John 16:5-16 shows us that the Holy Spirit will convict us of our sin, comfort us, and guide us. The challenge? Will we respond or run? Our culture says that we avoid all three of these. We have to relearn how to react.

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His conviction is based on his love for us and the fact that he doesn't want to see us or others hurt by our sin or immature actions. If we are feeling conviction we should respond rather than run or try to blame others. Taking responsibility for our own action is the first step in change. Knowing that we are loved and that Jesus has a solution for conviction is necessary to make that first step possible.

When convicted we only have one course of action that will take care of the guilt we feel. We have to go to Father God and ask for forgiveness in Jesus' name. We have to go to the cross.

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If we don't go to the cross then we tend to try and cover over the voice of God or ignore it. We avoid church, worship, or reading the Bible. Our activities change and we keep ourselves so busy that we fall asleep from exhaustion at night (if we aren't exhausted, we can't sleep because of the guilt).

- Do your students avoid their guilt or deal with it quickly?
- Have they created a lifestyle that avoids God or one that includes him?
- Have they learned how to clean up their messes with God?
- Have they learned how to clean up their messes with people?

Giving them the tools and opportunities to do this are all apart of equipping the saints for the work of the ministry. That means you remind them of the guilt-forgiveness fact. It means you give them the opportunity to experience forgiveness almost every time you meet.

Going to the Cross and Beyond

Forgiveness is a miracle but the miracle isn't supposed to stop when we are white as snow. For many people that's all they know about the Christian life. Sin, being forgiven, and going out and do it again and ... you know the cycle.

Permanent change only happens when something changes inside us. The two key elements have to do with the head and the heart. We need to spend time with God for that to happen. If we don't, then we will only repeat the cycle of sin and forgiveness for the rest of our life.

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Help people to design their own personal time for God in their schedule. You can help them by having times like these designed into your retreats, camps, outreaches, and services. Until it becomes a personal discipline for them, you will need to help your students and staff have these experiences in their lives. John 14:6 tells us we have that privilege. We need to utilize it.

The Comfort of the Father

Time in God's presence will allow us to deal with the heart issues. Here we can unload our pain, sorrow, wounds, and fears. Here he can replace them with the truth that sets us free from the old patterns that used to determine and dominate our lives.

For example, I may be a quiet person because I have made mistakes in the past when I opened my mouth and people made fun of me. Dealing with that in God's presence will replace that with a boldness and strength. Only God's touch can heal that area and replace it with what should have been there all along.

The key again is: Do the students and staff have the opportunities on their own or do you need to provide it? Either way it becomes a calendar issue. Train them how to calendar for change.

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Five minute devotions won't work. These things are issues that take time. Give him enough time to do something great in a life.

The Renewing of the Mind

The heart and the head are connected and influence each other greatly. We need to complement a healthy heart with the truth for a renewed mind (Corinthians 12:2). For example, if rejection is an issue then a scripture like Psalm 27 could help set someone free. It may be more than one scripture but the truth has to get in there somewhere or the heart will not work in unison with the head-they will fight each other.

Your mind is like a filter that responds to things before your heart gets a chance to be impacted. How your mind deals with the issue will determine what happens in the heart.

Most of us know about a military veteran who has struggled as they try to live life outside of the war zone. Other veterans seem to be doing just fine. Why? That was determined by the condition of their mind. For some who had never seen blood, or understood that war is a result of man's greed and desires (just look in the Old Testament), this was a nightmare that they haven't awakened from yet.

Others saw the same action and atrocities and came out very grateful. Grateful that their lives were spared and that God had a plan for them to fulfill here on this earth.

One was shattered and another strengthened. One was guilt ridden - another was forgiven. The setting didn't determine it; the mindset of the individual did. Renewing our minds is necessary to help us deal with the past as well as the future.

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If I think that Christians should get a red carpet (very unbiblical by the way) life and one blessing after another without any problems or hassles then I can almost guarantee that my faith in God will be shaken on a regular basis.

If I think along biblical lines then I can face the real issues of life and meet the challenges. But I will only think biblically if I have been exposed to the truth and had the opportunity to memorize and renew my mind. You can have the software but if you don't install it and learn how to work with it, it doesn't do you any good.

The question arises; Do the students and staff have the exposure to the truth as well as time to memorize and internalize it? If so, then the renewing will be an ongoing process. If not, then they will be doomed to repeat the past.

Jesus as Lord

Mark 1:17 is a simple sentence but is it a practiced truth? Is he our coach or is he just an advisor? Are we playing life by his rules or making up our own as we go along. He can't bless our mess unless it is our honest effort at his plan.

Is he our coach or is he just an advisor?

Presenting the Gospel plan of repentance and following Christ is always a part of our work. How often do we do it? Do we present the full claims of Christ or only parts? Do we give people the tools they need to live that life or only frustrate themselves?

Are we giving them opportunities to be involved in the activities that Jesus called us to do? All of these have to do with someone giving their lives to Jesus. As their spiritual caretakers we must give them the tools and opportunities to grow in all areas.

The Holy Spirit as the Power Source

Now that we are back out into the real world with a renewed mind and a life submitted to Jesus are we ready to embrace the power that the Holy Spirit has made available to us?

He convicted us before and that wasn't all that fun. Now he will guide and empower us if we will let him. That means prayer time where we pray in the Spirit. That means having a lifestyle that is slowed enough where we can keep in step with the Spirit (Galatians 5:25).

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All of these factors will become a part of our lives if we also embrace the painful times of conviction and comfort. We can't shake his hand and keep Him at a distance when he convicts and give him a big hug because he gives us power. We need to embrace him at all times, in all settings, and for all that he does in our lives.

Only a renewed mind realizes that conviction is from God and that it is for our good. It

is based on his love. If that is understood then we can embrace the power of the Holy Spirit when it is needed. If not, we will never have power for any length of time.

Again, are our people growing in this area and are we giving them the tools to grow with? Remember the teacher hasn't taught until the learner has learned. You will recognize that some of your student's and staff's problems are based on one or more of the six key areas covered in the loop of life.

Your "lost kids" and the "have-to-be-there kids" are only living in conviction. No wonder they don't want to be there. Your new Christians may be very frustrated and constantly on the verge of giving up. They need some real comfort and renewing times to make it. Your solid students can become a little flaky if they have hit a lordship issue (something he wants them to do that they don't want to do) with Jesus. Everything was cool with God until he asked me to be a "...". Then the problems begin. For others they have a great zeal but not enough knowledge or power to pull it off.

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It can sound complex but at least it can be understood and truth always sets you free ... even if it is a long road to total freedom.