

Change

Change is painful, and it has often been said that we will only change if the pain of not changing is greater than the pain associated with the change. Moving to a new house is painful, for example, but a family will move if the house they are living in is too small or too decrepit and the new house is far better than the one they currently have. We will change if the pain of staying the same is greater than the pain of change.

Change is not only painful, but it can be frightening. When I began my seminary education, I decided to attend a seminary north of Chicago, a place which I had visited only once, a place where I knew only one person. So visceral were my feelings, that as I left Ontario, I felt the need to pull my vehicle over because I felt that I was going to throw up. I was leaving what I knew and what was familiar to go to a place where I knew no one, and I was afraid of what this new situation would be like. When I arrived at my new home and began my studies, the pain of being in an unfamiliar environment continued, and I felt an incredibly powerful homesickness. This passed, however, when my classes began, and I met fellow students and became friends with many of them. It turned out that my year in that seminary was one of the best years of educational life. I longed to return to finish my studies, but the high tuition and living costs of that school prevented me from continuing, and I enrolled in Calvin Seminary. There, I discovered that this change was also good, and I developed some life-long friendships with both students and professors. While change was frightening, things turned out well, and I am glad that I endured the pain I experienced when moving to new places.

When confronted with the possibility (or need) for change, what may hold us back is the fear of the unknown and the pain of change. Yet, our fears can be completely unfounded, and the benefits of making the change can far outweigh the pain of entering into a new situation. Take the earlier example of moving to a new house. While the prospect of moving to a new house might be intimidating because there are many unknowns, after experiencing life in the new house, the family understands that life is so much better with a house that fits their needs.

The family that makes the move to a new house has valuable experience that they can share with others. Perhaps they have friends who have a similar problem, and they can help their friends envision what life could be like. This is often called "casting a vision." Casting a vision helps others see the benefits of change and helps them move to a better life. Casting a vision helps others overcome the fear of the unknown and makes the pain of change more manageable.

As followers of Jesus Christ, as a church, our primary task is to work to build God's kingdom. Our task is to bring all parts of creation back under the lordship of Jesus Christ. That means that we are asking for change. The world has fallen into sin, and the values of the world are often completely opposite of the ones Christ asks us to have. Differing values results in different priorities, different systems, different lifestyles, etc. To bring God's world under the lordship of Jesus Christ means that there needs to be changes. And, as we know, change can be frightening and painful.

As Christians, people who follow Jesus Christ, we can help others understand the benefits of living for Jesus in the way we live and act. We model what it is like to live with Jesus as our Lord, and we speak of the blessings we have received as we experience his presence in our lives. Our experience enables us to cast a vision for others so that they can become willing to consider the blessing of trusting Jesus. Effectually, living our lives as citizens of God's kingdom and as children in God's family is a witness to the blessings of putting our faith in Jesus. Living as disciples of Jesus Christ is as powerful a witness to the gospel as are our words, recognizing, of course, that we will need to be able to give an answer for the hope that others see in us.

If we are going to do that effectively, however, we cannot be reluctant in our commitment to Jesus and his kingdom. If someone moves into a new and better house and yet continually speaks of their longing for the old house, they are not casting an effective vision. If I had attended seminary but expressed how much I disliked the courses and how living north of Chicago was a terrible experience, others would have become discouraged by my attitude and actions. Wholeheartedly adopting what it is we want others to experience is necessary if we want them to experience the same. In other words, being reluctant (or, better, unfaithful) followers of Jesus Christ will not encourage others to consider putting their trust in the Lord.

Change is painful, and it can be frightening. People will only consider change if their fears are removed and the pain of not changing becomes greater than the pain of changing. God has called us to help others understand that the blessings of belonging to Jesus far outweigh the pain of leaving the values, priorities, and activities of those who do not belong to the kingdom of God. A faithful witness to Jesus Christ is one who helps others understand what a blessing it is to belong to Jesus, and the best way to model that is to throw ourselves wholeheartedly into living faithfully. Of course, we recognize that the only way people will change to become followers of Jesus Christ is through the work of the Spirit, but the Spirit uses us to accomplish his task.

We have been changed because of Jesus, and that change, we know, has been exceedingly good for us. Let's also be agents of change in the lives of others, helping them to see the blessings that come from putting our trust in Jesus.

Pastor Gary