

A process of change

Tim Miller, Gateway Fellowship, 7/23/2017

- 1.) Hurt enough - realize you need to change
- 2.) Learn enough - realize change is possible
- 3.) Receive enough - actually change

I. Hurt enough - realize you need to change

The Lord says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life.

I will advise you and watch over you.

9 Do not be like a senseless horse or mule

that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control."

10 Many sorrows come to the wicked,

but unfailing love surrounds those who trust the Lord.

11 So rejoice in the Lord and be glad, all you who obey him!

Shout for joy, all you whose hearts are pure!

(Psalm 32:8-11)

If we're healthy, God can reach us with a whisper. God can lead a healthy disciple with eye contact, a whisper, a voice, our conscience, the voice of others, circumstances, and inspired logic. His original and enduring intention is for our hearts to be happy and free, and for our desires to align with His in such a way that he can relate to us with subtle communications. The more intimate we are with someone, the more we understand the depths of who they are, and can anticipate — not simply respond to, what they might want or need. God intends us to be friends, not servants. He wants to give us authority to ask whatever we wish. A gentle whisper, or the beauty of Jesus

reach a healthy heart, so if pain is the only thing that can reach us, it indicates that we've been running over a whole lot of roadblocks for a while now.

Outside of God's design, we end up grinding the gears, or blowing a gasket, or burning up our brakes. Eventually it takes a toll. A friend of mine used to say, "if you're gonna be dumb, you'd better be tough." He ended up being pretty dumb. Consequences are much louder than sermons. We spend too much time rescuing people from the very thing that might rescue them from sin. We plead with people, but rearrange our lives to keep them functional, instead of letting them hit the wall. We forget that **sometimes people won't change until the pain of staying the same is greater than the pain of change**. That's how I came to the Lord. I became aware that I was too far east of Eden; that my choices were hurting the people I loved most, that I didn't even respect myself any more, and that I was becoming a person who would eventually be incapable of love and trust, locked in a prison of my own making.

I don't think we can oversell the glory of heaven. But I do think we can undersell the glory of what's available in this life. My salvation experience was rooted in a realization of what a miserable man I'd become living from my wisdom for my pleasure, and reaching out in the off chance that God might have mercy on me. My prayer for salvation was about getting free or saved from that. Saved from the hell of me on the throne of my life. **Hurt enough, realize your need for change.**

II. Learn enough - believe you can change

Jesus is the brightest light in human history. Jesus is both our Gift and our Example. **As Gift, Jesus is our righteousness**, forgiveness, and advocate with the Father. He is our spotless Lamb who takes away our sins so that they are removed as far as the East is from the West, throwing them in a sea of forgetfulness so that they are never remembered against us again. Through Christ we are holy and blameless in God's sight. That's Jesus as Gift.

As Example, Jesus reveals what it looks like to be a human in right relationship with Abba. If Jesus did it, we can do it. If Jesus told us to turn the other cheek, extend mercy, go the extra mile, forgive 70 times 7, and be free of lust, greed, worry, and hatred, then **it wasn't to prove that we can't** so that we'd realize our need. It was so that we'd abide in Him deeply enough that His nature would be the sap running through our roots and up through our lives all the way from motives to thoughts, emotions, and actions.

We can never over-sell the glory of Jesus as Gift, but I believe we have undersold Jesus as Example, because we didn't think it was possible. We didn't realize following Him as example is about abiding in Him as Gift and letting Him live through us. We can hear God's voice, heal the sick, command the created cosmos to line up with Abba's will with authority, but most importantly, we can be God's dearly loved children: Jesus, as Example, taught us these things.

Before we the Israelites can take the promised land they need to know two things: **First, the land is worth taking**, even if it is difficult. Moses didn't just send the spies into the land to spy out the enemy, but also to investigate what the land was like (**Numbers 13**). And they brought back the giant cluster of grapes as just a taste. The treasure is worth the price, and Moses wanted them to see it.

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.”
(**Matthew 13:44**)

The second thing they needed to know was who God is, and that He has promised the land to them and their ancestors. If they don't know both of these things, they won't face the giants. They won't know there's anything in life but slavery. I still find far too many of us living like there is no promised land, and no God of delivering power for this life. And until we learn what's available, what's been accomplished, what's ours in Christ, and what's being offered, we won't even know it's possible.

When I read history and discovered the stories of saints who came from being enemies of God to friends with God, and how that happened when they realized that Jesus' death freed them from the endless treadmill of never being good enough - it opened my heart up to the possibility of a grace-based relationship with love instead of a tense workaholism propelled by the pressures of performance.

When I discovered that the gifts of prophesy and healing were still active in this covenant - and then read about people like John G. Lake, and modern believers like Randy Clark, I realized that this is possible. The kingdom-of-God as ***lived reality*** is possible.

But knowing doesn't make it automatically happen. It just makes it available. **Hurt enough, need to change. Learn enough — realize change is possible.**

III. Receive enough - able to change

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17)

There is a big difference between doctrines and lived realities. I know that joy in the Holy Spirit is one third of what Paul said the Kingdom of God is about rather than mere rules. I know it. But I don't think it's my lived reality at a high level yet. It can be, though, once I actually believe and live out some things that joy is founded upon.

James is the guy in the New Testament who popularized the idea that if you aren't living it, stop claiming you believe it, because what you truly believe is revealed by what you do. Jesus said people draw near with their mouths, but their hearts are far from him. They say a lot of worshipful stuff to and about him, but don't do what he says, so history will record that he says, "I don't know you." Even though they sure claimed to know him.

I am aware theologically that God is the fountain of living waters, that he is the source of the most satisfying love and hope and peace that can ever be. I am aware theologically that he has chosen me and adopted me and speaks to me and has a plan for my life that is good and right and for the healing of the nations and that he ALWAYS has my best interests at heart...on and on I could go. But the problem is that being theologically aware of these things is not the same thing as actually having them be **lived realities**. I can see on the news about a bombing somewhere far away on the planet, but unless I personally know somebody there it doesn't really affect my emotions, life, priorities in a deep way - typically.

And what am I getting at? I'm getting at the idea that until I am personally engaged with Jesus as the bible presents him - deeply and personally involved with him, in doing his sayings and re-doing his doings - until then, what he believed won't be my lived reality - even though I claim to believe it.

Whatever we focus on the most grows bigger in our understanding. The more I think about and talk about something, whether cars, soccer, a girl, work, illnesses, isis, the perfect healthy diet...whatever! Whatever we focus on grows bigger in our understanding, bigger in our hearts, bigger in our priorities, bigger in our mental map of the world. What gets your attention, eventually gets you.

When what's wrong with the circumstance is taking up more space in my head and heart and mouth than what's so right with the gospel, then you can bet that worry and complaints and fear are going to dislodge peace and gratitude and faith. They'll erode the foundations where love grows best. But when a better gospel than this circumstance, when a bigger Jesus than what the devil is doing, when a more wise and kind Abba than what that person who is breaking my heart is doing - when God becomes a lived reality in the present moments, then change happens. We step out of what's normal for the kingdoms of the world into what's normal in God's kingdom. We manifest the kingdom on earth.

And that happens, not because we build ourselves through discipline. That happens because we learn to abide in the finished work of Jesus, the always available and present grace of my place in Christ. I'm not out. I'm not striving to attain. I'm simply remembering and receiving and cooperating with what's already mine because of Jesus. Abide. Receive. Bear much fruit. Apart from Jesus, I can do nothing worth doing.

But isn't that the thing that gets me? How hard it is sometimes to face myself, face my fear, sadness, hurt, depression, whatever it is, and actually relate honestly to God? It takes effort to drag my idolatrous heart to the actual fountain of living water when it's pretty sure that a lot of other little trinkets and treasures and distractions will do the job, maybe not ultimately better, but they're easier and less costly and less ... well... they are more instant gratification. And that's the thing. Drinking salt water because it's easier than doing the work to get the salt out will eventually dehydrate you. Yeah. You drink yourself dry because you are drinking the wrong thing. Your thirst is dumb. It's your job to direct that desire to the right place. But when we do. When we come together with God's people and sing, pray, worship, look into God's face. When we spend just a few minutes enjoying God. Seeing him clearly. Allowing his Spirit to wash over us. Allowing him to recalibrate us. Letting him love us. Letting him just be with us. Be together. The more we do that, the more he is our lived reality, and that transforms us. Until the fake looks and feels fake, and the real feels properly attractive.

When I eat wrong and don't exercise, I crave the wrong foods AND I don't know when to stop. When I exercise and eat sensibly, my palate changes and I automatically feel gross if I eat too much fast food or overstuff my belly.

Receive enough, able to change. I think the reality that God is love and those who live in love know God is actually a totally phd level spiritual insight. If we don't love, we haven't received enough of God's love. It hasn't yet become the lived reality we've rooted in, that sap hasn't flowed through every cell of our being and transformed us yet.

Before Jesus, people speculated about what and when and how the kingdom would come. Jesus said, “Repent. Change the way you think, live, and act. The kingdom’s here now. Make space for it by throwing out what you’re into now and coming after Me instead. Enter my kingdom now. Begin to live in the reality NOW of the kingdom that is one day going to take over everywhere and forever.”

The kingdom isn’t eating and drinking - not rules. It is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Righteousness in Christ. Peace because worry went out when we stopped worshiping stuff and money and people’s opinions as our security. And joy because we’re already in and we know God and we know the end of the story. We experience God’s goodness as a lived reality, not just song lyrics. At least, we can, if we... receive enough — we actually change.

- 1.) Hurt enough - realize you need to change
- 2.) Learn enough - realize change is possible
- 3.) Receive enough - actually change