

INTRODUCTION

This is the second message in the series on change entitled, “Need a Change of You?” Most people are wanting a change of “view”—a change of location, or a change of their situation, but what is really needed is a change of YOU—personal change. This message is “Change, of Course.” You can read it with or without the comma. Change is going to happen, of course, or you may need a change of course—a change of direction.

Jesus talked about the need for change in Matthew 18:1-4: “At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said, ‘I tell you the truth, unless you CHANGE and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.’”

We have seen radical changes in America over the past 100 years. For instance, in 1907, the average life expectancy in the U.S. was only 47 years (compared to about 78 years today); only 14 percent of homes had a bathtub; 8 percent of homes had a telephone; \$11.00 was the cost of a 3-minute long distance call from Denver to NYC; and the average wage was 22 cents per hour, so that 3 minute phone call would have cost the equivalent of five hours of labor. In 1907 women washed their hair about once a month using either Borax or egg yolks for shampoo! 100 years ago there were only 8,000 cars in America and 141 miles of paved road. The maximum speed limit in most cities was 10 mph. 95 percent of babies were born at home and only 6 percent of Americans were high school graduates. In 1907 there were 230 murders reported in the entire U.S. (Detroit alone had 417 murders in 2006); and this may blow your mind, but 100 years ago, more people were moving from the U.S. to Mexico than from Mexico to the U.S.!

During this series about embracing change, I’m encouraging you NOT to fear change—if you do, you’re going to be fearful because there are going to be more and more changes around us and they’re going to come faster and faster. As followers of Jesus Christ, we need to be willing to adapt to changing times by hanging onto the unchanging nature of God. As we talk about a change of you, I want to talk about cultural changes and personal changes. First, I want you to be aware of:

1. CULTURAL CHANGES WE MUST UNDERSTAND

Over the past thirty years we’ve seen technological changes, sociological changes, and moral changes. If you’re going to deal with change you must understand the impact of these changes.

(1) Changes in Technology: Everything is going faster and getting smaller

Just think about it, until about 150 years ago, the fastest a person could travel was the speed of a horse—about 25 mph. But then there were trains that could go almost 40 mph, cars that could go almost 60 mph, airplanes that could go almost 200 mph and then jets that could go at over 400 mph. When George Washington was President, it took him ten days to travel from his home in Virginia to Washington D.C. Today the Space Shuttle speeds along at 25,000 mph and covers the distance between Washington and San Francisco in about 2 minutes.

Someone said, “My great-grandfather rode a horse, but was afraid of a train. My grand-father rode a train but was afraid of a car. My father drove a car, but was afraid of an airplane, and I fly in an airplane, and I’m afraid of a horse!”

As you know the first computers in the 1960s occupied entire rooms. But now there is more speed and memory on my Blackberry than in the computers that were around only ten years ago. And this is not only a phone, it keeps all my appointments, has over a thousand of you in my contacts list, it is a camera—smile—and it has a gigabyte of storage for my favorite songs. That’s how fast technology is changing.

The internet has exploded over the past 20 years. For instance, when Bill Clinton was elected president in 1993, there were only about 50 websites on the world wide web. Today, nobody knows how many there are because every minute dozens of new website are set up. Google estimates there are at least 20 billion different websites operating today!

Most churches are missing out on this technological revolution. Next week, I’m not going to ask you to turn your cell phones off—go ahead and bring them—just put them on vibrate. For those of you who choose, I’ll text you my message notes next week. All you have to do is to send me your cell phone number and I’ll send you a text during the worship service next week so you can have the notes on your phone rather than using a printed outline! Just email me your number at david@mail.gabc.org. You’ll actually receive three texts, because I’m going to do it at each worship service. We’ll continue to see amazing technological advances in the future.

(2) Changes in Sociology: Every decision is harder because of multiple choices

When I was growing up, there were three television choices, NBC, CBS, and ABC. Today, there are 750 channels—and none of them are any good! When I was a kid, my choices for ice cream were vanilla, strawberry, or chocolate—today there are thousands of flavors. Coffee used to be a choice between regular or decaf. But there are over 20,000 different combinations you can choose at your local Starbucks. You might think all these choices make life easier, but actually, we’re finding all these choices make life more stressful.

Dr. Barry Schwartz has written a book entitle, *The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less*. He writes: “Choosing something as (seemingly) simple as shampoo can force us to wade through dozens, even hundreds, of brands. Constantly being asked to make choices, even about the simplest things, forces us to invest time, energy, and no small amount of self-doubt, and dread. There comes a point at which choice becomes debilitating rather than liberating.” Don’t expect that to change. Over the next decade we are going to be bombarded with more and more choices.

(3) Changes in Morality: Every value is being challenged

For the first 200 years of America’s history, right was right and wrong was wrong, but over the past 30 years, we’ve seen a dramatic shift away from the Biblical values that made our nation great. Parents used to teach that not only is honesty the best policy, it is the *only* policy. But now we’ve arrived at a time when a mother in Garland, Texas coaches her 6-year-old daughter to lie

in an essay claiming her dad was killed in Iraq so she could win tickets to a Hannah Montana concert.

I heard about a coach at a public school who saw a group of guys kneeling in the gym. He walked over and said, “What’s going on here?” The guys said, “We’re just shooting dice, coach.” He said, “Whew, for a minute there I thought you might have been praying.” We used to simply assume our culture would follow Biblical morality, but those days are long gone. We’re now living in a time when wrong is now right and right is now wrong. We’ve can no longer expect the majority of people to follow Biblical moral standards.

II. PERSONAL CHANGES WE MUST UNDERTAKE

When the disciples of Jesus were arguing about who was the greatest, Jesus took a child and placed him before them and taught a timeless principle about change. He said, “I tell you the truth, unless you CHANGE and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” While changes are happening all around us, what is really needed is a change of you—a change of course. The change of course you need to make may be that you need to change to become like a child again.

Did you hear about the guy in California who saw a sign in the window of a Zen Buddhist Pizza Parlor that said, “Pizza with everything on it, \$5.99 including tax.” The guy walked in and said to the monk behind the counter, “Give me a pizza with everything on it.” When the pizza was ready, the guy handed the monk a \$20 bill and the monk slipped it in his pocket. The guy said, “Hey, what about my change?” The monk bowed and said, “Ah so, change only come from within yourself.” In a way, he was right. The real change that must happen in your life can only come from within. Jesus said you must change and become like a child if you want to enter His Kingdom. To become like a child doesn’t mean you become childish—but that you become childlike. Here are five things you may need to change if you are going to become childlike.

(1) To be like a child, you must change by being excited about new experiences

It’s sad, but the older we get the more we seem to resist and oppose change. As I mentioned in the last message, adults tend to develop patterns, which become routines, which become habits, and often become ruts—and a rut is a grave with both ends kicked out.

But have you ever noticed how little kids can get excited about almost anything? You can tell them you’re going to get them a Happy Meal and they’ll run around in circles like it’s the best thing ever—and when they get there, they’re so excited about the playground equipment that they forget all about their Happy Meal. Kids are always ready for the next new thing.

We even use expressions like, “as excited as a kid in a candy store” or “as excited as a kid on Christmas morning.”

As I’ve grown older myself, and watched other people grow older, I’ve discovered there are some people who grow older in terms of years, but they never seem to lose that childlike spirit of excitement and that sense of adventure about life. When Jesus spoke about changing and

becoming like a child I think He was saying that even as you grow older you don't have to grow up. One of the main differences between adults and kids is that kids love to have fun, and many adults think they are too dignified to loosen up and have fun. The old Methodist Evangelist Sam Jones used to make fun of uptight adults by saying, “Some people have confused dignity with death—the most dignified people in town are in the cemetery.”

Academic studies have been done of the most effective business leaders in America, and one study finds most successful CEOs share one common trait—neoteny. That may be a new word for you, but comes from two Greek words, *neo*, which means “new or young” and *teinin* which means to “extend.” It's the new hot-word in business. Neoteny is the ability to maintain youthful, childlike qualities even as you grow old. Two Harvard Business School Professors, Drs. Bennett and Thomas have written a book called “Geeks and Geezers.” Neither of those labels are negative—a Geek is just a young successful CEO under 30 and a Geezer is a successful CEO over 70. They discovered neoteny was the key to success, regardless of a leader's age. They wrote: “Neoteny is the retention of those wonderful qualities that we associate with youth: curiosity, playfulness, eagerness, fearlessness, warmth, energy. Unlike those defeated by time and age, our geezers have remained much like our geeks—open, willing to take risks, hungry for knowledge and experience, courageous, eager to see what the new day brings.” Warren Bennet & Robert Thomas (*Geeks and Geezers*, p. 20)

Does that sound familiar? The business world is just now catching onto a revolutionary concept Jesus introduced 2,000 years ago. So are you growing more and more excited about life, or are you just growing older? There's something much more damaging than hardening of the arteries, it's the hardening of the attitudes. Do you need a change of you? Do you need to change to become like a child and start living life with excitement about each new day and the changes you'll face?

(2) To be like a child, you must change by forgiving others quickly

I was a pretty rambunctious kid. My teachers and parents probably used other words to describe me. I didn't always behave very nicely in Sunday School and big church. I can imagine if the kids' SS teachers at my home church had used a SS draft I would have been the last one chosen! For instance, one Sunday, before our teacher came in, I got into a fight with my best friend, Andy White. He was the preacher's son. I don't remember what we were fighting about—Andy had a big nose, and I sometimes called him “Nanner nose” (that might have been the reason). We were rolling around on the tile floor with our clip-on ties pulled off going at it—Smackdown 1963. At that moment our teacher walked in and separated us. He told us to apologize to each other, so I said, “I'm sorry.” and Andy said, “That's okay.” He made us shake hands and we sat down beside each other, best friends again in seconds.

That's the way kids are. They can be in conflict in one moment and then two minutes later they're playing together again. Wouldn't it be wonderful if adults could do the same thing? As we grow older, we learn how to carry grudges and seethe with bitterness over the wrongs inflicted on us by others. Little kids have neither the desire nor the capacity to hold grudges.

Is there someone against whom you've been nursing a grudge? If you keep nursing that grudge,

it will only get stronger. Get rid of it. The Bible says, “Love keeps on record of wrongs.” As you enter 2008, one of the healthiest things you can do is to tear up your list of wrongs. If you have a mental computer file named “People I won’t forgive because they have hurt me.doc” you need to hit the delete button, and then go to the recycle bin and delete it again. If you find it hard to forgive others, you need a change of you. You must change to be like a child and be quick to forgive others.

(3) To be like a child, you must change by accepting others without prejudging them

Prejudice is the sin of judging someone before you know them. When you pre-judge someone because of their race, their nationality, or by the way they look, then you are guilty of prejudice. Have you ever noticed kids aren’t naturally prejudiced? It’s something we learn with time.

I grew up in a poor family; we just didn’t know we were poor. Unlike a lot of kids in the 1960s both my parents worked outside the home. My mom was an registered nurse and my dad was a Forester. So for much of my growing up years, we had a black maid who kept us. The sweet lady I remember best was named Marjohn. Sometimes she would bring her son, J.B., who was about my age with her. So, some of my earliest memories as a child was playing with this kid named J.B. I thought it was so neat that instead of a name, he had letters—J.B. We had loads of fun. One time J.B. said, “Why don’t you come over to my house to play?” I said, “Sure, that would be fun!” But when I asked my mom if I could go to J.B.’s house to play she told me I couldn’t go to his house. My response was the same parents have heard millions of times, “But, mom, why not?” I can’t really remember her answer, but it was probably something like “They aren’t our kind of people.” That was my first childhood lesson in prejudice. It is a learned behavior.

Go out to our daycare playground some day and watch those kids play. They don’t ask each other what Country Club their parents belong to. They don’t ask where their parents went to college, or what job they have, or how much money they make. They just accept each other and laugh and play together.

Wouldn’t this city and this world be a better place if we could dig down and scoop out all the smelly vestiges of prejudice we were all taught? Will you change and become like a little child and start accepting people regardless, of their face, their race, or their place?

(4) To be like a child, you must change by recapturing a sense of joyful wonder

Kids are easily fascinated. When my granddaughter, Lizzie, was here for Christmas we went to eat at Don Juan’s one evening. Lizzie got a little fussy before everyone else was finished, so I gladly picked her up and carried her in my arms into the lobby area. It was decorated for Christmas, so there were some glass ornaments in the shape of stars with mirrors hanging from the ceiling. When I touched the star, it twisted gently and created hundreds of little reflections of lights on the wall. Lizzie was fascinated, and started laughing and going “ah!” We stood there for ten minutes and she never lost interest. She reminded me of how a simple light show can be something wonderful. As we grow older, it seems that we lose the ability to be amazed.

Academic studies have shown that most children are wildly creative when they are young, but as

they grow older, our world stifles that creativity. Gordon McKenzie is a creative specialist for Hallmark. He has gone into hundreds of elementary schools to encourage children to develop their creative skills. He says his first question when he goes into a classroom is, “How many artists are there in the room?” He says the responses never vary. In the first grade classroom, every student waves their hands like maniacs—they believe they are all artists. However, when he asks the same question in a second grade classroom, only about half the hands are raised. By the third grade, only about a third of the students consider themselves artists. By the sixth grade, only one or two kids self-consciously raise their hands. McKenzie says our culture seems to be suppress creativity—the subtle message to kids is “be normal.” In his book, McKenzie writes: “My guess is that there was a time—perhaps when you were very young—when you had at least a fleeting notion of your own genius and were just waiting for some authority figure to come along and validate it for you. But none ever came.” (Gordon McKenzie, *Orbiting the Giant Hairball*, p. 20)

Kids love to have fun, and it doesn’t take much to entertain them—they do funny things because they like having fun. I can remember years ago visiting in a home with parents who had a little boy. After dinner all the grown-ups were sitting in the den having a grown-up conversation about grown-up things. Suddenly, we heard this shriek announcing, “It’s Pantyman!” At that moment, their son ran through the room wearing nothing but his panties and a towel around his neck for a cape. The parents were a little embarrassed, but something tells me God smiled at that. Now, I don’t advise any of you guys to do that at your next party, but maybe we need to learn how to have fun again like kids.

Look into the eyes of a child when they see a rainbow, or a butterfly, or a caterpillar, or a mud hole—that’s joyful wonder. Most of us have lost that unless we see a particularly beautiful sunset, or a majestic mountain. We need to recapture that sense of fun and joy kids have. Have you become old and unimpressed? Maybe it’s time for a change of you to become like a little child.

(5) To be like a child, you must change by simply and totally trusting God

By nature, children are very trusting. That’s why you have to teach children NOT to trust strangers. Have you ever listened to a child pray as they pour out their heart to God fully believing God is hearing and will bless their mommy, daddy, puppy, and their kitty?

Children possess a wonderful sense of innocence that we need to recapture. They have the wonderful gift of not being too self-conscious—that’s why they’ll sing a song, dance a dance, or run across the room as Pantyman! If you hit the rewind button, and go all the way back to the Garden of Eden you’ll discover God’s two original children, Adam and Eve weren’t self-conscious. In fact they live in the first nudist colony! They wore their birthday suits all day and felt no shame or self-consciousness. But when sin entered their world, they sudden felt shame—they became self-conscious. Before the fall, they had no inhibitions, being self-centered, or self-conscious is a part of the curse. Jesus came to reverse the curse!

If you think of spiritual maturity as a continuum, and on one side there is God-consciousness and on the other side is self-consciousness, then spiritual maturity is becoming more like a child and

thinking less of self and more of God. I'm afraid the church has often lost sight of the truth that a person has to become like a little child to enter the Kingdom of God. We expect children to become like adults to accept Christ, when the truth is adults have to become like children to be saved!

I've lead many children to Christ and I've never had one of them ask me, "Yeah, but what about Calvinism?" None of them have asked me, "Does this make me a premillennialist?" Kids have a simple enough faith that when you tell them they can ask Jesus to come into their hearts, they smile and say, "Jesus, please come and live in my heart." And then if you ask them "where does Jesus live?" they'll say, "In my heart of course."

CONCLUSION

When you boil it all down, do you know what salvation is? It's a change of course. You're on the wrong road, headed toward destruction, and you must make a change of course—a change of direction. You must turn from your sins and turn to Jesus. What is happening all around us? Change, of course. What do you need to do to become like a little child? Change of course.

So, are you willing to mature and grow down to be like a child again? Once again, my favorite author, Anonymous, has supplied me with my closing thought: "I am hereby officially tendering my resignation as an adult. I have decided I would like to accept the responsibilities of an 8-year-old again. I want to go to McDonald's and think that it's a four-star restaurant. I want to think M&Ms are better than money because you can eat them. I want to return to a time when life was simple. When all you knew were colors, multiplication tables, and nursery rhymes, but that didn't bother you, because you didn't know what you didn't know and you didn't care. All you knew was to be happy because you were blissfully unaware of all the things that should make you worried or upset. I want to think the world is fair. That everyone is honest and good. I want to believe that anything is possible. I want to be oblivious to the complexities of life and be overly excited again. I don't want my day to consist of computer crashes, mountains of paperwork, depressing news, doctor bills, and gossip. I want to believe in the power of smiles, hugs, a kind word, truth, justice, peace, dreams, imagination, mankind, and making angels in the snow. So...Here's my checkbook and my car keys, my credit card bills and my 401K statements. I am officially resigning from adulthood. And if you want to discuss this further, you'll have to catch me first, 'cause... "Tag! You're it!"

OUTLINE

1. CULTURAL CHANGES WE MUST UNDERSTAND

Change in

- (1) Technology: Everything is going faster and getting smaller
- (2) Sociology: Every decision is harder because of multiple choices
- (3) Morality: Every value is being challenged

II. PERSONAL CHANGES WE MUST UNDERTAKE

To be like a child you must change by:

- (1) Being excited about new experiences
- (2) Forgiving others quickly
- (3) Accepting others without prejudging them
- (4) Recapturing a sense of joyful wonder
- (5) Simply and totally trusting God



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes