

West Valley Church  
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**Life's Ahead:  
Embrace it Part 3**

The act of driving our cars is a fitting metaphor for change in our lives; we all travel down the road of life and are confronted with steep hills, downhill runs, sharp turns and stops and starts. We turn one corner and run into a sign telling us we have to do something else, go a different direction, slow down, speed up, or take some detour. All we want to do is get from point A to point B, and we'd like that to happen as smoothly as possible. We'd like to have a nice, straight, smooth road. But the reality is that life is full of changes. You can't go far at all in life without hitting bumps or taking detours that seem like they go way out of your way. We cannot live this life for even a few minutes without having to deal with some kind of change. So we can avoid it or we can accept it. We can complain about it or we can capture it. We can deny it or we can drive it. We can ignore it or we can embrace it. Because change in life is inevitable. These signs represent that. So the question we must ask ourselves is not, "How can I avoid change?" because change is inevitable. The question becomes, "How can I benefit and grow from change, for my sake and the sake of others?" Change *is* inevitable, it's what we do with it that matters. Life is ahead. Don't run from it; embrace it! Because all of life involves changes. And truth be told, change is hard. Older adults really get a bad rap when it comes to change; people say senior adults don't like to change. But it's not just the senior crowd. How many of you are on Facebook? How many of you liked the changes they made this week? I couldn't believe the intensity of the response to change—so many posts saying "I hate Facebook!" and "I'm quitting Facebook; I've had enough!" By the way, the average age of Facebook users is thirty eight. Nobody likes change, especially when the change involves something we've known or held onto for a long time. Let me give you an example of someone who refuses to allow change: Meet Mr. Charles K. Johnson. He says, "The facts are simple, the earth is flat." Johnson is president of the IFERS: the International Flat Earth Society. "Nobody knows anything about the true shape of the world," he contends. "The known, inhabited world is flat. Just as a guess, I'd say that the dome of heaven is about 4,000 miles away, and the stars are about as far as San Francisco is from Boston."

Shown in a map published by Johnson, the known world is as circular and as flat as a phonograph record. The North Pole is at the center. At the outer edge lies the southern ice, which he says is a wall 150 feet high; no one has ever crossed it, and therefore what lies beyond is unknown. The sun and moon, in Johnson's version, are only about 32 miles in diameter. They circle above the earth in the vicinity of

the equator, and their apparent rising and setting are tricks of perspective, like railroad tracks that look like they meet in the distance. The moon shines by its own light.

Ironically, Johnson lives near Edwards Air Force Base where the space shuttles used to land. Well, according to Mr. Johnson, NASA *claims* there were space shuttles. He says, “The space shuttle is a joke—and a very ludicrous joke, because you can’t orbit a flat earth.” He believes the space program is a lie created to prop up the dying myth that the earth is a globe.

It is amazing how far we will go sometimes to hang on to some idea or some thing no matter how silly it is—no matter how outdated it might be. No matter what the facts may be.

The truth is that we live in an ever-changing world, and as things change around us, sometimes the church looks and acts like the flat-earth society; hanging on to archaic ideas and methods. How do we manage to maintain our mission while the world changes all around us? That’s what we are going to look at today. We are in the last of a three-part series designed to help us understand and deal with life-change, and we are going to do it from a book about change, called the Bible. I defy you to read anywhere in the Bible for ten minutes without coming across some kind of change. I want us to conclude today by looking at why we as a church must deal with change.

To do that, we need to start by seeing that

### **1. The world is changing.**

I know clothing styles, music and popular culture all change, but that’s not what I mean. What I mean is that we are in the middle of a societal revolution. For nearly 500 years now, western society has been in what is called the “Modern Age.” The modern age has been based on *knowledge*—what we can learn, what we can gain, and what we can understand. It defines a way of thinking and looking at the world and how we understand it. It started in the Renaissance in the 14th century. That led to what philosophers call the “Age of Enlightenment.” Next came the “Age of Reason,” and these birthed the Modern age. For us in the modern age, scientific research and empirical evidence decides what the facts are going to be for us. In other words, what we know and believe has been proven to be true by reason and research. So therefore, the more we know, the better we become. Modernity is the idea that through knowledge, we can be in greater control of our environment, our circumstances, and our world. By discovering nature’s secrets, we can exercise power over both physical and human nature. And the greater power we have, the more safe, civilized, and controlled our society can be.

Out of this quest for knowledge came the idea of Rene Descartes who said, “I think, therefore I am.” That line of reasoning elevated the individual self to the center of the world. The reasoning is this: because I think, and can reasonably prove my existence, therefore I am. So the more I know, the more real I am. Everything can be reasoned by us—we live in an ordered, rational, scientific world. It is “cause and effect”—if you can experiment enough times with the cause, and then can prove the effect, you have knowledge and therefore have more power.

“I think, therefore I am.” “I am.” It is the essence of western thought. Does “I am” ring any bells for you? Wasn’t there someone else who described himself as “I Am”? Remember the conversation between God and Moses: Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (Exodus 3:13-14, niv)

I wonder if our philosophy saying “I am” has anything to do with our desire to be God? Anyway, this reasoned approach to self-betterment and self-fulfillment is what our country is based on. For example, we in the US believe it is the right of every individual to have an education, and our government provides that education, so that we can be an intelligent (and therefore enlightened) nation made up of fulfilled, empowered, and successful individuals.

Do you see that? Why am I telling you all this? Because all that I just described is changing. “Great! I just started figuring this out and now they change everything!” But it’s true—the method of understanding ourselves and the world we live in, at least for Western Civilization, is changing from modern to what is being called “Post Modern.”

I know this is a lesson in philosophy, but this is extremely significant, so please stay with me. How do we define Postmodernism? It’s multi-dimensional right now and still being formulated. But “post-modern” is just what it says—it is a system of thought *after* modernism. At its extremes are what’s called “deconstructionism” or worse yet, “anarchy” - the thinking that we need to destroy all systems related to modernism and start over; whether social, governmental, mental, religious—whatever. That would result in chaos, but the idea is that we could then start completely over. That’s an extreme.

Let me bring this down to everyday experience: instead of being entirely dependent on *mental* or *intellectual* conclusions, Postmodernism puts a high value on *experience*. Here’s an example you might recognize. Many of us who are older remember commercials that would convince us to use a certain toothpaste or

aspirin because “4 out of 5 doctors or dentists recommend it.” But in the mid-nineties, Tylenol came out with a commercial that said, “Do I take Tylenol because 9 out of 10 doctors recommend it? No, I take it because it works.” *That* statement reflects the change from modern to post modern. Is it about scientific proof? No, it’s about my experience; *that* validates my reality.

There are many dangers to this, and one that has come out of this way of thinking is called Moral Relativism. Moral relativism states that there are no moral absolutes or laws—everything is relative to me and the situation I am in. What *I* decide in any given circumstance is what is right. Because I value my own experiences, then I will use those experiences to decide what is right for me. *You* don’t do that for me, nor the government, not the law, and certainly not the Bible. “I decide at any given time what’s right and wrong for me.” You can see the danger in this, can’t you?

Why am I telling you this? Because increasingly, this is the world that the church finds herself in. It’s what the Apostle Paul anticipated in his letter to young pastor Timothy: “Don’t be naive. There are difficult times ahead. As the end approaches, people are going to be self-absorbed, money-hungry, self-promoting, stuck-up, profane, contemptuous of parents, crude, coarse, dog-eat-dog, unbending, slanderers, impulsively wild, savage, cynical, treacherous, ruthless, bloated windbags, addicted to lust, and allergic to God. They’ll make a show of religion, but behind the scenes they’re animals. Stay clear of these people.” (2 Timothy 3:1-5, the message)

So what do we do when everything around us, even the way we think and what we value is turned upside down? Well, the good news is that

## 2. ***God* is not changing.**

The world has gone through all kinds of changes through all kinds of ages, generations, centuries and millennia. But through it all, God remains unchanged. He says, “I am the LORD. I do not change.” (Malachi 3:6, niv) Our God is an unchanging God! What God *is* for us, he has always been and will always be. He does not change. That means that Jesus Christ, God’s Son, doesn’t change either. The Bible says, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings.” (Hebrews 13:8-9a, niv) What God has revealed to us in Christ we will always be able to count on; he is unchanging. This is how Jesus describes himself: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.” (Revelation 22:13, niv)

There is great comfort, hope, and encouragement for us to know that we have a never-changing God. No matter what happens around us, God’s character, his justice, his mercy, his grace, and his love for us are dependable, enduring, and will

always be. We can count on God being all that we need, in the past, for right now, and forever.

I like that. It reminds me that among the things in life that can be changed to suit my taste, one remains tamper-resistant--I can't change Jesus. When life is unsettled, I gain great comfort from the Bible's affirmation that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). Praise God that His Word and His love are perfect and unchanging. And praise Him too that in His love He is working to change me and you for the better. We'll talk about that in a minute.

Now if God doesn't change, then neither do His promises:

### **3. The Message does not change.**

Jesus *is* the message from God—Jesus is the embodiment of the Word and promises of God. That's why the Bible says, "In the beginning the Word (Jesus) already existed; the Word was with God, and the Word was God. From the very beginning the Word was with God. Through him God made all things; not one thing in all creation was made without him." (John 1:1-3, gnb)

Jesus doesn't change, and Jesus is the Word, so the Word doesn't change. The Word is both the promise and the fulfillment, the message and the means. God has a message for men and women; it has always been the same, over-riding message from the very beginning: that he loves us and longs to be in relationship with us. He is *for* us, not against us, and he wants us to reach our highest and greatest potential. And he spared no expense to make that life available to us, even though it cost him the life of his One and Only Son.

When you accept that message and enter that relationship with God, then your life will change forever. You are now on a course for eternity, to enjoy peace, rest, joy, and at the same time have a quality of life here that you never had before, and will one day to live at the highest level of living, forever in heaven. That's why the Bible says this to those who respond to the message: "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, 'All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever.' And this is the word that was preached to you." (1 Peter 1:23-25, niv)

This message will endure until every single word, even every punctuation mark in the Bible, has accomplished its purpose. Jesus said this about the message: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished." (Matthew 5:17-18, niv)

And God said through the prophet Isaiah, way back in the Old Testament: “Turn to the LORD and pray to him, now that he is near. Let the wicked leave their way of life and change their way of thinking. Let them turn to the LORD, our God; he is merciful and quick to forgive. ‘My thoughts,’ says the LORD, ‘are not like yours, and my ways are different from yours. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways and thoughts above yours. My word is like the snow and the rain that come down from the sky to water the earth. They make the crops grow and provide seed for planting and food to eat. So also will be the word that I speak-- it will not fail to do what I plan for it; it will do everything I send it to do.’” (Isaiah 55:6-11, gnb)

God’s unchanging message will change lives in every generation, every age, every culture—modern, post-modern, and whatever comes next if Jesus tarries. *While the world is changing, God does not, nor does his life-changing message for every person. And the church’s job is to constantly communicate that life-changing Good News to our ever-changing world. (repeat)* To effectively do so,

#### 4. The **Methods** must change.

If this church is going to be effective in giving this unchanging message to others and accomplish our purpose in this community, it will require us to be willing to change. While the *invisible* church of Jesus Christ exists independent of and outside this culture (remember Jesus said that his kingdom was not of this world—John 18:36), the *visible* church manifests itself in every era and every place as a social institution that reflects the social norms and structures of the culture it’s in. Does that make sense? The methods and structures that the church uses to function reflect the culture and time that the church finds itself in.

Let me give you an example from the Bible: in Acts 1, the disciples need to replace Judas as one of the twelve disciples. So they pick two men, then they prayed, and they drew straws. Would we select our leaders that way today? No. How would we? We pray, and then we *vote*. Why? Because we are more enlightened than the apostles were? Of course not. We do it that way because we live in a democratic society. I can guarantee you that Chinese Christians don’t select leaders with a vote. Does that mean one way is bad? No, it’s just the *method* that we use, because of our culture, and we trust God to direct the process.

Here’s the point: the church has been given the task of communicating the unchanging message about the unchanging God to a changing culture. And the method is the way we do that, the way we carry out the work of the church. We use changing methods to communicate an unchanging message that changes lives. When a culture changes, and the church *doesn’t* change its methods to reach that culture, then the church is no longer effective.

The problem is, we tend to think the methods should be unchanging—this church has sometimes mistaken the *method* for the Message. And when that happens, we are no longer effectively reaching our culture.

We get comfortable with our methods because it's what we are familiar with. Those methods are probably the ways that *we* were reached, right? But increasingly we fail to see that the world is changing and those ways are no longer effective. So we resist change. Face it—no one likes change! Mark Twain once said that no one likes change, except a baby. Take it from me: we have three boys and they didn't like change all that much. Here we were trying to help them get out of those messy diapers and they fought us. I've changed many diapers and *I* didn't like it that much either.

Have you seen those motivational posters that businesses sometimes use? Like these about “greatness” and “achievement.” Well, there's one that says: “Change. Sometimes it's really needed, but it's not always pretty.” Every parent here can appreciate the truth of that. Shall I leave that up, or “change” it? We don't like change—it can be messy! But change is necessary if we are going to effectively deliver the message to this culture. Our attitude must be like the Apostle Paul's: he was willing to make any changes necessary to reach people: “When I am with people whose faith is weak, I live as they do to win them. I do everything I can to win everyone I possibly can. I do all this for the good news, because I want to share in its blessings.” (1 Corinthians 9:22-23, cev)

Your pastors and leaders are committed to doing everything necessary so we can introduce people to Jesus Christ, equip people with a faith that works, and live as people with purpose. That's our mission! And to accomplish it, if it's necessary to change some methods, so be it. Because we are here to make sure this church is loving others, sharing the Good News, and growing in our faith.

So please understand: sooner or later change is inevitable. There will be changes in how this church does things. There will be changes in who this church reaches, how and when they are reached. There will be things required of us to do so. *No one* will be spared this change: not even the pastors and leaders. We must be willing to do whatever is necessary to carry out our mission. Listen, we will *never* change things just for change's sake, or because some other church has made a change. When changes are made here, it's so we can effectively reach and grow people with the Good News.

Do we like change? No; it's uncomfortable and scary. Some of us won't like it, and some will leave because they don't like it. But let me ask you this: if we make changes in order to reach lost people and grow found people, and someone in church doesn't like those changes, what's the worst that will happen? They will

leave and go to another church. Are they still Christians? Yes. Are they still in the Kingdom and going to heaven? Yes. But if we DON'T make changes in order to reach unchurched people, what is the worst that will happen? Unchurched people in West Valley could die and spend eternity in Hell, apart from God. Which is the greater risk? Which SHOULD we do? If we're not willing to change, then we will be as relevant as the flat earth society (as far as the unchurched in West Valley are concerned).

We don't like change, but change is God's business. Change is inherent in our theology. It should be our *nature*. You say "Why? God never changes!" Right. But it is the character and nature of God to create, to constantly do new things for new times and new people. God didn't stop creating after the first six days. He's never stopped doing new things. Listen to just a handful of examples of all the change God does, from these Scriptures:

"He taught me to sing a *new* song, a song of praise to our God. Many who see this will take warning and will put their trust in the LORD." (Psalm 40:3, gnb)

"See, the former things have taken place, and *new* things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you." Sing to the LORD a *new* song, his praise from the ends of the earth, you who go down to the sea, and all that is in it, you islands, and all who live in them." (Isaiah 42:9-10, niv)

"I will create *new* heavens and a *new* earth. The things that have happened before will not be remembered. They will not even enter your minds. So be glad and full of joy forever because of what I *will* create. I will cause others to take delight in Jerusalem. They will be filled with joy when they see its people." (Isaiah 65:17-18, nirv)

"A *new day* is coming," announces the LORD. "I will make a *new covenant* with the people of Israel. I will also make it with the people of Judah." (Jeremiah 31:31, nirv)

"Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are *new every morning*; great is your faithfulness." (Lamentations 3:22-23, niv)

"I will give them a *new* heart and a *new* mind. I will take away their stubborn heart of stone and will give them an obedient heart." (Ezekiel 11:19, gnb) Again Ezekiel says,

"I will give you a *new* heart and a *new* mind. I will take away your stubborn heart of stone and give you an obedient heart." (Ezekiel 36:26, gnb)

"Forget the things that happened in the past. Do not keep on thinking about them. I

am about to do something *new*. It is beginning to happen even now. Don't you see it coming? I am going to make a way for you to go through the desert. I will make streams of water in the dry and empty land.” (Isaiah 43:18-19, niv)

Folks, God is in the change business. He changes a dark void of nothing into created something. He changes an evil world into a water world. He changes an infertile elderly couple into the fertile father of a nation. He changes those who are not a people into those who are his people. He changes the youngest son in a family into the greatest servant in Egypt. He changes an exiled orphan into the Exodus Deliverer. He changes a rock into a spring of water, he changes the desert into a dining hall. He changes enemy occupied real estate into the promised land of milk and honey. He changes a slave girl into a saving Queen. He changes a shepherd boy into a giant slayer into a mighty king. He changes an illegitimate son of adultery into the insightfully wisest king of Israel. He changes a backwater village in Bethlehem into the birthplace of the King of Kings. He changes a baby into the embodiment of God, the stuff of man into the savior of men, He changes water into wine, blind eyes to sight, poor to rich and slave to free. He changes the misshapen to marathon runners, sinners to saints, he changes a grave stone into a door way, he changes **death to life** . . . and he changes you and me, transforming us into the very character and nature of Christ. And through those with Christ-like character, he changes West Valley. He changes lives. He changes the world. Folks, **God is in the change business**; change is necessary and change is coming for you and me, and for this church, so that change can come to this city! Let's leave here and be agents of change for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. West Valley Church, let's change the world!