

Are you trying to Change without Changing

By Dave Batty

How easy is it for you to make changes in your life? Some people love change and welcome it daily, and their credit cards have the evidence to prove it. They love to shop and bring home something new.

But when it comes to real change in your way of living—how about that? If you have a problem or weakness in your life, how do you change that?

Joe, a young husband struggling with drug addiction said, “I went to church on Sunday, and prayed, and God turned my life around 180 degrees.” He went on to talk with such enthusiasm about how much better he was.

Perhaps you might be saying, “Praise God for another miracle! Isn’t God good?!” But I said to myself, “Is Joe trying to change without changing?”

❖ **What is the process God uses to bring change into our lives?**

❖ **Are you a dysfunctional Christian?**

❖ **Why don’t some miracles last for people who have been healed?**

Melissa was talking about her new fiancée, “He’s such a wonderful person! And he’s so different from my ‘ex.’ ” She then described his charming qualities.

“So why did your previous marriage break up?” asked the counselor.

Are you praying for God to use His “magic wand” to make your problems go away, or are you fully embracing His process for real change?

“He was an alcoholic,” Melissa replied, “and I finally had enough of his abuse and his promises to change.”

“And your new fiancée, does he drink?” asked the counselor.

Melissa responded, “He only drinks with his meals, and then with moderation.”

She was completely surprised at the counselor’s observation that she was setting herself up to enter the same kind of relationship she just left. Not only was she entering another high risk relationship, but even more basic, she had not changed her way of choosing her friends. Change without changing.

Jane lamented, “I’m so stressed out with people in my life! My boss stresses me at work, my kids stress me out at home, and at church it’s the same. Why can’t these people stop stressing me out?”

So if the boss changed, and the kids changed, and the people at church changed, would that really fix everything? Isn’t that a demand for change without changing?

The reality may be hard to face, but if the boss, and the kids, and the people at church did change, Jane would still be the same on the inside. The real problem is not what others are doing, it’s how Jane is responding to the challenges she faces in her life.

The problem with change

Even though change is part of everyone’s life, many of us struggle to make the right changes in our lives. Often change is painful, and it takes time and hard work. We want the quick solution, the easy path to change. We love to watch the “Extreme Makeover” TV program which in one hour shows the incredible transformation that is made on a home—where all the work is usually accomplished within a few days.

But the harsh reality for most of us—we don’t have a team of experts to come in and transform our home in

a few days.

When it comes to making changes in our personal lives, whether it be weaknesses, unhealthy habits, addictions, relationships, or handling stress—change becomes even more complicated. That's when we want to take out the magic wand and instantly fix whatever is wrong. Change without changing.

When Joe told me about his “incredible experience with God on Sunday,” I was convinced he was in delusion, not in recovery.

“Why would you be so negative?” you ask. “Don't you believe in prayer? Don't you believe in God changing a drug addict—or anyone else?”

Oh, yes, I believe in miracles, and I believe God changes people. But the question is, do we understand “real change” from God's point of view? Do we recognize what God says needs to change in our lives, and do we accept the process it will take for real change to take place in our lives?

Why did I doubt that Joe had really changed? Because Joe had been raised in church, and now he

was “using” church, saying the right things, trying to convince himself and his wife that he was all better.

He was trying to change without changing. He was trying to use the “magic wand” in his life to change. Even though he was passionate about how different he was, he had not really changed. I was saddened to receive a phone call 3 months later that he was back to using drugs.

God's process for change

Mark 10:17-22 tells the story of a young man who came to Jesus asking for help with a problem. “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” he asked Jesus.

In response Jesus told this young man to obey the commandments of God, quoting several of the ten commandments. The young man replied, “I've been doing that since I was a child.” His answer shows that he was still struggling with doubts about whether or not he was ready for heaven.

Jesus did not tell this young man to pray more or read the Bible more, or just believe more. Jesus didn't encour-

age him to spend more time at church.

Jesus did not pull out His magic wand and say, “Let me touch you and everything will be just fine. Let's watch how fast those doubts fly away after I touch you!”

Today people are looking for the quick solution, the “magic wand” solution. That is the Gospel according to Disney, not the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The solutions Jesus offers are real solutions that bring real change.

The solution Jesus offered this man shows God's process to real change. Jesus looked at him and loved him, and said, “Go sell what you

Admitting you have a problem does not change you. Real change involves living out God's truth on a daily basis.

have and give to the poor, and then come follow me.”

This intensely practical answer doesn't deal with theory or theology. It deals with practical action on the real living level. Jesus tells him to “go”—if he wants a real solution in his life, he is going to have to take action, not sit around and wait for others to fix him.

The solution process Jesus prescribes is specific and goes to the heart of this man's problem. This young man was placing too much value in his material possessions. The solution Jesus offered was hard—sell it all and give it all away.

This is not the solution for every person who has wealth—but it was God's solution for this young man.

Are you a dysfunctional Christian?

The most important change you can make in your life is to surrender your life to Jesus and say, “Save me. Please forgive my sins. Jesus, I want you to be the leader of my life.”

When you pray that prayer, God does a miracle in your life, and forgives your sins, and you become a Christian. But this does not automatically take away all your problems. If you were a

dysfunctional person before you surrendered to Christ, now what?

You are a “dysfunctional Christian.” Those dysfunctional issues will need to be addressed, one at a time. This is what Jesus means when He says, “Come follow me.” He has a plan to overcome the problems, the addictions, or anything that is holding you back. It means following His solutions, His path to healthy living.

But the rest of God's solution was even harder than the first part. Now Jesus says, "After you have completed part one, here is part two—now come follow me!" This is the call to be a lifetime disciple of Jesus.

The two part solution of Jesus included first "putting off" or getting rid of the behavior that was the root of the problem in this man's life. This second part of the solution is the "putting on" of the new way of living that will characterize healthy living. This is real change.

Godly people need real change

Being a committed Christian does not give us a free pass from having to deal with our problems. Greg came to Teen Challenge in 1971 and encountered Jesus in a real way. He graduated, went on to complete college, and responded to God's call to fulltime ministry. For the past 20+ years he has been pastoring a growing church.

About 5 years ago Greg had a heart attack, and ended up in the hospital. The doctor told him to change his eating habits and get more exercise. For the next few months Greg dedicated himself to change, but ended up only making some minor changes in his lifestyle.

Two years later he had another heart attack. This time the doctor said, "Greg, do you want to live or die? If you want to live, change!"

Greg got the message, and this time dedicated himself to real change. He radically changed his eating habits, lost over 75 pounds, and put himself on a consistent exercise plan.

Greg could have looked very

spiritual, prayed more every day for a new miracle in his life—and he could be in heaven today, if he had chosen that "spiritual" approach to his problem. But instead he chose the hard solution, changed his way of living, and today is living in good health, and still pastoring. He stopped trying to change without changing. Instead he embraced the hard process that led to real change.

And Greg's solution is grounded in the need for continued diligence. If he returns to his old eating patterns, puts the weight back on, he would soon find himself back in the high risk category, and could soon be dead.

The solution Jesus offered the rich young ruler was the same—if

you want real solutions, then "follow me" for the rest of your life! It's not for a day, or a week, or a year—it's for a lifetime.

We must fully embrace the real solution if we expect to maintain a lifestyle of healthy living.

Why some miracles don't last long

A pastor who saw many people experience God's healing in their bodies was dismayed at how many of them were back 6-9 months later requesting prayer for the same serious physical need. "Why don't these healings 'stick'?" he asked God.

A few days later he was visiting

What are God's rules for real change?

1. Come to Jesus

Jesus has real answers, and He best understands what you need to change.

2. Full honesty

We need to stop hiding our problems and be completely honest. Another major issue is we often compartmentalize our life. "I'll seek help for this one problem, but I won't say anything about this other issue in my life." We need to be ready for real change.

3. Embrace the solution

The solution Jesus will offer is often painful, but you can be sure it will be the right solution, one that will bring real change into your life. Don't look for the quick fix. Embrace all the changes God wants you to make in your life.

4. Live out the steps to change

Real change takes action, not just warm fuzzy thoughts.

- A. Put out of your life whatever God says.
- B. Make a decision to follow Jesus and His solution all the way to the end.
- C. Put into your life whatever God wants. It's not enough to stop negative thoughts or actions. You must replace them with the positive things God wants in your life.

5. Commit to a lifetime of change

It's not enough to change for a day or a week, or a month. We must commit to a lifetime of following Jesus and His new way of living.

his doctor for his annual checkup, listening to the doctor's strong advice to watch his eating habits, lose a few pounds, and get plenty of exercise.

He asked his doctor, "If I was in good health today, and I started eating junk food and stopped exercising, what would happen to me?"

"In about 6 months you would be back here or in the hospital, a sick man," the doctor replied.

Instantly the pastor had his answer. God's healing was genuine, people had been healed. But they had experienced change without changing. They had received God's healing, but had not changed their unhealthy living patterns. They had not embraced healthy living disciplines. Six months later they were back, praying for another miracle. Trying to change without changing.

Real change does not mean I heal myself. We truly do need God's help, and He has promised to help us. But He has not promised the magic wand solution so we can change without changing.

My young friend Joe who still struggles with drug addiction will continue to get worse until he embraces real change. Another trip to the altar at church is not the key. He must embrace a process of change that will affect his thinking and his actions 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Real change requires that we go to the root of the problem and get rid of whatever God wants out of our life. We must establish new boundaries, and consistently apply God's steps to real change. We need to continue to look to God for help, not for the magic wand solution, but for the strength and wisdom to make the real changes—the hard changes that will lead to healthy living.

Are you trying to change without changing?

Discussion Guide

The following questions can be used for your personal reflection on this topic, or it can be used as a guide for a group discussion. If this is used in a group setting, please understand that you are not required to disclose the specific details of past sins, failures, or personal experiences.

1. What examples have you seen in people where they are trying to change without changing?
2. Read Proverbs 16:5 and 18:12. Pride holds people back from admitting and dealing with their problems.
 - A. What is God's attitude toward those with pride in their lives?
 - B. How will pride affect your ability to make changes in your life?
3. Read Psalm 34:18. What is God's response to those who admit they are in need of help?
4. Read James 1:22-25.
 - A. What characterizes those who are deceiving themselves?
 - B. What is the key to real change?
5. Read Mark 10:17-22.
 - A. Put yourself in the place of the young man who came to Jesus. Which do you think was the harder request of Jesus—to (1) sell all he had and give to the poor, or (2) to come and follow Jesus? Explain your choice.
 - B. Reflecting on your own life, what is the hardest part of making the changes God wants you to make in your life?
6. Read Philippians 3:12-14 and 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. How do these verses speak to the issue of making change a permanent part of your life?
7. For some people, we make some progress in changing, but then stop. How far are you willing to go in making changes in your life?



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