

How To Cope With Change

Many years ago a Greek philosopher said *“the only thing that is permanent in physical life is change.”*

This is certainly true of society today. We live in a rapidly changing society. We live in a “throw away society”. Products are made to be used temporarily and then discarded.

Very few products are made to last any length of time.

Science and technology is changing, text books are out of date by the time they are printed.

Technology and change are not always progress! I heard recently that in 1911 you could with a horse and buggy drive through inner London at 11 miles an hour. Today with modern technology and high speed cars you can go at almost half that speed.

We have really progressed haven't we!

Life is a series of changes apart from technology and change causes stress.

Thomas Holmes in his famous “stress scale” listed the 43 most common reasons for stress. When we have a combination of these events in our life this can cause great stress and pressure. For example: **Too much change causes fatigue.** Anyone who has experienced moving to a new home knows this. For many days after the move you seem to lack energy to do much at all.

Change that comes fast causes frustration and fear.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 [NIV] *“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”*

What Paul is saying in this letter to the church at Corinth is that everything we experience in life can be divided into two groups:

a) **That which is temporary. The visible things we can experience with our physical senses: touch, taste, feel, see and hear, that pass away and change.**

b) **That which is permanent.** The things that we cannot experience in a physical way. **The invisible values in life that really last, never change.**

That which is changeless and that which is constantly changing.

The material things we have are not going to last; they all deteriorate in time, but the invisible things in life that we can receive are going to last for ever; never deteriorate in spite of all the visual changes that take place in our lives.

The key to learning how to cope with change is to focus on the things that are going to last.

If we want to be solid when the winds of change are blowing all over the place and it looks as if everything is falling apart and being uprooted. **Focus our attention on those things that are not seen, the values that are going to last.**

I want to ask you a question. How do you normally cope with change?

What is your normal reaction when things change in your life?

I suggest it is in three different ways.

1) We resist change!

We fight it, we oppose it, we are sceptical.

In the 19th century there were a group of people called the Luddites, and those people went around smashing all the labour-saving devices because they thought it was unhealthy. Things were happening too fast for them: they felt insecure.

When a person is insecure his first reaction to everything is always negative. “I’m against it.”

Ever heard this statement? “We have never done it that way before.” That is a statement of an insecure person.

Have you heard the story of two caterpillars who were looking up in the sky and seeing a butterfly said, “you will never get me in one of those things”?

I call this “*the hardening of the attitudes.*”

Resisting change seldom works, because change is an inevitable part of life.

If you don’t believe this inevitability of change, just look at photos taken 20 years ago to see how you have changed. [20 years ago I had a full head of hair, dark and wavy!] Or try to make a growing child wear last year’s clothes.

2) We resent change

We don’t like change but don’t do anything about it. We just gripe and complain, grumble and moan about it.

Ignore change, pretend it doesn’t exist.

The older we get the more we desire security, so anything that shakes our comfortable routine, such as changes, threatens our security.

Change, any change, even positive change, produces stress.

Some items on Thomas Holmes’ stress scale were very positive; like a wedding, new baby born, graduation, promotion, personal achievement.

3) Run from change

Try to go back to the past. The “*good old days*”. It is just not like it used to be when things were not so stressful.

We retreat from the present and become nostalgic.

Why do you think there is such a craze for nostalgia today?

We desire to return to what we think was a less stressful lifestyle.

Human nature tends to glorify the past, only remembering the good things and forgetting or making little of the not-so-good.

I heard a little while ago that they uncovered a Babylonian inscription that was 6,000 years old, and guess what it said? *“The times are not now what the times used to be.”*

Nothing new about nostalgia.

The past was not that much better but the difference is that we know what it was like while the present is changeable and the future is unknown.

That is what is frightening about change. Without change we would get bored. We all like change but only if it is gradual and we can control it and we know where we are going. What we don't like is uncertainty: the fear of the unknown and that is what causes stress.

How then can I not be worried and stressed by the future changes that are certain to come into my life?

Paul tells us to build our life on something that doesn't change that is permanent, [Philippians 4:11-13].

Build our life on a foundation that cannot be shaken, [Luke 6:47-48].

Look at and focus on the things that are unseen that are permanent, values in life.

You say, *“is there anything permanent in life?”* Yes, there is.

1) Jesus Christ does not change

Hebrews 13:8 [NIV] *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.”*

While everything else about us is changing, He remains changeless.

All that Jesus Christ was yesterday as recorded in the Bible, He is today and will be for evermore.

Jesus Christ is already in our future, for God is not limited by time: time is physical, determined by the movement of physical bodies in the vast heavens.

God is eternal; that is past, present and future all in one, so God is already in the future ahead of us, and that can be comforting.

So whatever changes I go through God is going to be there in the future ahead of me. Therefore make Jesus Christ the foundation of your life, and experience stability. You will never fear the future friends **if** you focus on the unchangeable facts about the unseen God.

2) God's Love for us will never change

Jeremiah 31:3 [NIV] *“The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.”*

No matter what we do, God's Love for us will not change.

God loves us just as much on our bad days as on our good days. No matter how we feel, God's Love for us will never change.

Why? Because God's Love for us is not based on what we deserve, His Love is based on His Grace.

God loves us not because we keep up His standards, but He loves us because He has chosen to love us.

That's grace.

Romans 8:35-39 [NIV] *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

It does not matter what I do, how I feel, whatever happens to me, wherever I go, nothing will change the Love that God has for me.

In a time of change people need islands of security, God's unchanging Love is such an island of security.

Security in the raging storms of change is something that can never be taken away from us and God's Love is such an island of security.

Hebrews 13:5-6 [NIV] *“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”*

Money is no real security. We could lose our income, all our wealth, overnight with a stock market crash or a cancer.

Our only confidence is in God's Love for us; that cannot be taken from us.

3) God's Word will never change

Psalms 119:89 [NIV] *“Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.”*

God's Word is eternal, so we build our life on God's Word and we have a rock or island of stability in our life.

Isaiah 40:8 [NIV] *“The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands for ever.”*

Permanent growth and life is only found in God's Word.

It is amazing to me where some people look for their sources of strength and stability in a time of stress.

They read the latest paperback on *“How to relieve stress”*, knowing that within a year that book will be in the second-hand book store because everybody found out that the theories and answers didn't work.

They read their horoscope.

They go on some fad health diet.

They get the newest form of therapy.

The fact is that God's Word, the Christian Bible, has stood the test of time and is still the best therapy for stress that has ever been inspired and written. God's Word has been attacked by dictators, ridiculed by critics, burned and outlawed, but has outlasted all these people who have tried to silence it and destroy it.

Why? Because it is eternal, permanent.

Matthew 24:35 [NIV] *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”*

The words of Christ, God’s Word, never can be destroyed.

Voltaire once made a shocking statement in his home saying, *“in 100 years from now the Bible will be an obsolete book.”* Do you know who today occupies that very same building? ‘*The British Bible Society*’.

If you want stability you build your life on principles that have stood the test of time, that are “*rock-like*”.

Matthew 7:24-29 [NIV] *“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”* When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.”

The words of Jesus Christ are eternal principles that are as true today as when they were written. For example:-

“What you sow you will reap” [**Galatians 6:7**]

“Give and it will be given” [**Luke 6:38**]

“As a man thinks in his heart so he is” [**Proverbs 23:7**]

If we want stability in our lives, read God’s Word, remember it and apply it to all parts of our lives.

Many people are “falling apart” today because they don’t have God’s Word as the foundation to their lives.

4) God’s ultimate purpose will never change

God has a plan and He is working it out. God is working in human history to bring that plan to fruition.

God has given us a free will, and as a result He has given us some choices we can make.

Many times we make the wrong choices and as a result we have crime, poverty, injustice, wars, etc.

In spite of all this God is ultimately in control of history as He works out His Plan for mankind, which will never change.

When you put your trust and your future in the hands of such a God it gives you great confidence.

Psalm 112:6-7 [Amplified Bible] *“He will not be moved, for ever, the uncompromisingly righteous, the upright, in right standing with God, shall be in everlasting remembrance He shall not be afraid of evil tidings, His Heart is firmly fixed, trusting, leaning on and being confident in the Lord.”*

People throw up their hands in horror as they hear the news saying “what is this world coming

to?” I reply, the history of man is moving towards an appointed time in the Plan of God.

This world, this society, is coming to an end. It will come near to destroying itself before Christ returns as He promised to intervene “hands on” to save it from complete destruction. “When will this happen?” you say. I reply, “I don’t know”, for the Bible tells us that “no man knows the time and the hour” of this direct intervention by Christ in this world [Matthew 24:36].

The Bible talks more about the Second Coming of Jesus the Christ than it does about His first coming.

In confidence we may say, “I don’t know what the future holds but I know who holds the future in His Hands.”

God not only has a plan for mankind as a whole but He also has a plan for each of us individually.

No person has ever been made by accident; it makes no difference what the circumstances of our birth was, God has a purpose for our life, and plan for it.

Real success is discovering what that plan is and living right in the middle of it. All our life revolving around that specific, personal plan God has for us individually.

The safest place in this world is to be in the centre of God’s Will for our lives.

We can choose to co-operate with God or not. When we do co-operate with Him, God takes all the changes and trials we go through and works them all for good.

Romans 8:28-31 [NIV] “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?”

All things work together for good, although not everything in our life is good.

Is this true for everyone? No! Only those who love God and conform to His Purpose in their lives.

What are the changes taking place in our lives at this moment: changes that are causing pressure and stress?

Do we feel we have no control over these changes and our future?

If we put our lives into the hands of God by building our lives on the things that will not change:

- a) Jesus Christ
- b) God’s Love for us
- c) God’s Word
- d) God’s Purpose for our lives

We will be building our future life on a rock and whatever storms we face in the future we can face them in great confidence.

None of us know what will happen to us in the next few days. We may have to face big changes in our lives. But four things we can be sure will not change.

Jesus Christ and God’s Love for us will still be the same as it is now; God’s Word will still be just as true and God’s Purpose for us will not have changed.

Anchor yourselves on these unchangeable things and we will have a safe, stress-free island on which to dwell, as the storms of change blow all around us.

We then don't have to resist change nor resent change or run from change; we can rest confidently in it.