

Newsletter

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS FOR TODAY'S MANAGERS

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How to make changes in your life

Most of us realize that we are not perfect. In this imperfect state we recognize the need to change; to refine ourselves in some way to become better. But what is better? And how do we make changes in ourselves that will stick over time? While the answers to these questions aren't hard to get, making the changes stick is hard.

If change was easy the whole diet industry would be out of business tomorrow. Millions of people really want to change the way they look; loose a few pounds, or tone up here and there. Yet millions of dollars are made every year on new versions of diet pills, fat removing creams, and fad diets. Diet centers that sell motivation and pre-packaged meals have customers streaming through their doors. If change was easy all of us middle-aged, self-conscious, slightly overweight people would simply look at ourselves in the mirror and say, "Enough is enough. Tomorrow I will change my eating and exercise habits, lose weight and get in shape." And having had this little chat with ourselves we would, from that moment on, set upon a new path toward skinniness and physical fitness.

How often have you come away from a performance review promising yourself you will amaze your boss with heightened levels of achievement only to hear the same comments from your boss at the next review? Have you ever listed all your "weaknesses" on a piece of paper and vowed to make every one of them go away only to make a similar list and a similar vow in a few months?

If you have, you are not alone. Few people can recognize a fault or decide to make a change in themselves and then just make it happen. But successful people do learn to make changes in themselves, and make those changes stick. Therein lies the difference between a successful well-adjusted business person, and a person stuck in a dead-end job full of bitterness.

Perhaps you see yourself in the middle; not as successful as you had hoped, but you've learned to accept your life without bitterness. You're

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“comfortable,” riding through life without taking any risks or rocking the boat.

A business acquaintance of mine is known for his philosophical “thoughts for a day.” Pass him in the hallway and ask him for his thought of the day and he’ll provide a day’s worth of wisdom in a sentence. One morning his thought for the day to me was, “The ship’s in the harbor, but that’s not what it was built for.” As I pondered this bit of wisdom I pictured in my mind a battleship ready for battle but sitting safe alongside a dock in a harbor. What good is a battleship sitting next to a dock? It was made to be at sea, protecting us from antagonists.

God did not make us to be comfortable creatures simply coasting through life. John re-

calls Jesus’ words to the church in Laodicea, “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!” (Rev. 3:15). These words are a warning not to become complacent.

Consider the parable of the talents that Jesus told the disciples in Matthew 25. As the story goes, a rich man gave five talents of money to one man, two to another, and one to a third man to invest. Upon his return the rich man rewarded the man with five talents who had doubled them, and the man with two talents who had also doubled his. But the man with one talent was afraid of the rich man, and didn’t want to lose his money, so instead of investing it he buried it in the ground. The rich man called him wicked and lazy and took the one talent away from him. In an effort to avoid risk and

play it safe the man lost what he had.

LOOKING BACKWARDS TO SEE FORWARDS

There is a Japanese proverb that may be roughly paraphrased, “A man in a rowboat looks behind to see where he is going.” If you’ve ever tried to maneuver a rowboat you know it is a constant exercise in turning around to see where you’re going, and turning back around you see where you’ve been. By picking out a point in front and behind you can draw an imaginary line between the two that helps keep the boat on course.

The first step in making positive lasting change in your life is to understand where you have been. Like rowing the boat, it is important to look back at where you’ve been to help understand where you are going.

I know there are a lot of people who will tell you that you don’t need to look back, that the past isn’t important, but that’s baloney. The Bible uses the word “remember” 166 times. Many of the occurrences are men promising to remember God’s acts of kindness, many more are God promising to remember a covenant with man, while others are God reminding man to remember the things that happened in days past. Clearly God thinks there are worth-

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while things to be learned from the past.

What are the kinds of things we should remember? We should start with a review of the major events in our lives. Much of what we are is shaped by events in our lives and those around us. Think about times when you were successful and times when you failed.

Many people can fill a legal pad with a list of their weaknesses. Ask them what their strengths are however, and they will struggle to list even one or two. But we have many strengths. God gave them to us in the form of spiritual gifts. It's important not to dwell on past failures in the form of an "Oh poor me" pity party. Rather, it is important to understand the failure; what happened and why. Likewise, it is important to understand what led to success. Was it skill, luck, timing, or help from others?

BEHAVIOR REFLECTS VALUES

Another thing we can learn from our past is what our values are (not what we would like to think they are). Our values are reflected in our behavior. For example, you may say you value persistence but you frequently quit projects before they are completed. So your behavior reflects your true values. If you don't like what you

see in the values mirror there is a behavior you need to change.

Values that are important in the world are not values that are important to God. Men value power, possessions, and prestige. But these are not God's values, "For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world" (1 John 2:16).

How do you know what values should be important in your life? Here are three steps to help you clarify your values.

- **Determine What Is Important**

Power, prestige and possessions are all short-term. You can have them today and lose them tomorrow. God

takes a longer-term view of what is important, "The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever" (1 John 2:17). Values that line up with God's will are the ones you should hold onto.

- **Reject What Is Not Important**
Paul writes to the Romans, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world" (Romans 12:2). Paul wanted these Roman Christians to put away their old views and accept God's teaching. We must do the same. Whatever does not help us achieve God's will for our lives should be put aside.

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Words to Ponder

"The probability that we may fail in the struggle ought not deter us from the support of a cause we believe to be just."
Abraham Lincoln

"Humility and the fear of the Lord bring wealth and honor and life."
Proverbs 22:4

"The house of the righteous contains great treasure, but the income of the wicked brings them trouble."
Proverbs 15:6

"Christians are supposed not merely to endure change, nor

even profit by it, but to cause it."
Harry Fosdick

"The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him."
Nahum 1:7

"When I was young I was sure of everything; in a few years, having been mistaken a thousand times, I was not half so sure of most things as I was before; at present, I am hardly sure of anything but what God has revealed to me."
John Wesley

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• Focus On the Eternal

To bring our lives in line with what is important we need to focus on the eternal. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love” (1 Cor. 13:13). No matter what else we may have or do the things that last are faith, hope, and love. Our values should help us focus on God’s kingdom not on man’s world.

DEVELOP A VALUES BASED VISION

One author described vision as what you hope would be said at your funeral, “He was a man of great integrity” versus “He was an inconsiderate, self-centered jerk.”

A vision is a picture of what you want to achieve by the end of your life. Paul wrote to the Romans, “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). Our personal vision should be based on the values that we have established for ourselves.

When we have a values-based vision firmly in mind we can put into place the changes we want to make in our lives. As the change is enacted we gain strength from our relationship

with God, “But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:25).

“Values that are important in the world, are not values that are important to God.”

SURROUND YOURSELF WITH THE RIGHT PEOPLE

Making change stick is tough, but you can enhance your chances significantly if you

surround yourself with the right people. Solomon wrote, “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17).

We need to surround ourselves with people who understand what we are trying to do, who will challenge us, hold us accountable, and encourage us. These people may be part of our work team, peers, mentors, or members of a more formal accountability group. Whoever they are, and whatever role they play in our lives, we need to enroll people who can aid our change process.

PREPARE YOURSELF FOR ADVERSITY

Change will not come without difficulty. Work habits and social habits are learned over a long period of time so don’t expect to change without struggling. Most people never get

started changing because of their worry. But we should not avoid change because of worry, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Phil. 4:6). So in the midst of your struggle to change keep God involved through prayer.

When the time comes that you suffer a setback remember that even in our difficulties God will bring some good, “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” (Romans 8:28).

TRUST IN GOD

Here is the most difficult step in making lasting change; trusting in God. Especially at work we want to believe that we can control everything and don’t think about needing God’s help, but nothing could be further from the truth. God wants us to trust in Him to help make these changes, “for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Phil. 2:13).

God is not, as some people fear, a cosmic killjoy. He wants us to lead good lives that honor Him, “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to

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give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah. 29:11).

GETTING STARTED

We have discussed some of the issues surrounding what changes you should make in your life and the importance of a values-based vision. Now let’s review six practical things to focus on as you begin to make changes in your life.

- **One Thing at a Time**

Don’t try to make a complete changeover of your work and social habits all at once. Focus on the one change that is the most important for you to make. Don’t worry about making other changes until you’re well along with the first change.

- **One Day at a Time**

When Moses led the nation Israel through the desert for 40 years God gave them

enough manna for each day. Don’t worry about how you’ll get through tomorrow, just focus on today, “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matthew. 6:34).

- **Just the Facts**

In the middle of change it is easy to over-think things. Resist this temptation. Focus on dealing with what you know not on what you think, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Phil. 4:8).

- **Those Who Help**

Don’t try to make big changes without trusted peers or friends to help, “As iron sharpens iron, so one

man sharpens another” (Prov. 27:17). Surround yourself with those who can support you in your times of difficulty, offer encouragement when you’re down, and hold you accountable for making the changes you want in your life.

- **Finishing Not Quitting**

Anyone can start but not finish. We should be focused on making the change complete and lasting. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize” (1 Cor. 9:24). There is no honor in starting knowing that you do not intend to finish. We must start, knowing that not only do we intend to finish, but to be successful.

One Final Thought

Deciding what to change may be laborious but it is not particularly difficult. Making the changes in our lives and making them last is the really hard part.

There is one over-riding principle that we must keep in mind throughout the whole analysis and change process, and that is we need to make changes that honor God. Don’t worry about

making changes in your life that make you more acceptable to the “world.” Rather, focus on making changes that make you more acceptable to God.

Paul wrote to the Galatians, “So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the

sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want (Galatians 5:16-17). If you struggle with change that you know is from God, then recognize that it is your sinful nature. Keep your attention focused on God and His plan for your life. When you do you will have God’s power to help you, and who could possibly be a better mentor than God?

Cases in Real Life

Mark was 44 years old. The first big event of his young adult life was entering the military as an officer after getting his college degree. He became a captain in a special forces unit stationed in Vietnam during the war.

Up to this point he was a pretty “normal” non-Christian. In Mark’s case that included a lot of drinking, partying, and chasing girls.

But daily confrontations with death led Mark to ask himself some big questions; “What is the purpose of life?” “Is there a God?” Even then God had His eye on young Mark.

When Mark got back to the States he made the transition to civilian life by getting a sales job with a big company. But those “big questions” kept nagging him so Mark found himself trying out some churches looking for answers.

He met a wonderful young woman, dated, and fell in love. Her devotion to God and her personal relationship with Jesus intrigued him. Answers to those big questions started coming and Mark finally accepted Christ as his personal Saviour.

“Mark didn’t become a whole new person overnight, but slowly things began to change. God was working in him on a daily basis.”

Mark didn’t become a whole new person overnight but slowly things began to change. God was working in him on a daily basis. Mark’s values began to change. He found him-

self studying the Bible, going to church, and trying as hard as he could to be a good husband to his new wife.

Soon a baby came along and caused Mark consider making more changes in his values. From his military experience Mark

understood the importance of a strong leader. He also understood that a leader had to model the desired behavior for the troops. Mark knew his son would emulate his behavior. Since he didn’t want this son to drink Mark decided to quit, and so did his wife.

This change in values soon surfaced at work where having a few drinks after a tough day or at meeting was par for the course.

Employees started asking about the change and for the first time Mark found himself explaining what a relationship with Jesus was all about to his employees.

During a performance review his boss expressed some concern about his proselytizing other employees. Mark boldly stood up for his values saying that when people asked why he didn’t drink, or why his life was different, they deserved an honest answer. Then, since the boss had brought it up, Mark explained in more detail what he talked about with some of the employees. Suddenly, instead of worrying about Mark evangelizing at work, his boss was asking him the big questions.

Mark and his wife are active members in their church; leading Bible studies in their home and at work. They are both bold defenders of their faith making apologies to no one for their adherence to the values they hold dear.

They have endured difficulties with children, finances, changes in careers, having to move several times, and many other big events. But their focus on God’s plan for their lives has kept them happy and secure. Mark knows he and

“During a performance review his boss expressed some concern about his proselytizing other employees.”

his family will undergo many more changes in their lives but he isn’t worried because He trusts in God’s plan for his life.

Meeting Notes

Use these meeting notes to help employees identify what they want to change about themselves and how to go about making the changes last.

- 1) Ask employees to list values that are important to them. Capture the list on a blackboard or generated chart.
- 2) Have employees make notes about significant events in their lives, whether they were positive or negative, and what strengths or weaknesses were apparent during these events.
- 3) Have employees make a list of their strengths.
- 4) Have employees develop a personal vision statement that is based on values that are important to them.
- 5) Have employees list changes needed to accomplish their values-based vision. The list should include things they need to stop doing and things they need to start doing.
 - a) Once the list is developed ask employees to prioritize the changes: number the most important change #1, next #2, and so on.
 - b) Ask employees to lay out a detailed plan to accomplish change #1, along with a timeline.
 - c) Once the plans are made ask employees to list things that can go wrong while they are trying to make this change, and to think about what they will do when the inevitable difficulties arise.
- 6) Ask employees to make a generic list of people who can serve as a support group to help make desired changes (friends, family, peers, mentors, support groups, accountability groups, etc.). Capture the list on a generated chart.
- 7) Have employees make a list of the specific people they will want in their support group.

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Key Points: Creating Change in Your Life

Change is difficult but the following ten tips can help you analyze the changes you want to make in your life.

- ***Should I change?***

If you don't like where you've been, where you are, or where you're headed you need to change!

- ***What do I need to change?***

Pin-point the area for change, no generalizations allowed.

- ***What is the source of my problem?***

Is your problem "can't do" because of ability, or "don't want to" because of a lack of interest.

- ***What are the rewards of making this change?***

Knowing the pay-off provides direction and motivation.

- ***What or who will remind me of the need for change?***

Signs on your desk, to do lists, or a supportive spouse or friends can help keep you on track.

- ***What assets do I have to help me change?***

Lasting change is built on strengths. Know what yours are and use them.

- ***What will keep me from making the changes?***

Fear of change whether real or imagined must be dealt with up front for change to occur.

- ***What specific plans will I make to change?***

General plans lead to failure. Make specific plans with actionable steps that lead to the desired change.

- ***How will I monitor my success?***

Set specific, measurable goals to monitor your progress. Seeing the accomplishment of goals is motivating and provides reinforcement to continue the change process.

- ***Will I be patient enough?***

You did not get where you are overnight. Making changes will take time and require considerable patience.

