

Chapter 13 (Change)

In fact, the most effective churches change constantly. Effective churches never change the mission or the message (those are eternal)- Carey Nieuwhof

It's time for a change. Throughout history the church has moved, parted ways, and yes, even changed. It has changed from a small rag tag fugitive fleet (Battlestar Galactica) to the mega-church. This thing called church has moved from Africa to the four corners of this earth. The great commission has happened. There are now probably thousands of denominations across the globe. Church has evolved and changed.

It goes even further. Schisms, assassinations, and church splits have formed the modern religion. Who did it? Was it us or God? That is a good question. Carey Nieuwhof describes 7 signs your church will never change. Amazingly enough the first sign is called *the same conversation*. Boy that is rocket science. What do they say again? Insanity is repeating the same thing twice and expecting different results. In the last chapter I talked about three points that describe your church. Each point is described by a word. Every church has three words that describe itself. Churches have been doing this over and over forever.

Basically, there are about ten good words to describe Jesus. Over the centuries, many churches have put those words into a bingo balls machine. Every three years or so they pull out three good words. In the long-term scheme of things, we just repeat the same conversation over and over. We care, we love, and we share just like Jesus. Yet, church is stuck. We have said those words so long that they have become white noise. The heart has been replaced with redundancy. This is what the church proclaims but not what they do.

I believe in traditions. Oh boy, do I ever. Our for-fathers took careful time and consideration to enact the traditions we have. Through the years we have gained creeds that were

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whittled down to focus on single words like begotten. Nothing they did was reckless or willy-nilly. They chose carefully. A wide net was cast to encompass the wealth of knowledge within the religious community. Even the construction of the Bible took years to complete. The traditions of the pass deserve our respect. Why? It's because they respected God's plan.

With that said, it does not take a rocket scientist to figure out that culture changes. Some history depicts cavemen dragging their women by the hair. Not so sure that was real. Other history lessons involve slavery and child sacrifices. Why is it that some men chose not to sacrifice their children anymore but they continued to ban women? My point is that some traditions are cultural and not very Godly. Paul insinuated that women should cover their heads. Today that is not how our culture rolls. Why would we expect a 2000-year-old practice or expectation to stand today?

Neiuwhof also mentioned that God does not change but that does not mean your church should not. Times change. Our history had racially segregated churches not that long ago. Imagine that the Jews and Gentiles did not begin together as one happy family. I believe it because the council in Acts 15 addresses that very issue. Who should be in the body of Christ? Yet, today church is a mosaic of color and gender. As it should be. Things change over time.

Culture changes. Traditions come and go. Yet, the main pillars and traditions of the church still stand up to time. We do have communion. We do practice baptisms. Some churches hold them weekly while others do it sparingly. Regardless, these events handed down through the centuries still hold value. Segregating Africans has no value. Change is part of culture. The church can change as long as the core traditions and values found in the Bible remain the same.

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I'm troubled with mixing tradition and culture under the same umbrella. We have communion because Jesus did. So, Paul advises that we not let women lead in a church. What we often forget is that the Bible is written to the world long ago. Paul wrote to the Corinthians. Matthew wrote to the 1st century Jews. We have these letters but we are not part of that world. There are some things mentioned in the Bible that we just don't know why or how it was received by the ancient readers. Plus, the culture in that day believed many things that we don't today. Further to this is information. Some names, cities, and events are known by ancient biblical writers and readers. They most likely understood the Biblical words better than we do. Why? It's because the Bible is so old, some things we just don't understand anymore. We were not living in those times.

For instance, the Sons of God mentioned in Genesis 7. Who were they? Joshua circled Jericho. Which Jericho site? Where exactly is the Sea of Reeds (Red Sea)? Today, we have the tradition of the nativity scene that shows three wisemen present. Biblically that is just not true. The Apostles' creed was carefully written. However, at times, we have recklessly used tradition and culture to the disadvantage of others. Partly for our own gain.

Jehovah witnesses are concerned with the mention of 144,000 saved in revelation. Catholics put a ton of stock into Jesus' mother Mary. In so many cases, churches look down on other denominations based on these beliefs and understandings. Who is the real church? So, we take what we like from the Bible and leave the rest to interpretation. All along, the church has congruently used what they like to exclude others. In the meantime, culture, meaning, and understanding have changed.

Church change comes from culture change. It also comes from within the faithful. *We have always done it this way* is a common phrase. Yet, that is not true. I know a couple that

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fought hard to keep a little picket fence before the alter and pulpit. I believe it was meant to keep the pulpit clean. Confession comes before the fence. The fight was over who could proceed past the fence. Some traditions are purposeful like remembering Jesus at communion. Others like fences and segregation are done for other reasons. Church changes. A new pastor dropped the fence. That couple left the church.

I could go on and on. Yet, the fact remains, things change. God does not change but how we explain his word does. We don't ask people at an alter call to come hither. We don't make the women sit in the back or wear a head scarf, do we? Is God upset with culture change? Did Billy Graham do amazing things without speaking in tongues? Did Rick Warren create a dynamic church model that was unique and different? Is Hillsong in Australia going beyond traditional Hymns? Things change and churches do as well.

First century church was small and hidden. 15th century church was visible and large. The Holiness movement of the 20th century has it's good and bad sides. So did the schism of 1054 navigate us through troubled waters. People died. Churches split and wars were fought. Change can be hard for some. I do believe that the modern church has tried to perfect its Christianity. They have incorporated business and tradition together. The current religious leadership have tried to updated the music and beliefs. Yet, Jesus remains. God the Father remains. Throughout history the Trinity remains.

Church has changed but God remains the same. With that said, it just might be time to change once again. I sat in church a few weeks ago just before December. It's custom to play Christmas music in church as December arrives. Plans are being drawn to welcome people to Christmas church. However, this year felt different.

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We didn't get the regular Christmas message asking us to be extra friendly this time of year. We all know that some people only attend church a few times a year like at Christmas. Were we instructed to be extra friendly? No, we were given the great joyous news that the church will be splitting soon into two campuses. Further to this, they wanted us to offer our Christmas money to launching that new church. Further to that, they were going to train a new pastor that had never been to Bible school and was a relatively new Christian. Some change is good but timing is good too.

What we did not get was the traditional call for money to help the poor or destitute. We were not encouraged to make Christmas hampers, shoe boxes, or baking. The modern church is quite corporate. The exciting news is that were opening up a new franchise. All funds are allocated to making the corporation bigger. Honestly, it made me sick. At home, that night, another church I know posted on Facebook that they wanted to collect funds from the Christmas bake sale for an august missions' trip. Something is seriously wrong with the modern church!

Someone told me that it's the perfect time to ask for money. People are more giving at Christmas. Sure, but where do they think that money should go? To building a new church, missions over-seas, or to the poor? What do you think? I have to admit we were stunned. Traditionally, don't we help people at Christmas? Don't we think about the less fortunate? Apparently not!

Years ago, I spent hours in meetings planning Christmas and Easter. The whole thing was designed to draw them in. I never thought much of it, but now I can see that this just might be the same thing that I witnessed this year. Church desires to grow church. I'll be honest here; I think they want more money. More money and bodies on a spreadsheet look like progress. I remember the first years of the Samaritan shoe's boxes needed several trucks. Now they draw

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straws to see who will take the ten boxes in their hatchback. Something is missing in the heart of the modern church.

Modern church is not the Acts 2 church. Oh no it is not. Imagine if you heard church was about money. Because of those rumors you decide never attend regularly. One Christmas you decide to go. They give the “building a new church” speech. At home that night it got you thinking. Where was the compassion? Where was the heart for the unfortunate? Maybe, just maybe, you remember church in your childhood being about charity. If you heard that speech about growing compared to giving, would you ever come back? Did your view of God, church, and Christians get darker? Hell ya!

My goodness, we need a change of heart. Honestly, I think we need a heart transplant. For so long churches have trained churches to follow a program. Follow this three-point sermon, formula, and these three inspiring words. Church after church has added a plan that others found successful. Now that is it. What is successful? I know a pastor that planted a church. Within a year he had two hundred people going. That is remarkable. Yet, there is more.

Within his success, he was invited to speak all over north America. He must have a formula that works. He must be doing something right. Weekend after weekend he has flown here and there. Yet, he asked me what they could do better as a church? I mentioned serving the community and creating a bible culture. A giving culture. I could tell in his voice that it just did not compute. I’m betting that it never crossed his mind. Build the church kingdom or build and invest in people. What is the sexy choice? What will get you speaking engagements?

We need to change. Church leaders have gone so far down that road that giving, serving, and reading the Bible seems like work. It’s not sexy spreadsheet stuff that gets you invited to

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speak all over North America. Maybe I'm wrong? I never figured a church plant would have time and resources to travel like nuts. Time to visit anyone but the congregation. Honestly, if your speaking 1000 miles away, you're not helping your own people, are you?

What does change dictate? For starts a small church plant needs milk. Imagine a church that had 118 new baptisms in three years. That's a ton of babies. Exactly how long does it take to grow Christian babies? Three years? Well that all depends on how many hours the pastor puts into them. It does not depend on how many life groups they belong to. Discipleship takes a long time. A 6-month course won't cut it. I have been a Christian 20 plus years. Within that time, I have had a couple of mentors and a degree in theology. I still need to grow. It takes way more time than you think.

Change means we need to invest time in people. A lot more time than you're willing. Time is not sexy. It does not go well on spreadsheets. The yearly board meeting on performance hates time waisted visiting. It looks like you're doing nothing. Spinning your wheels. How do you measure investing time in people? The problem is perception. The modern church has been taught to trust programs and spreadsheets. They have looked to the next book or fad. Oh, yes, they do. The first change is I would love to see for the modern church is *investment in people*.

Rick Warren has a fabulous book called The Purpose driven church. How to build a church properly. His overarching plan is to have stages and expectations. There is a long process from believing to leading. All I know is that a church leader must be an extrovert. They must love people. They crave friends and time spent visiting. I may have mentioned a pastor that I visited for six months. That was the best of times. Yet, I can see now that he never once came to my place. It figures.

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My goodness people, Jesus traveled to your home. Why must we sit and wait for them to come? Jesus never did. Never! I actually wonder if he went to the cross partly to visit the thief beside him. Jesus would! Instead, we build programs to draw. We hold lengthy meetings devising plans. Yet, all it took was a visit from Jesus to the woman at the well. An invitation to a wedding. I love the book *in his steps* by Charles Sheldon. The main question was “*what would Jesus do.*” Read that book. Jesus did not devise a three-point plan, or a church base. A program to feed the poor. He was the program. He was the three-point plan. Wherever he was is the church base.

We are so engrained in church as an institution. Since we believe Jesus is the church, people think that protecting the institution is paramount. Make it a strong entity. So, we embrace the corporate model. It’s bigger, better, faster, more. Make the lead pastor the C.E.O. Then we have divisions below. If Jesus did not do that then why in heavens name do, we? How often were his family, friends, and disciples second guessing Jesus? It’s because Jesus rolled with the Spirit, not a corporate model.

We need to change our hearts and minds. Basically, we have adopted the pope mentality. Oh, the evangelicals are crying foul over my words. You know it’s true. Church is top heavy. We are so engrained in programs, ministry, and timelines that spreadsheets look holy. Going for coffee with a troubled soul seems dirty. We don’t put friends first. There are stigmas, cautions, and reservations to whom we interact with. You know it’s true. So, we create things within church walls to maintain distance with the troubled and lost.

How so? Come to our Christmas gathering. There is a new series starting this weekend. Set up the billboard and Facebook page. Use catchy lines to draw attention. Give out invitation cards to pass to friends. What is missing in all this? You can’t see it can you. It’s you! You’re

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missing. Jesus sent them out. We do patrick, with invitation cards. Oh, no it's you. In Matthew 25:31-46 there are a lot of "you" words. I believe Matthew 10 and these verses in chapter 25 point only at you.

The change? It's you. We have left another church. I am stuck at a cross roads. They played church. The pastor is selling his success more than his message. I hate that. So, I have friends that claim their pastor is all about community. We will try, yet again, another church. However, what is the problem here? Will they allow us to reach the community with good works? Better yet, will I reach the community regardless of the church I attend. Maybe God has given us no church because we are his church. Just go! Be you!

The church plant I attended has what they call a church hub. They do church in a movie theatre so there is no physical building. They own a house that serves as their church offices and meeting rooms. It's really smart. They call it the hub. Maybe we need to change our minds on what is the hub. I like their house concept. It is a really good idea. Yet, aren't people the real hub? When we work, play sports, or just hang out in the world, we are the hub between them and church. The hub between Jesus and the world. What if Christians were the hub?

Far too often we say church is the hub. The programs and ministry are the bridge between the lost and the saved. Yet, I will come back time and time again to the verse "God draws." Who has God drawn into your life? There were a few people that always came into the movie theatre to see a movie. Yet, they stumbled on church. Usually, they book it out of there pretty fast. Yet, God draws. We had a chance to make an impression.

When you work, do you make an impression. Does it happen in your neighborhood? How about while playing sports or in a library. Are you making a hub impression? Church leaders

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spend so much time devising ways to draw them in. Yet, right before their noses are Gods hub. This is my main beef with life groups and ministry. We are so used to growing church that we forget to grow people. Do you honestly think you can grow a new Christian in a life group and church on Sunday? A new Christian needs a personal touch.

Why did the church fathers have Sunday night services? Why did they disciple? Why did they have mid-week services? Building Christians takes time. It also takes more time than Sunday. It takes more time than a small group once a week. Now, if it's common to attend church twice a month, we have a problem. We need to change our speed. Stop running the church and start sitting with people.

Baptism is good. yet discipleship is better. Church on a Sunday is good but serving the community is more impactful. We immediately say that is false. Sunday church is pinnacle. Really? So, a pastor that I knew was on the financial board in his city. By the numbers his church drew in large funds. Could he have changed the community through that board? Possibly. Yet, he said many times that on Sunday he has his game face on. What about the rest of the week?

I may attend this church plant in my home town. The pastor said he loved the fact that his church is always looking to serve people. We shall see. The problem is that we talk serving, growing, and many other Biblical words to describe Jesus. Yet, what is really happening under the hood. Is the people hub doing church or growing in Christ? I will repeat it again: growing in Christ goes way deeper than Sunday and a once-a-week life group?

Change must divert our eyes. Divert our heart. For so long we have looked to the shiny thing. The other day I showed my son a cell tower. We all know what they look like. All those transmitters high up on the top a very tall pole. The pole was completely covered. I then showed

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him a church tower with a cross on it. It was surrounded with transmitters. A money driving scheme surrounding the cross. The one thing you had held high to draw people in and you commercialized it. Patrick, we need the money. It's too bad Jesus didn't do a plug for God while he was on the cross. Oh, right he did. The thief noticed Jesus. The centurion noticed Jesus.

What do you think people notice in a church cell (cross) tower? What do they hear when they attend church twice a year? They call them seeker services. Yet, we are asking for funds to grow the church. What if they only heard about growing people? What if they were met by vibrant Christians at the door. There is a difference between a person ushering and a person looking for someone to shake their hand. Someone to notice cold hands. What if we didn't ask for money at Christmas, but offered the service as a free gift? What if?

I know a popular church that decided not to have a service between Christmas and New Year's. It was a break for all those servers. I know a good church that has a giving box on the wall. They always make budget too. We need a change of spirit. What if the main goal was trying to replicate your position? What if the next person through the door became a lifelong friend in Christ instead of a giving opportunity? I am beginning to wonder if we need space between the giving bag and the hand that feeds it. Space between services to give servers a chance to re-charge. Is that space a chance to talk and listen to people?

Imagine a church that longs for the next reclamation. The next inspiration. What if money became secondary because friends became more important? What if time in ministry meetings became a distant third to spending time growing people in Christ? What if life groups were not about taste and games but about making the Bible real? What if?

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Patrick, a church like that would not last long. Oh, I have heard it all. The problem is this: never tried is never known. It's that simple. We have done church this way for so long that trying something different becomes an argument in a 4-hour long meeting. Real change is putting people ahead of church business. What if church grew when you invest time and love in people. I am sure that if we were friends first, the church would explode.

Instead, we have taken the easy out. It's like this. Some sports teams have certain spots in the building that are rarely sat in. The rule of thumb is, if it's not expensive then people won't take it seriously. So those seats are covered with tarps or closed off. Yet, in pro sports the tickets are always too high priced. They would rather have a half full building with money in the seats. Real butts in the seats are secondary. What if getting people to come was more important than money?

It's similar in church. Let's be honest here. We pass the offering plate because we don't trust people. Church likes levels of attendance to make up for small giving. 300 people giving is better than 100 strong tithing Christians. Why? You need to invest time to get 100 strong tithing Christians. The 300 casual attendees are easy. Just build a revolving door and watch it turn. No effort needed. Two services mean more room. Church growing? Healthy church? If you say so.

The change is so simple. God gave you a finite amount of time to be with people he created. God gave you and them free will to choose. To choose God and choose to love. Pastors get burned out because they love church too much. Obviously, they did not love their family more. Their people more. Honestly, does family and friends burn you out? How can you run out of time loving people? Yet, many pastors say they don't have enough hours in the day to run church?

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Become a love people factory and your church will produce butts in the seats. Make church a hub where people love people and the funds will overflow. People that love something will give to something. They will attend something if they love it too. 100 vibrant Christians will far exceed 300 church attendees. The word is investing. If God draws in a person to you, then invest in them. Never and I mean never love people in the name of Christ. Never do it to grow your church. Never do it to look healthy. Love people because you can.

Again, I will be honest. Change is hard. We are addicted to the corporate model of church. Enough money will come in if we build and draw. There will always be just enough. Yet, if we take the time to grow people, in time, the store house would explode. How do I know it? I know a church that wanted to expand. The pastor did a few strange things. He stopped church several times to pray in groups. That was un-nerving. He brought in special speakers to address sin head on. Marriages were rocked. Yet, they raised 12 million in one year. They paid for the expansion in full.

Invest in people. Change the way you view church life. Cut the meetings in half. Schedule church time and invest in people and family. You know the saying: give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Train him to fish and you feed him for life. If you only give people a small amount of Biblical milk, they have to return to you. It's a job sustainer. Teach him or her to sustain their own Christianity and you will have them for life. They don't need you; they need the trinity. However, they would indebt to you for a lifetime.

Finally, I do want to mention the trinity. Why does God exist like that? Let's change our thinking on God. We need the word. The word from a pastor is good but an effort to open the book yourself is far better. A prayer from a friend is nice but praying for others is far better. Hearing about the good Sheppard is good, but being a good Sheppard for others is far better.

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Each one of us, in church, needs to live the trinity life. Love God, be like the Son, and live in the Spirit. That's all we need. If you make church all about the trinity in people, you will have a full church of cheerful givers and servers. No small group, Sunday service, or ministry project can match the power of a full trinity life.

Say no to change and this generation of church goers will be weak. Feeding them just enough to keep your pastorate safe is shallow. It's not God approved. The other day I was discussing if someone needed schooling to be a pastor. A pastor is a Shepard of people. Is a president of the United States a pastor? We all scream no! What separates a president from a God-fearing preacher? They both are in the people business. They both love God. Seriously, what sets you apart? A president has finite time to help you. A pastor has a lifetime. A hub of people has more than enough time to grow others to feed themselves. Don't destroy your life by straining time and love. Inspire people with overflowing love and commitment to seeing them stronger spiritually than humanly possible. God says he draws. He has the church in his hands. It's your job to do the best with the people he draws. Is change worth that?