

The Spiritual Dimension of Change:

For the Sake of the Gospel

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

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¹⁹ *Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ.* ²⁰ *When I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to Christ. When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too lived under that law. Even though I am not subject to the law, I did this so I could bring to Christ those who are under the law.* ²¹ *When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law, I too live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ. But I do not ignore the law of God; I obey the law of Christ.* ²² *When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some.* ²³ *I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings. (1 Cor 9:19-23; NLT)*

As most of you know, back in October, my wife and I drove across the country with our two kids. Over 6 days and 5 nights, we drove from San Diego, CA to Basking Ridge, NJ. My wife had this fun idea to capture our cross-country trek. You know that whenever you cross state lines, you see a big sign, usually on the side of the highway, that says “Welcome to Missouri” along with the state’s moto. Like “Welcome to Missouri! The Show Me State.” Laurie’s idea was that we would take a picture of every state sign we passed. That means 13 states and 13 state signs to capture, on camera, moving along at 70 mph . . . without being blurry! No pressure! So, whenever we got close to a state border, we’d start watching the GPS screen. “*Okay, how many miles until the state line?*” The kids would get excited. And, we’d all start looking out the windshield, straining our eyes far in the distance to see the sign. We needed to be alert because going along at 70 mph we only had a few brief seconds to capture the sign on camera.

Now, have you ever driven in a car and tried to read a sign that was too far off? At first, the state sign is unrecognizable. You can’t even tell it’s a sign at all. Then, as you drew closer, you could catch the edges, but you still have no idea what the sign says. A few more seconds and the sign’s letters begin to become recognizable. Then, for only a few precious seconds, you can read the sign before passing it by!

Now, if we didn’t have the camera turned on, in hand, and ready to shoot, we’d miss the shot as we flew past the sign! The excitement in the car would escalate as we neared each sign. The kids would be on the edge of their seats, straining against their seat belts saying, “*Are you ready? Are you ready? Here it comes! Get ready! There it is! There it is!*” I’m happy to report that we got pictures of all 13 state signs, and 12 of them are readable . . . Guess which one was blurry? The most important one: NEW JERSEY!

As I reflect on that experience, I see a parallel to our church. What do I mean? Like that cross-country trek, you and I, that is our church body, are on a journey together. God has brought us together to travel this road for His glory. Now, when we started this journey together last November 1st, there was a sign far in the distance. It was, at the time, too far away to read. As we've traveled together these 8 months, we've drawn closer and closer to this sign. Month-by-month it has come into more into focus. Recently, this sign became extremely clear to read.

This morning, we'll hold off on the few remaining weeks we have to finish up our series in the book of Micah. Instead, I feel led to discuss what has come into focus on that sign. After thinking and praying about our upcoming vote on the proposed New Name for our church, the Lord has laid it upon my heart to talk through a number of issues that this proposal has brought to the surface. Like signs on the highway, the issues on this sign have become clearer as we've gone down what I'll call the "New Name Road". In a providential manner, the Lord has led us down this New Name Road. If we're willing, this journey will strengthen our church.

That idea may sound as crazy to you as it did to me at first. Hear me out. Traveling this road the past three months has brought issues within our church to the surface. That's a good thing. You see, traveling this road has brought us to a place where we can now read the sign, and discuss the issues written on it.

What is my goal this morning? Is my goal to convince you to vote "yes" on the proposed name this Wednesday night? No. Convincing you is not my goal. I'm not going to review reasons and logic for the new name. We've held a series of large, medium, small, and individual meetings. Further, you can pick up in the Foyer, at the Welcome Center, a thorough document titled "New Church Name Proposal" which explains the careful process of graduated steps, prayerfully taken, over the past four months. It also explains the logic, reasoning, and evidence for this the New Name.

So what's my goal this morning?

In a nutshell, we need to speak about the "*Spiritual Dimension of Change.*" We need to sort through heart issues related to change. My goal is that we learn to make decisions based upon what is **best** for the spread of the gospel, not what is most comfortable or familiar. My goal is that no matter what you vote, yes or no, you are casting your vote because you think it **best** equips us, as the body of Christ, to share the gospel with our community in our cultural context.

While the "New Name Road" has brought certain heart and spiritual issues in view, most of these are related to bigger issues than just the new name. In fact, some are unrelated to the New Name, but this process has brought them to the surface. These are weighty issues. These are critical issues. These are heart and spiritual matters related to change in general. They are: **fear, comfort, grief, and forgiveness.**

As we've traveled down this New Name Road, these issues have come into focus. Like I said, this is a good thing because it provides us the opportunity to talk about them. It's good *if we address them*. This morning, we're pulling off the road for an important pit stop. We're going to get out of the car, and we're going to examine the issues on the sign. We're going to open our Bibles. And I pray, process these issues according to Scripture.

Before we read the sign, let's remember who we are and then read our sign based on that identity.

Biblically, we must approach this subject, any subject, as a disciple of Jesus. What then does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus? Jesus put it this way in Luke 14:33:

Luke 14:33

“. . . any of you who does not give up **everything** he has cannot be my disciple.”

To be a disciple involves sacrifice, it involves a willingness to let go and to change. The gospel compels me, and it compels you, to hold **everything** loosely in order to follow Jesus. Notice that Jesus equates loss with discipleship.

God calls us to give up **everything**. But what does “**everything**” mean? Jesus warns us that “everything” we hold dear **MUST** be released in order to follow Him to share the gospel in this community. Everything.

You may have heard of the book called Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream, by Dr. David Platt. Platt was a professor at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. A few years ago, he became the pastor of a church in Birmingham, AL. Platt has just released another book entitled: Radical Together: Unleashing the People of God for the Purpose of God. In this second book, Radical Together, Dr. Platt is calling the church to evaluate itself in light of God's calling, which is to be willing to give up *everything* to be a disciple of Jesus. Platt correctly notes that giving up “everything” often includes “good” things.

Why would we give up “good” things? Listen to what Platt says:

Everything, even “good” things

“We must be willing to sacrifice good things in the church in order to experience the great things of God. ... We have to put everything, even good things in the church, up for reconsideration before God, releasing them wholly to him and asking him to show us his priorities and purposes for each.” Source: Platt, David (2011). Radical Together: Unleashing the People of God for the Purpose of God (p. 9). Multnomah Books.

For some in our church, the name “Millington Baptist Church” is a deeply held ‘good thing.’ I understand that. I get that. I feel that. The name “Millington Baptist Church” evokes powerful emotions because it brings to mind family and friends who you have loved and who have loved you. I get that. I love my home church of First Baptist Church, Amarillo, TX. I was baptized in First Baptist Amarillo. I grew up in that church. And its pastor for 30 years, Dr. Winfred Moore, is a man whom I deeply, deeply respect and love. He’s a Christian giant in my mind.

For some in our church, the word “Baptist” is a deeply held ‘good thing.’ For you, the word “Baptist” evokes wonderful, positive feelings and memories. I understand that. I get that. I feel that. It does the same for me. Not only my home church is Baptist, but the first church that hired me is “Baptist”, Birdville Baptist Church. The University I attended, Baylor, was and is “Baptist.” I met my wife at a Baptist university. I received my calling to ministry at a Baptist university. So “Baptist,” for me, evokes decades of ‘good’ memories. My memories and feelings of my “Baptist” heritage are ‘good’ things.

But, I am not a disciple of a denomination. I’m not a disciple of a name. I am a disciple of Jesus. As Jesus’ disciple, I am commanded to give up everything, even ‘good’ things, if doing so will help to spread the gospel.

God’s Word, compels disciples to do this. Platt got it right when he wrote this:

The gospel compels us

The gospel compels the church to go to God with everything we have and everything we do and then ask, “What needs to go? What needs to change? What needs to stay the same?” Source: Platt, David (2011). *Radical Together: Unleashing the People of God for the Purpose of God* (p. 9). Multnomah Books.

Folks, the gospel should compel us. That is why the Elders and leaders are asking this question:

What is best

to fulfill Jesus’ command to take the gospel to our communities (Matt 28:19-20)?
to be Ambassadors for the gospel of Christ (2 Cor. 5:17-20)?

Folks, I’m concerned because I have not heard any arguments for how keeping our name **better** equips this church in this culture. None. We have not heard any arguments for how keeping “Baptist” in a new name **better** equips our people to be Ambassadors for the gospel of Christ.

You see, I’m **not** concerned that some disagree. Disagreement is okay *if* that disagreement is: (a) kind and gentle exhibiting a Christ-like disposition, and

(b) focused on finding the **best** way to fulfill the Bible's commands to take the gospel into our community.

I'm concerned because the arguments against change, as far as I can tell, have not been asking the right questions. God's Word commands us to seek the absolutely **best** way to reach our post-Christian, New Jersey culture with the gospel. The gospel compels us to evaluate **everything** in order to overcome barriers that hinder people from hearing the gospel, connecting with believers in this church, and becoming fully devoted followers of Christ. Instead, the reasons not to change have largely been based on other reasons.

These reasons given for not changing are the 'things on the sign' that I've pulled over to read, examine, and talk about. Before walking through these, please, please, please hear me say this: If you've offered any of these reasons, please know that this is not directed at you personally. These arguments have been given by other people too as reasons not to change the name or as support against other changes in the church.

Okay, here's a **brief outline of where we are going.**

First, I'm going to address 3 arguments offered against a New Name. I've selected these 3 arguments because they pertain to the much bigger issue of change in general. Second, I'm going to discuss 4 heart or spiritual issues related to change. Again, these 4 spiritual issues pertain to other changes and change in general. So, 3 arguments against change, and then 4 heart/spiritual issues related to change.

Okay, let's take these one at a time:

Argument # 1 is that:

(1) "God will bring people if he chooses regardless of the name."

If this argument is correct, then missionaries to other countries and cultures have it all wrong. All the ways in which missionaries across the globe are trained to change their customs, dress, name, language, etc. *in order to reach people who come from different cultural perceptions* is a colossal waste of God's resources. If this argument is correct, then Campus Crusade for Christ (CCC) should stop its name change process. It should not be concerned that Muslim students find their name offensive because it contains the word "Crusade" in it. But Campus Crusade for Christ, which our church supports financially, is concerned, and they are willing to do everything they can to remove barriers for Muslim students to hear the gospel. Campus Crusade for Christ *is changing their name in order to be "all things to all people so that by all possible means [their campus missionaries] might save some"* (1 Cor 9: 22).

Hopefully, you're taking notes! On your notes page, you'll see **1 Corinthians chapter 9, verses 19-23** printed at the top. Look at verses 22 and 23. Paul writes:

1 Corinthians 9:22b-23

“. . . I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. 23 I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings.”

There's that **“everything”** again. The Apostle Paul is saying that for the sake of the Gospel, he adapts and changes his methods according to the cultural context. It's no different for us today!

God places us within unique, particular cultures. Each culture has its unique features. Basking Ridge, New Jersey's culture is different from Atlanta, Georgia's which is different from Tacoma, Washington's. Let me give you a few examples of cultural adaptation:

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew and Aramaic. The New Testament was written in Greek. Yet, we provide you Bibles in English. Why? It makes little sense having pew bibles written in those languages. We change the translation to reach a different culture.

Did you know that South Korea has a far greater percentage of Evangelical Christians than the percentage in New Jersey? Did you also know that those Evangelical churches in South Korea are sending missionaries to New Jersey! Praise God that they are! We need them. Did you also know that when those South Korean missionaries arrive in New Jersey they change their name as well as their customs? Why? They know that trying to get Americans to pronounce a Korean name, much less remember it, will hinder their efforts at reaching Jersey with the gospel. Their tactics come straight from Scripture. **Look at verse 22 on your sheet.** Inspired by the Spirit, the Apostle Paul said *“. . . I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.”* (1 Cor 9:22b)

Mark Driscoll is a pastor in culture much like our own. His church is in Seattle, Washington which is pretty dark place spiritually. In his book entitled, The Radical Reformation: Reaching Out without Selling Out, Driscoll challenges the church to follow Jesus' command to be prepared to give up everything for the sake of the gospel. He writes:

Change for the sake of the gospel

*“. . . Christians and churches exist to perpetuate the gospel and should be swift to change their cultural forms if they are not the **most beneficial** for achieving that goal. This is what Paul told the Corinthians about being all things to all people and using all means to see as many people as possible saved (1 Cor. 9:19–23).”*

Source: Driscoll, Mark (2009). *The Radical Reformation: Reaching Out without Selling Out* (p. 100). Zondervan.

Driscoll's focus is right on target because it's biblical! What is "most beneficial" for the church to perpetuate the gospel?

What does Paul mean in v.19 by making himself a slave? He explains in the following verses. He became like a Jew to win Jews to Christ. To reach the Hellenistic Romans, he changed and adopted Greco-Roman practices.

God leads us and is at work in people's hearts. But God places people and churches *within a particular culture to reach particular people within that particular culture*. If Paul was cognizant of and adapted to changing cultures, why wouldn't we?

Argument # 2 is that:

(2) "That's the way we've always done it."

No, not really. For example, you may know that the founders of our church came from a Baptist church. But, did you know that our founding church did *not* originally have the word "Baptist" in the title? MBC was founded by another MBC. This church was founded by members of The Mount *Bethel* Church in 1851. The 80 founding members of our church came from a church without "Baptist" in its name.

Did you know that in the New Testament, a local group of Christians is called by different names? For example, in the book of Acts, believers are called followers of "the Way." In Acts chapters 19, 22, and 24 (e.g. 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22), "The Way" is the title given to designate the followers of Jesus.

This argument fails to account for the fact that time, cultures, and peoples change. Churches either change or they become irrelevant in their culture and die. Period.

Argument # 3 is that:

(3) "There's too much change too fast."

This is really a personal preference and a reaction to change. Underlying this statement is a commentary about one's own comfort. Change, any change, has the potential to inject the unfamiliar into one's life. And unfamiliarity causes us all to experience various levels of discomfort. Resistance to change, then, is an effort to stop being *uncomfortable*. This bears repeating. Change causes us to experience unfamiliar things. Unfamiliarity leads to discomfort.

Resisting change in this case is a desire to stop being uncomfortable. But, being uncomfortable isn't a bad thing.

We must recognize that a desire to remain comfortable is a spiritual issue. God does not care about our comfort. God cares about our character.

Therefore some resistance to change is a spiritual issue and may reflect heart issues. Next we'll examine 4 spiritual issues related to change.

Spiritual issue #1 is that:

1) For some, resistance to change is a fear of the unknown.

"Fear is the path to the Dark Side. Fear leads to anger, anger leads to hate, hate leads to suffering." (YODA, Star Wars)

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

The first saying is from the movie Star Wars. While it's funny, it contains truth. And all truth is God's truth. Fear can be destructive. Fear can paralyze individuals. Fear can paralyze churches. But we must remember, God calls us to move forward, not in the absence of fear, but in faith. As Galatians 2:20 says, we are to *"live by faith in the Son of God."* We are to move forward in reliance upon Him who is greater than our fear. In Christ, we have nothing to fear!

Spiritual issue #2 is that:

2) For some, resistance to change reflects a desire to have it my way.

That's not biblical. The church is not Burger King. ☺

Where in Scripture is personal preference put forward as the correct decision-making criteria? Instead of "my desires" and seeking "to have it my way," disciples of Jesus should be asking:

- (a) What glorifies God the most?
- (b) What best reaches people with the gospel?
- (c) What best develops other disciples in spiritual maturity?

These questions reflect the mind of Christ. These questions remind us that we are called:

- 1) to love and glorify God, not our history and not our comfort.
- 2) to sacrifice for Christ, not to expect that to have our needs met.
- 3) to serve others, not to ask our church to serve us.

Spiritual issue #3 is that:

3) For some, resistance to change is an emotional reaction to loss.

Some in our church body feel there have been a lot of changes over the past 8 months. Let's talk about some those changes and the feelings that it has generated for some.

What are some of the changes?

1. To begin with, Me! 😊. You've got my ugly mug to stare at. Listen, I stare at it every morning. I know it can be jarring! But it's not my fault. Take it up with God!
2. Different pulpit. The one Pastor Pendell used was custom made to fit him. If I used it, I'd have to stand on a step stool to see over it!
3. Hymnals removed. We've asked around, and the best we can tell, the hymnals were last used in a morning worship service about 9 years ago! 9 years! Shoot, even the IRS only requires you to keep the past 7 years of old tax returns!!! Look, we understand that some enjoy flipping through and reading the great lyrics. That's awesome! Know that we are keeping some hymnals for the occasional hymn sing. Know too that we would love for the remaining hymnals to find a nice home. If you would like one, it's yours!
4. New staff ministry staff – Bob Erbig, Kristen Hamilton, and Jen Roth. These are great additions! Thank you Lord for bringing them to us!
5. Jeri Romaine, our Office Manager, retired. This is a loss for us, but her grandkids are the beneficiary! So, we have new office staff: Nanette Conn, and Debbie Locke. Wonderful ladies!
6. Buying your own food. No free bagels. No free pastries between the services. No free lunch in the summer. But every time you drop a buck in the can to pay for your bagels, think \$35 K. That's right, we're saving \$35,000 dollars in this year alone by not spending it on food. Instead, we're using that \$35 K to start Cornerstones, disciple our kids and reach our community with the gospel Christ. We sacrificed a "good thing," food, for the "best thing."

Those are changes. Some are small. Some are big. But, individually and collectively they have an emotional impact. Let's talk about the emotional impact which change may cause.

Let's recognize that different people will process changes differently. Some folks are relatively unaffected by change. For others, change is very difficult. Let me speak to those of you who don't mind change. Be gentle with those who struggle with change. Pull alongside them. Love on them. Encourage them. Help them navigate the emotional impact of change.

This is important because change can trigger grief. Why is this? Grief is a response to losing something. Change can create a sense of loss, thus triggering a grieving process. Know this, it is okay to grieve. Grief is a natural way of processing change and moving on. We all should be cognizant of and sympathetic to people feeling sad and grieving over change.

But, please remember this:

Experiencing grief is NOT a valid reason not to change. Grief is uncomfortable. Grief is unpleasant. As humans, we naturally recoil from discomfort. We try to avoid things that are unpleasant. We naturally seek comfort. But, as any doctor worth their salt will tell you, it's terribly un-healthy to give in to this natural tendency to be comfortable.

For example, our physical health will suffer if we are always comfortable. If we give in to the desire to be comfortable, we'll never exercise. If we don't exercise, then we're more likely to experience things like high-blood pressure and pre-mature bone loss. So, we need to experience the discomfort of exercise to be physically healthy. The discomfort is good for us. It changes our health for the better. This is true in other areas of life.

Being uncomfortable is okay and quite often great for us. In fact, discomfort is usually the precursor to spiritual growth. Being uncomfortable often comes as the result of God pushing us out of our comfort zone. God does this because He's more interested in our character than our comfort. We need to be uncomfortable to grow and be used by God to His glory.

For example, four years ago, in the summer of 2007, my wife and I began selling off almost everything we owned . . . cars, bikes, electronics, furniture . . . you name it, to move to England. These were things we had accumulated over 14+ years of marriage. Some were things we cherished. And the experience was more than a little uncomfortable! I remember one morning posting an advertisement with pictures of a beautiful armoire on Craig's list. Within 30 minutes a lady had seen the ad online, called me, come over to my house, put it in her truck, and driven away! Seriously! 30 minutes! I remember feeling this bizarre sense of loss as I looked at the empty space where it had sat in our living room.

A few weeks later, we had a garage sale. I remember having this conversation with my son who was 4 ½ years old at the time. You see, we had to sell almost all of his toys. It's simply far too expensive to ship them overseas. So, there we are, standing on the curb, as this guy loads a box of my son's toys, his bike, and his Thomas the Train table and train cars into his mini-van. My son looks at me and says, *"Why do we have to sell all my toys?"* Looking into those sweet, chocolate brown eyes I replied, *"We're giving up our toys because God wants us to do something for Him."* You know what he said, *"Okay. I'm sad. But it's okay. I understand."* Holding his hand on that curb, I remember thinking how God must have been so very pleased with my son's response.

Why would Laurie and I do this to ourselves and to ourselves and to kids? It's simple really. We had to make big changes to follow God. He was calling us to leave our friends, our family, our wonderful church, and a secure job in which I had received a great promotion to move to England so that I could pursue a Ph.D. That process caused us to experience enormous and profound change. As a result of those changes, we experienced grief and sadness. I'm sure that missionaries undergo similar feelings of grief and sadness when they give up comfortable lives with friends and family in the states in order to live in unfamiliar and often dangerous surroundings so that others can hear the gospel.

Yet, that grief and sadness is not an indication that the change was bad. The grief we experienced didn't mean we shouldn't have moved to England. God led us into that change so that in the grief and sadness we would be given the opportunity to rely on God more than ever. Pushed out of the familiar, we were pushed into the arms of our Savior. You see, grief and sadness is a normal human reaction to change. And our human nature is to resist and even recoil at being uncomfortable, at feeling sad, at going through grief. But, we must realize that God utilizes change to refine us, bring us into a deeper dependency on Him, and make us more like our Savior for His glory.

Spiritual issue #4 is that:

4) For some, resistance to change is due to a lack of forgiveness over past hurts.

I understand that some still dwell on past hurts like the Al Reilly situation. I have heard that resistance to change may stem from past issues like that. Friends, let me blunt. You must forgive everyone, completely, and move on. If you are a Christian, then not to do so is a sin.

Disciples are commanded to forgive

. . . "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" ²² Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. (Matthew 18:21-22)

¹³ Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. (Colossians 3:13)

It doesn't get any plainer than that. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. The sin of un-forgiveness must not prevent the church from moving forward.

Okay, so here we are pulled over on the side of the road. We've gotten out and read the 3 arguments against change and the 4 spiritual issues related to change. Before we conclude, get back in the car, and go down this road, I would like for you to consider something.

After much prayer, thoughtful discussion, and the input of many, many of you, the Elders of this church have made a recommendation for a New Name. They have done so because they feel it is the **best** way to fulfill our calling as disciples and as a church. The Elders have provided the congregation with many opportunities to ask questions and provide input. This included meeting with the entire staff, meeting with lay leaders, and holding two Interacts. In addition, the Elders offered themselves to you personally: to visit with folks individually in their homes, in Sunday Schools and in Small Groups. They have done this as well. The Elders have provided a substantial document detailing the logic, data, compelling reasons, and Biblical rationale for a New Name. They have asked for and listened to comments, input, and feedback.

Because no compelling arguments or data have been presented that suggest keeping our existing name or leaving the word “Baptist” in a new name is the **best** way to reach people in this culture with the good news of Jesus, the Elders and leadership of the church are proposing that the church adopts the new name of “Crossridge Church.”

I conclude by asking you, my church family this question which Dr. David Platt raises in Radical Together.

THE QUESTION

Specifically, is your community of faith willing to put everything down before God and say, “We will do whatever you want, we will drop whatever you command, we will eliminate whatever is not best, and we will add whatever is necessary in order to make your glory known in the world around us, no matter what it costs us”?

Source: Platt, David (2011). *Radical Together: Unleashing the People of God for the Purpose of God* (p. 12). Multnomah Books.

I pray that each of us will go before the Lord and ask this question.

I started this morning explaining that we were pulling off the side of road to explore some weighty issues that have come into view.

As we get back in the car, and continue down this road, I am praying:

1. that each of us will consider the things we’ve covered this morning in up-coming decisions, and that our decisions, whether we vote yes or no, would be based upon asking what is **the best way** to take the gospel to our community
2. that all of us will stay low before the Lord,
3. that we will be a people who are willing to be uncomfortable for the sake of the gospel,
4. that we are willing to give up everything for the sake of the gospel.