

Chapter Thirty

How People Change

How many counselors does it take to change a light bulb?

Only one, but the light bulb has to want to change.

Over my 30 years of clinical experience in counseling and education, I have learned many things. Some have been useful to me, others have not. Over the years, it was revealed to me that there are major discrepancies between many of the theories and traditions of modern psychology and the sure and steadfast witness of the Bible.

I was initially educated in Freudian psychoanalysis, Transactional Analysis by Harris and Steiner, Client-Centered therapy by Carl Rogers, Behaviorism and Operant Conditioning by B.F. Skinner, Self-Actualization by Abraham Maslow, Reality Therapy by William Glasser, Gestalt Therapy by Fritz Perls, and various Encounter Groups and Sensitivity Trainings, including much early "New Age" teachings. You have to know that back in the 1970s if you weren't in therapy, you were in denial!

You can imagine my confusion! This was all BEFORE I became a believer and began understanding the Bible.

Since becoming a believer in 1976 and having learned what the Bible teaches, I have thrown overboard most of the humanistic "Psycho-babble", as I refer to it. During my walk with the Lord, I have learned many things, some that were easy to understand and embrace, some that were more difficult. I learned from the Bible that the central issues of what is wrong with man are NOT his "nature and environment", "irrational thinking", "cultural lag", "class struggle", "human weakness and ignorance", or "primitive instinct left over from evolution." The Bible calls it SIN and there is only ONE remedy and that is the once-for-all sacrifice of Yeshua and the continuing ministry of the Holy Spirit within.

All through this process, I have been guided by His Spirit speaking through His Word. I am not yet a finished product. There remains more work to be done. That is called progressive sanctification and I embrace it fully, trusting in His wise and loving care for me.

I do not want anyone to receive this teaching as a "formula approach" or "canned sales pitch". It is not a rigid method. It is helpful to see this as a "flow" that is useful to understanding the complexities of the processes involved. It is provided with the understanding that true Biblical counsel will always

be centered on the Word of God and dependent on the leading and inspiration of the Holy Spirit as He brings conviction and enlightenment into the soul of man.

How to Help People

The first rule of helping is simple: DO NO HARM.

Ephesians 4:29 says, "Let no corrupt speech proceed out of your mouth, but only what is good for building others up as the need may be, that it may give grace to those who hear."

We don't need a dictionary to inform us of the meaning of the word corrupt. We see examples in the news every day. Aside from its description of political power grabs, unlawful business practices, and personal moral failures, it can also describe falsehoods, untruths, lies, deceit, and errors. The text here in Ephesians should remind us to guard what we say in terms of truthfulness. I believe the best way to ensure our words are based on truth is that they are based on the Word of God, the source of ultimate truth.

Our speech is also directed to be only that which is good for building others up, not tearing them down. In our approach

to helping people, there is simply no room for personal attacks, put-downs, manipulations, or self-serving hypocrisy.

Finally, our words should always be seasoned with grace. It is by grace WE have been saved, so we need to extend that to all others as well.

It is especially important that we understand that we can be correct in our theology and wrong in our approach. I have seen, and been a victim of, many "fleshly" arguments from well-meaning people, who may say correct things, but their spirit causes defensiveness, confusion, and rejection.

I reject "canned" sales-track approaches to evangelism and counseling. They tend to pigeonhole people's issues and concerns into categories to then attempt to refute them. I think some of the so-called "witnessing" methods and approaches tend to appeal to the pride and showmanship of the witness rather than a genuine, in-depth exploration into the needs of the individual. I remember back in 1970 as a young man, not yet a believer, being witnessed to by a number of "Jesus Freaks", as they were called. I had rejected Catholicism, as I mentioned previously, but did not have a suitable replacement for the content of my faith. I had a lot of sincere questions. I was interested in what these believers apparently possessed, and I did have some dialogues with them. My discussions, however well-intentioned on their part, were much more of a hindrance to my

understanding than true help. When I asked numerous questions, I was met with a barrage of Bible verses, almost always in King James English, which I do not speaketh. When responding for clarification, yet more Bible verses came my way. I finally stopped dialoguing altogether in frustration at not understanding. It took another 6 years for me to discover the meaning and truth of the Word of God. How sad that a genuine seeker of His truth should experience so many barriers to that truth.

The above verse from Ephesians contains the important clause about "building others up as the need may be". It is this discovery of the unique issues and needs within the individual and tailoring our responses to those issues that make our counsel effective.

Exercise #1

Let's examine our own history with changes we have made to gain a better understanding how other people change.

What fears, concerns, and expectations do you have when you consider encouraging others to change a particular position in terms of theology? Many people, if not most, will honestly list fear of rejection, perhaps anger and fleshly argumentation,

failure to "get the point across", or even loss of friendship. Many simply refrain from interaction on certain subjects, such as "sex, politics, and religion", to keep the peace. We become timid and tied to our fears, oftentimes related to our past ineffectual and frustrating attempts to counsel others.

So, let's try to understand how the process works by a little personal reflection.

- Think of some particular theological position that you have successfully changed in your past. It could be what faith means, what salvation means, any particular doctrine or teaching, or understanding of a Bible verse.
- Now consider how much time elapsed between your original position on the subject and when you realized some discrepancy between your previous belief and what the Bible teaches. For many, this gap of time could be months or even years. It took time to recognize and appreciate the subtleties and nuances of context. Some of us spent much time simply living with this unresolved question.
- Now consider how much time elapsed between the very first time you recognized this discrepancy between your

belief and the Bible and the first time you made an earnest attempt to reconcile the issue. Again, this gap of time could be months or years.

- Finally, consider how much time elapsed between your first attempt at changing your position and the time when you resolved all your questions and fully embraced your new position. Again, likely to be months or years.

The Progression of Change

In the above example, we see the progression of change as we moved between the following:

- Your original position.
- First awareness of a discrepancy between your belief and the Bible.
- First attempt to change your position.
- Final resolution of issues and questions and fully embrace the new position.

Now, let's ask some tougher questions about the above exercise.

- Did you ever experience some success in changing your position?
- Did you ever experience hesitation or confusion?
- Did you ever experience a return to your original position after experiencing some success at changing it?

Conclusions drawn from this exercise:

- Theological challenges are common.
- Change often takes a long time. We go through periods of searching, wondering, exploring, seeking advice, or studying.
- The pace of change is variable. We may make rapid progress in our understanding one day and slow down to barely any the next.

- Knowledge is usually not sufficient to motivate and complete change. It is not always a "gang of facts" that convinces us. We need to process the ramifications of accepting a new theory.
- Movement is not always linear. Sometimes it's the old "one step forward and two steps backward" experience. We are subject to theological relapse. Change is not usually a binary event. It is not like flipping a light switch.
- Oftentimes, our emotions get in the way. Our confusion and uncertainty about a particular idea create an emotional pull back to the safe waters of the harbor that we know. Fear of the uncertain or unknown with all its possible ramifications can cause us to turn the boat around and head back to shore.
- When we apply these understandings of our own personal experience with change, we can now perhaps begin to understand how our own expectations of other people regarding theological change are frequently unrealistic. As I have taught many new counselors, having unrealistic expectations for other people, no matter how noble or pure the intention or goal, can lead to frustration and burnout.

Exercise #2

- Think about the issue you dealt with in Exercise #1.
- Think about people who were **NOT** helpful to you.
How did they come across? What did they do that was **NOT** helpful?
 - Judgmental
 - Accusing
 - Impatient
 - Know-it-all superiority
 - Condescending
 - Unforgiving
- Now, think about people who **WERE** helpful to you.
How did they come across? What did they do that **WAS** helpful?

- Patient
- Kind
- Empathic
- Genuinely Caring
- Loving
- Knowledgeable
- Humble

We can learn from our own experiences with people interacting with us what is helpful and what is not. We can appreciate the need to have more realistic expectations for people in terms of the time needed to process change. We can hopefully appreciate and recognize small "baby steps" as people continue to process. We can have more opportunities for dialogue as people feel safe to continue interacting with us without fear of harsh responses or judgmental disapproval. We can avoid the trap of "all or nothing" thinking which misses the process entirely and demands submission to our will instead of assisting a person to discover the truth for themselves through the process.

I repeat our starting verse:

Ephesians 4:29 says, "Let no corrupt speech proceed out of your mouth, but only what is good for building others up as the need may be, that it may give grace to those who hear."

Motivation and Resistance

There is an inversely proportional relationship between motivation and resistance. What does this mean? Aside from sounding profound, it simply means that when you feel attacked or challenged by someone, it is normal to get defensive. We put the wall up, sometimes even draw the bridge over the moat, and stay secure in our castle. Our motivation to listen and consider a position contrary to what we currently hold goes down or even disappears if we feel threatened by another opinion. It is oftentimes reflexive and unthinking. Sometimes the person offering the opinion or teaching can be as kind and well-meaning as possible, but the results will be the same. The reaction of defensiveness exists within the person whose position is being challenged. Defense mechanisms are internal to us all. They are not always bad, but they usually operate below the surface. They are not designed to trick others. They are designed to protect us, but in doing so, we are not always aware of their active operation.

The way to move forward through the minefield of defense mechanisms is to not directly attack the point of resistance but to focus on the motivations, benefits, and blessings of the new position being advocated. When people begin to cognitively appreciate and embrace the positive feelings associated with the new teaching or doctrine, their defenses relax, and a spark of motivation can begin the journey forward. It is this internal motivation, the intrinsic motivation of attraction, that fans the flame of desire to at least consider embracing the new idea.

I spent most of my counseling career working with court-mandated criminal offenders who only ever attended the prescribed counseling and treatment programs because the judge, probation, and/or parole officers mandated it. Talk about defense mechanisms in full play! The clients were only present because of what is called "extrinsic motivation". If they failed to attend, they were heading to jail, fines, etc. This external motivation was not "change" as I would define it. It was "compliance", which is not the same thing.

The approach I used and taught other counselors was to use this "extrinsic motivation" to keep them involved while we attempted to tap into the "internal motivation" of change to produce movement towards "low-risk choices" and away from "high-risk choices". The same dynamic applies to helping people move from error to truth. Having an understanding of how to

do this was essential to seeing the many successes with an admittedly difficult population. The same processes are no different for any group of people when dealing with any issue.

There are important distinctions between empathy, sympathy, and compassion. Empathy is the sense that you can understand what another person is feeling and perhaps even why they are feeling it. It is that sense that gives us the perspective of what it's like to "walk in their shoes". Empathy is a one-to-one connection that can be powerful in helping people, as long as they perceive that it is genuine and sincere. Sympathy is more of an emotional reaction like feeling sorry or pity for someone, to actually feel the same thing as they feel. It can lead to emotionalism and away from objectivity. Compassion is more of a general attitude towards people with problems. It is a heart attitude and willingness to help people out of pure motivation.

Some possible reactions from people contemplating change are as follows:

- "I am having too much fun with my present belief. It fits my needs. For me, it is "settled theology".
- "I see no need to change."
- "Change takes too much effort. What difference does it make, anyway? What would others think? If I think of the logical conclusion to what you are saying, it makes

me feel uncomfortable or induces fear."

- "I am not teachable. I already know the answer and you're wrong." This demonstration of pride, arrogance, and fleshly ego can be defended with much energy and passion.
- "I feel hopeless and overwhelmed by it all. I'll just stay where I am in safety."
- "I have reasons and answers for everything."

What does the Bible say about our attitude and conduct throughout these processes?

- Proverbs 15:18 says, "A wrathful man stirs up contention, but one who is slow to anger appeases strife."
 - It is imperative that in our interactions with others, we remain calm and non-reactive.
- Proverbs 20:3 says, "It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife, but every fool will be quarreling."

- We don't "argue" people into our position.
- Proverbs 26:21 says, "As coals are to hot embers, and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindling strife."
- Aggression has no place in our witness.
- 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 says, "Love is patient and is kind. Love doesn't envy. Love doesn't brag, is not proud, doesn't behave itself inappropriately, doesn't seek its own way, is not provoked, takes no account of evil; doesn't rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things."
- We don't "keep score" of past wrongs.
- We don't play the "gotcha game".
- There is no room for unforgiveness, bitterness, or resentment.
- We affirm every positive move, no matter how small.
- Proverbs 29:22 says, "An angry man stirs up strife, and a wrathful man abounds in sin."
- Anger has no place in our witness.

- Proverbs 30:33 says, "For as the churning of milk produces butter, and the wringing of the nose produces blood, so the forcing of wrath produces strife."
 - No "bloody noses", literal or otherwise.
- Colossians 3:12,13 says, "Put on therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, humility, and perseverance; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, if any man has a complaint against any; even as Messiah forgave you, so you also do."
 - This is quite a high standard for forgiveness.
 - It is interesting that the Hebrew word for "compassion" is Rachamim. It is always written in the plural which gives us an indication of how extensive God views it.
- Colossians 3:14-16 says, "Above all these things, walk in love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body, and be thankful. Let the word of Messiah dwell in you richly; in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms, hymns, and

spiritual songs, singing with grace in your heart to the Lord."

- The content of our counsel is the Word of God.
- We need to genuinely live it.
- If you are a faithful believer, if you know His Word, and if you are Spirit-led, then you are qualified to teach and counsel each other.
- Ephesians 4:2,3 says, "With all lowliness and humility, with patience, bearing with one another in love, being eager to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."
- Romans 14:1 says, "Now accept one who is weak in faith, but not for disputes over opinions."
- Romans 14:19 says, "So then, let's follow after things which make for peace, and things by which we may build one another up."
 - Many things are peripheral, non-essential issues.
 - Traditions that are not in conflict with the Word of God are optional. They should never be misused in

a legalistic fashion.

- Proverbs 27:9 says, "Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart; so does earnest counsel from a man's friend."
- Proverbs 27:17 says, "Iron sharpens iron; so a man sharpens his friend's countenance."

Consider the Example of Yeshua's Witnessing

- Yeshua called us to be fishers of men, not hunters.
 - We have different bait for different fish.
 - We go to where the fish are.
 - We are patient.
 - John 3:16 is not a rifle caliber. It is not a hunting tool.
- Yeshua was compassionate and faithful to the Torah.
 - Matthew 9:36 says, "But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion for them because they were harassed and scattered, like sheep

without a shepherd."

- Matthew 5:17 says, "Don't think that I came to destroy the Torah or the Prophets. I didn't come to destroy, but to fulfill."
- Truth without compassion is cruelty.
- Compassion without truth is co-dependence.

Consider the Woman at the Well

- John 4:1-6 says, "Therefore when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Yeshua was making and immersing more disciples than Yochanan (although Yeshua himself didn't immerse, but his disciples), he left Judea and departed into Galilee. He needed to pass through Samaria. So he came to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there. Yeshua therefore, being tired from his journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour."
 - Yeshua was not afraid to go outside the established

cultural and religious boundaries set by the traditions of men.

- Neither should we.
- John 4:7-10 says, "A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Yeshua said to her, "Give me a drink." For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman therefore said to him, "How is it that you, being a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Yeshua answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."
- Yeshua was not afraid to openly speak with a Samaritan, especially a Samaritan woman, something Jews of His day would avoid out of prejudice.
- Yeshua did not rebuke the woman for being a Samaritan or for questioning his motives. He did not get defensive.
- His careful interactions were designed to show empathy and love throughout the conversation.

- John 4:11-14 says, "The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. So where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob¹, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his children and his livestock?" Yeshua answered her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst again; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."
- Yeshua took the opportunity to take an ordinary, mundane task of drinking water and transform it into a learning moment. In studying His parables, He did the same thing with ordinary, familiar concepts such as "the lost sheep", "the lost coin", "the prodigal son", "new cloth on an old coat", "new wine in old wineskins", "a lamp on a stand", "wise and foolish builders", "the types of soils", "yeast", "the mustard seed", "the fishing net", etc. The many examples of Yeshua's transforming common everyday experiences that all could relate to and then engaging people to pause and consider deeper spiritual meanings are examples of His mastery of connecting with people.

- This planting of the seed regarding the water carried a deeper spiritual meaning. It caused the woman to ponder the issue. She now had a deeper issue to grasp and reckon with.
- John 4:15-18 says, "The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I don't get thirsty, neither come all the way here to draw." Yeshua said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered, "I have no husband." Yeshua said to her, "You said well, 'I have no husband,' for you have had five husbands; and he whom you now have is not your husband. This you have said truly."
- Yeshua sensitively brought up the issue of her past husbands and her current relationship.
- It is important that we do not read sarcasm or harsh judgmentalism in His tone. I believe He was full of compassion and patience as he broached the subject.
- She had related high values in her life as she demonstrated respect for her heritage through Jacob and affirmed the Torah's history.
- Yeshua planted the seed of the discrepancy between

her values and the realities of her lifestyle without a confrontational style involving harsh disapproval or shaming.

- John 4:19-22 says, "The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." Yeshua said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship that which you don't know. We worship that which we know; for salvation is from the Jews."
- The woman was certainly accurate in describing Yeshua as a prophet. How else could He know her background?
- It is interesting that the woman immediately changed the subject to a discussion of the place of worship instead of her current relationship issue. In psychology, this is called deflection. It is not uncommon when we get close to issues, that people's defense mechanisms kick in automatically. When we perceive this in others, it can be a clue that our message has been on track. It is always wise to observe

reactions and to think through the why of those reactions to guide us in our dialogue. Counseling others is not a mechanical process. It requires listening to the other person as well as listening to the Holy Spirit.

- When confronted by the discrepancy between her values and her conduct, she remained ambivalent for a time. This is common. We should not step in to try to resolve the conflict. It is the person who has to process through the discrepancy.
- John 4:23-26 says, "But the hour comes, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such to be his worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming, he who is called Messiah. When he has come, he will declare to us all things." Yeshua said to her, "I am he, the one who speaks to you."
- It is critical to see that Yeshua continued to paint the picture of true worship and presented ideas about qualifications for worship. He was illustrating the pros of this new understanding of worship. He did

not argue with her about her ambivalence. He did not rebuke her or shame her. He allowed her time and space to reflect. His compassionate interactions are a witness to us. His manner and tone continued with respect.

- He accepted her genuine faith in a coming Messiah.
- It was at this point that He revealed Himself to her.
- John 4:27-30 says, " Just then, his disciples came. They marveled that he was speaking with a woman; yet no one said, "What are you looking for?" or, "Why do you speak with her?" So the woman left her water pot, went away into the city, and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything that I have done. Can this be the Messiah?" They went out of the city, and were coming to him.
- This courageous woman of faith was transformed into a powerful witness to her entire village.
- She had begun in pre-contemplation and was now in the action stage as she was convinced of the truthfulness of her new understanding regarding the Messiah.

- John 4:39-42 says, "From that city many of the Samaritans believed in him because of the word of the woman, who testified, "He told me everything that I have done." So when the Samaritans came to him, they begged him to stay with them. He stayed there two days. Many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "Now we believe, not because of your speaking; for we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Messiah, the Savior of the world."
- He exhibited empathy and respect throughout the interchange.
- He avoided direct arguments and challenges.
- He sowed the seed of the discrepancy between her values and the realities of her lifestyle.
- He added depth and color to His message to aid in her decisional balancing.
- Yeshua stayed focused on the issue and allowed the woman time and space to process her issues herself toward acceptance of His message.
- He offered Himself as her Messiah.

A Final Word about Our Approach to People

I want to close this section with a poem given to me about 40 years ago or so. I used to have this in a frame on my desk as a constant reminder of the values I have come to embrace. I do not know the identity of the author, or I would certainly give credit. I DO know that the author of this poem knows the Author of our faith!

The harvest is so great, Lord. And the workers, there are few.
Help me every chance I get to bring a soul to You.
Fill me with the Spirit, Lord, that I may spread Your Word.
And bring Your hope and joy to those who haven't heard.
There are so many troubled, Lord, so burdened and distressed.

Help me guide them home to You so that they may find their rest.

They are fighting such a battle, a battle they can't win.
Unless they turn to You, Lord, and invite you to come in.
The time is short to labor and the fruit is there to yield.
Guide me in Thy battle, the sword of truth to wield.
You have given me so much, Lord, may I not use it just for me.

But share it with another so that he too may be free.

1. Samaritans were half-breeds of Jewish and gentile peoples.