

THIS, TOO, SHALL PASS

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Alright; you ready for my question today? Are you a change agent or a change resistor? [Congregant: "It depends!"] It depends ... [Laughs] Alright. And I want us to talk about change, because how many of you notice that the world seems to be changing, whether we want it to or not? Like the world's changing! So, you can either get on the bus or you can get into a place of real resistance and fight it all along the way. But it's going to change!

And what I want us to be able to do is embrace the highest level of good in your life. And I believe that, for many of us, that change is going to actually take us to a better place, a higher place, a more blessed place. But we have to be willing to actually engage in the change.

Jack Welch said, "*Change before you have to.*" [Laughs] And I love that line! Right? Because we're going to change, right? There's going to be something that calls us to change, and the more receptive we are to the Holy Spirit calling us into this change, the easier that change becomes. And sometimes out of fear we just lock down, afraid to move forward, afraid to change, afraid to evolve.

But the reality is that Spirit isn't done with you. That there's more good -- more God -- in you than you can even imagine! In all the change that is going on in your life, let it be for the glory of God. Let it be to manifest and express the highest level of good -- the highest level of God -- in your life.

John D. Rockefeller said, "*Don't be afraid to give up the good for the great.*" And I want you to see that in your own soul. That each and every one of you is good. But what if there's greatness? What if there's greatness within us all? Would you be curious about that? Would you be willing to touch that; to express that; to call that forth; to be more than you've ever been before? To allow the fullness of God to manifest in you and through you in ways that you can't even understand now ... but that's in you and has been in you since the beginning of time?

That there is so much God; there's so much good! And sometimes, in the face of adversity, we find our own greatness.

You know, it would be great if you could just kind of be tripping down and just pop into your greatness one day and say, "*Welp; here I am!*" But that's not the way it seems to work for most of us. Most of us really find our greatness in a spirit of adversity, where life calls us to be more than we've ever been before.

Michael Jordan said, "*I believe that greatness is an evolutionary process that begins and changes from era to era.*" And I love that idea that, as amazing as you are in this moment, God is not finished with you. That, as amazing as you are in this moment, there is greater goodness in you that is waiting to be called forth.

In Romans 12:2, we read, "*Do not conform to the patterns of the world.*" When it comes to change, what do you think are the patterns of the world? I think the pattern of the world when it comes to change is resist. Resist! Resist as long as you can, as hard as you can.

But it goes on it says, "*But be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you can test and prove that God's will for you is good and pleasing and perfect.*" But go with it! Go with it! "*Be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you can test and prove that God's will for you is good and pleasing and perfect.*"

I mean that's a big statement! Sometimes when we're in the middle of change that we didn't want, that we didn't ask for, and that we're not very happy about. And in those moments where life is asking us to change, it's hard to believe that God's will for us in that moment is perfect ... because it's like he's asleep at the wheel! [Congregants laugh] Like he's in the Caribbean or someplace, because I'm not feeling it right here! But the world teaches us to resist. But God's will for each one of us is greater good than we could even imagine.

You know, in the time of Jesus, there were many of Jesus' followers that wanted Jesus to be the warrior king. They were being persecuted by the Romans and they saw this charismatic leader -- spiritual teacher -- in the form of they were hoping like David; that he would step in and he would free them. He would liberate them from the oppression of the Romans. And so they wanted him to step into that.

And yet what Jesus taught was how to be spiritual; how to touch higher and higher levels of God's good in a changing world. And many of them were disappointed and frustrated that he wouldn't step in and be that warrior king for them that would liberate them from all the suffering that they knew. And yet, what he taught them was how to be spiritual in a world that sometimes feels chaotic. How to know God in the presence of a world that sometimes feels upside down.

And that's where change comes for us. You know, how we manage the change; how we live in change; and how we do it from a spiritual point of view makes all the difference in the world!

So how are you managing change in your life now? If you look at what's going on in your life right now, how do you deal with a change? Because I believe that, as spiritual people, we can feel the change coming. We may not want to acknowledge it; we may not want to look at it; we may not want to pretend that change isn't coming ... but we can see change when it's miles off. And sometimes we just get so busy it's like, *"If I just stay busy, maybe it'll just pass me by."* But how we manage change actually moves us forward.

So tonight, I want to talk about seven ways that we can help manage change in our lives, especially those changes that feel overwhelming.

And the first step in managing change effectively, I believe, comes when we can **ACKNOWLEDGE THE CHANGE.**

"I have change in my life."

Will you say that with me? [With congregation:] *"I have change in my life."*

So when we can acknowledge the change -- we can recognize it and accept it -- change is easier to deal with. If we just pretend that there's nothing going on, it's not always helpful. And the least helpful idea is when our mind entertains the thought, *"It shouldn't be this way!"*

Have you ever gone through a time of change and your dominant thought was, *"It shouldn't be this way!"*? And if your dominant thought is, *"It shouldn't be this way!"*, are you more open and receptive to the activity of God or are you less open and receptive to the activity of God? I can think I can build a case that, when our mind goes to that belief that it shouldn't be this way, that we are actually less receptive to the activity of God leading us, guiding us, supporting us. Because our mind has already convinced itself that it shouldn't be this way, and we are in an absolute sense of lockdown.

So, what if change is actually ... in the middle of change, God is actually using it for your blessing? To bless you in greater and greater ways. Also, understand the why. Sometimes when it comes to change, we spend so much time trying to understand why this is happening, and sometimes that's not helpful. Sometimes there is no "why" this is happening. Sometimes the change is happening, and it doesn't make sense. And it doesn't mean the change isn't for our good. That sometimes, in the midst of change, we

may not understand why for 10 or 20 years down the road. And we can't get the "why" right here, right now. We have to trust that, in the midst of that change, the "why" will reveal itself when we've got the blessing; when it's appropriate; when we can see the bigger picture.

But sometimes in the middle of change, when you say, "It shouldn't be this way!" or even, "Why is this happening to me, God?" It doesn't matter! It's an intellectual activity that's not always helpful, and it will be revealed. You will know why this happened. You will see the blessing. You will see, even in the most difficult situations, you will understand the why. It just may not be today.

STAY FLEXIBLE AND OPEN-MINDED. (Two.) Be willing to adapt. Flexibility is the key in dealing with unexpected *changes*. Try to let go of the rigid expectations and be open to new possibilities. Experiment and adjust. Growth requires experimentation. It doesn't allow us to just be the same old person and relate to life the same old way we always have.

To be flexible and open-minded means that we are willing to embrace life in a new way, and are open and receptive to the guidance and direction of Spirit. Spirit has a plan for your life, and when we open to that guidance and direction of God, we can actually stay flexible and open-minded and be curious how this is all going to work out.

"I wonder how I'm going to get out of this!"

Together: [with congregation] *"I wonder how I'm going to get out of this!"*

One more time like we mean it: [with congregation] *"I wonder how I'm going to get out of this!"*

Because what I want us to see is that activity of just being in wonder -- being curious -- allows us to be lifted higher and moved in a greater direction.

Three: **PLAN, BUT STAY AGILE.** Set small, achievable goals and break them down to even smaller measurable steps. In times of change, plan for the desires. Plan for your heart's desire. But allow those goals to be small, attainable. And be prepared for obstacles.

Obstacles always kind of surprise us. You know, when an obstacle hits our life, we're always like so offended! Like, how dare an obstacle show up in our lives?!? Like, how rude! Like, we always greet it like it's a personal affront to us. Like, *"I'm such a good person, there should never be an obstacle in my life!"* Right?

But the idea that obstacles are part of the plan -- that our obstacles make us stronger! And if we can actually expect that there's going to be challenges and setbacks, and that we can actually plan for them, or be willing to tolerate them, and know that it's still a part of God's plan. It's still here to bless us. It's going to make us stronger and wiser. *"Oh, it's just an obstacle!"* And we're going to get around it. We're going to get through it. We're going to open the door. We're going to find the way around it, because we always have and we always will.

Like, you have already overcome every obstacle in your life! You have! You have a 100% track record. You have overcome every obstacle. Now, was it always beautiful? Was it always seamless? Was it always easy? No! But you overcome every obstacle!

Communicate. Four: **COMMUNICATE AND SEEK SUPPORT.** Like, I really believe that, in times of change, we have to share more of our feelings with the people around us, not less. And many of us, in times of change, we actually talk less; we actually share less. We actually go into survival mode: we shut down, we get quiet, and we don't share what it's like to be us. We don't share our burdens; we don't share our upset; we don't share our feelings; we don't share how it feels to be us. Because we think we have to go through change in this stoic position, and nobody's supposed to know that anything's hard.

I don't think that's the way! I think in times of great change we need to be communicating more; we need to be talking more. We need to be spending more time uncovering and discovering what we're feeling.

And seek support! This is the time where you need your people around you; where you need your tribe; where you need the people that pray with you and trust you and walk with you. And you need to be building those people into your life so that, when those difficult times happen, you know the people that you can count on that will walk with you and offer you support.

Five: **STAY POSITIVE AND FOCUS ON GROWTH.** Embrace a growth mindset. Change requires that we bring opportunities for growth by focusing on what we're learning and experiencing, and more likely to come out stronger and more resilient. Embrace a growth mindset: *"I can do this. I can overcome this. God is guiding me. God is directing me."* Embrace a growth mindset that allows you to open to possibilities that are greater than you see right now.

Celebrate all the small wins. Acknowledge your process. Give yourself credit for handling all the changes so far. Celebrate every day! What are your one or two or three successes of that day? And even if your greatest success of that day is that your shoes match [congregants laugh], some days that is very good news! You know, some days I look down at my socks and I think, *"Good job, Richard! You made it! Your socks actually match today!"* Right?

Because sometimes we think our successes have to be such big deals! And if my shirt matches my sweater, it's a good day! [Congregants laugh] You know, if I got myself into the car and got to work, that's 90% of it!

Like, when we can really celebrate the small wins in our lives, it gives us encouragement. [Laughs] It gives us something to giggle about; something to acknowledge. Because sometimes -- and especially if we're high achievers -- unless we're setting the world on fire, we don't think we can celebrate the little things. But it's often the little things that make life enjoyable. Celebrate the small wins!

Six: **TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF.** Prioritize well-being. Change can be stressful. Ensure that you're taking care of yourself mentally, emotionally, physically. That you're doing things that support you: walking, exercise, meditation. That you're eating right. That you're doing what you know you can do to actually take care of it.

And, most of all, be kind to yourself. Self-compassion is essential. Understand that everyone copes with change differently, and it's okay to feel overwhelmed. So be kind to you. Be generous with you. Reach out and do the things that are meaningful for you.

And the seventh one -- and maybe the most important -- is **FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL.**

Now, how many of you have had any luck with controlling family members? [Congregants laugh] How many of you have a spouse that you can control on command? [Congregants laugh] Right? What I want us to see is that, most of us: our circle of control is about this big. [Draws imaginary circle around himself]

Saturday night, one of our neighbors was having a party. And about 11:30 ... Now, on Saturday night, because I do church on Sunday morning, I'm in bed very early. Like, embarrassingly early: 8:30 I'm in bed, right? I'm in bed on a Saturday night.

And at 11:30 the dogs go off; the neighbors are having ... the party's getting louder and louder. And I am thrilled. [Congregants laugh] Thrilled! Like 11:30 -- sound asleep; awake! The dogs are both freaked out; they're barking. The neighbors are partying like it's a wild thing. And I am so excited! [Congregants laugh]

Now, how much control did I have in that moment? None! Right here [encircles himself] Like, even the dogs weren't listening to me, right? And they're usually my solid bet. If I can get the dogs to listen to me, I feel like I have some level of control. I had no control! Right?

So I was wiggling around and got ahold of myself and [grousing] “*Brah, brah, brah, brah, brah!*” and put myself back to sleep. At five o'clock in the morning, I thought well maybe I should let the whole neighborhood know that I'm up and going to church and maybe they should join me! [Congregants laugh] So I thought maybe I'd just drive around the neighborhood honking for a little bit to let the neighborhood know [laughs] that I was safe and on my way to work. I talked myself out of that one, too. [Congregants laugh] Right?

So what do you have control over? You have control over your reactions, your decisions, your mindset, what you're thinking, what you're feeling. You have control over YOU! And, for most of us, the circle doesn't get any bigger. Sometimes we don't even feel like we have control of ourselves! But that's all we can hope.

So tonight, I'm going to invite you to really honor that most of us are in a time of change. And during times of change, we have feelings and we get scared and we get upset. And we're not sure how it's all going to work out. And we have to walk through times of change with faith and wisdom and guidance ... but we also need support. We need to be willing to call on the people that walk with us, so that we can feel their presence; so that we know that we're not walking this walk alone.

I believe that God is calling us all into a higher expression of life. And sometimes the change that we're being asked to go through seems too much, too big, too overwhelming. And I believe that God is using change every day to bring out the best of us. And how we manage change really, truly does make a difference.

So tonight, when you look at your life, do you see the change that Spirit is using to call forth the next greatest version of you? And can you trust that that same Presence and Power that creates your life is actually going to guide you and direct you and walk you through that change? That you can actually feel the presence of God with you as you move through that change, as you use that change as a spiritual vehicle for the next highest, greatest version of you?

Tonight, I want you to embrace change. Not because we want it, not because it's easy, not even because we like it ... but because it's one of the greatest tools we have to awaken to the glory of God. In difficult times, we find the Holy Presence within us, when we can trust that change is truly here for our own good.

Will you pray with me?

And I invite you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to the activity of God. That tonight, I want you to just look at your life. I want you to feel that activity of God that is guiding you and directing you and with you right here, right now. And to be willing to trust that Spirit is there.

Holy Spirit, show me the way. Reveal my path; clear my path; bless my path; prosper my path that I may walk in the glory of God.

In the name and through the power of the living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.