

Learn to Celebrate Change!

✖ It seemed like a dream—but it was all too real. I remember walking down the long center aisle at First Church of God in Inglewood, California, the faces of hundreds of people on my right and on my left flashing past me as if in a movie. I remember hands reaching out to touch and hold me; the black limousine; the long ride to Forest Lawn Cemetery; the prayers, the hymns, the folded flag of the United States of America; the silence as the impact of the death of Wayne Sylvester Davis sunk in.

Wayne—my husband and my friend, the father of my children, the pastor of my church, beloved bishop of World Won for Christ Ministries. Now he was resting eternally in the arms of Jesus.

“Oh God, what will I do?” I remember crying. “Somehow in the Spirit You whispered to me that this day was coming. But in my flesh, in my denial, I ignored Your voice and thought, No, just keep believing. The Lord is going to heal Wayne and raise him up as a witness that nothing is too hard for God. Instead, you chose to set Wayne free from sickness and pain by taking him quickly to Yourself.

“Lord, I’m not really angry with You,” I prayed. “I didn’t want Wayne to suffer any longer. But what am I going to do now?”

In one swift moment, I realized, my life had changed—dramatically, irreversibly. Change! What a difficult word. Most of us try to avoid it like the plague. But God has a way of using change for His purposes in our lives and in His kingdom, as I was about to learn.

Commanded to Celebrate

Days passed into weeks, and weeks into months. It was a

struggle to hold family and church together and to move not only from married to single status but also from staff pastor to senior pastor. But God was gracious, and although many things changed, we managed to survive.

In the fall of 1993, I sent a delegation of church leaders to the Crystal Cathedral Annual Women's Conference in Garden Grove, California. Several weeks later, just before I was scheduled to travel to Israel with a special delegation of African-American pastors, I called an early morning staff meeting at my home and asked one of the women who had attended the conference to give a report.

When she began to share, I noticed the words written boldly on the conference folder she held in her hand: Celebrate Change! At that moment I heard God speak quietly and clearly in my spirit: "Your church theme for 1994 is Celebrate Change!"

Silently I sent up a protest. "Celebrate change, Lord? But change is so painful, so personal, so uncomfortable, so costly! And besides, haven't I already had to deal with the greatest change in my life with the death of my husband only eight months ago? On top of my grieving, my sorrow, my pain, are You really asking me not only to change, but also to celebrate change?"

As the staff meeting continued, Isaiah 43:18-19 began to thunder in my heart: "Do not remember the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it?" (NKJV).

I knew then what I had to do. I interrupted the meeting and told my staff that God had just given us our 1994 theme: Celebrate Change. The looks on their faces told me that many of them were sending up the same protests I had made only moments before. I couldn't blame them. Here I was, the new pastor, giving what seemed to be an outrageous instruction, even as a part of me was screaming along with them, "No, no,

no!"

Change! I admit I wanted to resist it at first. But God has a way of getting us to surrender our will to His. I distinctly remember driving south one afternoon on the 110 Freeway, looking up to heaven and shouting, "God, I don't like this! I don't understand what You are doing or what You have done. If You had to take one of us from earth to glory, why Wayne and not me? After all, he was the visionary. He was the pastor of pastors. Did You make a mistake?"

"I have instructed you to celebrate change," He thundered back. "I am the Lord your God. I am sovereign. I don't have to explain My actions to you. If I wanted Wayne left on earth, I could have left him on earth. I chose to close that chapter of life. If you are struggling with My decision, I can allow you to join Wayne. Remember, you purchased two funeral plots at Forest Lawn Cemetery."

Well, needless to say, I immediately repented and assured the Lord that I was in full agreement with His plan. "Please don't take me home—at least not right now!" I said.

Preparing for the Promise

I cannot report that from that moment I have always understood change—or always embraced it. But I have tried to be in constant consent with the will of God. And when I have struggled, I have allowed God to strengthen me so that His Word can become a reality: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth"—in my life!—"as it is in heaven."

I have also tried to celebrate change. I've found that celebration is the best preparation possible for the change that God promises to bring into the lives of each and every one of us.

The word change means "to alter." It means to turn away from what was to receive what is promised; to cease to be what

you've been and decide to become who you are meant to be. It is the process of righteousness—converting sinner to salvation, sickness to health, poverty to wealth. To change is to have the ability to look at devastation and recognize, "This is not my destiny." It is necessary preparation for the birth of new vision, new dreams, new hope and new life in Christ.

When a woman prepares to give birth, she must suffer the agony of submitting her body to painful pulling (change!); painful stretching (change!); painful pushing (change!); and painful cutting (change!)—all to receive her promise, her precious child. But once that promise is delivered, the pain becomes overshadowed by the joy and blessing of the newborn baby. So it is with all the promises of God.

A Plan for Prosperity

When should we change in life? It's simple: We should change when God says change! We should change when what we're doing is just not working. We should change when our spiritual, physical, emotional or financial survival demands or requires something different. We should change when we become convicted or convinced that we are headed in the wrong direction.

We should change when the pain of our circumstances in life dictates change: "When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the Lord your God and obey His will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them" (Deut. 4:30-31).

It's interesting to note that most of our blessings, promises and miracles are wrapped around the Word of the Lord and the covenant of God with our "fathers"—our prophets, pastors and forebears in the faith. What God promises in His written and spoken Word, He brings to pass. That's why it's so important to believe.

Second Chronicles 20:20 declares, “‘Believe in the Lord your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper.’” Prophets declare things that have been and things that will be; in other words, they are the voice of God to usher in change. When God speaks, we should not hesitate to believe, but trust that His purpose in change is always for our best.

The Apostle John echoes this thought when he says that God wants us to “prosper in all things and be in health, just as [our] soul[s] prosper” (3 John 2). To prosper us, however, sometimes God must change us. That change may seem harmful or feel painful. It may threaten to overwhelm us. That’s when we need to believe God’s Word and remember: The purpose of change is to usher us into blessing and prosperity, not harm and destruction. God is faithful!

I confess there were many days and nights when I wanted to tell God, “Stop it with all this change, and give me back my Kleenex!” I wanted desperately to cry, “Wait a minute! Can’t I have more time, please?” When God said, “Behold, I will do a new thing,” I wanted to scream, “But can’t you see that I’m still trying to recover from the old thing?”

Nevertheless, faithfully, patiently, God began changing me—transforming the very complexion of my life as a woman, a mother and a minister. My church began changing; my adult children began changing. Even my physical appearance began changing—for the better, praise God! As I increasingly understood that God was trying not to hurt me or destroy me but to bless me, I entered fully into a celebration of change.

New Life

Little did I know all the changes that were in store! At the bridal shower of a dear friend, Carolyn Harrell, six different women of God prophesied these words to me: “This that we do for Carolyn, soon we shall do for you. You shall be married

again very soon.” It was as though God had said, “Wipe your eyes and put on your dancing slippers! ‘Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning’” (Ps. 30:5).

Thirteen months later I went from being a grieving widow to a grinning bride. I became the wife of a wonderful man and minister—Andrew Carnegie Turner II. Complete opposites, Andrew and I are celebrating on a daily basis the new blessings and opportunities that come as we birth new vision, new purpose, new family and new ministry.

To think all this joy was wrapped around grief! All this happiness was tucked underneath sorrow! All this new life began with death! What was it that got us from there to here? Change.

In life, I’ve learned, we must be willing to change, or we will never know the joy of God’s promises. We will never walk in destiny until we step out of history. God has something new and wonderful for each of us, a plan to prosper us and not harm us. But first we must travel the road called change. And on the way, let’s celebrate!

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