

Supporting Others in Change

Change is a constant in our world and in ourselves. It is one thing to experience change ourselves, and yet another thing to walk with others during their season of change. Consider the relationships in your life right now. How many of your close family or friends are in the middle of a transition or change? Perhaps it is supporting parents in transition to a nursing home or encouraging a son or daughter in transition to a new job or it could be walking alongside a member of your church family as they navigate change in church. Each of these examples have unique aspects to consider for the respective change. The following general principles can be helpful to think upon as you support others through their change.

PRINCIPLE 1: CHANGE ELICITS VARYING RESPONSES

How is it that you show support to others in their season of change? First off, it is important to note that change can be welcomed at times and unwelcomed at other times. A recent, welcomed change in my son's life was the opportunity to drive after passing his driver education test. There are other types of change that are unwelcomed. For example, a couple of my children would prefer summer to last longer before heading back to school. It is also true that each of us have different responses to change. Some people welcome change and in fact, to these individuals, life can feel boring if there is not enough change. While for others, change can be stressful and energy-draining, even if it is a welcomed change.

As we support others, we do well to remember to meet relationships where there are; not where we want them to be or think they should be. For example, if they seem to struggle with change and we find ourselves typically enjoying it, we need to allow for them to respond to change as they do based on their personality and life circumstances and not as we would.

Change is inherently inconsistent. As we come alongside others to show support, it is important that we maintain consistency in our interactions with them. This takes intentionality but this consistency can provide a constant, stabilizing factor in others' lives. Being a safe place to openly share about the realities of the specific change they are going through is important. This reflects God's presence in our lives – *Psalms 46:1* “*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*” One of the things Jesus communicated to his disciples was his presence with them. When the disciples' world was about to be turned upside down, Jesus reminded them of his presence with them through the Spirit – *John 14:16* “*And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;*” Similarly, supporting others involves being a consistent, loving presence in their life.

PRINCIPLE 2: CHANGE ELICITS VARYING EMOTIONS

Change can lead to a myriad of emotions with varying intensity levels. Change can at times bring intense fear due to much uncertainty or times of sadness which wash over an individual after a loss. At other times there is excitement and anticipation for future opportunities. The mixture of emotions can lead to individuals being more reactive, gloomy, or living with a heightened sensitivity. At other times, it can manifest in rigidity. For example, someone who responds with heightened resistance may be experiencing an intense fear related to change. This fear may not even be readily apparent to the individual who is exhibiting rigidity/resistance.

Helping others through change involves making room for and seeking to understand emotions triggered in the other. This begins by accepting the person's emotional response - not resisting, reacting, avoiding, or correcting. It continues with you letting them know that you see them and that their emotional response makes sense in light of the way they are perceiving the reality of their change. This allows emotions to be soothed and relieved which makes way for further discussion or sharing truth. This is an opportunity to bless others by modeling the gospel of love and keeping Jesus central in how we help others – *Colossians 3:12-14* “*Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind,*

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meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.”

Additionally, allowing the individual to discuss their emotional response helps others seek to understand the deeper meaning in their reactions toward change. It can be helpful to not get caught in specific details of a particular change in the life of another and miss how God might be using this change to transform and shape them in His hands. As Paul communicated with the church at Philippi, we have an opportunity to communicate our confidence of God’s work continuing in them through the change (*Philippians 1:6*).

PRINCIPLE 3: CHANGE EXPENDS ENERGY

What thoughts and emotions does it bring up in us when others are changing? What does being a consistent support of others during change look like for us? Reflection on such questions can be helpful. The process of change is not something that can be rushed. It does involve waiting and being patient for things to unfold. This can be difficult, particularly when waiting means watching those you love experience some painful and difficult emotions and realities. Those of us who have flown are familiar with the preflight training that asks all travelers to place their own oxygen masks on first before assisting others with their masks. This concept is true when helping others through seasons of change. Our ability to help others well is influenced by our own emotional, physical, and spiritual health. We need to continue to “fill-up” in healthy ways as we “pour out” to support others during seasons of change.

Life is filled with change. As we have the privilege of sharing in change with others, we would do well to remember individuals all have different responses and emotions that come with change. Change provides the opportunity for growth and fruit and allows for us to point others towards the confidence of God’s work in them, ultimately pointing them towards our unchanging God himself— who is “*the same yesterday, and today, and for ever*” (*Hebrews 13:8*).