

AN INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP  
"FOLLOW YOUR CHANGES"  
JOHN 16:4-15

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On January 31, 1829, Governor Martin Van Buren of New York wrote this letter to President Andrew Jackson. "As your know, Mr. President, railroad carriages are pulled at the enormous speed of 15 mph by engines which roar and snort their way through the countryside, setting fire to crops, scaring livestock and frightening women and children. The Almighty certainly never intended that people should travel at such breakneck speed."

Do you remember when a mouse was a rodent that liked cheese, a chip was a piece of wood, and blackberries were fruit from which your mother made pies? Remember when bunnies were small rabbits and rabbits were not Volkswagens? Remember when grass was what you mowed, coke was a cold drink, and pot was a container in which you fixed dinner?

My how things change! The pace of change is not slacking. The pace is increasing. Because change is often difficult, God has given us a PCA - a personal change agent - to help us navigate our way through life. That agent is none other than God himself in the person of the Holy Spirit. Come, let us take a closer look.

**WE FACE CHANGE WITH THE HELP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Change is certain. Change is necessary. Most change is natural. A number of you are graduating from high school or college or some other school of learning. These are exciting and emotional days. These are days filled with laughter and tears. Change is in the air. Things will no longer be like they used to be.

When our youngest left for college and the milk spoiled in the refrigerator, Sandy cried. When the first tuition bill arrived in the mail, I cried, too. Growing up requires letting go. Letting go is hard to do.

A typical sixth grade science question goes like this: What is the largest organ of your body? Your skin. Without skin we would look weirder than we already do. Without skin, all our other organs would be hanging out all over the place. Skin cells change at the rate of 30-40 thousand a minute. So, if you don't mind would you please clean up all the discarded skin you leave in the pews today?

Change is sudden. We have been praying for the family of a 20-year-old college student who was driving home from school a week or so ago. Exams left him short on sleep. He dozed off at the wheel and was killed in a car accident.

There might have been time when job security was a reasonable thing to expect from a company in exchange for loyalty. Not any more. We call it down-sizing. It does not feel any different than being fired.

Bad news from scans, troubling news from tests, the gnawing dis-ease that comes from disease is no respecter of persons. It has no regard for our personal plans. We need the counsel of the Holy Spirit to face the changes of life. Only the Holy Spirit can comfort us, help us, and heal us. *When other helpers fail, and comforts flee, Help of the helpless, O abide with me.*

### **THE HOLY SPIRIT HELPS US FACILITATE CHANGE**

It is the work of the Holy Spirit to convict, convince, expose, and enlighten the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment.

The Holy Spirit helps us see the need for change. You worship in a church today that has been in Brentwood for over 155 years. Brentwood Methodist was in Brentwood long before there was a Brentwood. Not many churches of any denomination adapt to a changing population the way this congregation manages it decade after decade. Churches of similar size in our community are much newer churches. Churches with similar histories are still small, family chapels.

How did this happen? The people who came before us were willing to sacrifice their self-interests for the sake of reaching new people for Christ. As one church Father says so eloquently, “Brentwood was changing, and we decided to change with it.” May that spirit of service always define this congregation.

The Holy Spirit helps us catch the vision. Did you hear about the Kentucky hillbilly who brought his family to the city for the first time? He walked into a high rise hotel and found himself standing at an elevator. An elderly, crippled woman on a walker hobbled onto the elevator. The door shut. The lights flashed. In a few minutes the door opened again and a beautiful, attractive, well-dressed young lady stepped out. The hillbilly, who had never seen an elevator before, punched his son and said, “Boy, go out to the truck and get yer maw. We need to put her in that thing.”

There is a saying in life that goes, “If you can see it, you can do it.” Vision is the God-given ability to see the better road. It is the task of every visionary to articulate the vision in such a way that other people can understand and follow. With the help of the Holy Spirit, first century Christians convinced entire countries that a Roman criminal was the Savior of humankind. Is that visionary or not?

The Holy Spirit empowers us to take the plunge. We can hesitate making up our minds, but we cannot hesitate making up our lives, for our lives get made up one way or another. The Holy Spirit reminds us of that judgment.

For many years Varun Gauri rejected religious services, practiced no rituals, and spurned all religious, mainstream notions of God. Then one day Varun’s 5-year-old daughter started asking deep questions about life and death. Varun thought he better get some help. So, he enrolled his daughter in a Christian pre-school and started attending services himself.

The words of the prophet Isaiah are so right, “A little child shall lead them.”

Whatever instrument the Holy Spirit chooses to use - have faith; take the plunge. It will bring a change with benefits out of this world.

### **THE HOLY SPIRIT HELPS US FLOW WITH CHANGE**

The Holy Spirit honors the past. *“He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you”* (John 16:14). The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not divided. They are one.

Luis Palau is in town. Our congregation owes a debt of gratitude to Stuart McWhorter who has chaired this festival of faith for Nashville. A small group of us were with Luis Thursday night. Luis said to me, “You Methodists started this revival movement with the Wesley’s in England and Asbury in America. What I am trying to do is an extension of what they did 200 years ago.” My fervent, pleading prayer for this denomination is that we somehow experience again the powerful wind and fire of the Holy Spirit in these cold hearts of ours.

The Holy Spirit reveals the future. *“He will declare to you the things that are to come”* (John 16:13). There are many things about tomorrow I do not pretend to understand. But there are some things about the future of which I am certain. When I get to where I am going, God will already be there. When I face whatever I have to face, I will have sufficient grace.

When the Holy Spirit is along side, I can know, I can deeply know, that it is alright, it is alright, it is alright. Even when all is wrong, everything will be alright.

Brad Paisley sings it:  
Yeah when I get where I’m going,  
There’ll be only happy tears.  
I will shed the sins and struggles,  
I have carried all these years.  
And I’ll have my heart wide open,  
I will love and have no fear.  
Yeah when I get to where I’m going,  
Don’t cry for me down here.

Nobody knows the price of gas tomorrow. Nobody has the promise of health today. But we can know the One who holds tomorrow; we can trust the Holy Spirit to guide us through today. Amen.