

# Real Hope and Change: It Begins With Us

Over the years, I have encountered some well-meaning Christians consoling guilt-ridden family members or friends. Perhaps they abused their spouses, or hit the bottle too many times, or were sent to prison for dealing dope. Perhaps they betrayed a trust, abandoned the wife and kids, or embezzled money.

Whatever the case, all too often I've heard someone say these words to the afflicted: "Don't worry. Jesus loves you just the way you are."

Baloney.

Jesus may love us, but if He loves us just the way we are, then why all the preaching about conversion and the absolute necessity of changing our lives? Why the many warnings about what will befall us if we don't change? Why the death on the cross for our sins?

Jesus didn't tell the woman accused of adultery to have a nice day. He told her to "sin no more." In the Sermon on the Mount, He didn't say, "You guys are a wonderful audience." He called for radical transformation, recognizing that "the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life." He didn't tell the Pharisees that God "loves you just the way you are." He called them "hypocrites" and "a generation of vipers," and commanded them to mend their ways.

Most religions and their founders – Christianity, Islam, Buddhism – urge us to change the way we think, to see the world with new eyes, and to live more wholesome lives.

But change is tough.

I've seen churches where a new pastor introduced a few innovations and left half the congregation with a case of the vapors. I've known of schools where a new headmaster took the helm, and students and parents complained that she didn't operate the way Mr. Weatherbee did. We've all seen the results of Donald Trump's election to the presidency. That change has driven many of his opponents beyond the borders of sanity.

The hardest changes are the ones we ourselves undertake. The smoker who wants to ditch the cigarettes, the alcoholic who has finally hit rock bottom and must now make the climb out of that hole, those who know that they need to exercise more – I'm one of them – but who keep putting off that challenge: the list goes on and on.

Usually, when we want to change some habit or behavior, we see improvement as the goal. If we give up smoking, we will save money, breathe easier, and probably live longer. If we work on slowing down our frantic pace, our blood pressure will go down and we will have more time to appreciate the good things in life.

Given that these alterations in our personal behavior take so much effort and willpower, you would think it might be difficult to change an entire country. You would think proposals for such massive transfigurations would at least be offered in a spirit of humility.

Apparently not.

Every day the chattering classes – politicians, members of the media, and other public figures – throw out their plans for America, some of them diametrically opposed, some of them out of touch with reality, but all of them ostensibly aimed at improving our lives. They offer all sorts of solutions to what they regard as "our problems," but none of them come round knocking at our doors to find out what we're really thinking.

And rarely do they suggest that improving America might best

be accomplished by change from the bottom up rather than from the top down.

But what if by transforming ourselves we could transform the country?

What if we treated others – the harried barista, the elderly grocery store clerk, the mom on the bus with two wiggling boys, our political opponents – with courtesy? What if all of us, especially our public figures, listened to people instead of shouting down their arguments?

What if we learned more about the history of our country by reading books like [Wilfred McClay's Land of Hope](#)? What if we taught that history to our children and grandchildren? To love truly and passionately means familiarity with the beloved. The same holds true for our country.

What if we learned more about the way our government is supposed to function? In a recent poll, more than one in five Americans [couldn't name](#) any of the three branches of our government.

We can do better than that.

Finally, what if we made it a habit to contact our local, state, and national officials and let them know what we think of their words and deeds? If we believe, for example, that those in Congress should make a greater effort to reduce our \$22 trillion dollar deficit, why not take a few minutes and shoot our representative [an email](#) expressing our concern?

“Everyone thinks of changing the world,” Leo Tolstoy once said. “But no one thinks of changing himself.”

What if we could do both at the same time?

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