Christian Leadership in Time of Change

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Introduction

Change occurs all around us – continually. In fact, nothing ever stays the same – except God.

How we process change, as Christians (and as leaders), can make an enormous difference in how we grow individually, relate to others and move on in life.

The following material (in dot point form, for brevity – do with it what you will) has been prepared from a Christian perspective, drawing on personal experience, including mistakes made along the way. Some of it may echo thinking I have picked up over time from the broader community, but that is not the key driver.

As the community of Christ we must think about the issues involved, so that we can respond appropriately to what is going on in our lives, and those of men, women and young people whom we inevitably touch.

Leadership is a privilege. With God's help and guidance (and not unquestioningly aping secular management models, even if espoused by influential Christians) let's be agents for the kind of change for good that <u>He</u> wants to bring about in our world.

Changes that Create Turbulence

- leadership churn, often at short notice
- leadership changes that give rise to new relationship styles and "coalitions"
- new / adjusted organisational structures
- new governance arrangements
- strategic changes – new directions
- established programs come to an end and are not renewed
- new emphases, eg worship formats, missions, social involvement, finances
- doctrinal change / discovery / correction
- inter-generational change and transfer of functions / authority
- cultural change, eg church make-up and profile in the community
- external pressures, eg political, legal, financial, time stresses
- social trends
- moves of the Holy Spirit that up-end cherished processes
- church building programs
  - demands, agendas and stresses associated with initiating and implementing
  - "gap" felt by some people when the program is completed and/or leadership changes   > "what now?"
- changed personal circumstances (eg marriage and family status, relocation, health, work or financial crisis)
- economic volatility in society, technological change, revolutions in ideas

Change is inevitable; it is a fact of life.

Recent Change – Personal Reflection

Recall a recent change or event that involved you personally…

- who was involved? what was your role?
- did you understand what was happening?
- did you carry out a "stock-take" afterwards?
- what worked? what did not work?
- how did you feel?
- how did you respond, specifically, to the situation (internally/externally)?
- what did you sense God was saying?
- what happened in your relationships with others?
  - were some friendships strengthened? did others suffer?
  - are there unresolved issues?
  - do you have an effective strategy for moving forward?
- who were your leaders or mentors?
- what were your reference (or compass) points? were they valid?
- what lessons were learned? how do you *know*?
- looking back, how do you think you managed yourself?
- what weaknesses in your personality showed up?
- what would you do differently next time?

It is hard to remain objective when we are subjectively involved.

Common Objections to Change

- *"We have always done it this way",* eg structures, worship styles, language, programs
  - *"If it is not broken, don't fix it. I am happy with the way things are." (caution)*
  - *"I don't like the new direction. I don't know where we are going." (fear)*
  - *"I am confused." No one consulted me." (resentment, alienation)*
  - *"It will all go away if I put my head in the sand." (denial, avoidance)*
  - *"It did not work last time."* (cynicism, disappointment, frustration, lack of trust)
- vested interests at risk (authority, influence, emotional investment, financial stake)
- perceptions leaders are seeking to entrench themselves, friends, "hobby horses"
- suspicion of external models & adoption of "blue prints" that "work elsewhere"
- allowing cliques to develop (at the cost of minority groups, who end up feeling disenfranchised or excluded)
- momentum "out of control"
  - the temptation is to walk out (Psalm 55:6, 7)
- complaint: "lack of discussion, consultation, trust, openness, or accountability"
- change fatigue – *"Not more change!" "The old is better."* (Luke 5:39)
- fear of burn-out (Job 17:11-16)
- new ideas are seen as *impositions* on the existing culture / behaviours or threaten to undermine values *"We have everything we need; we have all truth."*
- the change environment threatens to offend / hurt / cast away "good" people
- fear (sometimes justified) of compromise with non-Christian thinking

Response to change is often shaped by the prevailing culture.

Identifying the Real Objections

- resistance to change can be lasagne-like, covering up underlying issues, eg
  - ❑ loss of perceived status, prestige, influence
  - ❑ loss of power
  - ❑ loss of profit
  - ❑ lack of willingness to deal with long-standing issues
  - ❑ fear of being marginalised, considered irrelevant or moved on
  - ❑ fear of the unknown, of letting go of familiar boundaries
- peoples' motives will not be uncovered by focusing on their objections; go deeper
- everyone has "blind spots" – our hearts can deceive us
- conversely, there may be valid objections to change; the change agent may be moving in the wrong direction, acting out of self-interest, or going about it the wrong way; change agents are not infallible; moving quickly does not necessarily denote improvement or progressiveness, even if it is popular
- everything needs to be put under the spotlight
- alternatives need to be presented and examined fairly

Leaders must understand the complexities people face when responding to change.

Poor Management of Change

- *"My way or the highway"* – may lead to abuse of spiritual authority
- *"My way is God's way"* – assumptions of infallibility, hierarchy, or exclusive revelation
- *"Don't touch God's anointed" (1 Samuel 24:6, 10)* > remoteness, lack of accountability
- lack of effective leadership and follow-through – *"Who is in charge?"*
- hasty introduction of new models, staff (existing people feel "left behind / shut out")
- invalidation of the "old" a threat to those involved (feel "obsolete", cf 2 Samuel 17:23)
- people feel disempowered (especially those who built the original model and prospered/benefited from it, or believe they should be part of the decision-making process)
- change is approached by "formula", cf needs to be relationship-based, linked to trust
- misunderstanding of the local culture and history on the part of the "new broom"
- competing values and priorities not addressed
- inflexibility on all "sides" as change is rolled out – question of "loss of control"
- isolation and insensitivity on the part of senior leadership
- change is allowed to be externally-driven; "others" are blamed for creating uncertainty
- lack of planning (crisis management), leading to reactive ("knee-jerk") responses
- resistance, hostility or impassivity dismissed without understanding / evaluation
- lack of communication, timely information, feedback
- misinformation not corrected quickly
- unwillingness to take responsibility for downsides of change and repair damage done

"Comfort zones" become dead zones without the Holy Spirit's leadership and results.

The Role of Christian Leadership

- An effective Christian leader is an authentic and consistent follower of Christ, having an obvious relationship with (and dependence on) God

- Leadership worth following demonstrates high standards of personal integrity

- The genuine Christian leader sees ministry as a call to "service", a developed life, not a vocation / position / job / personal possession

- The leader is focused and knows which way to go

- Having done well, the genuine Christian leader seeks to excel

- Effective Christian leadership functions through team relationship

- Good leaders genuinely like people (they do not "use" them)

- Leaders have followers – by definition – and must look after them

- Good leaders are made by trials and tests that cleanse and shape them

- Christian leaders of influence know what is "going on"

Leading change is one of the ultimate tests of spiritual leadership.

Christian Attitudes to Change

- God does not change (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8) – He is our rock
- change in our lives *will* however occur – the Holy Spirit can help us see it as "positive"
  - change can be refreshing and reinvigorating, if we are prepared to let things go
- everyone has hopes, aspirations, trials, disappointments, break-throughs
- we need to value what is of God, what He wishes to continue, or is permitting to die
- as Christians we believe in God's love for His church, His goodness, claims over our lives, creative power & sovereignty, but recognise different perspectives re change
- we believe God does not introduce change to harm us
- changes can "work" for us, according to God's purposes (Romans 8:28)
- we have access to the strength, leading and wisdom of the Holy Spirit (James 1:5)
- God has promised to be with us in fire, flood, personal adversity (Isaiah 43:2)
- God can change our direction at any time (eg Acts 13:1-4, 16:6-10)
- God can touch and use *all* people, regardless of age, gender or status (Joel 2:28-29)
- we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13)
- the Holy Spirit can unify people undergoing change, to move forward in His plan
- our equipping and open / closed doors come from God (Revelation 3:8)
- we need to keep an eye on God's larger plans and His ultimate objective of investing for eternity, not just for the moment (Matthew 6:33)
  - it is all about *Him*, not us (Isaiah 42:8)
- in the end, the greatest "change" is lives re-shaped like Christ, and re-shaping others

"I am doing a new thing" (Isaiah 43:19)

Positive Management of Change

- accept that change is a normal part of growth; nothing living stays the same
  - some people are "change junkies", thriving on constant churn; others (especially leaders) find it threatening and destabilizing
  - people respond to change in different ways (Ezra 3:12, 13)
  - the role of the leader is to help the team face up to what needs to change and embrace and facilitate it with resilience, grace and confidence in God (Nehemiah)
- retain a strong spiritual focus and Christ-centredness (Philippians 3:13, 14)
- actively *listen* to the Holy Spirit
  - Christians prefer to follow leaders who "hear from God"
- maintain the right attitudes
- share the vision – explain and articulate it in simple words (Habakkuk 2:2)
  - in the context of the "big picture"
  - share the rationale for the change, ie not change for its own sake

- "walk the talk", ie *lead* by example, with integrity
- recognise the perspective, input and validity of others
- recognise threats, barriers and opportunities implicit in change
- recognise that most people feel vulnerable and are motivated by "WIIFM?"
- keep "talking" to people; dialogue often prevents misunderstanding and builds trust
- keep the team involved and affirmed, so all understand their responsibilities / roles
- celebrate faith in God's goodness and positive outcomes along the way

People will embrace change if they believe it is valid.

Holy Spirit-Led Change

- verify: is the change *really* necessary?
- share the vision and get "buy-in" from men and women who hear from God
- be receptive to new ideas – they *may* be coming from God (but test them)
- be flexible, innovative, open to new things / people
- lead change in a "Christian" way, not just by secular management modelling
- lead change through prayer - for wisdom to know what to do & how to do it; ideas; solutions; discernment; skills; anointing; unity; resources; partners; tangible results
- listen to God – don't get in front of Him, or lag behind; boldly obey the Holy Spirit
- be open to God's correction and the wisdom / insight of others, whom you trust
- look for the *gifts* and *fruit* of the Spirit being extinguished or operating
- get everyone involved to think creatively, "outside the box" – be open yourself
- clarify confusion that emerges, on the basis of encouragement (not judgement)
- pray for relationships with like-minded people who will introduce the changes with you
- keep a compassionate "servant heart"; build up rather than tear down
- if some people will not adapt, move forward with God's grace nevertheless
- use your positional authority with humility – seek Holy Spirit-based leadership
- *plan* the work … then work the plan, to full implementation

Godly men and women, with God's opportunities and anointing, will lead change His way.

Evaluating Change After the Event

- was the change worth it?
- did it deliver what people were told it would?
- how did it work for all involved?
- was it carried out in a godly way? (remember, we are talking about Christian leadership, not replicating populist models or Machiavellian politics)
- do participants have a greater, or diminished, sense of God in their lives as a result?
- is the leadership group still trusted?
- can people describe the changes and vision in their own words? (this is the real test of whether they understand it)
- do all involved understand what truths and values the "new" stands for?
- has anyone "fallen between the cracks"?
  - if leaders do not address this issue they have not grasped Jesus' way
- is there a "redemptive" approach to those who remain "outside" the process?
- is growth occurring?
- is the overall vision inward or outward looking
- is the Holy Spirit still in charge?

Honestly and transparency in assessing change are crucial.

More Information

For further information and contact details check out:

www.Relevant-Christianity.com