

It's good to be with you this morning. For those of you who are new, as Pastor Rick mentioned my name is Andrew...and I'm so glad to have you with us. This morning we're going to continue our message series "Dangerous Prayers" by looking at the prayer "Change Me." For those of you who missed last week, the idea behind "Dangerous Prayers" is a challenge for us to be bolder in the prayers we pray. As we did last week and we will do throughout this series, we'll be looking at the types of prayers that stretch us and get us out of our comfort zone and hopefully make the biggest difference in us, in the lives of those we love and ultimately for God's Kingdom.

The prayer for this week "change me" is a perfect example. Change is hard for a lot of us isn't it? Most of us are uncomfortable with change or at least the idea of change. Someone once pointed out to me it's not "change" in itself that we really have the difficulty with. It's the pain or loss that change can bring with it. Change itself is neutral. I thought this was brilliant. Think about it, if your boss were to give you a twenty percent raise, that would be a pretty big change for you wouldn't it? How many of you would turn down that raise just because you're uncomfortable with change? You tell your boss, gosh...thanks, but I'd rather not...If I take it, I'm going to have all this extra income that I'm not going to know what to do with, so I'd rather not experience that feeling.

Sometimes we say we want to change, but then once we start the process, and experience some pain or discomfort we back off. We call that it the month of January. We set a resolution, and two weeks in realize that we don't want to change as much as we thought we did. A couple of years ago I got a personal trainer for like three weeks. I figured I exercise pretty regularly, but I want to get in better shape, I just started dating my wife at the time, and I wanted to impress her. I wanted to change, and I knew that doing the same old routine I always did wasn't going to get me to where I wanted to go. I met with a trainer, and before we started, we talked through goals, and I shared "I don't want to do any workout that I've ever done before. If I've done it,

I don't want to do it." I really thought this was a great idea, but half-way through the first workout I'm doing burpees for minutes on end and swing these giant ropes that I swear weighed as much as I do, and I knew this was a huge mistake! There's a reason I've never done this workout before. It hurts. I wanted to go back to my old routine. Afterward, I was sore everywhere. I don't know if my fingertips have muscles, but even they were sore. After a few sessions, I was done.

In the same way, praying "God Change Me" can be dangerous. Because the change that God wants to bring about in you and I might make us more than a little uncomfortable. You might not have sore fingertips, but it might mean that you're going to have to let go of some things in your life that you don't necessarily want to. The change that God wants to see in your life is dangerous because it might yield more conflict and resistance than it brings peace.

But here's the thing. The change is also the counterintuitive blessed life the Jesus talks about in the beatitudes: blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek, blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The change that God wants to bring about in us is Christ-likeness. It's more people, more like Jesus, right? It means taking the form of a servant and taking up the cross, laying down our lives. But it's also receiving the full and abundant life Jesus talks about in John 10:10. It's becoming an heir to the Kingdom; it's how we're created to live and what we were created for. It is hard, and it is worth it.

I know some of you are listening and you truly want God to change you. You're hungry for it and don't care what it costs you just you want to know how? We'll get to that in a bit, but I want to start with a couple of truths that scripture teaches us about change.

The first is that "**your change is God's work.**" It's God's work. Your change is not an issue of your "self-improvement" or herculean discipline. It's God's work, and as such, it is by God's power. In his letter to the Philippians, the Apostle Paul shared with them how he regularly

prayed, giving thanks to God for their partnership in the gospel, but also giving thanks for what God was doing in them and had yet to do. He said "***being confident of this that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.***" The he in this passage is God. Notice what it says, he began the work, he started it, and he will carry it on to completion. He doesn't begin the work and then hand the project off to us once it has a good start. Our change is God's work, beginning, middle, and end.

Work has gotten a bad reputation in our culture where people play the lottery dreaming of someday quitting their jobs. We save and save hoping to take retirement just a little bit earlier...and the words of the 80s band Loverboy "Everybody's working for the weekend." When we talk about our change being God's work...we shouldn't imagine God sitting in a windowless cubicle performing some joyless task. Our change isn't something God does begrudgingly because he knows we can't do it ourselves. The work of bringing about that change in us is something God delights in and rejoices over. Ephesians 2:10, tells us ***we are God's "workmanship."*** The Greek for workmanship is poiema – from which we get the word poem. The implications are we are God's artwork that he gladly pours his love and creativity into us. If you read through Genesis one and two, as God creates, pronounces things good, and rests – and then walks about and among his creation you get the idea of God enjoying what he's made, it is no less the case in his ongoing work in us. God loves what he's doing in you. It might be taking a while, but it's worth it.

Paul makes an important point a little later in Philippians that we have a part to play in the work. Philippians 2:13 & 14, is our memory verse for the week. It states "***Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.***" It's clear that there is a part the part for us to play, and one which we are to take quite seriously, just as God pours himself into it, so we should pour ourselves in it. But don't miss how Paul continues

for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose." I don't know who said it first, but I love the paraphrase: "We work out what God has worked in us."

If you're not growing or changing or changing, our first point doesn't give you cover to blame that on God, we have a part to play too...but it is equally erroneous, if not more so, to try to bring about change in our life without inviting in and relying on God's power to do so. God takes the initiative, and we come along as partners in the work.

The second truth is that for those who have put their trust in Christ, **we have been changed**. The reason I think it's worthwhile to state the obvious is that sometimes we can get so discouraged by our lack of change, that we can become hopeless. The devil will throw this in your face, again and again, you're never going to change. You might as well accept it; this is just who you are. It's lies like that which we need to confront with the truth that "In Christ, I have been changed." If you brought a bible with you today, would you open with me to the book of Colossians

Paul says this in chapter two "***When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross***"

Is there a greater change than something dead being brought back to life? We were spiritually dead. Without hope. And we've been given new life. I cannot think of a greater change that could occur in us. We want to change our attitudes, maybe certain desires or habits we have, we want to change how we treat some people in our lives. Don't get me wrong, God wants to change those things too, and if you're open to it, he will begin construction but don't glance over the fact that you were dead and now you're alive. Let that be the framing

perspective for how you view all of the other quote impossible things in your life.

There's no line on for this in your notes, but maybe you want to mark down a couple of other changes that have come through Christ, verse thirteen tells us we are forgiven, verse fourteen tells us we are no longer debtors and we are no longer condemned. If you go a couple of verses back in chapter two to verse eleven we're told that our self-ruled flesh was put off, we have been buried with Christ by baptism, and we were raised with him. Jumping even further back to chapter one, verse twenty-two "***But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.***" We were God's enemies, and we've been reconciled. We sinners are now holy, pure, and beyond accusation. We could do this all day long listing what we were and what through Christ we have become. Changing his people is what God does. Be confident in that.

In a couple of weeks, we're going to have some folks taking the step of believer's baptism. And what they're going to do in baptism is symbolic action proclaiming that in Christ, they have been changed. As they go down under the water, they're saying I was buried with Christ, and as they're brought up, it symbolizes that through their faith will be raised when he returns at the resurrection. Baptism symbolizes their new birth, a new creation, that they have been washed clean. These are all things about them that have changed because of what Christ has done. If you've placed your trust in Christ and received His forgiveness by making him Lord of your life, but you haven't taken the step of baptism, then that's a step that you need to take.

The third truth is that a day is coming when **You will be changed**. Colossians 3:4 tells us "***When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.***" What we are today, is not what we will always be. Paul is talking about the transformation we will experience when Christ returns at the resurrection. We will no longer wrestle with our emotions, our desires, and our priorities. On that day

the prayer “thy Kingdom come, thy will be done” will be our highest priority and deepest desire. John promises us ***“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*** A day is coming when we will be changed.

When we struggle and stumble when we try and fail. We remember that God has changed us we can take hope in the fact that a day is coming when we will be changed eternally.

I think what many of us feel is this tension, where we know what is true about us, that we've been changed and we know what will be true about us, that we will be changed. But we're sitting between the two...what about me today? Why doesn't God just hit the easy button, when we put our trust in Christ and zap us into Christ-likeness? The reason is as I alluded to before, is that God's desires a partnership. He created us with a will where we could choose to obey him or disobey him. We can open up to his power working through us to change us. Or we can say no thanks.

For those who want to open themselves up and allow God to bring transformation, there are three main ingredients that God uses. That is, when you are bold enough to pray God change me, the first way he will do so is through our engagement with his word

If you want to change and grow more like Christ, the most basic simple encouragement I can give is make a regular, consistent habit of engaging God's word. A few verses further in Colossians, Paul says ***“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”***

In your message notes, maybe circle or underline the word dwell. We don't use this word all that often, but your dwelling is where you live. It's your home right? Paul is encouraging us to allow God's word to make it's home in us. Not just as a visitor who stops by for a couple of hours, but someone who lives there. When you rent or visit, you don't

make changes to the house. You're not digging a pool in the back yard, or remodeling the kitchen when you visit someone, because the house isn't yours. When God's word dwells in our hearts, it's because our hearts belong to God. And God's word makes the changes God wants to make. Bust out a wall here, add an extra bathroom there. It's up to God.

Just like an exercise routine or a diet takes a little while to see the changes, a steady diet of God's word might take some time before you really start to see an impact. But if you make it an ongoing habit to study His word, listen and apply what he says – you'll see the change and so will others. I love how Eugene Peterson describes discipleship as the "Long obedience in the same direction." There's nothing flashy or dramatic about it. But as you consistently surrender to God, through his word – it will yield a life of wonderful faithfulness.

The second ingredient God will use when we ask him to change us is **the people in our lives**. He will bring people into our lives, or he'll work through the people in our lives, to challenge us and encourage us. He'll bring people who will speak words of truth to us and those who model bold faith for us. Proverbs 27:6 says "***Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.***" God brings people into our lives who will cut us with their words, but the cuts are such that they cut out and remove our diseased and decaying habits. They will cut out cancerous attitudes and desires, leaving us more whole than before. Every week on the back of the connection card is a step – "I'm interested in learning more small groups," we offer this because we know the surest way to change outside of God's word – is through life on life interaction with other Christ followers.

One of the reasons "change me" is such a dangerous prayer to pray is that God might bring people into our lives so that we have to practice repeatedly offering forgiveness, not just once but the seventy times seven forgiveness Jesus talks about. God might bring in people who will challenge our capacity to turn the other cheek or force us to become more like Jesus by loving our enemy and praying for those who

persecute us. It is dangerous, but would the churches anemic witness for the gospel be better for it? Yes.

The last ingredient God that God uses to change us and grow us are situations that stretch our faith. Praying God “change me” is dangerous because God will intentionally put us in environments where we have to change and grow through our dependence on him. James, the brother of Jesus, taught that these are moments to rejoice in ***“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”*** I'm not saying God is the author of evil in your life, but by God's grace, he will redeem our pain and sorrow. These moments, or sometimes seasons force us to lean into God and trust him to get us through.

I don't know that we need to go out looking for suffering and pain, but I do think as we pray God change me, we need to cultivate a willingness to step outside of our comfort zone. And look for the day to day opportunities for us to stretch our faith and to trust God. Maybe it's engaging in a faith conversation at the grocery store, or inviting a co-worker to come with you to one of our Easter Services. When was the last time your pulse quickened because of something you thought God was calling you to do – and you still did it? I think it's those small stretching steps, the tiny yesses to God here and there will eventually lead to a changed life – one that is consistent with the change that Christ began in us, and will complete in us – on the day of his return.