

Our Passion Drives Our Change Readiness Series

Contributed by Dr. Madana Kumar, PhD on Jul 10, 2022

Scripture: Mark 10:17-22, 1 John 4:18, John 6:22-66, Psalms 42:1-11

Denomination: Evangelical/Non-Denominational

Summary: Encounters with God can fail, if we are not prepared for the change that follows any encounter. In this concluding part of the series Dr. Madana Kumar explores the dynamics all of us face when we are faced with change.

Encounters With God Series

Part 7

Our Change Readiness decides the outcome of the encounter on our lives

For a video/ audio version of the message, please visit <https://youtu.be/qzMm9hTdMNw>

Good morning.

This is the seventh and concluding part of this series of messages on Encounters with God. We started with the premise that having an encounter with God is a mighty good reason for us to come to church Sunday after Sunday. We saw that while coming to the House of God (Bethel) is a good thing, it can become meaningless unless we come to the House of God for meeting up with the God of the House (El-Bethel). We saw that we have to be one seeking this encounter since the other party, Lord God is omnipresent and always there. We saw that we can seek an encounter just as we are. It does not depend on our spiritual maturity. We saw that we need to have that encounter on a repeated basis and not as a once-in-a-lifetime affair. We realised that encounters are intensely personal in nature.

More importantly we saw that encounters result in change in us. These changes could be dramatic and immediate as it happened in the case of Paul, or subtle but progressive as it happened in the case of Jacob or like a roller coaster ride as it happened in Peter's case. But changes do happen. We studied specific changes in our vision, character and relationships. These are the three imperatives that I speak about in my book Not-So-With-YOU. https://www.menorahleadership.com/not-so-with-you_book/

We studied this using the examples set by Jacob, Paul and Peter. We saw how God encounters resulted in definite and positive changes in all the three characters we saw. There is one question remaining though. Can change happen to everyone? Is it possible that even after an encounter, people do not change? Are there things that prevent changes from happening even after an encounter? What should we be aware of, to avoid becoming one of those cases where we do not change even after a powerful encounter with God?

Today in the concluding part of the series, we are going to look at what can hinder change. Change is a funny thing. We all have heard the cliched sayings like , change is the only constant, or without change we perish etc. Despite all those sayings about change, when it comes to actual change, it is surprising to note that many of us resist change. In the corporate settings when we talk about change most of the people enthusiastically say that we need to change and we are willing to change. Then we run a Change Readiness assessment, and participants are generally shocked when they see

the results. The results show the extent to which they resist change and also throw up the specific areas where they resist change.

Let us look at some of those areas where we resist change.

I do an activity in my training programs asking everyone to make 5 changes to their appearance in one minute. It is amazing to note that 99% of the time, people make changes by removing things from their body, like watches, spectacles, bangles, hairbands etc. When we repeat the exercise, they reach a point where they say that they can't make any more changes because they can't remove anything more without breaking the decency code. It is only when I specifically tell them that they can also make changes by adding things to themselves that they start looking for adding things to themselves from others or from around them. This is the case with 99% of the participants. This shows a major mindset in all of us. When we hear the word change, the first thing that comes to our mind is what are we likely to lose, rather than what are we likely to gain.

Let me demonstrate this to you with a Biblical example.

Turn with me in the Bible to Mark 10:17-22. This is a story of a rich young ruler having an encounter with Jesus. This rich young ruler, comes to Jesus, kneels before Him and asks Him advice on how to inherit eternal life. Jesus answers him and asks him to obey the ten commandments, especially the ones about adultery, murder, stealing, false witness, fraud and honoring parents. The rich young ruler affirms that he had kept all those commandments for a long time. Then comes the punch line from Jesus. Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me (Mark 10:21)." The verse has several key points. First is that Jesus loved the young rich ruler, He loved the way the rich ruler was keen on eternal life and has obeyed all the laws. The second part is where Jesus highlights what the rich ruler must lose if he wants eternal life. He says, give all your temporal riches away. Jesus is highlighting that the young rich ruler must lose some of his possessions if he wants to gain the benefits of this encounter. But Jesus does not stop at that. Jesus does highlight what the young rich ruler will gain, if he is ready for the change. Jesus says "You will have treasure in heaven..." That is the reward. That is what we will gain, if we are ready for the change. But see where the focus of the young rich ruler is. But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions (Mark 10:22). The young man is focused on the possibility of losing what he immediately has rather than gaining what he cannot see or feel yet. He is not ready for the change, because he is focused on what he will lose, rather than what he will gain.

In the past messages on this series, we have focused on encounters that have resulted in change. We have seen that encounters result in change, slowly or dramatically. Reluctantly or willingly. But ultimately the change happens because Jacob or Paul or Peter are able to get over the initial resistance and go along with the changes. Here in the case of the rich young ruler, we see an encounter with a failed outcome. There is an encounter. There is a call for change, and there is a refusal to change. Not a mere resistance to change. In part 5 of the series, when we studied fear, we saw that Jesus used love as the weapon to drive our fear. We saw how perfect love drove out fear from Peter. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love (1 John 4:18). In this case with the young man also, we see Jesus using love to try and help the person get out of the fear of losing his possessions. Mark 10:21 says Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him...I am reminded about the time Jesus looked at Peter after his third denial, a look that told Peter, "I love you even though you have denied me." In this case too Jesus looks at the young rich ruler and loves him. The look would have communicated

the love of Jesus to the young man, but unlike in the case of Peter, where he repented and wept, this young man was so focused on what he will lose, and was not able to love Jesus back the same way the Jesus loved him. An encounter with Jesus wasted. An offer of a perfect love that drives out fear repulsed because the recipient was not ready to lose his worldly possessions.

How about us? Even when we have an encounter with God, even when we realise that changes will and can happen to us, just like it happened to Jacob and Paul and Peter, do we resist such changes, because we are focused on what we are likely to lose rather than what we are able to gain due to such changes? Let us examine ourselves this morning.

The other thing that makes us walk away from an encounter without being changed is the fact that change is hard. Look at Jesus's disciples (not the 12, but other disciples). John 6: 22-59 sees some of this hard teachings following his "I am the bread of life" statement. Jesus tells them about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. After hearing this teaching the Jews are offended. That should not surprise us. But what should surprise us is the reaction of some of His disciples. Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" (John 6:60). They found it too hard to swallow. And despite Jesus explaining it further and also showing them the ultimate of His own ascension, the disciples decide to walk away from Jesus. From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more (John 6:66). Yet another case of a failed encounter despite that fact that this time the people who walked away from the encounter were His own disciples, who had walked with Him, who had heard Him speak, who had seen the miracles He performed. Even after that, the hard nature of the change ahead made them walk away from the encounter.

There are several other resistances to change that we go through. Two of them are pride and fear. We examined them in detail already and hence will not get into it now. There is something that I call as Tolerance to ambiguity that prevents us from embracing change. In the change readiness assessment that I spoke about earlier, we look at seven traits that hinder or help change. If you take the assessment, you will come know about those traits.

One key trait is Passion or Drive. This can help us overcome almost all resistance to change.

Let me demonstrate this trait with a story of one person who set out to find David Livingstone, the famous missionary to Africa. Some of you who have studied the life of David Livingstone will remember the phrase "Dr. Livingstone, I presume!!" This was uttered by a person by the name of Henry Morgan Stanley. He was a news paper reporter and was assigned the task of finding Dr. Livingstone by his boss. Though the expedition started off as a means to improve the circulation of New York Herald, with a breaking news (something that today's media channels would do to improve their TRPs), Stanley got so involved in the search for the legend, it became a strong passion for him. And it was passion that drove him, despite the difficulties he had to undergo. The journey to find Livingstone and have an encounter with him was not an easy one at all. During the search to find Livingstone, he had battled malaria, starvation and dysentery, losing 40 pounds. The expedition had suffered floods, famine, pestilence and drought. Of two white companions who had begun the journey with him, one had died from elephantiasis and the other had fired a pistol at Stanley during a failed mutiny, only to die from smallpox later. Two-thirds of the porters had deserted or died. At one time In fact, Stanley was suffering from dementia brought on by cerebral malaria, the often fatal strain of that disease.

But what drove him was his passion for the mission of finding Livingstone. He wrote once in his diary, "Until I hear more of him or see the long absent old man face to face, I bid you a farewell," he

signed off. "But wherever he is be sure I shall not give up the chase. If alive you shall hear what he has to say. If dead I will find him and bring his bones to you." It is a strong sense of commitment, strong passion to meet with this legend that drove him to continue to seek the encounter with Dr. Livingstone. Passion can overcome every resistance to change.

The question we have to ask ourselves is do we have that passion. Stanley was no spiritual man, yet he had a great passion for having an encounter with the legend Livingstone. Do we have a similar passion for having an encounter with our God? Do we thirst for God?

Yes we all have a resistance to change, and that resistance can sometimes make even an encounter to fail. We may come to the House of God (Bethel) and even have an encounter with the God of the House (El Bethel). But we might still not undergo any change, if we continue to resist such change. The dynamics of change are not going to go away, they will remain. There will be the fear of losing what we have, there will be the fear of the unknown, there will be the reluctance to embrace the ambiguity, there might be our inability to adapt to such a change etc. But what can drive away all those fears, what can remove all the resistance is the passion that we have for our Lord.

Are we passionate about having an encounter with God? Do we seek Him with all our heart? If our passion has died down, let us seek His help to rekindle that passion in our hearts.

As we wrap up this series on encounters with God, let us continue to seek an encounter with Him, today, every day, passionately.

Let us prayerfully read Psalm 42 responsively.