

Five Ways To Change Your World 01
You're The Only One You Can Change
By Bill Denton

INTRODUCTION

A. Today I'm going to start a new sermon series titled, "Five Ways To Change Your World"

1. Just about everybody would like to change something about the world in which they live
2. A lot of people spend a large part of their lives making great efforts to change the world
3. Others make the same effort to stop changes from happening – which is just another way of thinking about change
4. Chances are, most of you here today are trying to change something about your world
 - a. maybe it's to change your physical appearance – hair, weight
 - b. or change your health – deal with a problem, or get fit
 - c. change your economic status – new job, raise, second job, retire
5. Some are trying to change some very serious things
 - a. bad marriage
 - b. trouble with children
 - c. personal crisis or mental/emotional stress

B. Perhaps at the top of the list of reasons why people seek counseling is the desire to change something

1. For several years, I was very involved in marriage counseling, and almost without fail, the couples wanted me to help them change something
 - a. husbands wanted to change their wives
 - b. wives wanted to change their husbands
2. Christian couples even had Bible for the desired changes
 - a. husbands – the Bible says wives ought to obey their husbands, so help my wife learn to obey me and our problems will go away
 - b. wives – the Bible says husbands ought to love their wives, so help my husband to love me better and our problems will go away
3. Both parties would then look at me like, "How can you argue with that? I've got the Bible on my side"

C. I want us to look at one idea today that can revolutionize your effort to change your world – You're the only one you can change

I. THE FALLACY OF TRYING TO CHANGE OTHERS

A. The greatest mistake people make in trying to change the world is trying to change other people

1. I agree that there are some things we can do (we'll talk about some later)
 - a. you can teach and inform
 - b. you can encourage and try to motivate
 - c. you can influence and provide an example
2. But the simple fact is you can't change anybody except yourself
 - a. even attempts to force people to change won't work
 - b. eventually people will return to whatever behavior they want

B. There are many examples that help us understand this point

1. Marriage – you can't make your spouse do what you want them to do, though this is the effort behind many failed efforts
 - a. this is the goal behind arguments and fights
 - b. this is part of the goal behind abusive treatment
 - c. this is the goal of manipulative behavior
 - d. none of this really works to permanently change anybody
2. Parenting – you can't make your children do what you want them to do
 - a. you might get some short-term cooperation but not real change
 - b. watch a parent who resorts to ever-growing strictness and I'll show you a parent who is deepening the problem they're trying to change
 - c. watch a parent who caters to their children's every whim and I'll show you a parent ingraining undesirable traits in those children
 - d. the problem is that parents aren't helping kids learn how to change and develop characteristics and behavior that works
3. Legislating morality through laws of the land
 - a. it's one thing to pass laws that protect people and limit damaging behaviors
 - b. some have the idea that we can legislate morality by passing laws that make undesirable things illegal
 - c. it won't work – even if you pass such laws, people will do whatever they want to do – the existence of a law doesn't make people moral
4. Churches can make the same mistake
 - a. trying to force others into the desired mold is the motive behind a lot of "hell-fire and brimstone" preaching
 - b. forcing change is the effort behind the un-Christ-like treatment given to people who don't measure up to what is expected of them

C. The only thing this produces is a lot of frustration and sometimes the illusion that we're succeeding – the truth is you can't change other people by force

II. THE BIBLE STRESSES PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

A. Ezekiel 18:20–23 (NAS) —

20 “The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son’s iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself. **21** “But if the wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed and observes all My statutes and practices justice and righteousness, he shall surely live; he shall not die. **22** “All his transgressions which he has committed will not be remembered against him; because of his righteousness which he has practiced, he will live. **23** “Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,” declares the Lord God, “rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?”

1. This passage is all about personal responsibility for the kind of life one lives
2. The point is that nobody will be held responsible for anyone except himself or herself
3. What does this have to do with our inability to change anyone but ourselves?
 - a. the passage says we can change ourselves
 - b. if we could change others, then a good argument could be made that would be responsible for whatever change or lack of change occurred
4. Instead, the only person you have to worry about is you!

B. Luke 13:1–5 (NAS) —

1 Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. **2** And Jesus said to them, “Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? **3** “I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. **4** “Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? **5** “I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

1. This is a passage in which Jesus calls people to repent – to change their minds
2. Good exercise – read through the New Testament and pay attention to all the passages on repentance
 - a. there isn’t one in which anyone is forced to repent
 - b. they might be given good reasons, including avoiding the consequences of not repenting, but nobody is made to repent
 - c. people are always invited or called to repent, even urged, but not forced to repent
3. Repenting, meaning to change your mind, is something only you can do for yourself – nobody else can do it for you, and you can’t do it for anyone else

III. ALL CHANGE BEGINS WITH “ME”

A. The biggest complaint I’ve ever heard when I tell this to people is something like this – “Yeah, but I can change, and it might not make any difference in (my spouse, my circumstances, my problems, etc)”

1. You know what – that’s exactly right
 - a. you can change, but your change won’t change anyone else – they still have to change on their own
 - b. changing yourself might not alter the circumstances in which you live
2. I’ll tell you what it will do, however
 - a. it will help you become what you ought to be – regardless of the people, circumstances, or anything else in your life
 - b. it will give you the best shot at influencing others, and giving them a model or a reason to effect changes in their own lives
3. One other thing about changing yourself – you might be surprised at how changing yourself corrects a bigger problem than you thought

B. A lot of Christians need to learn this truth

1. If they did, it would eliminate a lot of gossip, blame, and general bad-mouthing of others
2. If every Christian focused on changing only “self” we would finally be on target with Jesus’ desire for each of us

C. **Luke 9:23–27 (NAS)** — The call to follow Jesus is one that can only be answered personally – one person can’t do it for another

23 And He was saying to them all, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. **24** “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. **25** “For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? **26** “For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. **27** “But I say to you truthfully, there are some of those standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.”

1. Want to follow Jesus – then deny yourself
 - a. you can’t do it by denying others
 - b. you can’t do it by forcing others to deny themselves
 - c. you can only answer this call for yourself
2. Following Jesus is a very personal thing

CONCLUSION

A. While the stress of this lesson has been personal responsibility – realizing that you are the only person you can change, I need to at least mention that you won't have to do this alone

1. The gospel of Jesus isn't a "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" religion
2. **Galatians 5:16–26 (NAS)** — We've got some divine help on our side
16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. **17** For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. **18** But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. **19** Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, **20** idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, **21** envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. **22** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23** gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. **24** Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. **25** If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. **26** Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.
3. But not even God will do it for you – you will have to cooperate with the Holy Spirit to make good the changes needed in your life

B. If you don't learn anything else today, learn this – you're the only person you can change

1. Quit wasting time trying to change everybody else
2. Start working on the only project you'll ever succeed with – yourself

C. Invitation