Keys to Changing with Ease and Integrity Terry Paul Choyce

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Who here has NEVER had one thing change in their lives? ……Don’t be shy. Raise your hand….

I guess it is unanimous that change has happened to us all. Some of the changes we have made we have chosen -- hopefully the majority of them were chosen. Most of you were able to choose where you live and where you work. You chose your friends. You chose to come to this church. You changed into the clothes you have on today. There are big and little changes happening all the time.

Some of our changes are not what we would choose. We had no control over what family we were born into. As kids we had no choice over what school we went to or what our home was like. All of us have had things happen to us we wish hadn’t happened. We have gotten sick and hurt. Some of us have gotten divorced. Most of us have had loved ones die. A few of us have had trouble with job loss or leaving a home we loved. And 100% of us get older –whether we want to or not. Throughout our lives there is always change we did not ask for.

Most of us don’t like surprise changes. We prefer to stay in our comfort zones - even if they are not really comfortable. We agonise over making new decisions. We may like temporary variations, like when we go on vacations, but we get uptight about making big changes to our work, relationships, faith, and even our behaviours. But there are ways to help us cope with and even embrace change.

Who has keys in their pocket or purse? ….. hold them up. Most of us have lots of keys on our chain and each has a door to unlock. Each is a helpful tool. This fat one here is my car key. This little one is for my mail box. I need all of these keys at some time or another. Well, there are attributes that you have that are like keys to help you navigate the changes in your life. And that’s what I want to talk about today.

Key number one that is essential to all aspects of your life is your attitude. How you mentally frame what happens to you affects how you will feel and how you will react. If every minor change causes you stress, you are in for a rough ride. If you view changes as opportunities, than you have a good chance of being happy with what comes next. Charles Swindoll said ““The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failure, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company... a church... a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice everyday regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past... we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude. I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% of how I react to it. And so it is with you... we are in charge of our Attitudes.”

Key number 2 is adaptability. We have to be flexible. So right now, say hello to two people, preferably two people you don’t know (take a minute or two) Some of you may not have been comfortable doing this, but you were adaptable. This is a life skill that is essential for being comfortable about changes.

I’m going to do 2 keys at once now, vision and creativity. When life throws a change at us, or when we decide we need something new in our lives, all goes better if we take some time to think about what comes next. If we creatively envision a future that doesn’t look just like our past, we will probably be happier with what happens. For instance, when I decided to buy a condo 9 years ago I thought about where I wanted to live and how my home would look. I took the time to choose carefully, and I have loved my home. I used creativity in decorating and furnishing my place. I visualised what I wanted my home to look like. This helped make it feel like mine. It has been a very welcome change.

Action is inevitable when change comes. You have to do something when you either want to make a change in your life, or when life makes you change. How you act is the secret to success. You can act by being complacent and accepting. You can act out in anger or stubbornness. You can get excited by the change and find ways it can make your life better. You determine your attitude and most of the time you can determine your actions.

Another key to dealing with change is reaching out for support. This can mean finding people who will help you do what needs to get done. If you are having emotional difficulties it may mean finding someone to talk to. If you need a break from being a parent for an evening it means finding a babysitter. If your car is making a weird noise it means finding someone to fix it. None of us can do everything all by ourselves.

One of the UU principles I really love is Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. We are a part of one another . We need one another. When I used to conduct funerals as your UU chaplain I often used this reading by George Odell:

We need one another when we mourn and would be comforted.

We need one another when we are in trouble and afraid.

We need one another when we would accomplish some great purpose, and cannot do it alone.

We need one another in the hour of defeat, when with encouragement we might endure, and stand again.

We need one another when we come to die, and would have gentle hands prepare us for the journey.

 All of our lives we are in need, and others are in need of us.

The last key is the real secret to success, and that is gratitude. Being thankful for your precious life regardless of your circumstances brings you happiness. Find all of the simple things that bring you pleasure, all of the beautiful things that brighten your world, all of the kindness that you give or you receive - and be grateful for them all . That makes changes easier and that is what makes life worth living.

So the title of this talk is Keys to Changing with Ease and Integrity. I hope what I just said makes handling your changes easier. But what about integrity? That is all about being true to yourself. Our prime minister Justin Trudeau and his wife Sophie recently gave a talk at a Me for We youth rally. Sophie talked about the importance of loving and trusting yourself. When changes come your way, make sure you think about what is best for YOU.

Take the time to figure out who you really are and what you really want. Then make your changes based on what is good for you, as well as those who are affected by your decisions.

Have any of you seen the movie or read the book Hector and the Search for Happiness? I highly recommend them. Hector had the perfect life - great job, loving partner, good health, lots of money, etc. He had everything but meaning and happiness. One day he kind of freaks out and he decides he has to find the secret to happiness. So he makes radical changes in his life. He goes to China, he goes to a monastery in the Himilayas, he almost gets killed in Africa, and in Los Angeles (of all places) he has a big realisation. He realised he loved his old life. It needed some tweaking, but it was who he was and he wanted his life back. He went home with a much better attitude. He appreciated and was grateful for all he had and all he was. Meaning and purpose were back in his life. He lived with integrity, and with zest and with great love. He had the courage and determination to make the changes that really made him happy.

So what in the World According to Terry are the keys to changing with ease and integrity?

Having a good attitude whatever the situation. Being able to adapt to new occurrences. Taking the time for vision and creativity. Acting appropriately. Not being afraid to ask for help and to get the support you need. Making sure you spend time every day, many times a day, being grateful for the tiny and huge blessings in your life. And taking time for inner reflection to discover who you really are. What do you want? What do you belief? What are your values? What makes you happy? What do you love?

One of those old true adages is that “the only constant in life is change.” I hope this little talk will help you with all of the changes in your life - the ones you choose and the ones you get. Life is an ever changing adventure without Google Maps or a GPS. We navigate it the best we can and hopefully, we enjoy and learn from it ALL!