

How can we care about growing a church and not lose our theological moorings in the process? Andrew Heard shows us the way—providing a theologically sound look at practical ministry that will help your church grow and change the right way. I've known and seen the fruit of Andrew's ministry, and I commend this book to pastors and leadership teams.

**Ed Stetzer**

Dean, Talbot School of Theology at Biola University, California

Don't read this book if you're comfortable and relaxed in ministry and want to remain that way. I found *Growth and Change* compelling and uncomfortable. It's compelling in that, with laser-like clarity, Andrew brings us to the great truths of the Bible and shows how and why these eternal realities must change our lives. And it's uncomfortable in that Andrew then shows us the Bible's charge to Christian leaders to take up our responsibility for fruitful gospel preaching. He demonstrates that the Scriptures will not let us hide behind passive 'faithfulness'—God gives the growth, but we carry a level of responsibility for results. Andrew then spells out what a burning gospel desire will look like as we lead: a willingness to bear the pain of change. This book is theologically deep and biblically thorough, and it burns with a passion for the lost. This is the book to read with your church leadership team. I guarantee you won't be the same team once you've finished reading it.

**Al Stewart**

National Director, Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches Australia

This is a *brilliant* book, full of the genius insights of a highly effective church pastor and movement leader. But more than that, it's an incredibly *important* book, certainly for evangelical churches in the UK! It's so important because it provides a carefully argued biblical base for church leaders facing our responsibility under God for the ministry outcomes of our churches—wisely steering between the worldly ideas of godless, corporate megachurches and the equally damaging passive, pietistic minimalism that has gripped so many Bible-teaching churches

in the UK. At points it's painful to read how our failure to lead change is inhibiting the salvation of souls. But I honestly believe this could prove to be one of the most important books (after the Bible, of course) for church leaders in our time. While I've been trying to embrace and commend in outline the principles in this book for a decade, I'm so thankful to God that they're now finally available to leaders everywhere in more depth in this written form. May God be glorified in the salvation of many in countless churches as a result!

**Richard Coekin**

Senior Pastor, Dundonald Church, Raynes Park

Mission Director, Co-Mission church planting network, London

This is easily one of the most thoughtful books I've read on leadership or institutional change. Carefully and compellingly written, and helpfully supported throughout with Scripture, it articulates much wisdom on the greatest of challenges and opportunities we have: the need to change, and the dire consequences and compromises of not doing so. Every leader of a church or Christian organization should read this.

**The Rev Dr Robert S Kinney**

Director of Ministries, The Charles Simeon Trust, Chicago

Andrew Heard confronts the disturbing reality that most evangelical churches are not making "mature disciples of Christ in ever-increasing numbers". He challenges our simplistic theological presuppositions that stifle growth, wrestling deeply with "the complex interplay between two apparently contradictory ideas: God's sovereignty and genuine human agency".

Principles of implementing change are established without being prescriptive. The core message resonates throughout: "Leading for change is not primarily a matter of techniques and skill sets, but of deep conviction—of being fuelled by a heart that pulsates with the gospel, with God's love for the lost, and with God's love for his people".

Andrew's convictions have been forged in the real world of growing EV Church and equipping pastors. This makes for an engaging read, during which Andrew anticipates our objections and difficulties. Every

pastor and church leader must read *Growth and Change*. Debate with your teams and repent for the sake of hell-bound souls and Christ's honour.

**Colin Marshall**

Author, *Growth Groups*

Co-author, *The Trellis and the Vine* and *The Vine Project*

I **loved** *Growth and Change*! I felt both convicted and encouraged.

Far too often our ministries emphasize our faithfulness over God's. In other words, we can stop expecting God to work through our work, and settle for kingdom-less results. With great wisdom and clarity, Andrew Heard rekindles (or reignites) our hope that God desires to advance his kingdom through our service, while challenging us to share the responsibility for making that happen.

**Jeremy Conrad**

Executive Director, The Calvary Family of Churches, USA

Some people think it's a matter of the 'trellis' or the 'vine'. From both experience and theological conviction, Andrew Heard powerfully argues otherwise in this heartfelt book. He urges church leaders to do the painful but necessary work not only of reforming traditions and structures and programs, but of examining our hearts as we approach faithful biblical leadership. The result is a stirring call to radically rethink our trellises for the sake of growing the vine.

**Tony Payne**

Author, *The Trellis and the Vine*

In *Growth and Change*, Andrew Heard is having a 'fierce conversation' with the reader—not a harsh conversation but one that is clear and gentle, yet very much needed. He speaks to the elephant in the room: as evangelicals, we proclaim that the gospel is powerful to save, yet in many of our churches we don't see the inevitable gospel growth that should follow.

Carefully unpacking the Scriptures, Andrew shows that the Bible gives leaders a real responsibility for the outcomes of our ministry—

something that is often denied. Faithfulness must include fruitfulness, not be set against it. Andrew is forcing us to ask hard questions about what we leaders do, or don't do, that is getting in the way of gospel growth. This is combined with an urgent call to willingly embrace the inevitable pain that always marks outcome-driven ministry. Andrew rightly wants our prime motivation to be the desire of our Lord Jesus Christ to make mature disciples. I also appreciate his pastoral eye on the potential collateral damage when leaders take a greater ownership of responsibility. I look forward to the many sequels that should flow from this book.

**Ray Galea**

Senior Pastor, Fellowship Dubai, UAE

*Growth and Change* is uncomfortably comforting! With steely determination, Andrew Heard issues a clarion call for painful change because of the purposes of our unchanging God. A passionate and gospel-fuelled challenge for the glory of Jesus.

**Richard Chin**

National Director, Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students

Andrew Heard planted EV Church more than 25 years ago. He also leads an organization called Reach Australia that has helped plant scores of healthy, evangelistic and multiplying churches. For many years, he's been wrestling with difficult church-growth topics—including the relationship between inputs and outputs, balancing faithfulness and fruitfulness, the relationship between God's sovereignty and our activity, the importance of numbers, and principled pragmatism. *Growth and Change* will do for pastors and Christian leaders what JI Packer's classic *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* has done for outreach-focused Christians. It mines the riches of Scripture and carefully critiques the heart of the reader. I found it very challenging—and very enriching.

**Ben Pfahlert**

National Director, Ministry Training Strategy, Australia

The purpose of this book is clear and very unsettling: it calls church leaders to growth and change. This book cannot be dismissed as it is firmly rooted in the Bible, displays deep theology, and oozes wisdom. This is unsurprising, as Andrew Heard has a worldwide reputation for arousing a vision for the lost, penetratingly challenging structures for the glory of God, and being a wonderful practitioner of what he teaches. While calling for change, this book is also nuanced and recognizes the challenges and objections leaders face. I recommend this book to every pastor as both a rigorous theology and a wise, heart-warming call to best practice and obedience.

**Archie Poulos**

Head, Department of Ministry, Moore Theological College  
Director, Centre for Ministry Development, Sydney

Andrew Heard's passion for Christ, his gospel and the growth of his church has long been a great encouragement to me. He has evangelistic fire in his belly, and my prayer is that reading this book will help rekindle that same fire in many readers. In this book, I love the way Andrew seeks to keep the focus on Christ and evangelism even when talking about the priorities and processes of church growth. We want churches to grow as more people are introduced to the Saviour and are drawn to gather with other believers. We want churches to grow as they resource disciples to go and make other disciples. We want churches to grow as a testimony to "the manifold wisdom of God" who rescues men and women from diverse backgrounds and experiences and joins them to one another. I am grateful that Andrew has written this book with the fruit of his many years of serving the Lord of the gospel, who is the Lord of the church. I know he would want each reader to test what he has written against the word of God, perhaps even to challenge some of his conclusions, or his reading of the Bible or of how we have arrived at where we are, but above all to be willing to be led into whatever change might be necessary if we are to reach our community and the world with the life-giving message of Jesus.

**Dr Mark D Thompson**

Principal, Moore Theological College, Sydney

Andrew Heard has helped me see with gospel freshness the power and wonder and urgency of the grace and love of God in Christ Jesus. The truths and principles Andrew brings to our attention from the word of God have profoundly energized my soul to give my all for the glory of the Lord Jesus. I'm glad this book has been written so that many others can benefit from Andrew's clarity, insight and passion. When it's for the cause and glory of Christ, who wouldn't embrace change?

**Allan Blanch**

Minister, Dubbo Presbyterian Church, New South Wales

Andrew Heard writes as a pastor to pastors. He has a passion to see the lost saved and believers growing deep in their discipleship. This book provides a theological framework and tools to help Christian leaders ask the hard questions about their gospel heart and the effectiveness of their ministry. Andrew highlights that having specific goals and assessing if they have been met is confronting, but also that this feedback loop is empowering. It helps us, under the sovereign hand of God, to take "some measure of responsibility" for achieving outcomes and to make changes, even painful ones, when they could increase fruitfulness. This is a must-read for all ministry workers and leadership teams. It has the potential to make a real change to Christian thinking and practice.

**Sue Harrington**

Trinity Network, South Australia

Very few people have challenged my ministry thinking and practices as much as Andrew Heard. He has a unique ability to see where we have gotten into 'ruts' and to boldly, yet graciously, push us to see if we need to make changes in our churches for the good of the gospel. I hope every pastor reads this book and is stretched and challenged like I have been to consider how we can all do better at taking responsibility for leading our churches to see disciples made and grown.

**Phil Colgan**

Senior Minister, St George North Anglican Church, Sydney

When it comes to the topic of leading and growing healthy, evangelistic churches, there are few people I'd sooner listen to than Andrew Heard. Andrew brings wisdom, experience, passion, and theological sure-footedness to the sometimes-fraught world of church growth. Reading *Growth and Change* will push you, inspire you, and perhaps occasionally discourage you. But ultimately it will spur you on in the work of the Lord. What it won't do is make you feel comfortable. Andrew wants to see more people come to know Jesus. To do that, we need change. Change is never comfortable. Andrew's argument is not that it's comfortable or easy, but that it's worth it.

**Rory Shiner**

Senior Pastor, Providence City, Perth

Andrew Heard, one of Australia's most significant and successful church planters and ministry leaders, has written a unique book for church planters and ministry leaders. Those who pioneer new churches are usually marked as entrepreneurial characters with a pragmatic approach to leadership—'find what works and do it'. In *Growth and Change*, Andrew has taken the time to outline his approach and ministry values based on biblical principles. This book contains much practical and helpful information, but it is not just pragmatism; it's an attempt at a biblical framework for church leadership. The church in Australia and across Western nations will be indebted to Andrew for taking the time to write *Growth and Change*.

**Karl Faase**

CEO, Olive Tree Media

Host, *Jesus the Game Changer* and *Faith Runs Deep* video series and the *Daily Nudge* radio spot







# **GROWTH** *and* **CHANGE**

The danger and necessity of  
a passion for church growth

**ANDREW HEARD**  
with Geoff Robson

*Growth and Change*

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## FOREWORD

At a time when, in the Western world, not a few commentators are discussing the shrinking of our churches, we have come to expect to see books and articles that try to point the way forward. We reflect on the rising number of people who, when asked what religion they espouse, proudly tick ‘None’, and when we reflect on the remarkable turnover rate of pastors who pour themselves into their church ministries for a few years before abandoning them in deep discouragement, we conclude that it is not surprising to find a plethora of books promising to lead us out of the wilderness and into the promised land of growth and evangelistic fruitfulness. Some writers take us by the hand and lead us into the uplands of cultural apologetics; others take pains to distinguish merely anecdotal accounts from rigorous statistical analysis; still others offer ‘how to’ strategies of one sort or another. Nevertheless, the worrying trends continue, and, as useful as some of these books may be, quite frankly most of them seem a trifle anaemic—simply not up to the strenuous challenges of our age.

Enter *Growth and Change*, the new book by Andrew Heard. I am usually loath to proclaim that such-and-such a book is the ‘best’ in its field. Best for what? Best for whom? But if there is one book that happily serves as the exception to the rule, Heard’s book is it. The range of its coverage is remarkable: careful analysis of what ‘dechurching’ means in different subcultures, wise wrestling with several theological conundra, and more than a quarter of a century of ‘hands on’

church experience, not only in the congregation that Heard has served but also in many congregations where Heard has been influential in re-shaping the priorities of ministers and congregants alike, very often with stunning results.

In the name of faithfulness, some churches put a premium on tradition. It is easy to see why the clarion call for unchanging sameness has its own beauty in a culture of rapid change: the very repetitions are reassuring. One sympathizes with the old saw advanced by CS Lewis: he could put up with almost any kind of liturgy, he averred, as long as it does not change too much or too often. But on the other hand, in a very traditional congregation the commitment to traditional forms may be little more than a kind of ecclesiastical virtue-signalling. Meanwhile, if at least part of the purpose of our public meetings is to communicate the gospel faithfully and tellingly, and we perceive that our traditional forms serve obfuscation rather more than communication, something *ought* to change. Conversely, endless innovation may have more to do with titillating the saints than with declaring the whole counsel of God. Large numbers may be a mark of God's singular blessing on a particular ministry, but they may signal little other than professional-quality entertainment, bought at the cost of sustained biblical and theological ignorance.

As Heard points out, sometimes the polarities in our approaches to church planting are tied to certain theological commitments. Those of us who spring from a rather Arminian background may feel under some pressure to produce 'results', and in consequence drift into what 'works' or at least seems to work, even if the gospel is quietly slipping out of our hands. Those of us who spring from a rather more Reformed background may become so quick to remind each other that it is God alone who saves, and he knows those who are his, that we may drift toward a sort of soteriological fatalism, a long way removed from the portrait of a God who cries, "Turn!

Turn ...! Why will you die ...?” (Ezek 33:11). How shall we simultaneously cleave without hesitation or embarrassment to the sweeping sovereignty of God depicted in Scripture, while espousing without a tremor of reluctance the moving portrayals of a God who is not willing that any should perish? Getting these portrayals right will go a long way toward strengthening our evangelistic and church-planting commitments.

These are only a few of the tensions with which the Scriptures are replete. Andrew Heard is a reliable guide to the biblical, theological, evangelistic and pastoral issues that will confront all Christian leaders who aim for growth, recognize the need for change, and hunger to work out of a rich and faithful biblical theology. Andrew is well known and well trusted in Australia, his homeland. Now we pray that his influence may multiply exponentially around the world.

—DA Carson





# CHANGE AND THE UNCHANGING GOD

## **Serving the God who is committed to change**

This book is designed to help you think about a very important and very emotional topic: *change*. And not just change in some generalized sense, but a kind of change that could have great significance in your life: change to our churches, our gospel ministries, and our Christian leadership.

What's your initial reaction to the whole idea of change? How does it make you feel? Does the thought of change fill you with excitement and hope, or with nervousness and dread?

The experts confirm what we know through intuition and experience: even positive changes—getting married, having a child, starting a new job—are among the most stressful events we will face in life. Yet there are people who welcome change, or even go looking for it. Maybe you're one of them. Maybe you live by the mantra 'a change is as good as a holiday', or you share the sentiment expressed by legendary basketball coach John Wooden: "failure is not fatal, but failure to change might be".

Or maybe you're at the other end of the spectrum: what you crave more than anything is stability. Maybe you've worked hard to carve

out a life or a ministry with maximum predictability and minimal uncertainty. Or perhaps your world has been chaotic for too long, and the very last thing you're looking for is more change. It's even possible that you feel stuck in the mud and you know some changes would be beneficial, but you don't know where to start, so you choose the safety of routine over an uncertain future: 'better the devil you know'.

No matter how you feel about change, we can all agree that change is rarely, if ever, easy. The very idea of change requires a lot of hard work and a lot of careful thought—not to mention that it involves a great deal of emotion.

As with any topic, it's right to begin our thinking about change with theology. And straight away we are confronted with a potentially unsettling truth: those of us who know and love the God of the Bible cannot be opposed to change as a matter of principle. For we follow a God who is committed to bringing about change.

The irony here is that God, in his deepest being, does *not* change (Mal 3:6). In fact, God's unchanging nature is precisely *why* he is all about change.

The God at the heart of the universe is forever perfect, holy, good, loving and glorious. And this perfect, unchanging God made us in his image to live in a right relationship with him. But because we fell into sin, we don't properly occupy the position for which God designed us. We—his image bearers, the very pinnacle of his creation—have all fallen short of his glory in all kinds of ways (Rom 3:23). Left to our own devices, we cannot and will not live in a right relationship with him or with each other.

But the perfect, holy, unchanging God is not content to leave this situation as it is. He is determined to redeem us, to bring us back to himself. As he works to restore us, his unchanging nature empowers this work, assuring us that he will never cease in his pursuit of restoration. He works relentlessly to bring us back to our original

glory—in fact, to a glory that surpasses our original standing. God is at work to move his people from death to life, from one degree of glory to another, from corruptible to incorruptible, from mortal to immortal. God is completely committed to changing things *because* he is unchanging.

And think about what this commitment to change cost him.

The most famous verse in the Bible puts it this way: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). To bring about the change that he wanted in us, God sent his beloved Son to dwell among us. When he came to earth, Jesus Christ suffered abuse and rejection from the very people that he had made in his image (John 1:10–11). He humbled himself to the point of suffering death on a cross (Phil 2:9).

“In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). This verse wonderfully expresses the heart of God, who would pay such a price for sinners like us. God the Father gave up his only Son to death, and he did it for us. This is the extent of God’s commitment to changing us, to defeating sin and restoring his creation, and ultimately to bringing about a glorious new creation with no more death, mourning, crying or pain—the glorious city of God, where the redeemed “from every tribe and language and people and nation” will be gathered together to praise their Saviour (Rev 5:9).

The change that God brings happens on at least three levels. First, he seeks to change *our status*: by his grace, he rescues fallen sinners, justifying us—declaring us not guilty—and taking us from condemned to forgiven. But this is only the first level of change. He also brings about a change in *our very being*: we are taken from being dead in sin to now being alive in Christ, reborn by the Spirit of God through the word of God. And thirdly, he works within Spirit-indwelt believers to bring us *from immaturity to maturity*, that we

might more and more reflect the glory of Christ. And all this anticipates the final great change with the redemption of believers' bodies at Christ's final return (e.g. Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18; Gal 4:19; Col 1:22; 2 Corinthians 4).

God is absolutely committed to change. This is not 'change for change's sake'. He is deeply purposeful about the change that he pursues. It is all fuelled by his unchanging nature, and it all happens for the sake of his glory and for the good of those he saves. And our Lord was willing to pay the ultimate price to bring about this change.

## **Proactively pursuing change**

My purpose in writing this book is to promote change. The changes I'm writing about are less significant than the changes God is bringing, as described above, yet they directly relate to what I've described. For the change at the centre of this book is centred on our churches, our ministries, and our Christian leadership. These are not just random changes. I write to encourage purposeful changes that might genuinely serve God's greater purpose of restoring a fallen people to himself and to the glory he intends for us.

In particular, I write to encourage Christian leaders to initiate change.

As much as we might like to be in the driver's seat, sometimes change is forced upon us by circumstances well outside our control. These circumstances often take the form of challenges and hardships, but we are sometimes compelled to change by more positive situations. For example, revival—the rapid growth of the church in one place—has sometimes forced churches, leaders and ministries to adapt.

Perhaps the most obvious example of this is found in the New Testament. In the opening chapters of Acts, we read of the early church growing quickly through an outpouring of the Spirit of God.

Thousands were brought to faith in Christ. But this created a problem, as tensions arose among the growing group of disciples. In response, the apostles instituted a new structure for ministry: what is sometimes called the ‘diaconate’. Seven men, known to be filled with the Spirit, were chosen to take over the ministry of distributing food among widows who were in need (Acts 6:1–3). This change enabled the apostles to continue in their core responsibilities: “we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (6:4). In a sense, the apostles simply embraced change because the pressure of growth forced it on them. This certainly isn’t bad. They were wise enough to see what mattered most—their crucial role in leading the fledgling church—and readily brought about changes to meet the new need while guarding their priorities.

But change shouldn’t only be forced upon us. Outside of times of revival or unexpected difficulty, it is possible for God’s people—especially leaders among God’s people—to make changes that facilitate numerical and spiritual growth. Put positively, I want to suggest that proactively initiating change in ourselves, our leadership and our churches can bring about the growth of our churches or ministries. Put negatively, our failure to change ourselves, our leadership and our churches can often be a significant hindrance to the numerical and spiritual growth of our churches or ministries.

For some, this will sound obvious. But I’m conscious that for others this will be a radically different way of thinking. I’m aware that to some it might even seem, at least on first reading, blasphemous. It could seem like I’m suggesting that *we* are the key to the conversion or the spiritual growth of people around us—but isn’t this God’s work? Doesn’t Paul say as much? We might ‘plant’ and ‘water’ like Paul and Apollos, but God’s work is decisive: “So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth” (1 Cor 3:6–7). Perhaps you bristle at the impression that I might want to make organizational principles and

management techniques a central piece in the spiritual growth of a church or a person. Can this be so?

Hence the need for this book.

As will become very clear, I'm not endorsing every inference that a person might draw from my statements about growth and change. Not for one second would I suggest that God is somehow subordinate to us and our activities—by no means!

And yet I am convinced that many of the ways we are running our churches and ministries, and many of the ways that we are exercising our leadership within our churches and ministries, has become a significant hindrance to the fundamental growth of the church, both numerically and spiritually. Or, again to put it positively, I'm convinced that with some significant changes to church life and to our leadership patterns and practices, we will see a greater penetration of the gospel into the lost community around us and so see many more people saved. I'm convinced that we can see more men, women and children come to faith in Christ and grown to maturity in Christ.

In short, I am convinced that we need to make some changes.

## **Embracing the pain of change**

Of course, it's one thing to state that change is needed. It's another thing entirely to bring about meaningful change. And we won't make the necessary changes to facilitate growth until we are motivated to make those changes. Most fundamentally, this means we need to be convinced that changes will truly make a difference. But something more is needed: *we need to be willing to embrace the pain of change.*

This last statement leads us to a critical principle operating throughout this book—and throughout our lives and ministries: *we won't change the things that need to be changed until the pain of not changing is greater than the pain of changing.*

All meaningful change is costly and painful. A person concerned about their weight might know that some changes in diet and exercise will help them to be healthier, but those changes will cost them. The dream of change is easy, but in practice it is hard work. It's hard work to choose water over soft drink or salad over fried chicken, to go for a walk or get to the gym instead of sitting on the couch. They may feel bad about their poor health; they may grieve their situation. But until the pain of not changing is greater than the pain of changing, they won't follow through on their good intentions, change their habits, and make real changes.

The same principle applies to gospel ministry. We might quickly and easily agree with the idea that some changes would be useful, but actually changing things in church can be very difficult. Unless we share God's heart for the lost in such a way that it pains us greatly to see people perish without Christ, and unless that pain exceeds the pain that we know will accompany our efforts to make changes, we will almost always opt for the status quo. Of course, this is not the only factor that will determine whether we work to bring about change. But it's a significant and inescapable part of the equation.

Anyone who's tried to bring change in the church will surely agree that it's painful. For one thing, it's tremendously hard work—maintaining the status quo requires much less effort. On top of that, just try moving one piece of furniture, or changing the songs you sing together, or playing around with the order of the service, and see what reaction you get. With EV Church, we had only existed as a church for a decade before we clearly needed to make some significant changes. But, astonishingly, the suggestion that we needed to change was met with horror. Some people even appealed to the history of the church—all ten years of it!

Professor Robert Quinn is a secular expert in organizational culture and leadership. In his book *Deep Change*, he writes these powerfully disturbing words:

Virtually every dominant coalition, in every organization, has a sacred and self-sealing model. It represents the most sacred of common belief patterns because it justifies the present behaviour of the most powerful coalition. It justifies the current equilibrium and limits change to incremental rather than transformational efforts.<sup>1</sup>

Quinn's point is that every group of people forms a pattern of behaviour that becomes critical to their own sense of belonging and participation. This pattern of behaviour "seals" and defines the group; the life of each member becomes bound to the group staying the way it is. Any change threatens each member's sense of belonging, and so the group resists change, or at least limits change to minor areas. There is too much at stake for anything more to be allowed.

All organizations or groups of people are like this, but churches face a unique additional factor that makes change difficult: as we shape our life together, we tend to add an almost-spiritual sense of 'ought': 'This is the way God intends it, and perhaps God has blessed us while we were doing it this way'. Therefore, so the logic goes, changing things can mean defying God! This ratchets up the challenge of change by a few notches.

## **Change and the Christian leader**

In the face of these challenges, the key (humanly speaking) to bringing change to a church or ministry is the leadership. Leaders are the church's most important human resource—not, of course, in the sense that God loves them more or they possess some special spiritual privileges, but in the sense that God charges them to "shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight" (1 Pet 5:2). This divine charge entails having a special responsibility and authority to bring about the changes that are needed. A leader's actions affect the whole church in a special way: Paul tells Timothy, "Keep a



close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Tim 4:16). Church leadership is critical, and change in a church flows (mostly) from its leaders.

But here is yet another issue: getting leaders to change can be a challenge of its own. Even the most dynamic leaders can settle into patterns of behaviour. It's like driving on the beach: once a few cars have driven the same path on the sand, a deep rut forms. And if you drive too close to the rut, you just slide right in. Ruts have their own kind of gravity. And once you're in, getting out requires considerable, intentional effort—maybe even a push or a pull from a friend.

Throughout this book, I will argue that change in our churches and ministries is necessary. We will think about the kinds of changes that are necessary, and why. These changes will range from the small to the large: we need to be willing to change our roster structures, the shape of our yearly programs, and the pattern of our gatherings. But we also need to be willing to change our leadership styles, our personnel, our eldership structure, or perhaps even the very message we preach (though read the next chapter very carefully for more on this point!). In some cases, it will be obvious that change is needed; in other cases, a painful process of analysis and self-examination might be necessary before we can see the changes that should take place. But in the end, the key is a healthy appreciation that change is crucial, and that we cannot live if we don't change.

And so, fundamental to the change process is good and proper motivation. This book is about much more than some simple suggestions on ministry management or revamping your church structure. It is primarily about a deeper work within us. It is about being stirred to feel the pain of *not* changing, in order that we might truly own the need to make changes and therefore have the drive and motivation to continue with the change process over the long haul.

This deeper work is clearly the task of the Holy Spirit, for only God can truly bring about the change of heart that we need. Yet God works through his people. It is my prayer that he might use something of what I offer as fuel for his work in our hearts. For without this deeper work of God, we won't make the changes that are needed if we are to see the gospel bring about the conversion and spiritual transformation that is necessary in people's lives.

## **The glories and challenges of our work**

The next chapter of this book will set the whole enterprise in its proper context. Any pursuit of growth and change needs to be conducted with a careful eye to the dangers inherent in a desire to grow. In fact, these dangers are so significant that I see the next chapter as the most important chapter in the whole book.

The following section will focus on the need to change and the pain of not changing. These chapters are a call to be passionate about seeing the church grow—both spiritually and numerically. They are important because of the principle articulated above: change won't happen until the pain of not changing is greater than the pain of changing.

From there, we will deal with the boundaries and freedoms of change. What are we free to change? What can't be changed? The last part of the book (including the appendix) offers some preliminary suggestions on practicalities—learning to lead, fundamental decisions related to ministry structure, resourcing your ministry, and the like.

Some readers will find parts of the book confronting and challenging. This is deliberate. It is my desire to stir us to see the need for change, and even to create sufficient pain that we will be moved to bring real change. But though my approach may be confronting or perhaps even painful, I do it all with the greatest affection and

admiration for those who embrace appropriate leadership within God's people. And I do it with a deep desire to encourage those who minister within God's church.

The work we do as leaders and servants of the church of Christ is the greatest work to which any person can give themselves: "The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task" (1 Tim 3:1). It is an extraordinary thing to exercise some level of responsibility among the people of God—a people bought with the precious blood of Christ himself.

The great 19th-century pastor and preacher Charles Spurgeon is said to have captured these sentiments with a characteristic turn of phrase: "If God calls you to be a preacher, do not stoop to become a king". Perhaps Spurgeon was just echoing Martin Luther, who is said to have remarked: "If I could today become king or emperor, I would not give up my office as preacher". Leadership and service of any kind within and among the people of God is a truly great thing.

But it is not uncommon for leaders to lose this perspective.

Some time ago, I was speaking with a young pastor who was leading a small church in a struggling context. He had experienced some months of grief and pain in his ministry. The work was slow, and there was little understanding or support for all he was trying to do. He found himself drifting into depression. But around this time, he read some words from Martyn Lloyd-Jones's book *Preaching and Preachers*. Lloyd-Jones wrote of the importance of bringing the word of God to human hearts:

The work of preaching is the highest and the greatest and the most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called. ... I would say without any hesitation that the most urgent need in the Christian Church today is true preaching; and as it is the greatest and the most urgent need in the Church, it is obviously the most urgent need of the world also.<sup>2</sup>

As he reflected on these powerful observations, the young pastor found his soul deeply nourished. Despite the struggles, despite the pressures and the pain, the work mattered. It mattered more than any other work he could be doing. He was enabled and encouraged to press on.

The work we do as leaders, pastors and servants within the community of faith is the greatest work imaginable. This is not to denigrate the many kinds of good and important work that God's people can do in this world; it is simply to recognize that the work of serving and leading the people of God, of proclaiming the word of God, aligns with what God is doing in the world as he gathers a people who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ—a people who will live for his glory and will make his name known in the world through their witness and their godly lives. The importance of this work is surely why Paul exhorts the Corinthians to honour men such as Timothy and Stephanas: they were “doing the work of the Lord” (1 Cor 16:10, 15). Indeed, he encouraged the whole church as they played their part in this work: “be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain” (15:58).

The greatness of our work isn't always obvious when you look at our external entailments. We don't get paid like someone doing an important task; we don't receive the respect and regard to match other valued workers in our community. In fact, in Australia, surveys have shown that a minister of religion's reputation sits around the same level as a used-car salesman—which isn't meant to offend used-car salesmen, though it might.

But when the eyes of faith look at Christian leadership, they see something altogether different. They see beauty: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” (Rom 10:15). As I call for change, it is my intention to reconnect us with the beauty and the eternal value of our task and to encourage us in this great work.

And for those readers who are not leaders, my prayer for you is that you'll be moved to encourage your leaders in their work and support them as they bring about the changes that are needed. I hope your passion for the gospel will be renewed. And I hope you'll begin to see how you can be a positive agent for change within your church or ministry.

But while I will seek to encourage pastors, I will also speak some hard truths. And the truth is that, in many cases, we can do much better! For that reason, I intend to foster some pain—but only so that it might help us to generate the kind of change that our churches need. But even change is not the end, but a means to an end. The end, the thing that really matters, is to see many more men and women come to receive the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and be deepened in their lives with him, to the glory of God.

This is a book about big things. I write to encourage big things to happen, not for our satisfaction or our glory, but because there are big things at stake—the glory of God, and the salvation of men and women from hell.



## **Passages for further reflection**

- John 3:16
- 1 Corinthians 3:5–9
- 1 Timothy 2:1–4
- 1 Timothy 3:1

## **Questions for personal or team reflection**

- Do you share God's heart for the lost?
- Are you ready and willing to embrace the pain of change so that more people might be saved?

## **Quote for personal or team reflection**

“The work of preaching is the highest and the greatest and the most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called.” (Martyn Lloyd-Jones)