



*Jan Pierce*

Change is inevitable. I know that, but I don't like it. I'm a person who, if I could, would freeze-frame life at opportune moments—the day I was married; the rest break in the middle of a hike up Dog Mountain when the wildflowers were breathtakingly beautiful; when my children played on the back forty, their tiny backpacks filled with water and crackers as they searched for treasures.

But, alas, time marches on. Things change—everything changes, whether we like it or not. And changes aren't always for the better. But, thankfully, eternal truths remain.

In our spiritual lives, change brings either growth or decay. Staying the same is stagnation, and we can't live there for long. And while some growth occurs naturally as we put one foot in front of another, much of it comes via hard-fought battles that may be waged for years.

Sometimes we weary of the struggle. Sometimes we despair of resolving recurrent issues. But other times, in the midst of the struggle, we find the peace that God intends as we make our way through life.

How do you view change? Do you welcome it? Fear it? Fight it? What does the Word have to say about it?

My husband and I recently celebrated fifty-one years of marriage. (Lots of changes over the years!) We attend Grace and Glory Community Church in Vancouver, Washington.

*BIBLE READING: Romans 12:1–2; 1 Corinthians 3:1–2*

It's tempting to tell ourselves we aren't any worse than anyone else when it comes to the need for change. We're human, therefore sinful, but are we really so bad?

It may be I've made no discernible progress in my walk with God. I may still talk too much, eat too much, and judge others' behaviors harshly while condoning my own—but I'm only human. Right?

In the classic *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis likens the Christian life to the life cycle of a bird. He speaks of the difficulty of an egg turning into a bird. What a crazy thought. But it's an even wilder notion to imagine that bird flying while staying in the egg. No, we can't go on indefinitely just being an ordinary egg; we have to hatch or "go bad."

Lewis is saying we *must* grow and change—it's not an option. At some point the unhatched egg becomes rotten. The image is a bit disturbing, but the message is clear.

Paul reminded the Corinthians that they should have been eating meat, but still required milk. What to do? Evidently part of the solution is being willing to change. We must recognize our need of it, welcome it, and ask God to open our hearts and minds to the process of transformation.

What negative character traits and habits recur in maddening cycles? What message does God whisper in your ear repeatedly? What needs to be cut out of your life or added in?

God is faithful to transform as we open ourselves to the process.

*SONG: From Glory to Glory He's Changing Me*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, you know my tendency to resist change. Work in my heart to make me willing to be transformed by your love. Amen.*

—Jan Pierce

*BIBLE READING: Romans 12:1–8*

During the course of my teaching career, there were several years when I was forced to substitute. I hated subbing. I agonized, waiting for a 5:00 a.m. call each work day. Once in the classroom, lesson plans might or might not be helpful. One plan for the entire day read: “Continue farm unit.” Really?

One of my worst experiences occurred in a fourth-grade class studying the amazing transformation of a chrysalis into a monarch butterfly. The trembling creature hatched on the exact day I replaced the beloved “real teacher.” Worse, I wasn’t fully aware of the project and came dangerously close to stepping on the fragile body when it fluttered out of its cage. The students looked at me like I was an ax murderer.

The transformation from larva to butterfly is, indeed, a miracle. We, of course, are the larva turning into beautiful butterflies. Except, where is our glorious transformation? I’m not there yet, are you?

Sometimes we get inklings of growth—little wiggles while still in the chrysalis—but then there are periods of dormancy. How can we keep the miracle alive? We can focus on God.

The transformation isn’t ours to implement, rather we submit ourselves to God and receive it. After calling believers to submit themselves as living sacrifices and to the renewal of their minds, the Romans 12 passage goes on to encourage us to live in humility, to cooperate with others, and to intentionally use whatever gifts God has given us.

We may not have received our wings yet, but the transformation will certainly occur in God’s timing.

*SONG: Take My Life (Scott Underwood)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, change me to be more like you. Strengthen me to live a life of service in humility and love. Amen.*

—Jan Pierce

*BIBLE READING: 1 Peter 1:3–9; 5:6–11*

A friend recently disclosed with sadness and shame that she's struggling with depression. Five years ago she declared herself healed. By God's mercy, she'd overcome a lifetime of the darkness of depression.

Now she finds herself again in a pit of despair. What went wrong?

She doesn't know the answer to that question, and neither do I. Life can be confusing. We may believe we've emerged victorious from a struggle only to meet it head-on again. "I thought I was done with X, Y, or Z," we say.

Designers of educational curriculum know children need to revisit various understandings over the course of their studies. They may introduce a simple reading skill such as word endings in the first grade then revisit the topic every year with increasingly complex information. Each trip around the spiral goes broader. We don't learn all there is to know in one lesson.

Could it be that our spiritual growth moves in cycles as well?

I couldn't tell my friend God would heal her. I did tell her our growth and wellness sometimes takes us through cycles, and our understandings deepen with each encounter. I reminded her of God's undying love for her and that the Word promises that as we humble ourselves before God amid suffering, there will be restoration (1 Peter 5:6, 10).

*SONG: Leaning on the Everlasting Arms*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, when I am in despair, hold me in your arms. Heal me and restore me, I pray. Amen.*

—Jan Pierce

*BIBLE READING: Isaiah 1:18–20*

One of the biggest mysteries to me is how we Jesus-followers can be both whiter than snow and as rotten as the rottenest tomato. Just watching one thirty-minute news broadcast leaves me shaking my head at the absolute corruption.

We *are* lost. We're selfish, uncaring, and even cruel much of the time. But the new covenant God provided for us—the death and resurrection of Jesus—covers our sins, displaying us as whiter than snow before God. That's a miracle.

The language in Isaiah 1:18 reminds us of a court of law. "Come now, let us settle the matter." The Lord knows we're hopelessly mired, and left on our own we'd be destroyed. But instead we've been pardoned. God is saying, "I know you can't fix this on your own. I see you want to do better, but you keep falling down. Here, I'll help you."

Here is the situation we find ourselves in. We know by faith we've been rendered clean before the Lord—pardoned. But we also acknowledge our inability to overcome our sins. As Jackson Browne says in his song "These Days": "Don't confront me with my failings. I have not forgotten them." We're all swimming in the same pot of soup, not yet experiencing full freedom. Yet God chooses to see us as spotless.

If we truly comprehend what God has done for us, this pardon that covers us day by day, we'll grow in our depth of love and gratitude to the Lord of all.

*SONG: Give Thanks (With a Grateful Heart)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Thank you, Lord, for all you've done for me. Your love is amazing. Amen.*

—Jan Pierce

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 103:1–4; Psalm 147:3*

One of the reasons we love baby animals is that they are still fluffy and free of the scars that life may bring them in the future. The same is true of baby humans. We love their big-eyed innocence and soft, unmarred skin. They're beautiful. They bring us hope.

But life isn't always a peaceful hike in the woods. Sometimes it's a battle, and battles leave scars. No one is granted a walk though life without being wounded along the way. The scars, visible or invisible, remain. What can we learn from them?

Scars are both a reminder of the injuries we've sustained *and* the fact that we've been healed. Scars aren't pretty to look at, but they represent the touch of God. We aren't able to heal ourselves. That miraculous process belongs to God alone. Because of that, we can learn to honor scars in our lives much as Jacob valued his damaged hip after wrestling with God (Genesis 32:22–32). A scar on my thumb reminds me that God healed the twelve-year-old girl who let the knife slip while preparing a meal. The scars on my heart remind me of the healing I've received through struggles in important relationships.

Perhaps in addition to past scars, you're experiencing current injuries. Wounds are still closing, there is pain and discomfort, and the memory of the injury is still fresh in your heart and mind. Know that your healing will surely come. Marvel as God closes up the wounds, leaving a scar as a reminder of his touch.

*SONG: Broken Vessels (Amazing Grace) (Hillsong)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, I thank you for each scar I bear. They remind me of your healing touch in my life. Amen.*

—Jan Pierce

*BIBLE READING: Galatians 6:7–10*

Years ago, my vegetable garden was huge. I planted and watered, thinned and weeded. I worked like my family's meals depended on it. Today my garden is a humble raised bed approximately 3' x 12', but I still get great pleasure from gardening tasks, planting to harvest.

I have to admit I'm most engaged in the first two to three weeks after planting. I can't wait to see little green plantlets rise up through the soil. But after the initial excitement of germination, comes a lot of work. Sometimes we tire of weeding or forget to water. Or some nasty fungus attacks our plants, and they nearly die.

Our spiritual life can mirror plant growth drama. We love beginnings—the baptisms, the promises and vows, the births. But then the routine and hard work wear us down. Maybe we experience an attack that blindsides us and requires replanting. Perhaps we fail to take in the nourishment of prayer and meditation on the Word. We get busy and neglect our garden.

Growth proceeds through developmental stages. We have to throw in for the long haul and be patient. We can't force a seedling to bear fruit, but we can faithfully tend it as it grows into maturity. If we're faithful, we'll reap the reward.

Our spiritual health reflects the faithful work we put into it. Our well-being suffers when we become complacent, but we thrive when we persevere in the ways of the Master Gardener, trusting God for the harvest.

*SONG: They that Wait upon the Lord*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Thank you, Lord, for beginnings filled with excitement. And thank you for the strength and conviction to continue on when weary. Amen.*

—Jan Pierce

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 28:6–9; Joshua 1:9*

Another way to envision our life in God with all the changes and struggles it entails, is to envision a long walk home. There's a longing in our hearts to go home. That can be taken in the literal sense, as soldiers dream of reuniting with their families, or in the spiritual sense in which we all long for an end to sin and heartache. We hear about heaven where there will no longer be weeping and mourning, and our spirits lean into the idea, embracing it.

What would it be like to be entirely free of limitations? Free of our less-than-perfect personalities and our foibles? Free from the pain of hurting others and being hurt by them?

Someday.

Henri Nouwen says in one of his devotionals in *Bread for the Journey* that going home takes a lifetime. And the disciplines of prayer, fasting, and serving others are ways to help us return home. As we make this journey, we realize it's a great distance, but we also know that Jesus talks to us along the way, encouraging and uplifting us when the way is difficult.

If we listen carefully, we hear Jesus speaking, reminding us we're already part of his kingdom; we're already at home even as we make our way. Yes, we're in a lifelong process of growth involving change after change. But we're on the right road, heading in the right direction, and our destination is sure.

*SONG: All the Way My Savior Leads Me*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, I'm so thankful for being part of your kingdom. Help me to live well and finish well as I walk the road toward my home with you. Amen.*

—Jan Pierce