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Melvin University
and Me

How does change come about?

Change in church or in any ministry is actually a rather uncomfortable term. However, it is a problem that must be dealt with by pastors or leaders. That's because the ultimate responsibility for change lies with the leader at the top. In fact, if the church members first mention that "change is needed in our church," the pastor is a little burdensome. So I think it is necessary for a leader to first sense the need for change. There will certainly be signs of that.

However, the word CHANGE usually comes first from the mouths of pastors, but the results are often not good. Both pastors and laity expect changes to occur if the word change is brought up and announced. However, change does not happen just by informing and talking. We already know this. In other words, what process will it take to actually make a change happen after the word change is announced? In other words, how does change come about? This is the key.

There may be several books about change, but I got a lot of help and utilized it in the following two books. One is "Leading Change" (Prof. John Kotter), written by Professor John Kotter of Harvard University. He talked about eight steps, and among them, the term Sense of Urgency and its concept helped me a lot. Change is difficult if we don't feel the urgency. That makes a sense. The other book is "Managing Transitions" written by Dr. William Bridges, which means to manage changes well. The subtitle is 'Making the Most of Change', which I understand means 'bring change well'. In other words, it seems to be an answer to not bringing about change properly. I'm going to focus on his idea in this column.

Dr. Bridges said that there are two terms of change, and that there are three stages of change, which is the key point of this book. The terms "change" and "transition" are used. The word CHANGE means to change something in a location, but it is said that something changes externally, such as moving

out or getting promoted (e.g., Physical change), and that the word TRANSITION is not an external but an internal, psychological meaning. (e.g., Psychological change). For an easy example, when we were promoted as an elder from a deacon in the church, we changed our position externally, so it is CHANGE. But if we become an elder, but still we haven't changed our thoughts or commitment as a deacon, it's that the real transition hasn't changed yet. In other words, it was very helpful for me to distinguish the meaning of CHANGE and TRANSITION.

Then Dr. Bridges' excellence was that there are three stages to change. It means that we need to forget the past (Ending), and go into and through the middle zone (Neutral Zone), and then we have a (new Beginning.)

But what I'm most interested in here is the second one, the Neutral Zone. In fact, I had never thought about this step until I came across this book. For example, even when the Israel people left Egypt and to entered Canaan, it was significant that they went through this second stage, that is, the Judean wilderness. In fact, neither Moses nor the people of Israel had imagined that they would have to go through this stage, this process. People are exhausted in the wilderness. However, the leader has to do his duty anyway, and to enter Canaan. People's reactions were twofold. It's a group that wants to keep on going, and another to go back to the past, Egypt. It's kind of a dilemma to Moses.

Furthermore, it's just like turning on the radio and there's no sound, or turning on the electric switch and no light on. This is just like what people who follow and look at leaders. This is the real difficulty a leader has. This is why the will and determination of the leader are needed. The word OSCILLATION means swinging of the weight of a large clock. This is the reality that comes to the leader.

First, the leader should be aware that there are these processes and steps. If we don't admit this, we can't handle it. It's a natural reaction from people. However, there can be no major change in whether to quit here or continue. If Moses is also struggling with this problem, it is a lack of leadership qualities. In other words, there should be no [major] Oscillation. [minor] Oscillations are acceptable to everyone. This is what every leader has. The question whether to do this or not is a natural. However, if a leader is contemplating too much whether to go back to the past, or continue forward, people will immediately sense it and begin to conclude, "Our leader is shaking!"

My personal case was when I made a difference from the Institute to the

school. When I was in my sixth year at the LPM Korea Institute, I felt the need for a school and began to worry. At that time, I went to Yale Divinity School in New Haven, the U.S., for a while, and I started talking to Korea Institutes and core staff about the necessity of the school. First, I'm talking about the necessity, but it also meant to expect changes.

There were some different reactions when we talked about the transition to school. There were some staff members who looked at it positively, and some people responded that they couldn't believe it, and even said "the U.S., the headquarters of the ministry, didn't set up a school, so is it necessary to set it up in Korea?" Furthermore, even some responses, "isn't the direction of this ministry a school?"

What I felt at that time is that the person in charge of the ministry and the people who help it have different thoughts. The other is that the more I do that, the more I should not be swayed. I also learned that I should not be too shaken while converging the various thoughts of the members with the leader. I was becoming more and more determined to establish a school. Almost no one can't stop me. Of course, I thought that I was entirely responsible for the failure and success of the school establishment.

As we proceeded, the three steps presented by Dr. William Bridge were working, so moving forward slowly. There were "Ending," then "Neutral Zone," and "new beginnings" which is preparing for School Establishment. It was a three-step process: [notification] to them; [giving time] to think; and [new beginning].

However, this three-step process and progress are not marked like a radish, and of course, I felt that it was clear for me to lead the change, but the overall flow was almost overlapping. In other words, Ending, who forgets the past, felt that it was entering the Neutral Zone, which is a little overlapping between Ending and the Neutral Zone. And we went into the new Beginning, but it was also slightly overlapped with the previous Neutral Zone. Namely, I felt it was the responsibility of the leader to make sure that these three steps were smoothly overlapping, and at the same time, I felt that we had definitely entered the next stage.

It is natural to go through these three stages of change. We can't go straight from stage 1 'ending' to stage 3 'new Beginning,' and it's actually pointless to hope so. People must be given an intermediate level of second stage. It doesn't go straight from the past to the future. No, they can't move. If we try to go right away, problems arise and efforts to change are likely to end in failure.

We have to give people time. In other words, time should be given to accept new things, to decide whether to do it or not. Doesn't it take time for mushrooms to grow, and doesn't it take for bamboo to grow, or even to give birth ten months to a baby! Some could take years. Thus, it is necessary to give people time to think, to embrace change and prepare for new things.