
LAKE SIDE CHURCH of Chicago

† transforming lives † transforming our world for Christ

The **LAMPLIGHTER**



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CHANGE, CHANGE AND MORE CHANGES

Our household has been remodeled again. We sent our sixth child off to college last week, leaving only one child at home. We are not yet empty-nesters, but that status will force itself on us in a few short years.

In contrast, last night my wife and I talked with a couple expecting their first child. They are approaching this new phase of their lives cautiously, trying to avoid expectations. We gave them some general advice to prepare them for the upheaval to their current lifestyle, although the shockwaves of this transition usually elude the new parents' imagination.

Life never stops changing. Changes assert themselves faster in some people's lives than others. We went from one child to seven over sixteen years. At one time, our garage looked like a Kids 'R Us with boxes of children's clothes catalogued by age. Those boxes were replaced with boxes of mementos that each child saved, and even most of those reside with our adult children now.

Seven children compounded routine changes exponentially. Selecting home schooling curriculum to meet the unique educational needs of each child meant that we had to purchase some new books each year. Most children played at least one sport and some changed uniforms three times a year.

We retained one constant in music. Every child had to take piano lessons, so those books became quite worn by the end. Some continued longer than others and some adopted new instruments. We could not stop the changes.

Each child passed through the same developmental stages, but in very different ways with very different needs. Some might think that after seven children, we would have figured out this parenting thing. The only thing we figured out is that parenting requires increasing wisdom and flexibility, without which you will surely sink. You must expect change.

Ministry changes further exacerbated our home life. Four ministries over 33 years ranks as reasonably stable by current ministry statistics. We managed to move 11 times in two and one-half decades and we have retained our current address longer than any other residence.

Home schooling occupied my wife for 25 years, but 5 years ago she made a major life change by obtaining a part-time position at the local library. That changed last year when she became a full-time employee. She is still adjusting to the jet lag.

I have heard of the empty-nest syndrome most of my life, but I cannot remember ever imagining what it might be like, especially when we were scurrying from piano lessons to soccer fields to dentist appointments to play practices to dance lessons to ball diamonds Who has time to sleep, much less to dream about a season of life that seems as possible as a trip to Europe. (Actually, we spent more time considering what the trip might be like, but it never materialized.)

Diapers demanded changing for so long that we could do it in our sleep (and probably did a few times). With a very small budget in our early years of marriage, my wife washed diapers, buying disposables only for trips. She has endured stretches when the washer and dryer ran daily and one load of laundry was a light day. Diaper changes and clothes changes exemplified the changes we were experiencing in our family.

The house has become quieter, but the changes have not lessened. No one prepared us for parenting adult children. Are there any books on this season of life? I suspect that most parents run out of gas before they can write this book. This season has required many new changes in the relationships with our "children" – and their spouses, and our grandchildren. It never ends!

And what lies ahead in this new season? More changes. Bodies wear out, vision blurs, hearing diminishes, energy evaporates. Again, this varies from person to person. Eating healthy and consistent exercise can increase the odds for good health, but they do not guarantee it. Eventually, these changes lead to the cessation of changes on this side of life.

Apparently, God created us with the capability to adapt to change. That ability seems to reside in a relationship with the Unchangeable. The stability for life comes from "the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." (James 1:17) The author of Hebrews describes Jesus as "the same yesterday and today and forever." (Hebrews 13:8) In theological terms, we call this God's attribute of immutability, his unchangeableness.

The divine immutability provides the ballast for human mutability. "So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul" (Hebrews 6:17-19a)

Unchangeable God. Unchangeable purpose. Unchangeable promises. These enable us to steer our lives through the endless navigational changes that human life requires. He is the anchor of the soul. Don't let go of him.

Pastor Stan