

Ruach of Change

Nathaniel J. Crouch

GCN 618.OA: Theology in Mental Health Counseling

Dr. Julio Orozco

Spring 2023

“Change will not come if we wait for some other person, or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.”— Barack Obama (NYT, 2008)

There are a myriad of ways one may experience change. Some changes can be unexpected and sudden. While with other changes, one may be aware of the need for change, and the person sets out to intentionally change a behavior or characteristic. Both intentional and unintentional changes are difficult. One of the advantages of intentional change is a problem is recognized and a plan can be put in place to address it. Then, for the change to take place, action must follow, this is the hard part. The transtheoretical model of change (TTM) has become widely accepted as the standard for identifying the willingness to change and aiding the process of change, once it has begun. There are 6 Stages of Change outlined by Diclemente and Prochaska (Prochaska & Diclemente, 1982). The TTM, a theory for change, came about as their team did research for the American Cancer Society on cigarette smoking cessation. While nearly ubiquitous in the counseling and medical field today when change is discussed. I will outline the stages briefly here and refer to them throughout this essay. One, pre-contemplation, as the name suggests, this stage comes before one is acknowledging or aware of their need for change. In this stage a person does not see a problem in need of changing, or they estimate a change of behavior will be worse than continuing the behavior. “I don’t need to change,” is a phrase that

typifies this stage. Two, contemplative stage of change is the stage in which the awareness of the need for a change. At this stage, “Yeah, I should probably do something about this [name of problem],” one may think to themselves. The third stage begins when contemplation turns to a decision that the behavior does indeed need to change and one has decided to do something. This is the preparation (or determination) stage, the change has not yet begun, but the idea has dawned in the person’s mind. Four, the action stage, is the stage which begins the actual change. The individual is no longer thinking about it, the thoughts have led to behavior which begins the change they have been preparing for. There is action and intention of continued change in the behavior. This action stage is often two parts, stopping some behavior and beginning or replacing it with another behavior, in line with the desired change. Five, maintenance stage, is typified by on going change that has lasted 6 months or more. The decisions that brought about the change are the new pattern of behavior. “I different, I’m changed,” is something the person in the Maintenance stage may say. Sixth stage is recurrence, this would be going back to the original behavior that has been changed for awhile. While not a required stage, it is common to return to an old behavior even after a change in behavior has been established (Raihan & Cogburn, 2023).

As a theological concept, salvation is seen as “the” change above all others in the lives of those who follow Jesus Christ. To understand the impact and apply Christ’s life, death, and resurrection to my own life is to begin the ongoing process of His image being revealed in me. Leading up to the moment of understanding, the stages of change could be applied. From pre-contemplation, the not knowing my own need of true life in Christ. Followed by contemplation, life’s pressures, the universal ennui of the human condition, or some other means begins to disrupt one’s life. A thirst for a solution builds. An answer is sought, a prayer is released. Then

preparation follows, in the form of continued prayer, a decision to call a friend, pick up a bible, or seek out a church is made. Next, the action stage, this could be likened to the “change of mind” or “repentance”, so often referred to in the bible. The action is taken to show up in some way where the clarity of the gospel message is delivered to the searching individual.

Going from action to maintenance takes time and practicing of faith through various expressions of faith: prayer, study, fellowship, worship, confession, service, or any other means of grace. Six months is the TMM stage of change standard for moving from action to maintenance, so action is sustained. Should recurrence of sin occur, which it will, the believer will be met with a decision to turn back again to the source of all hope, or not. When they return, some growth will have come from their time of trial. Sanctification includes the action of the Holy Spirit making a person holy, “But now that you have been set free from sin and become slaves to God...” It includes the ongoing living holy, “...you have the consequence of a holy life...” There is another stage of (ongoing) sanctification, “and the outcome is eternal life” (Romans 6:22, CEB). Sanctification can be thought of in many different ways. It includes the ups and downs of life. There are milestones of significance and there is the seemingly insignificance of small pleasures or parts of life. Eugene Peterson, in his book, *Practicing Resurrection*, writes about the maturing process of the believer (maturing is another way of saying sanctification). “[A]mericans in general have little tolerance for a centering way of life that is submissive to the conditions in which growth takes place: quiet, obscure, patient, not subject to human control and management” (Peterson, 2010). The process of sanctification involves all of life. The process of being sanctified can look like the process of changing behavior that Prochaska and Diclemente depict in TMM. The Holy Spirit at work in the believer

ensures that the changes taking place, when viewed in light of God's presence and empowerment, will be continued ad infinitum. Holy Spirit guides in the change process at all stages "We know this because God is working all things together for good for the ones who love God and are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28, CEB).

For clients, believers or those who are not yet believers, will be recipients of Holy Spirit's work via our application of our lives to the practice of counseling. There are many ways that change can be fostered by means that do not involve explicit application of culturally Christian forms of grace. Self discovery, finding new community, and depending on others will all be included in the plan for lasting change for clients (Capstick, 2019). Every change along the way, large and small, spiritual or material, one-time or recurring will be embodied. We, the counselor, client, believer, or not yet believer are the change, the power for change is Holy Spirit.

References

- Capstick, L. (2019, November 26). Impossible transformations: How do people change? *Tedxmilehigh.com*. <https://www.tedxmilehigh.com/how-do-people-change/>
- Common English Bible: A fresh translation to touch the heart and mind. (2011). Common English Bible.
- Federal News Service. (2008, February 5). Barack Obama's Feb. 5 speech. New York Times, Politics. <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/05/us/politics/05text-obama.html?smid=url-share>
- Peterson Eugene H. (author). (2010). *Practice Resurrection*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Prochaska, J. O., & Diclemente, C. C. (1982). Transtheoretical therapy: Toward a more integrative model of change. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice*, 19(3), 276-288. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0088437>
- Raihan N, Cogburn M. Stages of Change Theory. [Updated 2023 Mar 6]. In: StatPearls [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2023 Jan-. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK556005/>

