

☞ Stay the Course

Someone came up with these humorous observations about life...

1. *Learn from the mistakes of others. You can't live long enough to make them all yourself.*
2. *I know God won't give me more than I can handle. I just wish He didn't trust me so much.*
3. *Once over the hill you pick up speed.*
4. *Junk is something you've kept for years and throw away three weeks before you need it.*
5. *My idea of housework is to sweep the room with a glance.*
6. *A conscience is what hurts when all your other parts feel so good.*
7. *There is always one more imbecile than you counted on.*
8. *Someone who thinks logically provides a nice contrast to the real world.*
9. *We cannot change the direction of the wind... but we can adjust our sails.*

The winds of our nation have changed drastically in my lifetime. It may be too late to turn the ship around, but we can still adjust our sails! We can stay on course.

When I was a kid... growing up in the church, drinking alcohol was largely frowned upon. Today, many think nothing of it to drink, and quite a few don't even see drunkenness as a problem as long as you don't hurt anyone else.

When I was a kid, swearing was only used amongst the roughest crowds or only in private with a few friends. Today, for many, it's almost an issue of pride to use the coarsest language.

When I was a kid, getting in trouble at school meant that you would also get in trouble at home.

When I was a kid, vandalism and theft were considered crimes regardless of the circumstances.

When I was a kid, murder was rare and only happened in large cities. Today, it's a daily news report and often in small towns.

When I was a kid, it seemed everyone had some church affiliation and most attended at least occasionally. Today, more and more people have zero church background.

☞ **Things have changed a lot** since I was a kid. A Gallup poll in 2017 showed...

- *69% of American adults view having sex without being married as morally acceptable.*
- *65% of adults view gambling as a morally acceptable behavior.*
- *63% view homosexual relations as morally acceptable.*
- *43% think having an abortion is morally acceptable.*

Now, you could hear all this and simply think, "boy, he's getting old." Well, ok. Some may recognize the changes over time and think of even more things that have changed. Some may get frustrated or even angry at the changes that have occurred in their lifetime. I'm not trying to invoke your anger or frustration. I'm simply demonstrating how things have changed. And, God told us in advance that this would happen:

☞ 2 Timothy 3:1-5

But mark this: **There will be terrible times in the last days.** 2 People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, 4 treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God- 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power.

He even predicted how Christians would be treated in the last days:

☞ Matthew 24:9-12

you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and **you will be hated** by all nations because of me. 10 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, 11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. 12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold

Along with the drastic changes over the years, many churches have shrunk and some have closed their doors forever. Many Christians are concerned about the future of the church in America. Listen to what Ed Stetzer, Executive Director of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College, has to say:

Despite what many think, the church in America is not dying (and no serious researcher thinks that). However, there are some challenges and changes to be considered. Here are some trends that are already evident, but will become even more important in days to come:

☞ 1. The word "Christian" will become less used and more clear. The fact is that **not everyone who uses the word "Christian" is using it the same way.** There are three broad categories that make up the approximately 75 percent of Americans who refer to themselves as Christians.

☞ **Cultural Christians**, about 25 percent of the U.S. population, are simply those who, when asked, say they are a Christian rather than say they are an atheist or Jewish.

☞ The second type is what I call a **Congregational Christian**. They account for another close to 25 percent of the population. This person generally does not really have a deep commitment, but they will refer to themselves as Christians because they have some loose connection to a church.

☞ **Convictional Christians**, also about 25 percent of the population, are those people who self-identify as Christian who orient their life around their faith in Christ.

So, what's the trend?

Well, first, the trend is that less people are calling themselves Christians and those who are will take it more seriously. In other words, Cultural and Congregational Christians, or the "squishy middle," is collapsing while Convictional Christians are staying relatively steady.

In the future, the word Christian will mean more to those who would be considered Convictional Christians. However, it will mean—and will be used—less to those who were nominal Christians in the first place. The word will be less used and more clear.

☞ 2. More robust churches will result from the death of nominalism. **It is beginning to cost something to be a Christian in America**—not as much as in many places in the world or in much of history, but more than it used to. Churches that are preaching the Gospel and are focusing on biblical truths are going to become more clearly distinct from the culture around them. The end result? Robust Christian communities are going to get stronger. These gospel-preaching churches will have members who are more, not less, committed and these committed churches will have ☞ less nominal Christians in the years to come. **Christianity will become more of a minority in culture, but more refined, more biblical, and more missional churches will be the result.**

☞ --Greg Surrat (from National Convention)...**God is Gideonizing the Church.**

Our world has changed radically in my lifetime. Moral standards have changed. Basic, human decency has changed. Even churches have been affected by all the changes. Now, when we talk about the way things are going, do you tend to be critical or does it stir compassion? ...God would respond with compassion first.

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. **He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish**, but everyone to come to repentance.

Jesus was primarily motivated by compassion when he looked on the crowds of people. That was still true even as the crowds turned against him and had him tortured and crucified. His compassion for people remained steady. He stayed the course.

☞ Regardless of what happens in our culture, **our calling and mission remains.**

☞ **Matthew 28:19-20** (*this is still the Church's primary mission...*)

go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

People need Jesus. He's the solution to all that ails our nation and world. You are responsible to lead them to Jesus. **"You're the only Jesus some will ever see."** How can you show them?

☞ **Matthew 5:13-16**

You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world... Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

☞ **1 Peter 2:12**

Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your **good deeds** and glorify God on the day he visits us.

☞ Colossians 4:5-6

Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. 6 **Let your conversation be always full of grace**, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

☞ 1 Peter 3:15

Always **be prepared** to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with **gentleness and respect**

So, let your light shine with good deeds, grace, and gentleness. Imagine if every believer prayed for the lost and demonstrated compassion and concern for their eternal souls; if each one really took on the **Great Commission** as their **Personal Commission**. When we see the condition of our world, it may be tempting to give up and just wish for God's judgment. But that is not what God would have us do. I think about Jonah... he wanted God to judge Ninevah and destroy them. But God wanted to show mercy; he wanted someone to reach out to them so that they could be saved.

In Exodus 32, God came and spoke to Moses. He said that he was about to judge and destroy the children of Israel. For most of us, that would have been enough. God said it - it was a done deal. But Moses would not accept it. He interceded with God:

Exodus 32:9-14

...But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God... "Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people..." Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

Now go back and rewind this scene. First God speaks to Moses and says, "Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation." Okay, press pause... Now let's insert a few theologians into the scene at this point to discuss whether or not God will destroy the Israelites. "Of course, He will," they all agree, "God said it and that settles it." Many might argue the same thing today. Maybe you feel as though judgment is inevitable. Okay fine. What are you doing about it? Are you saying, "It's about time!" Are you complaining about having to be included in it? Or are you interceding for mercy like Moses? Maybe God will pour out his judgment on our nation; or perhaps He will relent:

Zephaniah 2:3

Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger.

In Moses' case, did you notice who God was angry with? It was with his own people! Have you ever noticed how Jesus treated people? He was almost always compassionate. But there was a time he got mad. Who was he mad at? Those who were supposed to be godly leaders amongst his people!

☞ 2 Chronicles 7:14

if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

“Called by my name”: do you claim to be a Christian? Are you a Cultural Christian, a Congregational Christian, or are you a Convictional Christian? If you are a Convictional Christian, then you will want to be more like Jesus. You will be motivated by compassion for a lost and dying world. You will embrace humility and pray and seek the face of God.

Too many times we are looking for the wrong things. We looking for the flaws in others; for the trouble with our nation. Instead, Biblically, we should be looking for God. What is God up to in this situation? What does God want to accomplish now?

If you are a Convictional Christian, then you will turn from your wicked ways. You won't be content with being morally superior to the masses. Instead, you will see your own sin through God's eyes and confess and repent.

And if even the small minority of Convictional Christians does these things it can make an incredible impact upon our world. Greg Surrat said that God is Gideonizing the Church. When God used Gideon to reduce the army of Israel, he turned that small number of soldiers into a great victory. Likewise, God says that when his people return to him, he will heal their land. Most would agree that America and the world needs a revival. Hear this:

A recipe for revival: Draw a circle and get inside, then pray God will send revival within the circle.

Church, regardless of all the changes in our world, and regardless of the affects upon the church, our calling remains. We are to humble ourselves and pray and seek God's face. We are to turn from our wicked ways. We are called to let our lights shine, representing Christ to this world, and to go make disciples. Be a Convictional Christian and center your life around Christ. If you've been one of those "nominal" Christians, it's time to get back to your roots.

☞ **Joel 2:12-14**

"Even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning." **Rend your heart** and not your garments. **Return to the Lord** your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and **he relents** from sending calamity. Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing.

This scripture is especially fitting for the current time. But it also represents a proper daily attitude. Each day draw closer to God than yesterday. Each day, humble yourself and soften your heart to ☞ see as he sees. **Be filled with compassion, represent Christ in all circumstances and make disciples. Stay the course!**

☞ **Video – Kari Jobe: We Are**