

CONVERGENCE

Research and Recommendations: Finding transformation in times like these

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Remember a few months ago when we were optimistic and making plans for a fall mostly free of pandemic worries? It was the closest thing to collective hope I had experienced in a long time. It was glorious. Now we are in the midst of yet another surge, all our plans are thrown into uncertainty and chaos, and our hope seems nowhere to be found. I am reminded of the disciples when their fishing boat was tossed by the storm. How can we stay afloat through yet another season of unexpected and unwanted change?

When change swirls around us, our brains and bodies are actually designed to resist it. In my new book, [Church After: Finding transformation in unexpected change](#), I explore all the ways our very biology tells us that change is bad and should be avoided. This natural opposition to the new and different guided us well in our prehistoric decisions about what cave to rest in or what mushroom to eat. Yet in our ever-changing modern world, change resistance can keep us from living our fullest lives. The world is not going to stop changing. We have to learn to ride the waves.

Learning to navigate and be transformed by change is not easy, but important parts of human development rarely are. So how can we build our navigation skills for times of both wanted and unwanted change?

First, know thyself. What is your normal response to change? Are you excited about the possibilities? Do you hang back to see how it goes before jumping in? Are you generally opposed to change but willing if you know it will help those you love? Our new quiz, [What Kind of Change Maker are You?](#), can help you discern and learn about your change style. Whether you are a Catalyst, a Helper, an Evangelist, a Nurturer, or an Enthusiast, you have an important role to play in times of change. Each style has strengths and challenges, and knowing these will help you think through your responses to change.

Second, utilize your network of support. Letting others know what we need can feel vulnerable but is the only way to make it through such challenging times. Once you gather a trusted circle, research suggests that those who practice critical reflection are most likely to find transformation in change. Gather regularly and share your stories of change. Talk through how those experiences intersect with your beliefs and practices of faith, and be honest about where there is tension or where you feel most unmoored. The places of tension are often the places of greatest learning. There is no transformation without disorientation.

Third, take time for rest and deep work. We are all exhausted. Don't be afraid to stop everything non-essential for a season of rest. As the fantastic [Nap Ministry](#) points out, rest can be a powerful form of resistance against oppressive and unsustainable systems. My friend Brandeis Tullos pointed out in a sermon recently, if you need Biblical examples, that God sent an angel to a weary and scared Elijah to sustain him during a time of rest. Jesus slept in the midst of the storm. We can't reflect or contemplate if we are exhausted. Once we are rested, rituals and contemplative practices can help us process our feelings and learn from them. Consider a weekly time to write or say all that you are grieving from this time of constant change and give it over to God. If you have a mindfulness practice, don't neglect it. If you don't, now is a great time to start. Research has shown the power of mindfulness to actually change our brain patterns to dampen our negative reactions to unexpected events and increase our capacity for flexible thinking.

When Jesus faced events of increasing intensity and danger in the later years of his ministry, he took time away from the crowds for prayer, he went into the wilderness and faced his greatest temptations, and he gathered with his friends regularly. While none of us are Jesus, we can all do likewise when faced with intense seasons of change.

The great news is, if you learn these practices now to steer through such a stormy season, you will be equipped to find transformation in whatever changes come your way. Job changes, new or ending relationships, health challenges, all of these can move you closer to becoming all that you were created to be. While some changes will never be welcome, like our current pandemic, all can be transformational, if we let them.

For more on finding transformation in times of change, especially in church contexts, check out my upcoming book, [Church After: Finding transformation in unexpected change](#), which includes small group and children's program guides to aid in the work of collective reflection and ritual. Convergence also offers courses, coaching, and consulting to help your congregation navigate this season of change and all those still to come. For more information on courses, coaching, and consulting...