

CHANGE: GROWTH

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“Well said,” replied Candide, “but we must cultivate our garden.”

As the population continues to move away from the traditional family farm of past generations, I’m continually searching for venues in which I can teach life’s lessons in ways different from the way I learned them. On my family farm I learned about sowing and reaping, the change of seasons, the birds and the bees, patience, and that hard work is a predecessor to a bountiful harvest. The question remains, how do I adapt my teaching to an upcoming generation in different ways than I learned them? An example that has worked for me and is transferable from one generation to another is the garden.

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CHANGE IN THE GARDEN

Change is central to gardening. During its lifetime, every plant undergoes a fascinating metamorphosis. A tiny seed germinates and thrusts a tender shoot into the world to new surroundings. That shoot becomes a strong stem, which eventually provides support for branches, leaves, flowers, or fruit. It’s a wondrous thing to witness such change, and more wondrous still to participate in that growth by providing care and nurture for God’s creations.

But sometimes change in the garden catches me by surprise. An unexpected frost may toast my tomatoes, or an early spring may start the growing season sooner than expected. In order to keep up with the changes a garden goes through every season and prove a valuable steward, I have to be ready to adapt, to change my way of doing things to suit the conditions I’m faced with, even though I may have been taught differently.

Change, especially life or job threatening change, causes stress. The garden continues to teach valuable lessons that ultimately cause me to pause and glance heavenward, thanking the Creator for allowing me to grow, all the while relieving stress. Personal growth is not sought for at sowing time, but is a nice by-product of the process of helping other living things to grow.

CHANGE IN THE WORLD

The garden is really just the world in miniature. Change, in garden terms, is synonymous with growth, and, like the garden, the world goes

through continuous change. To cope with life's stresses, people have to be ready to change too. That's why I've always tried to keep my heart and mind open to new ideas and new ways of doing tasks—to the spirit.

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There have been times when I resisted change, but more often than not I've embraced it and enjoyed the natural benefits. Why plant an old variety, for example, when a new one produces more fruit or is tougher than its predecessor? Why use native garden soil in containers when soilless mixes are much better suited for the purpose?

Social change and campus change are occurring at a remarkable rate, and sometimes those changes come at a speed that's overwhelming. I find that puttering through a garden environment—where change is natural and positive—helps me keep things in perspective. I need the naturally and positively occurring perspective, the eternal perspective, to cope with things like the internet, institutional changes, satellites, and high tech. And as sure as spring follows winter and the harvest follows sowing, more changes or growth are coming. ∞