

IN THE MARGINS: Fifty years later, can people really change?

By Tony Martin
Editor

I recently attended my 50th high school reunion. As anyone who's reached that milestone can tell you, it's a bittersweet occasion. Of the 109 graduates in our class, 67 made it back to reunite and reminisce, but 17 of our classmates had already passed away. In a poignant turn of events, an 18th classmate died the day after the reunion. As I stood there among familiar faces, some aging more gracefully than others, I was struck by something deeper than the inevitable march of time: the realization that, in many ways, people hadn't really changed.

Those who were driven and high achievers back then still seemed to have that same spark in their eyes. They spoke of careers and accomplishments, grandchildren, and retirement plans with a clear sense of direction. Conversely, those who struggled to find their place in the world decades ago seemed just as adrift now. Some shared stories of hardship or simply faded into the background, as they had when we were teenagers. It made me wonder: Can people really change? More importantly, should we always be striving for change, or is there a point in life when contentment is a virtue?

As I considered these questions, I couldn't help but view them through the lens of my Christian faith.

The Nature of Change

The Bible teaches us that change is not only possible, but expected. Romans 12:2 calls on us to "be transformed by the

renewing of your mind,” urging believers to change their thinking and align themselves with God’s will. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul writes that “if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” These verses suggest that true transformation is not only possible but an inherent part of the Christian journey.

Yet, as I looked around the room at my reunion, I wondered if this kind of transformation had happened for everyone. Why were some people still stuck in the same patterns they had decades ago? Was it lack of opportunity, a stubborn refusal to change, or perhaps just a sense of comfort in the familiar?

Striving vs. Contentment

This brings me to another tension we face in life, especially as we get older: when is it right to push ourselves to grow, and when is it okay to be content with where we are? On one hand, the Bible calls us to strive for holiness (Hebrews 12:14) and to “press on” toward the goal of eternal life (Philippians 3:14). This suggests that there’s always work to be done, no matter how old we are.

On the other hand, there’s something to be said for contentment, for finding peace in what we’ve been given. Paul famously writes in Philippians 4:11-12, “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.” This was a man who had been through shipwrecks, imprisonment, and persecution, and yet he found contentment because his trust was in Christ. This is not the kind of contentment that leads to laziness or apathy, but rather a deep, abiding peace that comes from knowing God’s plan is being worked out in your life, even if it doesn’t look the way you imagined.

Where Do We Go from Here?

So, how do we navigate this balance between striving for change and being content with where we are, especially as we age? For me, the answer lies in a continual dependence on God.

We're called to grow in our faith and character, but that growth doesn't always look like worldly success. Sometimes, growth means learning to love more deeply, forgive more easily, or trust God more fully.

If you're nearing or have passed a milestone like a 50th reunion, you may be reflecting on what you've accomplished in life and what remains undone. Maybe you see areas where you wish you had done more or worked harder. Or perhaps you find yourself content with how things turned out. Neither state is inherently wrong – what matters is where your heart is before God.

Change is possible at any stage of life. The thief on the cross was promised paradise in his final moments (Luke 23:43), showing us that it's never too late for transformation. But real change, the kind that lasts, comes from surrendering to Christ and allowing Him to shape us into His likeness. That kind of change is more about who we're becoming in Him than what we're achieving in the world.

Final Thoughts

As I reflect on my 50th high school reunion, I'm reminded that the people I saw are still the same in many ways, but they've also been shaped by the lives they've lived. Some have achieved great things, while others have found peace in quieter, simpler paths. What matters most, though, is not what we accomplish, but who we are in Christ. In Him, we are always being transformed, no matter how many years have passed or how many reunions we attend.

So, can people really change? Absolutely. But that change, especially the kind that matters in eternity, is less about striving for worldly success and more about growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. As we grow older, we don't have to fear change or resist contentment. We can trust that God, who began a good work in us, will carry it on to

completion (Philippians 1:6). And that's a promise worth holding on to, no matter where we are on life's journey.