
Keep God. Lose the Traditions.

What it actually means to build a church that changes lives.

Overview.

A lot of people still believe in God — they've just stopped believing in church. Something about the rules, the routines, or the culture quietly told them they weren't the right fit. This discussion explores why that happens and what Jesus said to do about it. We'll look at what "life-changing" really means, why traditions can drift from God's Word, and what kind of church — and what kind of Christian — it takes to reach people who aren't in the room yet.

Warm up.

Icebreaker: What's one word you'd use to describe your experience of church growing up — or your first impression of it? (No wrong answers.)

Whether church felt like home, a rule book, or a mystery you never solved — tonight's discussion is about what it would take to make it genuinely life-changing for someone like you used to be.

Watch the video.

[3x Vision: How to Build a Life-Changing Church](#) — a video by Bay Area Christian Church

Follow along with the guide, or use it independently as a recap. If you're in a group, press play.

Read and talk.

1. God has a way. We have a way. They're not always the same.

Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, [2] "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!" [3] Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? [4] For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.' [5] But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is 'devoted to God,' [6] they are not to 'honor their father or mother' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. [7] You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: [8] " 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. [9] They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.'"

— Matthew 15:1-9 NIV

- **Key point:** Traditions aren't automatically bad — they become a problem when they matter more than God's Word. Jesus wasn't criticizing the Pharisees for loving structure. He was exposing the moment when structure replaced substance.
- **Reflection:** In what area of my church life am I most likely to follow the tradition rather

than ask what God actually wants?

- *(Examples: Sunday routines I've never questioned; the way I talk about faith with non-Christians; what I think "a good Christian" looks like; what counts as a "real" church service; etc.)*

2. "Life-changing" means something different to everyone — and that matters.

Because of our love for you we were ready to share with you not only the Good News from God but even our own lives. You were so dear to us!

— 1 Thessalonians 2:8 GNT

- **Key point:** The people we most want to reach aren't looking for a better religious experience — they're looking for something that moves the needle on their actual life. To share the good news the way Paul describes, we first have to understand what "good news" looks like to the person across from us.
- **Reflection:** What did "life-changing" mean to me before I became a Christian? How different is that from what I'd say it means now?
 - *(Examples: professional or financial breakthrough; purpose and direction; escaping something destructive; belonging somewhere real; someone being honest about their own struggles; etc.)*

3. A life-changing church keeps changing — even after you've arrived.

I thank my God every time I remember you. [4] In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy [5] because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, [6] being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

— Philippians 1:3-6 NIV

- **Key point:** One of the quietest dangers in church culture is the belief that transformation is what happens before you join, not after. A life-changing church has to be a place where growth is expected and welcomed long after someone becomes a Christian.
- **Reflection:** Am I expecting my church — and myself — to keep changing? Or have I settled somewhere and stopped looking for what God might want to do next?
 - *(examples: I feel like I've basically arrived; I'm growing but mostly on my own; my small group pushes me; I'm honestly not sure what growth looks like for me right now; etc.)*

Discuss

1. The episode describes a church that tries to be life-changing, non-traditional, and non-denominational — God-focused rather than rules-focused. Which of those three is hardest for me to actually live out? Why?

2. Who in my life is saying yes to God but no to church? What would it take for them to feel genuinely welcome in my community — not just tolerated?
3. Is there a part of me that knows what growth looks like right now — but is choosing easy instead? What would it look like to stop avoiding that?

Keep growing.

- This week, have one honest conversation with someone outside the church — not to recruit them, but to actually find out what "life-changing" would mean to them. Listen more than you talk.
- Identify one tradition in your church life you've never questioned. Spend 10 minutes this week asking whether it's pointing people toward God or away from him.
- Text or call someone in your group to share one thing from tonight that genuinely challenged you — not the easy part.

Dive deeper.

For more on this topic, check out: [The Church Exodus: Why Attendance is Declining in America.](#)