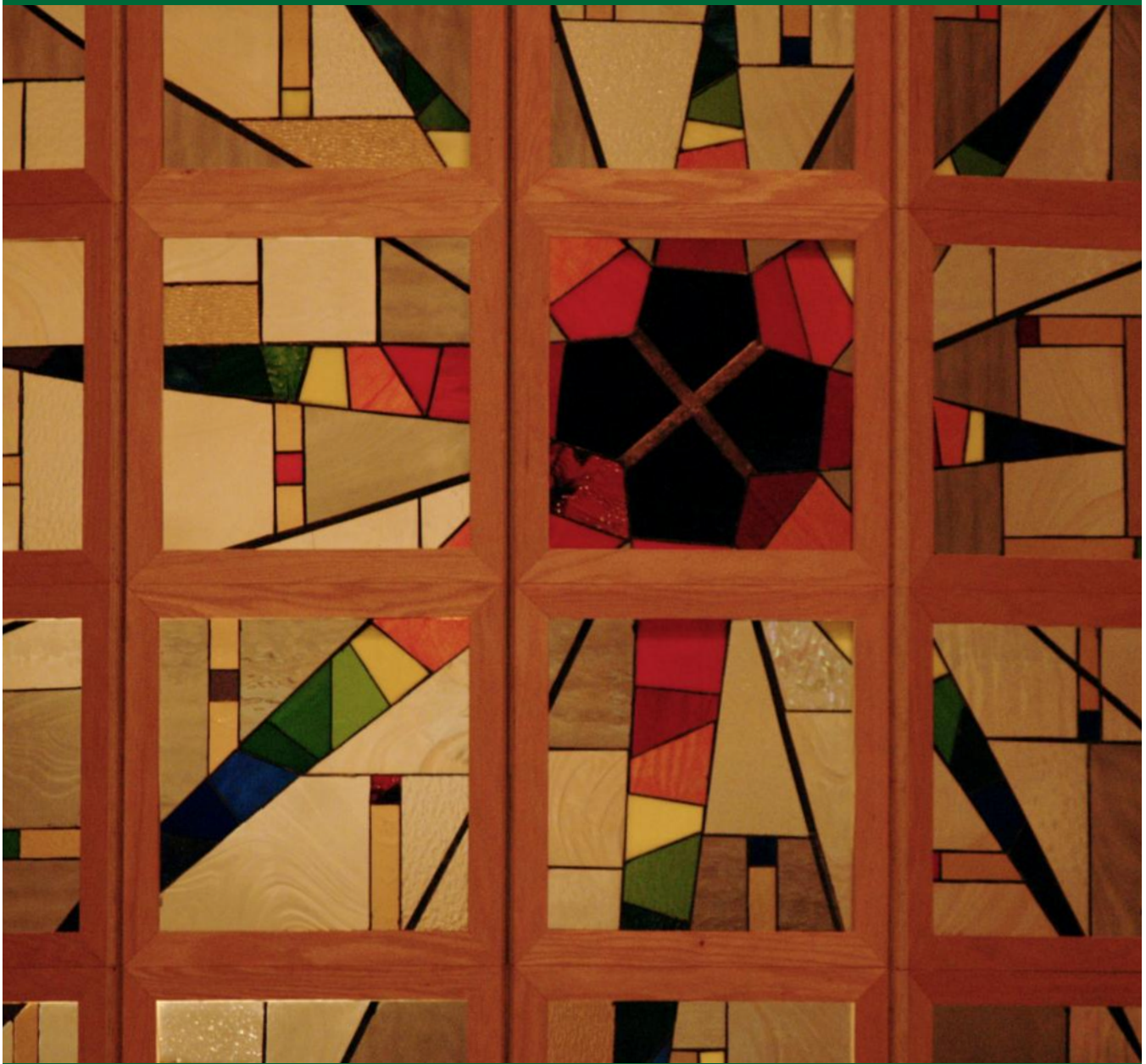


50 Quotations to Help Lead Change in Your Church

by Lovett H. Weems, Jr.



Lewis Center
for Church Leadership

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Preface

Why a collection of quotations? The right phrase or succinct quotation can sometimes carry more power than long essays or intense discussion. Capturing the essence of a truth in a sentence can cause those who read or hear it to say, “That’s right” or “Of course.” Something seemingly complex seems clearer, or perhaps an issue that appeared narrow now is seen in a broader context. Often a quotation will spark our own imagination and inspire our own creativity.

For these reasons, each issue of *Leading Ideas*, the popular online newsletter of the Lewis Center for Church Leadership, features a brief leadership quotation to stimulate the thinking of readers as well as to give them ideas to share with others.

In response to requests for a collection of these quotations, we have organized selected ones on the topic of *leading change in the church*. While there is a range of issues facing congregational life, inevitably they involve change of some sort. It is not enough to discern what is best for the church’s mission and future. There must also be careful attention to the process of change, or even the best ideas will not become a reality.

Churches face changes whether by design or circumstances, and not all of the changes are good. We hope these questions will help you lead within your congregation so that your future will be marked by increased service, vitality, and growth.

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Introduction:

Leading Change is Always a Theological Act

As people of faith, we have no option but to change. The way things are in the world at any moment is never synonymous with God's ultimate will. There is always a "not yet" quality and an incompleteness about things as they are. God is always pulling us into the future with a call for an order far different from the current state of things. Leadership is about that change to which God is calling us. Leadership is the discovery and articulation of a shared vision — a vision for the church and the world far different from the current reality.

To say we must change is not to judge the past except to the extent that we affirm no state of things can be deemed to be God's final will for us. It is out of God's work among us in the past that we are able to move forward and change for the future. It is with a deep sense of thankfulness that we turn in prayer to God, asking God to reveal to us that to which we are being called in the days ahead. Change is at its heart a theological issue. God has a future for us beyond all that we have known and experienced up to now. We are called to discern and pursue that future.

As we pursue that future, we discover that successful and lasting change comes more through evolution than revolution. Some assume that, if real change is to take place in their congregations, they must adopt an entirely new theological and liturgical identity. Rarely is this the case. There must be continuity for genuine change to take place — change that has integrity and staying power.

While there are times and situations that call for a new and radically different beginning for a congregation, my experience is that such occasions are rare for existing congregations. The ultimate goal, whatever the approach, is the revitalization of congregations to be more fully bearers of the witness of Christ in their communities and beyond.

An evolutionary approach is not an argument, however, for incremental change only. While all churches need constantly to improve all aspects of their ministry, evolutionary change goes well beyond such incremental improvements. The difference in an evolutionary model versus a revolutionary one is not in the size or scope of change. The distinguishing characteristic of evolutionary change is that it is clearly tied to the congregational story and culture.

Such change, though difficult, is possible. The pages of history are filled with stories of individuals and congregations who became more than anyone could have expected. Indeed, we know from experience that God, "by the power at work within us, is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine." (Ephesians 3:20)

We also know that all living systems have the capacity to grow and deal with changing environments. Though not inevitable, this potential is always present. It is in this spirit that every generation of Christians seeks to preserve the essentials of the treasure of the gospel without idolizing the “earthen vessels” in which the gospel is carried and which from generation to generation must change.

Lovett H. Weems, Jr.



These ideas are developed further in two of my books, *Take the Next Step: Leading Lasting Change in the Church* (Abingdon Press, 2003) and *Church Leadership: Vision, Team, Culture, and Integrity*, rev ed. (Abingdon Press, 2010). Learn more at churchleadership.com/books.

In addition to the quotations from *Leading Ideas*, additional excerpts from these books and from another written with Tom Berlin are included below under the heading, “Leadership Requires Change.”

1. God's New Thing

I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

— Isaiah 43:19a NRSV

2. Continuity

People will change only if they believe that a new insight, a new idea, or a new form helps them become more of who they are.

— Margaret J. Wheatley

Leadership and the New Science, 2nd edition (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1999), 148.

3. Understanding

The work of adaptive change requires an open heart to respect and appreciate the pains of change that you are asking people to sustain.

— Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky

“Leading with an Open Heart,” *Leader to Leader*, Fall 2002, 33.

4. Sacred Cows

Don't make today's innovations into tomorrow's sacred cows.

— Jeanie Daniel Duck

The Change Monster: The Human Forces That Fuel or Foil Corporate Transformation and Change (New York: Crown Business, 2001), 263.

5. World of Change

While the church has been hiding inside the walls for fear of death and decline, the world around has encountered remarkable growth and change.

— Dottie Escobedo-Frank

Rudy Rasmus and Dottie Escobedo-Frank, *Jesus Insurgency: The Church Revolution from the Edge* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 4.

6. Scary

It's scary work, trying to find a new world, hoping we won't die in the process.

— Margaret J. Wheatley

Leadership and the New Science, 2nd edition (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1999), 173-174.

7. Facing Facts

Church people have long been good at collecting facts but poor at facing them.

— Bob Jackson

Hope for the Church: Contemporary Strategies for Growth (London: Church House Publishing, 2002), 70.

8. Information

Resistance is not opposition. It is information.

— Gil Rendle

9. Sustain

It is very easy to start a ministry. It is very hard to sustain a ministry.

— Tom Berlin

10. Transition

Transitions are essential for thriving congregations, because these in-between times open us to new grace-filled possibilities.

— Beverly A. Thompson and George B. Thompson, Jr.

Grace for the Journey: Practices and Possibilities for In-between Times (Herndon, VA: Alban, 2011), 2.

11. Right to Lead

Leaders have to earn the right to make changes.

— David R. Brubaker

Promise and Peril: Understanding and Managing Change and Conflict in Congregations (Herndon, VA: Alban, 2009), 94.

12. Transformational Leadership

The church both yearns for and resists effective leadership, particularly transformational leadership that is oriented to change.

— Kenneth J. McFayden

Strategic Leadership for a Change: Facing Our Losses, Finding Our Future (Herndon, VA: Alban, 2009), 100.

13. Progress

As community stewards, leaders must be able to steer the course toward a destination that represents real progress for their communities.

— Juana Bordas

“How Salsa, Soul, and Spirit Strengthen Leadership,” *Leader to Leader*, Fall 2007, 39.

14. Ability to Disagree

Discovering that it is possible to disagree but still move forward is one of the critical differences between peaceful-but-stagnant congregations and those that are willing to disturb the status quo.

— Nancy T. Ammerman and Carl S. Dudley

Congregations in Transition: A Guide for Analyzing, Assessing, and Adapting in Changing Communities (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2002), 10.

15. Noticing

One of the first things we discovered about adapting congregations was that they simply notice what is going on around them. Declining congregations often barely realize that the world has changed.

— Nancy T. Ammerman and Carl S. Dudley

Congregations in Transition: A Guide for Analyzing, Assessing, and Adapting in Changing Communities (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2002), 8.

16. Story

Effective leaders succeed in conveying a new version of a group's story that makes sense in terms of both where they have been and where they are going.

— Jacqueline J. Lewis

The Power of Stories: A Guide for Leading Multi-Racial and Multi-Cultural Congregations (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 17.

17. Worship Change

Congregations that adapt their worship practices ... are indeed at a higher risk of conflict. But congregations that fail to adapt to a changing environment may be at much greater risk.

— David R. Brubaker

Promise and Peril: Understanding and Managing Change and Conflict in Congregations (Herndon, VA: Alban, 2009), 61.

18. Confusion

People say “no” to what is confusing.

— Nelson Searcy

19. Capacity Building

In a time of change, many congregations look for leaders who will make their problems and challenges simple. Instead, they need leaders who will help develop their capacities to respond effectively to the challenges at hand.

— Kenneth J. McFayden

Strategic Leadership for a Change: Facing Our Losses, Finding Our Future (Herndon, VA: Alban, 2009), 100.

20. Innovation

Innovation is inefficient.

— Ronald Heifetz

21. Smaller Churches

It's not change smaller churches resist; it's folly.

— David R. Ray

The Indispensable Guide for Smaller Churches (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2003), 244.

22. Adaptability

Social institutions are not known for their adaptability, and churches seem particularly inclined toward maintaining the status quo.

— Kathleen Garces-Foley

Crossing the Ethnic Divide: The Multiethnic Church on a Mission (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 140.

23. Urgency

Be aware of the common tendency every time you achieve a success to go back to equilibrium and allow the sense of urgency to crash.

— John Kotter

“Developing a Change-Friendly Culture: An Interview with John P. Kotter, *Leader to Leader*, Spring 2008, 33.

24. Clarity

Stability through change demands clarity about what you are trying to do.

— William Bridges

Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change, 3rd edition (Philadelphia: DaCapo Press, 2009), 107.

25. Contextual

The church should be extra cautious about franchised formulas, since churches that are committed to bringing about change are shaped by the context in which they are birthed.

— Eddie Gibbs

LeadershipNext: Changing Leaders in a Changing Culture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 134.

26. Power

In organizations lots of people have the power to stop things.

— Rosabeth Moss Kanter

27. Credit

Innovations sometimes succeed best when they have no obvious author.

— Clark Kerr

28. Business as Usual

The most common response to change ... is to proceed with business as usual.

— Nancy T. Ammerman

Congregation and Community (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 63.

29. Pace of Change

The larger your organization, the slower the pace of change ... A big ship must turn slowly; otherwise it may capsize.

— Sue Nilson Kibbey

Ultimately Responsible: When You're in Charge of Igniting Ministry (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 168.

30. Generations

One of the tasks of a leader is to serve as an interpreter among generations, helping each to understand the positions and the presuppositions of the others.

— Eddie Gibbs

Leadership Next: Changing Leaders in a Changing Culture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 53.

31. Paradox

People don't want things to change. They just want them to get better.

— Rosabeth Moss Kanter

32. Past Success

The greatest enemy of tomorrow is yesterday's success.

— Rick Warren

33. Direction

The central problem of leadership is getting the whole herd moving roughly west, and the key problem there is knowing which way is west.

— Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal

34. Loss

People do not resist change ... People resist loss.

— Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky

Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leadership (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 11.

35. Continuing

Change is prompted only when an organism decides that changing is the only way to maintain itself.

— Margaret J. Wheatley

Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World, 2nd edition (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1999), 78.

36. Losing the Future

Disconnecting from change does not recapture the past. It loses the future.

— Kathleen Norris

Dakota: A Spiritual Geography (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1993), 64.

37. Hearing

The hope of leadership lies in the capacity to deliver disturbing news and raise difficult questions in a way that people can absorb....

— Ronald Heifetz & Marty Linsky

Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leadership (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 12.

38. Resistance to Change

There is no sin punished more implacably by nature than the sin of resistance to change.

— Anne Morrow Lindbergh

Quoted in William Bridges, *The Way to Transition: Embracing Life's Most Difficult Moments* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 2001), 1.

39. Legacy

Remember ... that many fruits of your labor will not become manifest for many, many years.

— Marian Wright Edelman

The Measure of Our Success (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 59.

40. Evolutionary

Funny thing about technology revolutions — they're almost always more evolutionary than revolutionary.

— Harry McCracken

41. Rallying

A leader's job is to rally people toward a better future.

— Marcus Buckingham

The One Thing You Need to Know (New York: Free Press, 2005), 143.

42. Pacing the Work

Leadership often requires pacing the work ... at a rate people can stand.

— Ronald A. Heifetz

Leadership Without Easy Answers (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1998), 39-40.

Leadership Requires Change

43. Becoming What We Need to Be

Leadership is about change. It is important to remember that we cannot become what we need to be by remaining what we are.

— Lovett H. Weems, Jr.

Church Leadership: Vision, Team, Culture, and Integrity, revised edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 22.

44. Change Mandate Old as the Gospel

Although the challenge is change, the mandate is as old as the gospel. We are a people of repentance and conversion. We know that we serve a God of new life, new creation, and new humanity. We are pilgrims always seeking God's New Jerusalem on the horizon.

— Lovett H. Weems, Jr.

Take the Next Step: Leading Lasting Change in the Church (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 16.

45. Normal Resistance

Everything about human and organizational life leads toward stability and not change. So, change leaders must begin by understanding that the natural inclination of all groups is to resist change, regardless of the merits or who we are. Such resistance is not so much a moral failure of the people in our churches as it is a gravitational pull of groups to stability rather than change.

— Lovett H. Weems, Jr.

Take the Next Step: Leading Lasting Change in the Church (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 14.

46. Church Resistance

Churches share all the normal resistance of human organizations to change and perhaps bring more sources of resistance. Although not alone among institutions in stressing tradition, churches are clearly deeply rooted in tradition, not only a local congregation's history but also an ecclesial tradition and the centuries-long tradition of the Christian faith itself. Tradition is taken extremely seriously in the church.

— Lovett H. Weems, Jr.

Take the Next Step: Leading Lasting Change in the Church (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 14-15.

47. Rediscovery

Renewal will not come from imitating the past. It will not come from a nostalgic longing for the empire days of a culture gone or going, nor from adopting values alien to God's revelation in Christ. Renewal will come, as it always does, in a rediscovery of the church's rich heritage, identity, and mission.

— Lovett H. Weems, Jr.

Church Leadership: Vision, Team, Culture, and Integrity, revised edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 132.

48. Continuity and Change

The capacity for preserving an organization, its values, and its mission lies in continuous renewal and regeneration. When any organization decides it will seek to save its life by building walls against change, that organization is destined to lose its life, its vitality.

— Lovett H. Weems, Jr.

Church Leadership: Vision, Team, Culture, and Integrity, revised edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 22.

49. Change Not for Change's Sake

Change is not for the sake of change but for the sake of God's will. We affirm that God has been active in our lives and in our congregations throughout the past. For that, we give thanks. We also believe that God is present in our lives and in our congregations today. For that, we celebrate every expression of God's presence with us. Yet, none of us or our congregations so fully represent the fullness of God's will in our past and in our present that we can say, "We are now everything God ever intended for us to be."

— Lovett H. Weems, Jr.

Take the Next Step: Leading Lasting Change in the Church (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 15.

50. Rediscover Your Story

There is good news. Long before the current generation of leaders took charge at your church, God was calling it to fruitfulness. God had a vision for your church from the beginning, and God has a vision for your church today. It is a vision of health, vitality, relevance, and service. The important thing to remember is that it is God's vision that you are being called to fulfill. The key is to discover the story of God's calling for the congregation.

— Tom Berlin and Lovett H. Weems, Jr.

Bearing Fruit: Ministry with Real Results (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 46-47.

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- *Leadership in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Abingdon Press, 1999)
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