

Four Things That Will Change Your Life Forever **by Craig Marlatt ©**

Are you happy with your life the way it is? I don't mean the things you do, or the things you have, or the people you know. I'm talking about the person who lives inside of you: the real you. The person you really are in spite of what others may think about you.

Every one of us knows who we really are. Although we may build a world of fantasy about ourselves, others and the world around us, when we are alone we know the truth. If you strip away everything except who and what you really are inside, are you happy being this person? Do you believe this person is good, bad, you're not sure?

I've lived long enough to know that there are certain realities every man must face:

- Nothing will change unless you change. It's up to you.
- Others may want you to change but unless you do you won't change.
- No matter who you are and what you've done you can become a new person.
- Time passes faster than you think.
- One day you will die and then it will be too late to change.

There are four things that will change your life forever. These four things are the most important factors that make up who you are and what you become in your life. They are:

1. What you believe about God
2. What goes into your mind, body and emotions
3. Where you spend your time
4. Who you spend your time with

You may say to me, "But you don't know what I've been through". That is true. There is no doubt that all people are born into a situation over which they have little or no control. You may have had parents who were immature, mean, ignorant, alcoholics, drug addicts, or just terrible people. You may have been abused, neglected, rejected or mistreated when you were a child. I don't know what you've been through in your life but I do know this: In spite of all that, you can still change and have a wonderful life full of peace and joy and blessing. Let's look at the four life changers and see for ourselves.

1. What You Believe About God.

It is true that there are many religions on the earth. Some have been around for thousands of years and others came into being more recently. Everywhere you will find man throughout history you will see that there was some form of deity worship that went on among the people. Whether they worshipped the sun or moon, nature, a person, an idol made from wood or stone, or something more elaborate, man has within himself an inner awareness that God is there.

Because of this some would say no one really knows who God is or what he expects. The best thing we can do is try to live right and it will all work out in the end. After all aren't all religions essentially the same? You tell me. Some religions believe God is loving and

kind and merciful. Others teach that He is mean and cruel and we must sacrifice constantly to appease his anger. Some teach that he has an animals head and a human body, or that he has a human head and an animal body, or even several heads or bodies. Others say he has many forms. Some even believe he is just the Great Spirit up in the sky who watches over us, while still others profess there are many god's and it depends upon what you want as to which god you pray to.

It's not so different for man. If I were to ask a hundred different people about you I would probably get as many different ideas about who you are and what you're like. None of them would ever be a complete description of who you really are. Just fragments that come from their contact with you mixed with their own emotional and mental factors. It's not easy or even possible to know anyone in totality.

In fact if each of those hundred people were to write, confidentially, their descriptions of who and what you are some might even make you angry. Others might make you feel a little sad, or embarrassed; excited, happy or proud. You might be amazed at the difference of what people think you're like compared to what you think of yourself. It all depends upon interaction and relationships.

Fortunately for us God is not confused about who He is or what He is like. The Bible tells us that He is a loving, kind, holy, just and merciful Father who created us in his own image and likeness. He has a plan for each of our lives and it is possible for us to know that plan, and to participate with Him to see that it becomes a reality in our lives. He is able to overlook and forgive our mistakes and disobedience and He will put us back on the right track regardless of where we have been or what we have done.

The Bible teaches that there is only one God and that all other god's are false and not really gods at all. Many come from the mind of man and from the sense of guilt that he feels being separated from the real God by sin and disobedience. Others are fallen spirits, banished from the presence of God for their rebellion and disobedience, who now live in a lower heaven and are actively deceiving mankind into believing lies about who God is and what He has said in his Word, the Bible.

The Bible tells us the history of mankind and how we got off track and left God out of our lives, yet still He found a way to forgive us and give us the opportunity to come back into a relationship with him that is beautiful and blessed. Because He loves us so much He wants our lives to be filled with the joy and peace that comes from knowing him. For this purpose he has sent his own Son, Jesus Christ, to die on a cross and sacrifice his life to pay the price for our sin and disobedience.

The Bible even tells us that we can know whether this teaching about Jesus Christ is true. *"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself."* (John 7:17)

In my own personal life I have found that God wants to have a relationship with me but it must be a relationship based upon who He really is, not just a made up characterization of him from my own mind. In that way he is no different from you and me.

1. What Goes Into Your Mind, Body and Emotions

In many ways the human mind is like a computer. In fact the computer was designed to mimic and perform many of the functions of the human brain. Whatever a computer is programmed to do that is what it does and nothing else. It can only operate based upon the information that has been put into its central operating system and memory. Humans are the same way. As one comic philosopher put it, "You are what you eat".

I have heard many young people defend the type of music they listen to with this rebuttal: "I don't listen to the words just the music. I like the beat." They convince themselves that the growling, angry, evil sounding voice singing the dirty, hateful, blasphemous, and anti-social lyrics won't have any effect on them. Let's see if that really is possible. Try this experiment with me and you draw your own conclusions. The air we breathe consists primarily of nitrogen, oxygen and other vaporous gases. Take a deep breath in and then blow it out slowly. Now . . . take another breath, but this time only take in the oxygen and not the other gasses. Can't do it can you. The same is true with what goes into your mind through your sensory organs. You have no filtering system except your own will not to open your mind and let the information in.

Here is a simple formula that I believe holds true: What goes into the senses (seeing, hearing, smelling, touching) goes into the mind; what goes into the mind goes into the heart; what goes into the heart goes into the life; what goes into the life goes out to the world. In other words you eventually become like those things that you allow to influence you. "*You are what you eat.*"

Don't think that what you are reading, watching, hearing or experiencing doesn't affect you. The computer is running and the programming is happening. When you stand before your Maker and he pushes the 'PRINT' button. Guess what's coming out?

Searching for Inner Peace?

Many people believe that inner peace is the answer to life's problems so they meditate, go to enlightenment seminars, do yoga exercises, practice philanthropy, hang crystals on their rear view mirror and a host of other options available in the current marketplace of ideas and philosophies. Some just ignore the problem and hope to plead '*no lo contendere*' if and when they meet God at the end of their lives.

There are many ways to find inner peace, but that will only last while there is an outer reality (your body) containing an inner reality (your soul). The moment you die you will stand naked before your Creator and He will not ask you if you feel good about yourself, or if you have inner peace. There will only be one question on that day. "What did you do about my son Jesus Christ? I sent him to settle the debt you owe me. Did you accept his

payment for your debt to me, or reject it and choose to find another way or another method of payment? If your answer is the latter He will say, “Sorry, I don’t accept that”.

Like the television commercial that says, “Don’t bring your American Express to the Olympics this year because at the Olympics they only take Visa”. Jesus said it like this” “*No man cometh unto to the Father except by me*”. Sound a little narrow and harsh? I didn’t make the rules, He did!

A Bit of Personal History

During the 60’s and 70’s I – like many people I knew then – was a drug user. I made my living playing rock music and I really thought that somehow my experimentation with drugs would help me find out who God really was. In a manner of speaking it did. I ended up going to jail and prison several times for my drug use and it was during my last incarceration that I came to know Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior. Some might say that was chain gang religion, but it has lasted well over thirty years now so I’m pretty sure it’s the real thing. In fact I *know* it is.

While I was in prison I looked into many forms of religion. I studied Eastern Mysticism, Buddhism, Ek-Ken-Kar, Scientology, Spiritualism, Existentialism, Communism (it truly is a religion), Atheism (another definite religion) and the teachings of many different philosophers and religious thinkers. All of them left me as empty and unsure about the meaning of life and the purpose for my existence as I was before I started. The more things I looked into the more confused I got. Every day I got up sincerely trying to find the meaning to life and every night I went to bed knowing I had not found it.

One day, while in the prison chapel, I heard a man preach from the Bible and I asked God to help me and to show me if what the man was saying was true. He did. At once my heart was filled with peace and I understood why I could not find the answer. I had been putting things into my life hoping to find peace within myself . . . What I really needed was peace with God. My problem was that God had separated himself from me. It was He who was offended and until I made peace with God I would never know *true* peace within my own self.

That done, the changing of my life would now take place as I began putting God’s word into my life and practicing the teachings of the Christ as to how I should live. The Bible teaches that we are to be *transformed by the renewing of [our] mind(s)*. (Romans 12:2) This renewing is like reprogramming a computer, but unlike the computer the mind does not have to be stripped of its old information first. God forgives us and makes us just as if we had never offended. Now, as we put in the new information it will wash away the old stuff. (Colossians 3:1; Philippians 4:8) Remember the offense is against God so if He says you’re okay, guess what? You’re okay.

3. Where You Spend Your Time.

Ever found yourself *in the wrong place at the wrong time*? Of course you have, as have all of us at one time or another. I know a man on death row right now just because of that very thing. He didn't kill anybody, but he was there when someone else did and that was all it took for the jury to give him the death penalty. How tragic. Another acquaintance of mine happened to be visiting a house where people were running a secret drug lab in a nearby barn. He wasn't involved but he knew them and was found on the property where it happened so he went to jail. Eventually that one decision cost him and his family thousands of dollars and the loss his college scholarship.

Set goals for your life and spend time at the places that will help you get where you want to go in life. Don't expect to get into college by hanging out at the video game parlor while others are studying at the library. Don't try to find a good wife or husband in a bar.

It is the natural tendency for a person in their teen years to want to begin running their own lives. This is the internal program that God has written into your DNA to begin the process of becoming an adult. The actual time table of that process may have much to do with the culture and time period in which you live. In olden times people were expected to become adults at an earlier age than in our modern world. Because the average life expectance was not as high as it is today, at least in civilized societies, many were very young when they were expected to act like adults and fulfill adult expectations.

Still a young boy or girl was expected to learn from adults at home and in their own community or village. Apprenticeship programs were the norm and you could be given over to a teacher or craftsman for a period of time so that you could learn the proper way to do something with hopes of having a good trade by which you could support yourself and your family.

Today, many young people are raised by electronic media. They often spend the bulk of their time in front of a television, computer or video game. A study was done several years ago that concluded that people who learn and get the bulk of their information in this way will usually make decisions based upon emotion, while those who learn from traditional methods of reading, direct hearing or experiencing a process hands on will generally make decisions based upon reason.

How frightening this becomes if we honestly and objectively analyze what is usually being spewed from the portals of such media. If one thinks he or she can play games on a screen that consist of killing and mutilating people, animals or even imaginary entities hour after hour, day after day and not be internally affected by it they are unequivocally wrong. The desensitizing process of such methods has been demonstrated and proven without doubt by military and intelligence agencies worldwide.

4. Who You Spend Your Time With

The Book of Proverbs was written by King Solomon, one of the wisest men that ever lived. In Proverbs 1:10-18 we read, *"My child, when sinners tempt you, don't give in.*

Suppose they say, "Come on; let's find someone to kill! Let's attack some innocent people for the fun of it! They may be alive and well when we find them, but they'll be dead when we're through with them! We'll find all kinds of riches and fill our houses with loot! Come and join us, and we'll all share what we steal. My child, don't go with people like that. Stay away from them. They can't wait to do something bad. They're always ready to kill. It does no good to spread a net when the bird you want to catch is watching, but people like that are setting a trap for themselves, a trap in which they will die" (Good News Bible)

Time is the most valuable commodity each of us has in this life. The rich man on his deathbed would give everything he has accumulated for just another day of life. Another opportunity to try again, or spend another day with those he loves. Famous last words: "If only I could . . ." But you can't. When our time is up we can do nothing to get it back.

Spend your time with those who are going or have gone where you want to go in life. Don't accept what someone else has planned for your life or go along with the crowd because you think you have no other choice. Don't be afraid to ask someone you admire for help and guidance, especially people older and wiser than yourself. There is probably no resource in today's world that is more often neglected than the vast pool of experience and wisdom residing in our senior citizens.

You may think your parents or grandparents don't understand the world you live in but don't fall for that. There's nothing new under the sun, and it's never too late to change directions and find a new path for your life. Those who you most often neglect when you are seeking advice or direction may actually be the ones who have the most to offer.

Maybe you have already made terrible mistakes and you feel hopeless to correct your ways and get back on the path to a good life. Don't buy that lie either. And don't forget, Misery loves company. If you need to break away from relationships that are holding you back or taking you in the wrong direction for your own life, move on and get on a better path.

Conclusion: The Secret Weapon of Change

The Psalmist wrote, *Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.* (Ps. 119:9-11 KJV)

Satan defeated man in the Garden of Eden when he challenged Eve with the words, "*hath God said?*" (Gen 3:1b) By getting Eve to accept his challenge to the authority and truth of God's Word Satan was able to topple our first parents and eventually bring the entire creation into bondage. But Jesus Christ came onto the scene 2,000 years ago and when challenged by the devil with the same temptations he used the very words of God, thus defeating the enemy and eventually taking back that which was beguiled from our first parents in the Garden of Eden.

When you take the power of God's Word and incorporate it into your life by obeying what it teaches, you will experience change taking place in your life. When you surrender your life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and come back into the plan of God which He has for you, He will give you the Holy Spirit and Holy Spirit will begin the process of transformation that will change you forever. That which you once loved (sin) you will begin to hate and that which you once hated (obedience and authority) you will begin to love. When that happens . . . all things are possible.

You may be thinking to yourself, "It's too late for me. I've done too much wrong and made too many mistakes. I've hurt too many people along the way. I'll never be able to change." Don't listen to that lie. It is Satan trying to discourage you and keep you bound in a life that is not what you really want or what God wants for you. Someone once said, "When the devil reminds you of your past, just remind him of his future". I like that.

I was 27 years old when I got my GED diploma in prison, and I went to my first college classes two days a week behind that same prison fence. I did that for me. I wanted to change and I made the decision to do so. When I went forward in a chapel altar call in that prison on April 28th, 1974, there were many other friends of mine who sat in the same pew with me, but did not go forward that day. My life changed. I hope theirs did too eventually.

You can do this. Place your life in the hands of God's son Jesus and He will bring you into a life filled with peace, joy and fullness. It doesn't mean you will be without trials, in fact you may see even more in the beginning as you wake up the devil to the fact that he has lost you for all eternity. After all, he fought hard to get you didn't he? He won't give up that easy, but it's a lost cause for him if you continue to practice these four principles that I have learned in my walk with Christ.

There's no one formula to start the process but I recommend that you take some time alone, right now if possible, if not as soon as you can, and quiet your heart in prayer. Ask God to forgive you for your disobedience to Him and for messing up the life that He has given you. Forgive others that have led you in the wrong path or been a negative force in your life, whoever they may be. Ask Jesus Christ to come into your life and become your Savior and Lord and to give you the Holy Spirit.

Now get a Bible and read it. I recommend that you start in the Genesis Chapters 1-4 then go to the New Testament and read the Gospel according to John. After that read Matthew, Mark and Luke and then The Epistle to the Romans. Ask God to lead you to other Christians or a believing Bible Church who can help you grow in the faith. If you contact me I will help you to find such a group in your area as best I can.

May the Lord bless and keep you in His love,

Craig Marlatt

