

“Big Changes” Romans 12:1-8 (NASB)

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I think what the most important part of what the apostle Paul is writing about in this particular passage of Romans is about renewing our minds. In order to do that sometimes we need to quiet down and listen to what we are being told. So then we can transform and renew our minds and hear or feel what God is calling to us to do. That's it!

I like movies, in particular old movies.

One of my favorites is and movie from 1957 it's called "Heaven knows Mr. Allison", with Robert Mitchum and Deborah Kerr. The plot is: sort of a "Robinson Caruso during WW2 story". A catholic nun & a U.S. marine thru separate circumstances end up being marooned on an island in the pacific and living in a cave. The island that is occupied by the Japanese. They spend most of their time hiding from the enemy soldiers, stealing food, you know the usual stuff you do when you're hiding on an island with a nun. Deborah Kerr plays the nun and Robert Mitchum plays....well he plays Robert Mitchum in an Army helmet. (Actually he was a marine). As the story goes the two of them watch as the enemy is fortifying the island in preparation for an upcoming attack. The two of them see what the bad guys are up to but can't warn anybody so.....not sure of what do Mr. Allison thinks he hears a "voice" tell him to do something. The voice had told him how to go about disabling these cannons and anti-aircraft guns that have been installed on the island. It's a crazy plan but he thinks God was speaking to him. He asks the beautiful nun (of course she beautiful). He asks: "Sister, when God talks to you is it always a big loud booming voice, like over a loudspeaker?" She says "Oh no, Mr. Allison sometimes God speaks to you thru your heart". So now he is convinced that God was talking him, he goes out completes the mission, saves the day, we win the war. Mr. Allison the Marine in the story heard something that brought on some big changes.

We all have plans for ourselves; we're told that we have to plan for the future.....We need to have goals and objectives, we need to prepare for things because: *you never know what's going to happen?*

Jesus spoke to a man named Saul who was on his way to Damascus. This was probably also in that strong booming voice variety.

Saul was a tent-maker. He was from the city of Tarsus – which is in present day Turkey. He was raised in Jerusalem. He was highly educated and an expert on the Jewish law. His teacher Gamaliel was considered one of the greatest teachers of Judaism. Saul was a Pharisee and had the distinction of being a Roman citizen, which meant that it was likely that Saul's or his family had some wealth and social standing and therefore was well respected in the Jewish community. Saul was dedicated to the persecution of the early followers of Jesus and his mission in life (when he wasn't making tents) was to go around and persecute believers of Christ. (As recorded in **Acts: 9 & 26**)

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So he's on his way to Damascus, which is about 150 miles away, that's about a weeks' walk, so he's pretty dedicated to his task. So while he's on the way preparing for another busy round of persecuting, Jesus appears to Saul on the road, and speaks to him. "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" The others traveling with Saul only saw a light but didn't hear anything other than Saul's side of the conversation. They heard Saul say "Who are you?.....and then he said "What do you want me to do, Lord?"

Why did Jesus choose Paul who was a sworn enemy of early followers of the Way? Why? Because Paul had gifts and talents, and when these abilities were used towards the glorification of Christ it meant big changes. With Paul's' strong religious background and dynamic personality he was without a doubt the most effective person to help with establishing churches in the then known world. Because after seeing and listening to Jesus, no one worked so diligently and hard for the Lord's church than Paul did.

He was capable and tireless in his efforts to promote the faith. He could speak with confidence to citizens and Kings. He was an unrelenting force and tireless worker. He made three long missionary trips that took years to complete in order to establish and encourage a number of young churches. He wrote almost half of the books in the New Testament, fourteen encouraging letters included in the Epistles.

It's a pretty safe bet that all of this was not in Paul's original goals and objectives for his life. He made some Big Changes.

About four hundred years later Augustine of Hippo was the most respected theologian (outside of the apostles) of the church. But he didn't start out that way. In his early thirties he was a sex addicted party animal who struggled with his addictions. He attempted to read the bible but he could never get through it. He said that he given up trying and he went outside to a garden and suddenly he heard a voice from nearby chanting...."Pick-up and read - Pick up and read!.....He went back and picked up the book, opened it up and read the first passage he saw. It was Romans, **Romans 13**

<http://bible.oremus.org/?q=180006791> *"Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. ¹⁴ Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature".* He later described it this way: "It was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart." A big change.

Martin Luther was a catholic priest who teachings started the Protestant movement. He argued that we are not saved by obeying church leaders BUT we ARE saved by faith in Jesus. Prior to that he said that he had tried everything he could do to earn his place in heaven, he fasted so much that he permanently damaged his digestive system. He is quoted in his writing " If ever a monk could get into heaven by his monk-ery, it would be me". As a scholar he exhaustedly studied the bible. But he had a big problem with a phrase in the book of Romans, the phrase "Righteousness of God". Because he thought it was something that no human could measure up to, and because of that, God had a reason to punish people. He thought and thought and prayed, prayed for understanding. Finally it came to him.... the meaning was this - that the righteousness of God is through sheer grace and mercy – He justifies us by faith. He said this passage then became a gateway to heaven. Words from God were an answer to prayer and made for some big changes.

Sometime our gifts and talents are not so obvious. God speaks to us in different ways.

Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, as a student he studied Theology and languages; he was fluent in 10 different languages, he earned a degree in Divinity and went on to be a teacher. He taught Rhetoric, which is the study of and effective use of language and grammar. (I isn't too sure, but me thinks they no more teach that subject). At the outbreak of the American civil war he took a leave of absence to study in Europe, and then he went and joined the Army instead, because he thought it might be "fun". He was made an officer based only on his education. He had no previous military training. By the end of civil war he participated in 20 battles, was cited for bravery 4 times, was wounded six times (once so severely wounded it was announced that he had been killed) and he also contracted malaria. On the battlefield he was promoted to the rank of major general.

He was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his actions at the battle of Gettysburg. At the end of the war Gen. Chamberlain was honored to preside over the surrender march where the surrendering army passes by the victorious one. During this he performed an unthink-a-bly gentlemanly gesture; he ordered his troops to come to full attention and salute as the defeated confederate soldiers passed by. He called it a show of respect, FROM Americans TO Americans. Afterwards he suffered from the long lingering effects of his war wounds, and at the age 85, almost fifty years after being wounded he was listed as the last soldier of the civil war to die of his wounds. He was given a remarkable gift for leadership and I don't think too much of what he went thru was in original plans for his life.

Jackie Robinson was known as a great baseball player and he was an unusually gifted athlete. He lettered in four sports in college at UCLA: baseball, basketball, football and track. This was quite an accomplishment for an African-American student in America in the 1930's. Prior to his baseball career

Jackie was an officer in the U.S. Army. After completing Officer Candidate School, Jackie was commissioned as a second Lieutenant and on a career path in the military. While travelling in Texas on a US Army bus he was asked by the bus driver to move to the back of the bus. He refused. Later that day when they reached their destination he was arrested by the military police and was charged with a list of charges AND ended up facing a military court martial. He was acquitted of all the charges but all of this effectively ended his military career. He left the service and went on to play pro baseball in the Negro League. A couple of years later in 1948 he was signed to play for the Brooklyn Dodgers, becoming the first African American baseball player in sixty years to break the color barrier. But that's not all he changed: after his retirement from baseball he was the first African American TV baseball commentator, he was the General Manager of a professional Football team, he was the first black executive V.P. of a major American corporation (the Chock full o'nuts Coffee Co.) He helped found AND was the first Chairman of the Board of the Freedom National Bank of Harlem, in New York City. He started a Construction Company that built low cost housing. He was active in politics and served as the national director of a presidential campaign. Jackie Robinson followed a trail of talents that lead him to be the "first" at several things" and much more than a baseball player. Because he caused some big changes.

Elias Chacour is a Melkite Orthodox Arch-Bishop that lives in Israel. He became the Archbishop of Galilee in 2006. But when he was eight years old in 1948 he and his family were evicted along with their entire village from their homes in northern Palestine. At the time they were told it was temporary. After more than 60 years it seems pretty much permanent. That sort of a start in life would probably most likely sour you for the rest of your life, but Elias Chacour chose differently. And he heard a voice telling him of a better way, and how to make some changes. In 1965 as a young orthodox priest he saw lack of educational opportunities for Arab youth beyond the 8th grade. He created a school open to all children regardless of religious affiliation. In 1968 he started a school, he slept in his VW car and converted the office and bedroom in his home into a kindergarten classroom. That school has now grown to include all levels of education with 4,500 students of all faiths; including the first Arab university in Israel. He is also a tireless advocate of non-violence and he is noted for his efforts to promote peace in an area of the world that knows war all too well. At a speech he gave @ Emory University in Atlanta, GA he said : "If you in the United States are a friend of Israel, on behalf of the children of Palestine I call on you to give further friendship to Israel, they need your friendship.....and if you are enlightened enough to take the side of the Palestinians bless your heart, take our side.....,But if taking our side means you would become one sided against my Jewish brothers and sisters.....We don't need such friendship, We need more common friends not another common enemy.

I've been fortunate to have the opportunity to meet and hear Bishop Chacour speak a couple of times in Michigan on one of his "begging tours" as he calls them. He also said something else that stuck with me. He said "It's so very important that we get to know and understand and listen to Jesus. Not just as an abstract entity, but that he was a real live man. Western Christians tend to look at Jesus as a far off bright holy being. Mid-east followers look at Jesus as one of their own. He walked their land, he had conversations with people, he looked like us and he ate and slept just like we do, and was from their area of the world. He was born there, grew up there, taught there, he died and was resurrected there." Talk about some changes being made there.

I urge you to find out what your spiritual gifts are and act on them. Listen to God, listen to your heart, and hear what you are being told. There is a link on the Chilson Hills web-site, or just Google spiritual gifts inventory. It will help you to determine what your gifts and talents may be, and you can create some of your own Big Changes.

Paul the apostle is telling us in **Romans (12)** <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=180006870> to live a fulfilled life, a life where we encourage each other, a life that tells us to seek out our spiritual gifts and to act on them, a life that tells us to explore what our own personnel mission may be, and a life where we are to love and be devoted to each other, to live a life of peace and to faithfully serve the Lord in all things and to live our lives through Jesus Christ, so that you may start where you are, use what you have, and do what you can to make some Big Changes.

Amen