

## MAKING CHANGE

### "THOU CHANGEST NOT"

#### PSALM 102:23-28

Do you know the difference between you and God? God doesn't believe he's you. In fact, although you are made in his image, he is very different from you. Having seen what God's people had done to the Amorites, "Moab was filled with dread" (Nu 22:2), so Balak, the Moabite king, sent for Balaam, a diviner with an international reputation. Following his comical, donkey incident (vv. 21-35), Balaam meets with Balak, ostensibly to curse the Israelites. After blessing them rather than cursing them (vv. 7-10), frustrated Balak persuades him to try again. This time around, the LORD tells Balaam, "Go back to Balak and give him this word" (v. 16), so Balaam delivers this message to the Moabite king: "Arise, Balak, and listen; hear me, son of Zippor. God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?" (vv. 19). Balaam then goes on to bless Israel a second time (vv. 20-24). His words express profound truth regarding God. Unlike human beings, God does not lie, neither does he change his mind. Unlike human beings, he doesn't say one thing and do another, neither does he make empty promises that he has no intention of keeping. Unlike human beings, God, thankfully, is not fickle.

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***God has no choice but to change from anger to forgiveness when a sinner repents.***

**– John S. Feinberg**

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### **This Week's Core Competency**

**Trinity** – I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God-Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

On God's attributes, one theologian writes: "In reflecting on all of God's wonderful perfections, it is reassuring to know that our lives are entrusted to such a God. Still, we would be greatly troubled if our magnificent king should lose or change some of those perfections. But Christians can rest assured that this will not happen, because in addition to all his other perfections, our God is unchanging" (John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology, 264).

Theologians call this divine attribute *immutability*, and a number of passages testify to it. In the Old Testament, comparing the heavens and the earth to God, the psalmist says: "They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them, and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end" (Ps 102:26; cf., Heb 1:11-12). And the prophet Malachi quotes God saying: "I the LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed (3:6). In the New Testament, James writes: "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows" (1:17). In other places, immutability is associated in general with God's person, purposes, and promises.

But what about passages that suggest otherwise? For example, Exodus 32:14, "Then the LORD *relented* and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened," or as the NLT renders

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it, "So the LORD *changed his mind* about the terrible disaster he had threatened to bring on his people God." Following the golden calf affair, God is angry with Israel because of his people's disobedience. "I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses. "Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation." Moses responds by interceding for the people. He pleads with God: "Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people," reminding him, "Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make you're your descendant as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendant all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever'" (vv. 12-13). How can God be immutable if he intended to destroy Israel but did not?

Immutability precludes changes in "God's being, decree, purposes, or ethical rules and moral governance of the world," but not changes in his *relationships* "in virtue of God's unchanging moral rules and governance" (275). Otherwise, immutability would preclude the possibility of God's enemies ever becoming his friends through faith in Jesus. On Exodus 32:14, Feinberg explains: "When Israel disobeys the Lord, there is no option for God, given his unchanging nature and moral rules, but to punish them. However, God has also stipulated that if a sinner repents, he will forgive and bless. So, when Moses pleads for the people and in effect repents, this effects a relational change between God and Israel, but this happens because God's holiness and standards of punishment and blessing are immutable. In this case as well, God must forgo completely destroying Israel because of his covenant promises to Abraham (promises Moses reminds God of), promises that are unchanging. So God changes his relationship with Israel because of his unchanging covenant and unchanging moral governance of the world. The way the biblical writer reports this is to use the anthropomorphism that God 'repented' of the evil he had planned to do" (274; see Feinberg's detailed discussion on immutability, 264-76).

## day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

### Psalm 102:23-28

23 *In the course of my life he broke my strength;  
he cut short my days.*

24 *So I said:*

*"Do not take me away, my God, in the midst  
of my days;*

*your years go on through all generations.*

25 *In the beginning you laid the foundations  
of the earth,*

*and the heavens are the work of your hands.*

26 *They will perish, but you remain;*

*they will all wear out like a garment.*

*Like clothing you will change them*

*and they will be discarded.*

27 *But you remain the same,*

*and your years will never end.*

28 *The children of your servants will live*

*in your presence;*

*their descendants will be established before you."*

## EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

\* Underline "broke" and "cut short" in v. 23.

\* Circle "you" and "your" in vv. 23-28.

\* Bracket "In the beginning," "you remain," "you will change them," "you remain the same," and "your years will never end" in vv. 25-27.

\* Box "but" indicating *contrast* in vv. 26, 27.

\* Box "like" indicating *comparison* in v. 26.

\* Double underline "children" and "descendants" in v. 28.

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## day 2

**EXPLORE** – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Verse 23 contains an implicit *contrast* between the Psalmist's life and the LORD's life (cf., v. 27). Explain it.

2. One commentator suggests there is a note of complaint in verse 24: "I am not permitted to live a full generation, but you continue through all generations." Explain why you agree or disagree.

3. Define the divine attribute *eternity* based solely on verse 25.

4. Explain the *comparison* in verse 26.

5. Define the divine attribute *eternity* based solely on verse 27.

6. Verses 25-27 clearly teach the *eternity* of God, but they also imply his *immutability* (he is unchanging). How so?

7. What if God were not *eternal* and *immutable*; what difference would it make to you?

8. Describe the relevance of the divine attribute *eternity* for God's people according to verse 28.

9. **Discussion:** Talk about your interest in theological matters like the attributes of God.

The superscription of Psalm 102 calls it "the prayer of an afflicted man . . . his lament before the LORD." The psalm preserves the complaint of an unnamed individual that apparently resulted from his involvement in a national disaster—the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar (see 2Ch 36:15-19; cf. 2Ki 25:1-21; Jer 52:4-27). On the title of the psalm, the *NIV Study Bible* notes, "The title identifies only the life situation in which the prayer is to be used, and in accordance with vv. 1-11, 23-24 it designates the prayer as that of an individual. But vv. 12-22, 28 clearly indicate national involvement in the calamity. It may be that the distress suffered by the individual is the result of his sharing in a national disaster such as the exile—a suggestion supported by references to the restoration of Zion" (note 102 title, 892).

Psalm 102 can be divided into three parts following the psalmist's opening appeal for God to answer him quickly. The first part (vv. 3-11) describes his wretched state. His distress is so great that it has affected both his body and soul. His life has gone up in smoke so to speak. Physically he's wasting away because he's too depressed to eat and as a result is nothing but skin and bones. Emotionally he's forlorn, alone among the ruins of the city and taunted by his enemies. They mention his name in their curses on others, saying, "May you become like . . . in his distress." Ashes of mourning and tears of sorrow have become his only food and drink. All of this because God in his wrath handed Jerusalem over to Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylonians (2Ch 36:17).

The second part (vv. 12-22) describes the LORD's matchless compassion and mercy. The King eternal will have compassion on Zion. One writer explains: "The Lord had decreed seventy years for Babylon's hegemony, and thereafter it would fall. With the fall of Babylon, the 'time' ('the appointed time') of God's favor would begin the era of restoration . . . The new era is marked by forgiveness, renewal of the covenant, and the restoration of the people to the land. All this is in

view when the psalmist hopes in the promises of the Lord" (Willem A. VanGemeren, "Psalms," in *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, 5:752). And when the LORD has compassion on Zion, the kings of the earth will revere him (v. 15).

The third part (vv. 23-28) returns to the psalmist's state. He asks that his life be extended, a request he then confidently anchors in God's eternity. In contrast to the creation destined to perish, the Creator forever remains the same. And because the eternal LORD does not change, his people's future is secure. They will live in his presence.

God's infinity in relation to time is the point of the divine attribute *eternity*. Theologians agree that God is eternal, although they debate his relationship to time. According to some, "God's eternity means he exists endlessly outside of time;" according to others, it means God existed always, i.e., "God never had a beginning, nor will he die, but his existence extends endlessly backwards and forwards through every moment of time" (Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 255). While passages clearly speak of God's existence as *endless*, no passage speaks directly to the nature of that eternity, namely, whether it is temporal or atemporal. Certain passages teach God's endless existence in the past (Ps 93), while others teach his endless existence into the future (Ps 9:7). Psalm 102:25-28 teaches both.

The psalmist makes regular use of parallelism (cf., vv. 25, 27), contrast (vv. 26, 27), and comparison (v. 26). Commenting on the eloquence of verses 25-28, one expositor writes: "This is not only eloquence surpassing even that of Psalm 90: the range of thought leaves all our space-time landmarks far behind yet diminishes nothing of the significance of the present. This significance derives from God, who is committed eternally to his servants and their posterity—and to nothing else in creation, not even the universe itself" (Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, TOTC, 395). Believers today can "go to school" on this ancient psalm.

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day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

*The Message of the Passage*

*Because God is eternal and immutable, you can cry out to him in a time of need, knowing you live your life in his presence.*

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22.

What if God were not eternal and immutable; how would that impact your ability to cope with change in your life?

What if God were not eternal and immutable; how would that impact your prayer life?

What if God were not eternal and immutable; how would that impact your hope for the future?

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# notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

**Superscription** While this psalm is "the prayer of an afflicted man," the man's personal affliction is tied to the affliction of the Zion community (cf. vv. 10, 13, 16, 20), which suggests that it may have been written during the exile sometime after the destruction of Jerusalem. "Ps 102 is an Individual Lament in which the troubles of the afflicted man are related to, and set against the background of, the destruction of Jerusalem and its hoped-for restoration" (A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms: Psalms 73-150*, NCBC, 704). "The references to the condition of Zion point to the period of the captivity as the time when the Psalm was composed. Although Rashi [a rabbinic commentator of the eleventh century] identifies the speaker with Israel, he is more probably an individual captive who details his wretched plight. But he pours out his soul as a member of the Israelite community and speaks for his people as well as himself" (A. Cohen, *The Psalms*, Soncino Books of the Bible, 328).

v. 23 **broke . . . cut short** The psalmist returns to his personal lament in verses 3-11 and asks God to extend his life a little longer. "These words echo the lament of vv.3-11, where he again was occupied with the brevity, vanity, and anguish of life ('my days'; cf. vv.3, 11)" (VanGemeren, 5:754).

vv. 25-27 **In the beginning . . .** "God's permanence is demonstrated by first looking back to the past when the earth and the heavens were created and then by looking to the distant future. Here God's permanence transcends even that of creation, as illustrated by the analogy of clothing" (Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms*, NIBC, 393).

vv. 25-27 **you** "Verses 25-27 are applied to Christ in Hebrews 1:10-12. The psalmist was addressing the eternal Lord, and the writer of Hebrews identified Jesus Christ as the eternal One, the Creator and Sustainer of the world. This is a strong affirmation of the deity of Jesus Christ" (Allen P. Ross, "Psalms" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 867).

v. 26 **like** "The heavens and earth are often considered as symbolic of all that is permanent and enduring (cf. 78:69, 104:5, 119:90, 148:6; Ec. 1:4), but, in comparison with Yahweh, they are like a garment which is worn out sooner or later ( a similar idea is found in Isa. 34:4, 51:6)" (Anderson, 711).

v. 28 **children of** "God is unchanging (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8) and eternal (His years will never end; cf. Ps 102:27). Therefore, He will be faithful to all generations (to the saints' children and to their descendants)" (Ross, 867).

### Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Sending my firstborn off to school was one of the scariest things I've ever done. I wondered if I had prepared him enough to respect his teacher and follow the rules, navigate the lunchroom, and deal with bullies. What if he was "that weird kid" or the one that was always disruptive, bullied, behind, and every other thing we worry about as parents. I was pretty certain every other new kindergartener was already doing multiplication and reading on a fifth-grade level and I had failed miserably as a parent. I spent hours over the summer praying for the upcoming year, his teacher, safety for the school, friends, learning, and a thousand other things. The first day of school came, and launch . . . He was ridiculously excited; I was a crying mess! Thankfully I made it out of the building before I lost it. I remember turning him over to God and simply letting go. Times of great change can bring uncertainty, excitement, sadness, fear, hope and a million other emotions. There is no greater comfort than knowing our God is steadfast. He who created the heavens and earth also created my children and holds them in the palm of his hand. Parents, I know all the emotions you're going through during this season of change. What's more, he knows. Our eternal God knows you intimately and you can count on him. During this season, trust him to do amazing things in your family and with your child.

#### What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Psalm 102:23-28

1. What did God do in the beginning?
2. After the earth and heavens perish, who will remain?
3. Look up Psalm 102:12. Where is God and how long will He be there?

#### What Do You Think

How does knowing that God is eternal help you trust him in your circumstances today?

#### What R U Going To Do

Ask your parents to help you make a mobius strip. A mobius strip has no beginning or end. Share with your parents how this is like God.

#### Core Comp

Trinity - I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

#### Memory Verse

James 1:17 - *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.*

### KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse \_\_\_\_\_, completed *Scrolls* \_\_\_\_\_, brought Bible \_\_\_\_\_, brought a friend \_\_\_\_\_.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_ Parent's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

# 30 CORE COMPETENCIES

## 10 CORE BELIEFS

### **Trinity** *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

### **Salvation By Grace** *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Authority of the Bible** *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

### **Personal God** *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

### **Identity in Christ** *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

### **Church** *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

### **Humanity** *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

### **Compassion** *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

### **Eternity** *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

### **Stewardship** *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

## 10 CORE PRACTICES

### **Worship** *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

### **Prayer** *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Bible Study** *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Single-mindedness** *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

### **Spiritual Gifts** *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

### **Biblical Community** *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

### **Giving Away My Time** *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Money**

*2 Corinthians 8:7*

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Faith** *Ephesians*

*6:19-20*

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Life** *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

## 10 CORE VIRTUES

### **Joy** *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

### **Peace** *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

### **Faithfulness** *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

### **Self-Control** *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

### **Humility** *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

### **Love** *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

### **Patience** *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

### **Kindness/Goodness** *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

### **Gentleness** *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

### **Hope** *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

## About the Authors

**Tom Bulick** (M.A. in Educational Leadership, Eastern Michigan University, Th.M. in Old Testament, and Ph.D. in Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary). For more than forty years, Tom has served as pastor, faculty member, and administrator. Tom was Vice President for Student Life and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University (Vancouver, B.C.) for twelve years before accepting the position of Spiritual Formation Pastor at Pantego Bible Church in 1998. He and his wife Ruth have one son, Zach.

**Stephanie Thomas** (B.B.A. University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James, and they have four children: Elijah, Levi, Ella, and Simon. She and James are Sphephers of the Bailey Community Group. She has attended Pantego Bible Church for more than twenty years and has been on staff for more than five years.



8001 Anderson Blvd.  
Ft. Worth, TX 76120  
1-866-PANTEGO  
Fax 817-275-6403  
[www.pantego.org](http://www.pantego.org)

The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you Belong, Become, and go Beyond as follower of Jesus Christ through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is [tbulick@pantego.org](mailto:tbulick@pantego.org).