

Personal change — easier said than done

By Katharine Bird
NC News Service

As the man walked into his home, he heard angry voices upstairs. He couldn't make out the words but then he didn't need to: he knew. His wife and daughter were arguing about the disreputable state of the daughter's bedroom.

The same scene had been repeated every weekend for the past year.

Distressed, the man stood indecisively in the hall. Then his wife came angrily down the stairs.

Eventually the man went up to his daughter's room and found what he expected — chaos, a jumble of toys and clothes piled high. Now he too felt angry.

As always, the scene ended in an impasse with everyone thoroughly upset. The family felt caught in a troublesome pattern that kept repeating itself. But they didn't know how to change it.

Does that scenario sound familiar? Though it seems incredible that the same kinds of tensions can be repeated week after deadly week, according to psychologists people tend to pedal fast rather than change their established routines. By and large, the prospect of personal change is frightening.

As psychologist Howard Bregman of Arlington, Va., said, people will put up with an "astounding" level of discomfort to avoid change. No matter how uncomfortable they are, it's "easier dealing with what's known than with the unknown," added the marriage and family counselor.

People resist, the counselor said, because every personal change "involves a tradeoff. You have to give up something to get something."

He offered the example of the alcoholic who says he can't quit drinking or "he'll lose his wife." Explaining the seeming contradiction in the man's statement, Bregman said the alcoholic often finds a protective shield in alcohol. But then, having developed a rather poor way of thinking about himself, he's afraid to stop drinking and face himself. He may

regard himself as "worthless."

Yet, despite people's reluctance, psychologists and religious leaders alike emphasize that change is an



important human task. And it is possible.

Bregman commented that people have to change throughout life or they begin living in the past. The major religions recognize this need, finding a time in their yearly cycle to focus on self-evaluation and the potential for personal change.

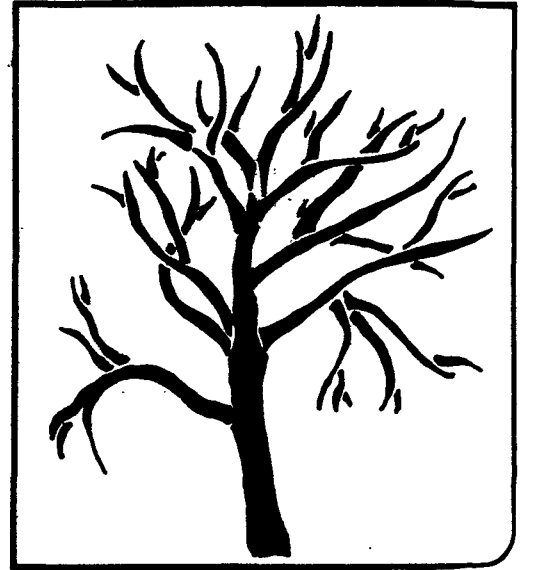
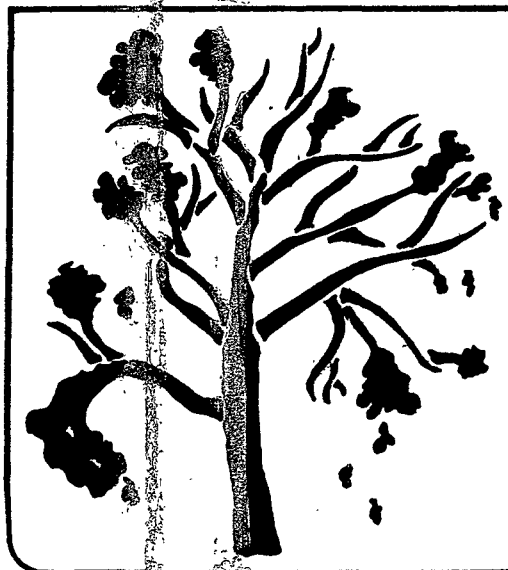
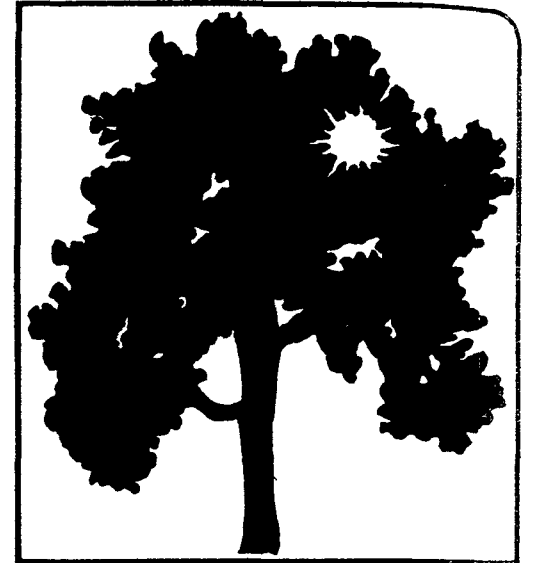
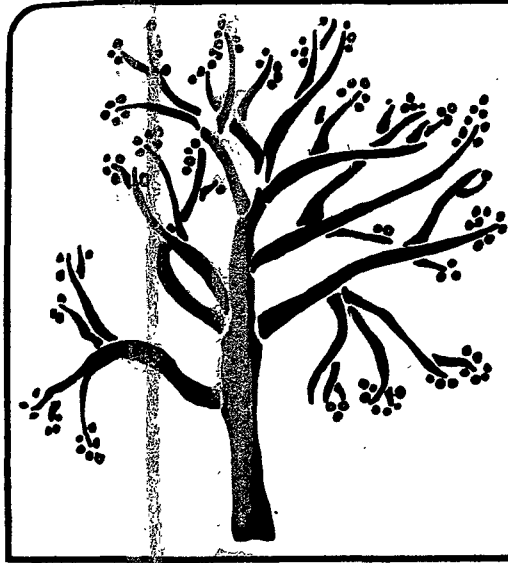
For Christians, he added, Lent provides an opportunity "to assess relationships to God, to other persons and to the world."

In Bregman's experience, it is often a crisis that forces a person to take steps to change an established pattern. A crisis may stem from a variety of sources. Sometimes, he added, "It involves the risk of a loss," such as a spouse threatening to leave an unhappy marriage.

What about the family that argued over the state of their child's room? In that case the husband and wife decided a change was necessary and sought professional help.

Making a decision to seek change is only the first step. Bregman stressed that much more will be needed — including support and encouragement from others. Some people are so unforgiving of themselves that they consider "any small failure a total failure," he said. That in itself can get in the way of personal change.

(Ms. Bird is an associate editor of Faith Today.)



LENTEN seasoning

Breathing new life into those dried up bones

By Father John Castelot
NC News Service

God's people were in exile in Babylon. They had no hope of ever getting home again. The prophet Ezekiel was hard-pressed to keep the Israelites' hopes alive.

In fact, Ezekiel needed to have his own hopes bolstered. They were bolstered when he was favored with an encouraging vision, the vision of the dry bones.

In his vision, Ezekiel describes the Lord leading him into the center of a vast plain. It is littered with human bones — dry, scattered, utterly lifeless.

Ezekiel hears the Lord asking him: "Son of man, can these bones come to life?" To this Ezekiel could only reply: "Lord God, you alone know that."

The Lord told Ezekiel to prophesy over the bones, saying, "Dry bones, hear the word of

the Lord." As the prophet watched, the bones started to come together, clickety-clack, clickety-clack. Soon they were covered with sinew and flesh, but remained lifeless.

Once again the Lord told Ezekiel to prophesy in his name with the words, "From the four winds come, O spirit, and breathe into these slain that they may come to life." Ezekiel did as he was told and suddenly a wind sprang up, symbol of the creative spirit of the Lord.

The wind brought life to the skeletons and soon a vast army stood in attention in the plain. Then God reproved the people for losing hope and saying, "Our bones are dried up, our hope is lost and we are cut off."

He entrusted Ezekiel with a reassuring promise: "O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them and bring you

back to the land of Israel."

Ezekiel's vision conveys a message. Neither as a people nor as individuals need we ever give up hope. God can go as far as the grave to recreate us. Raising his son from the dead was assurance of this.

Matthew's Gospel speaks of Jesus' death and resurrection in a way that recalls Ezekiel's vision: "Suddenly...the earth quaked, boulders split, tombs opened. Many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After Jesus' resurrection they came forth from their tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to man."

This is the prospect Lent holds out: victory over death. "I have promised, and I will do it, says the Lord."

It means that Lent is a season of hope, of promises. It points to the possibilities for new life.

By Pat
NC News

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