

Inner Development and Social Change Quotes

- “If there is righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character. If there is beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the home. If there is harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation. If there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world.”
— Confucius
- “Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise, so I am changing myself.” — Rumi
- “When I was a young man, I wanted to change the world.

I found it was difficult to change the world, so I tried to change my nation.

When I found I couldn't change the nation, I began to focus on my town. I couldn't change the town and as an older man, I tried to change my family.

Now, as an old man, I realize the only thing I can change is myself, and suddenly I realize that if long ago I had changed myself, I could have made an impact on my family. My family and I could have made an impact on our town. Their impact could have changed the nation and I could indeed have changed the world.” — Attributed to an unknown monk, ca. 1100 A.D.

- “Love your neighbor as yourself.” — Mk. 12:31; first you have to love yourself
- “Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye.” — Mt. 7:3—5
- “I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples.” — St. Teresa of Calcutta
- “The fruit of silence is prayer; the fruit of prayer is faith; the fruit of faith is love; the fruit of love is service; the fruit of service is peace.” — St. Teresa of Calcutta
- “There is a widely quoted Saint Teresa of Calcutta saying that goes, ‘If you want to bring peace to the whole world, go home and love your family.’ It’s a great quote. Very pithy. Unfortunately, she didn’t actually quite say it.

At the end of her 1984 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, what she said was, ‘And so, my prayer for you is that truth will bring prayer in our homes, and from the foot of prayer will be that we believe that in the poor it is Christ. And we will really believe, we will begin to love. And we will love naturally, we will try to do something. First in our own home, next door neighbor in the country we live, in the whole world.’” — Kendra Tierney

- “As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world – that is the myth of the atomic age – as in being able to remake ourselves.” — Gandhi
- “If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him ... We need not wait to see what others do.” — Gandhi
- “I really see no other solution than to turn inwards and to root out all the rotteness there. I no longer believe that we can change anything in the world until we first change ourselves. And that seems to me the only lesson to be learned.” — Etty Hillesum
- “Ultimately, we have just one moral duty: to reclaim large areas of peace in ourselves, more and more peace, and to reflect it toward others. And the more peace there is in us, the more peace there will also be in our troubled world.” — Etty Hillesum
- “Each of us must turn inward and destroy in himself all that he thinks he ought to destroy in others.” — Etty Hillesum
- “Before you speak of peace, you must first have it in your heart.” — Francis of Assisi
- “When a man starts out to build a world, He starts first with himself.” — Langston Hughes
- “The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast.” — Benedict XVI, Homily for the Solemn Inauguration of the Petrine Ministry (24 April 2005): AAS 97 (2005), 710
- “Non—violence was not simply a political tactic which was supremely useful and efficacious in liberating his people from foreign rule . . . the spirit of non—violence sprang from an inner realization of spiritual unity in himself. The whole Gandhian concept of non—violent action...is incomprehensible if it is thought to be a means of achieving unity rather than as the fruit of inner unity already achieved.” — Thomas Merton, “Gandhi and the One—Eyed Giant,” introduction to *Gandhi on Non-violence: Selected Texts from Mohandas K. Gandhi’s Non-violence in Peace and War* (New Directions: ©1964, 1965), 6.

- “Young people say, What good can one person do? What is the sense of our small effort? They cannot see that we must lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time; we can be responsible only for the one action of the present moment. But we can beg for an increase of love in our hearts that will vitalize and transform all our individual actions, and know that God will take them and multiply them, as Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes.” — Dorothy Day, *Loaves and Fishes* (Orbis Books: 1997, ©1963), 176.

- “In the 1950s, Dorothy Day writes a friend: ‘The older I get, the more I meet people, the more convinced I am that we must only work on ourselves, to grow in grace. The only thing we can do about people is love them.’ Maybe it’s old age, but I agree with her. Epilogue.” — Greg Boyle, *The Whole Language: The Power of Extravagant Tenderness*, 223.

- “The specific experience I’m talking about has given me one certainty: Consciousness precedes being, and not the other way around, as Marxists claim. For this reason, the salvation of this human world lies nowhere else than in the human heart, in the human power to reflect, in human modesty, in human responsibility. Without a global revolution in the sphere of human consciousness, nothing will change for the better.” — Vaclav Havel, Address to US Congress, February 22, 1990

- Writer Pico Iyer also observes this in his 2015 conversation with Krista: “Our outer lives are only as good as our inner lives,” he says. “So to neglect our inner lives is really to incapacitate our outer lives. We don’t have so much to give to other people or the world or our job or our kids.”

- “We’re trying to change the world, but we have to change ourselves, because we are a microcosm of the macrocosm. We must change ourselves in order to change the world.” — Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons, professor of religion and former Freedom Rider and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) activist

- “Wanting to reform the world without discovering one's true self is like trying to cover the world with leather to avoid the pain of walking on stones and thorns. It is much simpler to wear shoes.” — Ramana Maharshi

- “We do not think ourselves into new ways of living, we live ourselves into new ways of thinking.” — Richard Rohr

- “If we do not transform our pain, we will most assuredly transmit it — usually to those closest to us: our family, our neighbors, our co-workers, and, invariably, the most vulnerable, our children.” — Richard Rohr

- “Don't ask the world to change...you change first. Then you'll get a good enough look at the world so that you'll be able to change whatever you think out to be changed. Take the obstruction out of your own eye.” — Anthony de Mello, SJ, *Awareness: A de Mello Spirituality Conference in His Own Words*, pg. 151
- “It is from the oppression of your programming that you need to be liberated. Only then will you experience that inner freedom from which all social revolution must arise for the powerful emotion, the passion that arises in your heart at the sight of social evils and impels you to action, will have its origin in reality, not in your programming or your ego.” — Anthony de Mello, SJ, *The Way to Love: The Last Meditations of Anthony de Mello*, pg. 18
- “You cannot hope to build a better world without improving the individuals. To that end, each of us must work for his own improvement, and at the same time share a general responsibility for all humanity, our particular duty being to aid those to whom we think we can be most useful.” — Scientist Marie Curie on the importance of self—improvement; Source: Pierre Curie
- “We're not on our journey to save the world but to save ourselves. But in doing that you save the world. The influence of a vital person vitalizes.” — Joseph Campbell
- “If you want to change the world you have to change the metaphor.” — Joseph Campbell
- “The greatest revolution of our generation is the discovery that human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives.” — William James
- “What is the relation of [contemplation] to action? Simply this. He who attempts to act and do things for others or for the world without deepening his own self—understanding, freedom, integrity, and capacity to love, will not have anything to give others. He will communicate to them nothing but the contagion of his own obsessions, his aggressiveness, his ego—centered ambitions, his delusions about ends and means, his doctrinaire prejudices and ideas. There is nothing more tragic in the modern world than the misuse of power and action.” — Thomas Merton
- “What does our happiness have to do with addressing the suffering of the world? In short, the more we heal our own pain, the more we can turn to the pain of others. But in a surprising way, what the Archbishop and the Dalai Lama were saying is that the way we heal our own pain is actually by turning to the pain of others. It is a virtuous cycle. The more we turn toward others, the more joy we experience, and the more joy we experience, the more we can bring joy to others. The goal is not just to create joy for ourselves but, as the Archbishop poetically phrased it, ‘to be a reservoir of joy, an oasis of peace, a pool of

serenity that can ripple out to all those around you.’ As we will see, joy is in fact quite contagious. As is love, compassion, and generosity.” — His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu and Douglas Carlton Abrams, *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World*, pg. 63

- “But the true joyfulness comes from helping others. This way you get more satisfaction. So that kind of thinking about joyfulness is really an important factor in building a happy society, peaceful society. In order to create a peaceful family, first the individual person himself or herself should create inner peace, joyfulness. Then share with other family members. In that way one family, ten families, a hundred families. This way we can change and bring happier community, happier society, then happier humanity. Seven billion human beings, we all have the same desire, same right to achieve happy life.” — His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu and Douglas Carlton Abrams, *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World*, pg. 295
- “The more we make a different choice, to heal our own suffering, the more we can turn to others and help to address their suffering with the laughter—filled, tear—stained eyes of the heart. And the more we turn away from our self—regard to wipe the tears from the eyes of another, the more — incredibly — we are able to bear, to heal, and to transcend our own suffering. This was their true secret to joy.” — His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu and Douglas Carlton Abrams, *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World*, pg. 305
- “Then tell me, Critias, how will a man choose the ruler that shall rule over him? Will he not choose a man who has first established order in himself, knowing that any decision that has its spring from anger or pride or vanity can be multiplied a thousandfold in its effects upon the citizens?” — attributed to Plato in the Pulitzer Prize-winning play “The Skin of Our Teeth”
- “What is more important to bring about change as a society, changed individuals or a changed social structure? The answer to that is very simple because if you don’t start out with individuals who are determined to change something, you will never get a political consensus.” — Bayard Rustin, found in [“Remembering Bayard Rustin: The Man Behind the March on Washington”](#), *Throughline from NPR*
- As Jack Jezreel, founder of JustFaith puts it, “The world cannot be changed by love to become just unless we are changed by love to become whole, but we cannot be made whole without engaging in the work of making the world whole. Personal transformation and social transformation are one piece.”

- “Spirituality is both fuel and oxygen for social and political change.” — Omar McRoberts, Associate Professor of Sociology, The University of Chicago
 - “Far from being irrational distractions, emotions, along with transformed mental attitudes, are critical to achieving social change.” — Aldon Morris, “[From Civil Rights to Black Lives Matter](#)”, *Scientific American*, 3 Feb. 2021
 - “Lewis’s point is that prayer transforms us. If we are praying for a sick friend, it may be time to visit her. If we are praying for someone who is struggling with money, it may be time to offer him a loan. If we are praying for someone who is lonely, it may be time for a phone call. In these ways, prayer can soften our hearts and spur us to action.” — James Martin, *Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone*, pg. 106
- Research to follow with [Fetzer \(video\)](#) and Synergos: [Inner Work for Social Change](#)
 - Current [research](#) at the [Wellbeing Project](#)
 - [Parker Palmer talk](#) on “the link between inner work and institutional and social transformation.”