

4 Keys to How God Brings Transition

God has designed change to be a process, not an event. Getting to the next level does not happen quickly. Successful transition takes time.

Certainly God is interested in the end result of the changes He orchestrates in our lives, but the growth and maturity that accompany transition are also very important to Him. For this reason, He typically works diligently, deliberately and more slowly than you and I might want.

Nevertheless, His timing is perfect. And the entire transition process is part of a grand plan for your life that will bring you great joy and fulfillment as you patiently cooperate with it.

Little by Little

One Scripture that helps us understand God's approach to change is Deuteronomy 7:22: "The Lord your God will drive out those nations before you, little by little. You will not be allowed to eliminate them all at once, or the wild animals will multiply around you" (NIV).

Moses spoke these words to the people of Israel concerning their journey into the Promised Land. When the people looked around, they could easily see that in order to get to the place God promised, they needed to subdue nations that were larger and stronger than they were. This caused them to be very nervous and afraid.

The people knew that intense battles lay ahead of them, and they were not sure they could win. But Moses knew that God's heart was for them to triumph over their formidable enemies, and he knew that God had a strategy for victory and

deliverance.

What was God's plan? Basically, one step at a time, "little by little." The Israelites could not expect God to reach down from heaven, wipe out their enemies in one mighty sweep of His hand and give them a clear path to the Promised Land. No, in His wisdom, God knew they needed to fight for the land because when they arrived in it, they would need the strength and confidence they had gained through having to overcome along the way.

I know that God has a land of promise for you. I believe He has put vision and desires in your heart, and in your inmost being you can hear His destiny calling.

Like the children of Israel, you are on a journey toward the full possession of His promises to you, and also like them, you will face opposition as you go. But God has the same strategy for victory in your life as He had for His people centuries ago: little by little. You will get where He wants you to go one step at a time. One day at a time. One victory at a time.

God will not eliminate all the opposition against you at one time, nor will He set you in your land of promise without taking you through the experiences necessary for you to learn the lessons and develop the strength you will need in the new place, in the place your transition is taking you. Rather, He will take out your enemies, eliminating them one by one. This will take time.

Remove and Replace

If God were suddenly to remove all the obstacles before you, you would find yourself facing a big void, and this could pose a danger for you. God told the Israelites through Moses, "You will not be allowed to eliminate them all at once, or the wild animals will multiply around you" (Deut. 7:22).

The New King James Version of this Scripture says, "Lest the beasts of the field become too numerous for you." In other words, unless God drove out the enemies slowly, the wild animals would become more dangerous to them than the armies of other nations had been.

Instead of speedily eliminating the opposition, God wants to remove and replace. He will do this with attitudes, mind-sets, circumstances, relationships and anything else that would keep you from being fully prepared and equipped to possess the promises He has given you. For example, where you are afraid, He will orchestrate a situation that will help you overcome your fear and replace it with faith.

If you are in debt, and you need a breakthrough in finances, He may send you additional work so that your bondage to your bills can be replaced with financial freedom. If there is someone in your life who would be a liability to you in the future, He may remove that person and lead you to develop a relationship with someone who has the heart and ability to be a blessing at your next level.

Such significant changes in your life will require time and patience; so don't get frustrated in the process. Remain thankful in the time of preparation, and stay positive about the great endeavors for which God is training you. As He removes the things that would hinder you and replaces them with things that will help you, He is developing you into a strong, wise, well-equipped warrior who is able to emerge from every battle victoriously.

Change and Your Relationships

One element of transition that certainly applies to everyone is the fact that change is not a private matter. Your moving to the next level will impact the other people in your life—your spouse, your children, your church staff and business or ministry team.

In the mid-1970s, I became senior pastor of Trinity Christian Centre in Singapore. It was a small church when I started, but over the years, it grew to become one of the largest churches in the nation.

After I had been pastoring for a few years, I began to realize that I needed to prepare for a transition in the church's leadership. Although I was not planning for it to happen in the immediate future, I knew the day would come when I would step aside, and someone else would become the senior leader. I also realized it was going to take years for this to become a reality.

My transition took at least 10 years. Ideally, if you are in pastoral leadership, you want approximately five years to watch the potential new leader develop and to check his or her character and motives. Then for the next five years, you would want to prepare the person to handle the pressures and the scope of the position.

If you are pressured into a shorter time period, know that the transition might be bumpier than a well-planned shift in leadership. You may find it more difficult to groom the new leader in all the areas necessary for successful transition.

Those of you who are pressed for time should seek the help of someone from the outside who has made a successful transition. Look for an individual with a strong apostolic anointing in this area for spiritual guidance and wisdom.

In Singapore, by God's grace, I understood that transition would take time. I started very early because I wanted to make sure that the leadership transition went smoothly and would result in greater blessings for the new leader and for the congregation. My approach has always been to develop leaders, so instead of resigning from the church and leaving them to search for a new pastor, I began to take note of various people on my staff who might be qualified for the position. I

started doing this years before a new pastor would be needed.

Over a period of time, from a pool of possible candidates, I identified the man whom I believed to be God's choice to lead the church. I worked with him and helped him learn the things he would need to know as the senior leader, although he was not aware that he had been chosen as the new leader, until the last three years before my departure.

I encouraged him to develop skills he had not needed before, and I made sure he had new opportunities for interaction with our large staff, the congregation and leaders. Everyone needed time to adjust to the coming change. And the church needed to get to know and love the new leader through personal contact with him, and familiarity with his preaching and leadership styles.

By the time the transition actually took place in 2005, the new leader was equipped for his new position, and the congregation was eager to embrace him. Under his leadership, the church is growing, thriving and impacting more lives for God than ever before. Along with God's grace and the leading of the Holy Spirit, a deliberate, strategic process allowed enough time for a successful transition.

You may be thinking, *But I am not a pastor, so how can this help me?* It can help you see the deliberate process involved in transitioning effectively. In my case, there were many others who needed time to prepare for a change in leadership: the board, pastoral staff members who had served with me for years, other levels of leaders who had served faithfully and the whole congregation.

For you, it may be your spouse, extended family members, your children, neighbors and friends. Remember, transition is never a private affair, and the preparation it requires for everyone involved cannot happen hurriedly.

Wait Patiently

In God, even the longest wait has meaning and purpose. He redeems time and restores the years the locusts have eaten (Joel 2:25). You can have confidence that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28, NIV). Not one minute of your seemingly protracted journey is a waste of time. See it instead as a priceless opportunity for learning and growth.

Anyone familiar with the human body knows that a woman cannot give birth to a child the week after she becomes pregnant. Her body needs time to stretch and adjust to the new life that is forming within her. Her mind needs to get used to the idea of being a mother, and she probably needs to prepare her home for the presence of a newborn.

At the same time, one week after conception, no one can tell whether an embryo is a boy or a girl. No matter how much the new parents would want to buy clothes and paint a nursery right then, it is best to give the baby time to develop so the parents can make the right choices about those things.

In time, the baby will grow. Hands and feet and eyes will be evident. A heart and a brain and lungs will form. As this is happening, the mother’s body is also changing so that she will be able to deliver the baby at the proper time.

If a baby is born prematurely, the child could have serious problems or may not even live. But given enough time to develop naturally, the baby will be strong and healthy, and the mother will be prepared to deliver and care for this new life.

Likewise, many things in your life will need time to develop as your destiny unfolds. As you move up to the next level, during your transition, vital developments are taking place in you that are essential for your growth and future effectiveness.

God wants to bless you, but He needs to make sure you are wise enough and mature enough to handle the blessings He gives. That, my friend, is going to take time.

Therefore, let me encourage you right now to determine to be patient as you move into your new season. Do not try to change things quickly for yourself or rush ahead of God's timing. Embrace the process of transition and begin moving on and moving up—now.

Read a companion devotional.

Naomi Dowdy *is widely respected as a global Christian leader.*