

The Key to Succeeding During Disruption

Change is not simply a season in our spiritual journeys; it is a process we undergo for the whole of life.

As her labor pains intensified, I watched in amazement as my typically sweet-natured, mild-mannered wife took on the appearance of Sigourney Weaver in *Alien*. In one startling moment her peaceful appearance was replaced by a taut jaw, steely eyes and the bark of a drill sergeant preparing young soldiers for the battle of their lives. The thin line of sweat that had formed on her brow began to pulsate in rhythm with her temples.

I wanted to run for my life, to get as far away from this frightening creature as I could. But the next moment she was back to normal—normal, that is, for a pregnant woman about to give birth.

For a moment I wondered at the amazing transformation I had just witnessed. Was she possessed? Should I call the church intercessors? Was this the time to order the anointing oil I had seen advertised in *Charisma*?

Then I remembered the warning of the wise old doctor who had done everything within his ability to prepare my wife for this moment: “Transition is unlike anything you have ever felt before.” Suddenly, it all became clear to me. This was it—the dreaded stage called “transition.”

The lessons I learned on that stormy night 15 years ago have enabled me to keep my sanity during many other transitional experiences in my life, both natural and spiritual. Here’s what I’ve discovered.

Transition Is Unavoidable

The inescapable reality of life in the 21st century is "Change, or you will be changed." If there is anything we've learned from the last few years of experience in doing life, it's that the near future holds anything but the expected. We live in the midst of changing times.

Gone are the days of predictability and routine. Those frameworks that have held firm for generations, providing the basic structure of life, have begun to falter. The concepts that have governed business, science, government and philosophy no longer seem to apply. The traditional formulas for interpersonal relationships cannot guarantee the same results they once did.

And no one has felt the pain of transition any more than women.

As women have begun to take a more visible role in shaping our world, they have experienced the direct effects of transitional living. Fifty years ago, it was unheard of to have women as heads of state, industry and education, yet now they lead us capably and successfully. This social transformation has left women managing the pain of personal transition while also dealing with the pressure of learning new skills.

For years I lived with the idea that we were simply in a season of change, only to wake up one day and realize that this season was unending. Transition is not simply a period of time in our lives; it is the whole of life. In fact, transition is the lifestyle of Spirit-led men and women.

It is vital for us to embrace this truth because if we perceive transition to be only a "momentary affliction," then we will be incredibly disappointed when we move from one period of transition headlong into the next. My wife, being the insightful woman that she is, quickly discovered that the transition of labor leads to the transition of motherhood,

which leads to more transition in every area of life.

What's true of life in general is also true of our relationships with the Lord. As one well acquainted with transition, Paul said that in following Christ we are "transformed ... from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18). The end result of spiritual transition is total and complete glorification; anything less than that will keep us on the road to change.

Like ancient Israel, God created us to be a spiritually nomadic people who travel light along life's journey as we pursue the pillar of fire, the cloud of glory and the ark of His presence. We were created for the journey, not just the destination.

Transition Will Redefine You

For this reason, transition can be frightening, especially for those who have defined themselves by what they do rather than by who they are. I have counseled a number of women who fall into this category:

- Working women who quit their jobs to raise children—"I don't even know who I am anymore without my career."
- Married women who have just gone through a divorce—"If I'm not his wife, who am I?"
- Mothers whose children are now grown—"With our last child out of the nest, I don't know what to do with myself."

I recently experienced a similar identity crisis. After pastoring for 15 years, I went through a six-month period during which I wrote, conducted seminars and spoke in conferences but didn't actively pastor. One day during this period, Tyler, my youngest son, came home from third grade with a question.

“Dad, what are you now?” he asked. I groped for an answer, rambling on about what I was doing. His eyes glazed over.

Tyler was looking for a noun—pastor, lawyer, doctor, teacher—and all I could give him was a string of action words telling him what I was doing. For a few months I struggled with the way transition was redefining me.

But I finally realized that there was no point in trying to get comfortable because as soon as I did, change would appear on the horizon. Just about the time my wife became comfortable in her role as the mother of an infant, the baby began to walk, and our whole world changed. When we moved the breakables to higher shelves and covered the electrical outlets, we realized our world would never be the same.

Although we were eventually able to return the delicate figurines to their original places, we had to make other adjustments in our home and lives as we went from being the parents of a toddler to being the parents of a grade-schooler to being the parents of a teen-ager. Through the process I learned that the only way to avoid transition is to stop growing.

Transition Takes Time to Assimilate

Science teaches us that light travels through space at a constant speed of 186,281 miles per second. The governing laws of the universe dictate this speed with absolutely no deviation.

Yet humans travel through life without the benefit of a fixed velocity. We move at a variable rate that fluctuates according to our capacity for assimilating new information and influences. How well we absorb the implications of change dramatically affects the rate at which we successfully manage the challenges we face—both individually and collectively.

Each of us was designed by God to move through life most

effectively and efficiently at a unique pace that will allow us to absorb and respond to the major changes we face. When we assimilate less change than our optimum speed allows, we fail to live up to our potential. When we attempt to assimilate more than our optimum speed permits, we become overloaded and stressed out.

Many of the women to whom I minister have recently found themselves in an unprecedented state of disequilibrium. They're not quite sure where the world is going and where they fit in the journey; consequently, they feel "out of balance" emotionally, spiritually and physically. As a result of this upheaval, they often find it difficult to maintain a healthy balance between work, rest, worship and play.

The result is that they are allowing change to manage them rather than managing it. This can cause them to become bitter instead of better.

Futurist and author Alvin Toffler was the first to popularize a term that describes the potentially debilitating effects of transitional living when he coined the term "future shock" in 1965. In a book by the same title, he accurately predicted the devastation that could result if we are unable to properly absorb major changes in society.

"Future shock" occurs when people are asked to tolerate more disruption than they have the capacity to endure, and it results in high levels of stress and low levels of effectiveness. A few years ago, I learned that a number of pilots were in open revolt against more technology. These pilots were saying, "Please don't increase the technology in my cockpit. If I can't manage everything in here, you're going to kill me."

It seems the pilots were not complaining about inferior technology. In fact, what they were given was very often equipment they had asked for and even helped to design. But

they were worried about making a rapid transition to new instruments without proper time for assimilation.

We all need time to assimilate the changes that are necessary for our survival. Learning the principles that will allow us to manage change and increase our spiritual resilience is not just a luxury but a necessity.

Find Something to Focus on During Transition

I believe that the greatest challenge we face in life is the challenge to forget the past, consider the present as transitional and focus on the future. When we camp in one spiritual or emotional location for too long, spiritual rigor mortis sets in. To remain where we are is to remain as we are.

Several years ago, I found myself standing in front of a kiosk in the shopping mall, desperately trying to focus on a three-dimensional mosaic picture. I had walked by the booth a hundred times smirking at the silly people wasting their time trying to discern the unseen. After one of my caustic comments, my wife threw down the gauntlet: "All right, wise guy, if it's so easy, let's see you do it!"

I marched confidently over to the booth, picked up the picture and entered a world of total confusion. No matter how hard I tried, I could not see anything but a thousand unrelated pixels.

After allowing me to wallow in my humiliation for a time, my wife finally revealed the secret: "If you get close to the picture, relax your vision and focus on one spot, it will magically appear before your eyes." I finally did, and the picture became clear.

The key to retaining your sanity during the unexpected moments of transitional living is to stay focused on the big picture. Many people find themselves struggling with arrested emotional

and spiritual development because they have lost the power of vision during the process of transition.

What I thought was anger in the delivery room that stormy night in Kansas City was actually the intensity of my wife's focus. When I questioned her attitude, she quickly reminded me of the doctor's advice: "Find something and focus intently on it. It may be a picture, a light bulb or even my bald spot, but whatever you do, don't break your focus."

The same advice can be applied to transitional living. Find one spot on the horizon of your destiny, and focus on it.

Our ability to change determines whether or not we survive. The simple reality is that we have no choice over whether or not we will encounter the force of change in our lifetime. Our power lies in the ability to handle it correctly when we are confronted with it.

If you resist the changes that are necessary to succeed in business, you will eventually file bankruptcy papers. If you refuse to change as your spouse matures, you will eventually file divorce papers. If you resist the changes that are necessary for soul growth, you will eventually face defeat and despair.

In order to survive transitional living, we must make peace with the journey. The challenge to change is not some kind of divine punishment; it is a gracious invitation to rise to a new level of being.

Once you stop resenting the process you can engage in the exciting journey of encountering the unexpected. I challenge you to settle these issues once and for all and get on with the business of being "transformed ... from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18).

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