

When You Don't Want Change

I put out a frantic text to my cohort. "I can see my life shrinking. Soon it won't be bigger than my couch."

This was a critical moment in my recent transitions. We all reach that point—some of you aren't as dramatic as I was. I knew I was in trouble because I couldn't see past the end of my nose. I wanted to curl up in bed and never talk to anyone again ... ever ... unless they had chocolate, then I might say something rude so they'd drop the chocolate and run.

My grown-up brain knew I was in trouble, so I reached out to friends. "Tell me what life is like after the kids move out. Paint a picture for me that brings hope."

This particular wall was brought to you by my second child moving out to start her own life and live with friends. I was proud of her and terrified for me. You see, I have four kids. We managed the oldest going off to school, moving her residence to California and then getting married with only two meltdowns. But this is different. My younger three children have always been like dominoes. Where one goes, the others quickly follow. Within a year we will have all college students and above (my youngest will be in Running Start). The future is here!

This is the time I planned for! Since I was 16 I've planned for this day. I decided very young that the best years of a woman's life are 45 or 50 to 70. I saw it coming and every decision I made was with this time-frame in mind. Yet, here I sat, facing a blank wall of the future. (For those of you who know me, I've been "in transition" for about eight years ... but that's another post.)

Thank God for friends! My girlfriends (cohort) didn't wallow with me. Instead, they prayed. Within a week, I had a plan for transition. I don't have a clear vision of the future, but I

do know that I need to be firmly in transition before the future will show itself. So here is my plan for transition:

The first step in transition is knowing what you are letting go of, and letting go of it. As a pastor, I found the best way to help a family start the transition involved with the death of a loved one was to have them go through photos, remember together the past. So I started. I went to the basement and dug through all the boxes, bins and files of childhood I'd saved for my kids—then I sorted it all into bins: one for each child, one for Wes and myself, and one for genealogy (my mother-in-law's hobby that I'm saving for my children). Then, I went through the pictures, and kept those that might mean something to the kids someday. This phase will be done soon.

The next step in transition is redefining who you are without what you lost. Don't panic. I know I'm not losing my kids, but I am losing:

- Social buffers
- Reasons to interact with others (soccer, anyone?)
- Distraction/excuses
- People who force me to choose to be happy/look on the bright side
- People who force me to create a schedule

So, as I redefine who I am, I am going through the rest of the house and systematically culling—which means to gather from many resources and to “reduce a population (of animals) by selective slaughter,” both of which are appropriate here... well, not killing animals, but getting rid of the excess stuff. Everything that we don't have a use for needs to go away. So far, I've discovered that I have three (almost) identical sets of artists pencils. Every time I go on vacation, I buy a new set. Can you imagine how much space I will have?

The third step in transition comes all on its own. New

direction. This comes out of walking through the first two steps. It isn't something you can force—yet I find myself reaching. “Maybe I can do more work here. Maybe I should volunteer to help there. What about ...?” The trick is to sit. Let the process do its work, and wait for God to show up.

I've watched friends go through this phase—and the turn comes suddenly. Within a few days or a week, what was becomes old, and there is a new future on the horizon. So now is the time to settle everything so that it won't be on my to-do list when the new future arrives.

Are you in transition? What is your game plan?

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