

Don't Fear Transition

✖ *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 25 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, NKJV). 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).

Terry Crist is the senior pastor of City of Grace church in Scottsdale, Ariz. He is the author of The Image Maker (Charisma House) and The Language of Babylon (Baker Books).