



Life  
Transitions

## SEASONS OF LIFE

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(1 Chronicles 23)

**C**hange can challenge and grow us. Life transitions are important changes that occur throughout the life cycle from the cradle to the grave. Although some transitions come easy, others roll in like angry tidal waves, leaving total devastation in their path. Transitions can be as simple as leaving a comfortable bed to begin a new day; they can be as painful as having to learn to go on alone after losing a lifetime mate.

We can allow the seasons of change to transform us, or we can resist them. To resist these changes will complicate the process, since resistance will inevitably retard and restrict the transforming power of life transitions.

### **LIFE IS A PERPETUAL TRANSITION**

In the earliest stages of life, we are not consciously aware of the changes that are occurring and the transitions we are making. As we continue our development, we become more conscious of the changes that are taking place in our lives. At this point, it becomes healthy and necessary to recognize the inevitable role changes and transitions play in our personal development. Passively sitting by while "nature takes its course" will prove to be a self-defeating decision. Rather, we can decide to be aggressively engaged in becoming the people God intended us to be by learning to navigate the passages and transitions of life.

### **PARADOXES OF LIFE TRANSITIONS**

There is a rhythm of opposite seasons recorded in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. Without opposites, how do we know the reality of any experience? For example, how would we know darkness without light? How do people know they are well if they have never been sick? We read, "To everything there is a season . . . a time to weep, and a time to laugh" (Eccl. 3:1, 4). Life transitions

are both predictable and unpredictable. Like the four seasons, certain seasons of life are predictable, but many of them are not. None of us can predict our seasons of weeping and laughter or our season of death. A personal crisis, such as divorce or loss of a job, can suddenly thrust any one of us into unexpected change.

Life transitions can be both sad and joyful, as there is "a time to mourn, and a time to dance" (Eccl. 3:4). A wedding is usually a time of rejoicing for everyone. But it can also bring sadness with the realization that a season of life is left behind. At the same time, a transition can be full of hope and hopelessness. A newly married couple, full of hope for their union, can soon experience the hopelessness that comes with the inability to resolve their unexpected conflicts.

Life transitions signal an ending and a beginning. The end of a stage of development, such as adolescence, signals the beginning of both the freedom and responsibility of young adulthood. Sometimes it is difficult to envision a beginning while experiencing the loss that comes from an ending. We must give ourselves permission to grieve our endings, and be encouraged by the hope of new beginnings.

### **HANDLING LIFE TRANSITIONS**

Life transitions are inevitable. Accepting this reality is the first step necessary to

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effectively handling life's passages. We can avoid, or even prevent, some painful changes, but transitions are ultimately a way of life for everyone. Accepting this truth enables us to embrace life with its seasons of growth and development. For example, when we suffer grief through a death, divorce, or other significant loss, we can choose to remain angry, depressed, and hopeless, or we can choose to allow the pain to forge a passage into a new, hopeful, and meaningful life.

The second step is to allow change to work. Transitions help us become who we were meant to be. "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). When struggling with change, it is comforting to know that God is manipulating the situation for good. Because this is true, it makes sense to stop the resistance and go with the flow! Our faith has really kicked in when we are able to submit ourselves and our life transitions to God (1 Pet. 5:6).

The third step is perseverance—the ability to hang in there during difficult circumstances. "And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope" (Rom. 5:3, 4). God wants His children to grow strong spiritual muscles. He actually forces them to grow deep spiritual roots so they will be able to endure the storms of life (1 Pet. 1:6, 7). Character can be cultivated as we persevere through the pain of change. When we're passing through a painful transition, God's promises give hope. Hope when we are hopeless can come only through a relationship with the God who gives us such promises as: "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11).

The final step is to wait for the purposes of God to unfold. When a change is painful, we can trust that God has a purpose in it. We, like nature, require the winter seasons for renewal and growth. For Christians, death is the last life transition—a passage from winter into an eternal spring. Awaiting us at the end of our final passage, Jesus will say: "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For lo, the winter is past" (Song 2:10, 11).

#### **FURTHER MEDITATION:**

Other passages to study about the issue of life transitions include:

- > Psalm 16:7
- > Proverbs 20:29; 23:22
- > Malachi 3:6
- > 1 Corinthians 13:11
- > Galatians 6:9

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To Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on life transitions at Ecclesiastes 3:1-11 on page 854. See also the personality profile of Timothy on page 1597

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Since all that now *is* will be forgotten in the days to come.  
And how does a wise *man* die?  
As the fool!

<sup>17</sup>Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun *was* distressing to me, for all *is* vanity and grasping for the wind.

<sup>18</sup>Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me. <sup>19</sup>And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will rule over all my labor in which I toiled and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also *is* vanity. <sup>20</sup>Therefore I turned my heart and despaired of all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun. <sup>21</sup>For there is a man whose labor *is* with wisdom, knowledge, and skill; yet he must leave his heritage to a man who has not labored for it. This also *is* vanity and a great evil. <sup>22</sup>For what has man for all his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun? <sup>23</sup>For all his days *are* sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also *is* vanity.

<sup>24</sup>Nothing *is* better for a man *than* that he should eat and drink, and *that* his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God. <sup>25</sup>For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, *more* than I?<sup>a</sup> <sup>26</sup>For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a

man who *is* good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to *him who is* good before God. This also *is* vanity and grasping for the wind.

EVERYTHING HAS ITS TIME

**3** To everything *there is* a season,  
**A time** for every purpose under heaven:

- <sup>2</sup> A time to be born,  
And a time to die;  
A time to plant,  
And a time to pluck *what is* planted;
- <sup>3</sup> A time to kill,  
And a time to heal;  
A time to break down,  
And a time to build up;
- <sup>4</sup> A time to weep,  
And a time to laugh;  
A time to mourn,  
And a time to dance;
- <sup>5</sup> A time to cast away stones,  
And a time to gather stones;  
A time to embrace,  
And a time to refrain from embracing;
- <sup>6</sup> A time to gain,  
And a time to lose;

**2:25** <sup>a</sup>Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; some Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, and Syriac read *without Him*.

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**THE GOD-GIVEN**  
<sup>9</sup>What profit which he labors task with which cupied. <sup>11</sup>He has its time. Also hearts, except t work that God c <sup>12</sup>I know that to rejoice, and t also that every enjoy the good God.

<sup>14</sup> I know tha It shall be Nothing ca And nothir God does t Him.  
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KEY PASSAGE

A TIME FOR EVERYTHING

(3:1-11)



Life Transitions

In beautiful poetry, Solomon reminds his readers that life continues to march on through a series of inevitable transitions. There are times for birth, death, weeping, laughing, mourning, dancing, silence, speaking, and even war and peace. People cannot control these situations, and their reactions to them are natural. Sometimes laughter is the only response, sometimes tears. Without God, powerful contrasts cause people pain and indicate meaninglessness in life.

As joyous or painful as they may be, these are natural transitions. If people have God in their lives, they can trust Him through the changes, knowing that every day that passes brings them closer to their eternal destiny in the presence of God Himself. Solomon observed that God “has put eternity in their hearts” (3:11). Nothing short of the promise of eternity can give true meaning to the changes and transitions of this life.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about life transitions on pages 540, 541. See also the personality profile of Timothy on page 1597.

tinues in supplications and prayers night and day. <sup>6</sup>But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives. <sup>7</sup>And these things command, that they may be blameless. <sup>8</sup>But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

<sup>9</sup>Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, *and not unless* she has been the wife of one man, <sup>10</sup>well reported for

good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work.

<sup>11</sup>But refuse *the* younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, <sup>12</sup>having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith. <sup>13</sup>And besides they learn *to be* idle,

### PERSONALITY PROFILE



#### Life Transitions

## TIMOTHY: LOTS OF CHANGES

(1 TIMOTHY 4:12-16)

Timothy had experienced many changes throughout his young life. When he received this letter from Paul, he was already the pastor of the large church that Paul had planted in Ephesus. Yet Timothy was still a young man, for Paul encouraged him by writing, "Let no one despise your youth." So it seems Timothy had come a long way in a short time.

Timothy had been born of a Jewish mother and a Greek father, and had received religious training through his mother and grandmother. When the great apostle Paul made his way to Lystra, he met this young man who appeared to have great potential. Because Timothy "was well spoken of by the brethren" (Acts 16:2), Paul invited him to join his second missionary journey.

Timothy seems to have been somewhat timid, for Paul often encouraged him in these letters. With a man like Paul behind him, Timothy could hardly help but grow into a strong leader. Paul entrusted him with several important missions, some of which consisted of traveling in Paul's place when he was imprisoned or detained for some reason.

Life is filled with change. We grow; we develop; we mature. Some people go through many changes before becoming Christians. Others are fortunate enough to come to the Lord at a young age and experience their changes with Him. Hopefully, the changes we experience help us grow and mature as Timothy did. When we are open to God's will, we never know what surprises He may have for us.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about life transitions on pages 540, 541. See also the key passage note at Ecclesiastes 3:1-11 on page 854.

### SOUL NOTE



**Unwrapped Gifts** (4:14, 15) Paul encouraged Timothy to "not neglect the gift" that God had given him. God gives spiritual gifts to all believers. These gifts include teaching, hospitality, giving, or showing mercy (others are listed in Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4). Each person is responsible for discovering and using their

own gifts for God's kingdom. The variety of gifts is needed in order for the church to function at its best. Not everyone has every gift, so the church needs all believers to be using responsibly the gifts God has chosen to give them. The church is in operating mode when all of its gifts are! **Topic: Responsibility**

<sup>26</sup>But his wife looked back behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.

<sup>27</sup>And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD. <sup>28</sup>Then he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain; and he saw, and behold, the smoke of the land which went up like the smoke of a furnace. <sup>29</sup>And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in which Lot had dwelt.

THE DESCENDANTS OF LOT

<sup>30</sup>Then Lot went up out of Zoar and dwelt in the mountains, and his two daughters were with him; for he was afraid to dwell in Zoar. And he and his two daughters dwelt in a cave. <sup>31</sup>Now the firstborn said to the younger, "Our father *is* old, and *there is* no man on the earth to come in to us as is the custom of all the earth. <sup>32</sup>Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve the lineage of our father." <sup>33</sup>So they made their father drink wine that night. And the firstborn went in and lay with her father, and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose.

<sup>34</sup>It happened on the next day that the firstborn said to the younger, "Indeed I lay with my father last night; let us make him drink wine tonight also, and you go in *and* lie with him, that we may preserve the lineage of our father." <sup>35</sup>Then they made their father drink wine that night also. And the younger arose and lay with him, and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose.

<sup>36</sup>Thus both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father. <sup>37</sup>The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moab; he *is* the father of the Moabites to this day. <sup>38</sup>And the younger,

she also bore a son and called his name Ben-Ammi; he *is* the father of the people of Ammon to this day.

ABRAHAM AND ABIMELECH

**20** And Abraham journeyed from there to the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and stayed in Gerar. <sup>2</sup>Now Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She *is* my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.

<sup>3</sup>But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, "Indeed you *are* a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she *is* a man's wife."

<sup>4</sup>But Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, "Lord, will You slay a righteous nation also? <sup>5</sup>Did he not say to me, 'She *is* my sister'? And she, even she herself said, 'He *is* my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands I have done this."

<sup>6</sup>And God said to him in a dream, "Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. <sup>7</sup>Now therefore, restore the man's wife; for he *is* a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore *her*, know that you shall surely die, you and all who *are* yours."

<sup>8</sup>So Abimelech rose early in the morning, called all his servants, and told all these things in their hearing; and the men were very much afraid. <sup>9</sup>And Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? How have I offended you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done."

<sup>10</sup>Then Abimelech said to Abraham, "What did you have in view, that you have done this thing?"

<sup>11</sup>And Abraham said, "Because I thought, surely the fear of God *is* not in this place; and



SOUL NOTE

**When Changes Come (19:26)** The Bible tells little about Lot's wife except that she "looked back" at Sodom. The angels had dragged Lot and his family out of the doomed city, warning them not to look behind as they fled (19:16, 17). Why did Lot's wife disobey? Did she miss the comfort of the place? Did she fear the unknown future? Change can be difficult, because it means exchanging familiarity for the unknown. But God is with us; He is the constant even as our lives keep changing. He knows what is unknown, so trust Him and don't look back. **Topic: Life Transitions**

they will kill me indeed *she is* truth-ter of my father, mother; and she came to pass, wh from my father. "This *is* your kin me: in every plac "He *is* my brothe <sup>14</sup>Then Abime male and female Abraham; and h him. <sup>15</sup>And Abim before you; dw <sup>16</sup>Then to Sarah your brother a t deed this vindic with you and h was rebuked. <sup>17</sup>So Abraham healed Abimele servants. Then LORD had close



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part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

<sup>13</sup>And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love.

PROPHECY AND TONGUES

**14** Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. <sup>2</sup>For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. <sup>3</sup>But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. <sup>4</sup>He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. <sup>5</sup>I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for <sup>a</sup>he who prophesies *is* greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.

TONGUES MUST BE INTERPRETED

<sup>6</sup>But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you un-

less I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching? <sup>7</sup>Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played? <sup>8</sup>For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle? <sup>9</sup>So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. <sup>10</sup>There

Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:12

are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance. <sup>11</sup>Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks *will be* a foreigner to me. <sup>12</sup>Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, *let it be* for the edification of the church *that* you seek to excel.

<sup>13</sup>Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. <sup>14</sup>For if I pray in a

14:5 <sup>a</sup>NU-Text reads *and*.

SOUL NOTE



**The Gift of Love (13:7)** "Bears all things" means that love shelters or covers. "Believes all things" means that love never loses faith in others and is willing to think the best of them. "Hopes all things" means that love looks forward with optimism, knowing that God works all things together for good. "Endures all things" means that love holds on. In the end, love never fails and it never ends. When we love, we take part in eternity. We can ask God to perfect our love for Him and for others.

Topic: Love

SOUL NOTE



**Grown Up (13:11)** Adults have "put away childish things" when they no longer need bottles or teddy bears. The same is true in the Christian life. New believers need care and guidance to help them learn how to grow in their faith. As we mature, we know how to look to God for guidance for ourselves. As we feed on God's Word, we develop muscles and increase our strength. Even so, our faith will not be complete until we see Christ face to face. Then we will understand everything clearly. In the meantime, we should aim to grow and develop, seeking to be more like Christ every day.

Topic: Life Transitions

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light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; <sup>20</sup>knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation,<sup>a</sup> <sup>21</sup>for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God<sup>a</sup> spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

#### DESTRUCTIVE DOCTRINES

**2** But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. <sup>2</sup>And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. <sup>3</sup>By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judg-

ment has not been idle, and their destruction does<sup>a</sup> not slumber.

#### DOOM OF FALSE TEACHERS

<sup>4</sup>For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast *them* down to hell and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; <sup>5</sup>and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, *one of eight people*, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; <sup>6</sup>and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned *them* to destruction, making *them* an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; <sup>7</sup>and delivered righteous Lot, *who was* oppressed by the filthy

1:20 <sup>a</sup>Or *origin* 1:21 <sup>a</sup>NU-Text reads *but men spoke from God.* 2:3 <sup>a</sup>M-Text reads *will not.*

#### KEY PASSAGE



Values

### MOST VALUABLE?

(1:5-9)

What people value says much about their character. Some people value possessions, position, power, or wealth. But here are listed the life traits believers should value above all else. These values reveal a person's spiritual maturity.

Christians have faith in Christ, but faith that isn't put into action is dead and useless (James 2:17). Dead faith is still faith, but it isn't *doing* anything for God. Alive faith is working faith. It's not to be saved that believers need to add to their faith; they add these characteristics so that they will "be neither barren nor unfruitful." Believers who desire to mature in their faith and be fruitful for Christ will add such characteristics as virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, kindness, and love.

Christ gives us His divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4), but we are responsible to use that nature to set aside sinful desires and follow Him. We have to value Christ above all else.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about values on pages 1544, 1545. See also the personality profile of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego on page 1108.

#### SOUL NOTE



**Last Words (1:13-15)** Peter faced death calmly, knowing that he was merely putting off the "tent" of his body and moving on to be with Christ in heaven. Peter wanted to make sure the believers had a reminder of the gospel message that had brought them salvation, and of the power of God that had brought them true life. Believers should live each day reminding those around them—through words and actions—about the power of God. What legacy are we leaving for our loved ones? If we had to say our last words today, what would we say? **Topic: Life Transitions**