

# Transformational Transitions

Walking with God  
in Seasons of Change

## Review Guide



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# Transformational Transitions

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# Transformational Transitions

## Session 1 – Understanding Transition: Aim for Transformation

### Where we're heading in this session

Personal transformation in Christ is the goal of this study on transition. We are seeking to understand transition and to learn how to navigate transition, but if we ourselves are not changed in the process, then all the information we have gained is not super helpful. So in our learning about transition and our walking through transition, our primary aim is transformation.

That aim of transformation dictates not only the **content** for this study, but also the **means** by which we engage with God and one another in the study.

Our **content** will primarily be from Scripture, (after all, this is a Bible study) but the Bible nowhere directly teaches about transition. Therefore, we will study passages that give a narrative model of transition, as well as passages where transition can be one particular way of applying the general thrust of the passage. In addition, we will also consider other sources of information about transition, to the extent that it is helpful in moving us toward transformation. Our **means** of study and learning is also aimed at transformation. God is the source of our transformation, and we train our hearts to respond to His transforming work through engaging with the truth of His Word, sharing in community with His Body, and relying on His Spirit in the midst of trials. Thus each session will provide opportunities for interacting with God, with one another, and with our own hearts in different ways, in order to foster an openness to the Spirit's work of transformation in us.

Our theme statement points to this aim of transformation:

**Theme statement:** Thriving in transition—in ways that lead to transformation—comes through everyday practices of praying for wisdom, lamenting in community, holding on to hope, stepping out in trust, and maintaining perspective.

We will look at one of those everyday practices in each study and have some exercises to do, so that we're not merely learning *about* these things but actually *practicing* them. The study is structured in three parts: the first two sessions focus on Understanding Transition, the core of five sessions zeroes in on Navigating Transition, and then the final session will pull everything together by looking at Thriving in Transition.

This first session is focused around understanding how transformation and transition go together, so that what we're aiming at is transformation. We want to grow toward maturity in Christ, not just gain some information about transition.

### STUDYING THE WORD

**Read Exodus 34:1-10, 29-35.**

This passage in Exodus gives us the background to the main passage we'll be studying in this session. When God made a covenant with his people Israel and gave them the Law, Moses went up on the mountain to receive the tablets of stone on which God had written his Law. While on the mountain with God, Moses asked God to show him his glory (Exodus 33:18-23), and God allowed him to see only his back. After being on the mountain and seeing even a part of God, and after speaking with him and

receiving the covenant of the Law, when Moses came back to the people he was glowing. Moses had encountered the glory of God.

As Christians, we often speak of the glory of God, but what exactly is glory? If we're to understand what was going on with Moses in his encounter with God, and if we're to understand what our passage in 2 Corinthians is talking about, we need to grasp something of what glory actually means.

### 1. What is a definition of glory?

Pastor John Piper says, "the glory of God is the going public of his infinite worth." Piper defines God's holiness as "the infinite intrinsic worth of God," and when that infinite worth and beauty of God is displayed for all to see, that is his glory. "God's glory is the radiance of his holiness, the radiance of his manifold, infinitely worthy and valuable perfections."<sup>1</sup>

1. <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-gods-glory>

*If you feel it would be helpful for your group, this short (2.5 minutes) video explains about the glory of God: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BdxaOmX-STQ>.*

Another definition of glory is "the weight of the majestic goodness of who God is, and the resulting name, or reputation that he gains from his revelation of himself as Creator, Sustainer, Judge, and Redeemer, perfect in justice and mercy, loving-kindness and truth."<sup>2</sup> In C.S. Lewis' well-known sermon, "The Weight of Glory," Lewis also spoke of glory as both "fame" and "luminosity." In other words, God's infinite goodness and worth grants him acclaim or fame, but at the same time that infinite worth and beauty is displayed in a visible radiance and brightness.

2. J.M. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology*, © 2010 Crossway, page 56.

### 2. What was Moses' experience of glory in this passage?

It was that visible radiance and brightness of God's goodness and fame that Moses experienced on the mountain. The result of Moses' encounter with God's glory was that there was a literal glow radiating from Moses' face. Just like a glow-in-the-dark object that has been exposed to the light for awhile and thus continues to shine, so also Moses' face shone after being in the presence of God's glory. In fact, it shone so much that Moses put a veil over his face when he was with the people.

This is what Paul is writing about in his second letter to the Corinthian church. In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul wants to speak of a kind of glory, but in order to help his readers understand, he compares it with a glory they are already familiar with. He compares it with the glory that was radiating from Moses' face after talking with God and receiving the Law of the Covenant from him. Let's look at what Paul says about both those types of glory: what characterizes them, and how are they different?

### Read 2 Corinthians 3:7-18.

<sup>7</sup>Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, <sup>8</sup>will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? <sup>9</sup>For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. <sup>10</sup>Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have

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no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it.<sup>11</sup> For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory.

<sup>12</sup>Since we have such a hope, we are very bold,<sup>13</sup> not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end.<sup>14</sup> But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away.<sup>15</sup> Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts.<sup>16</sup> But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.<sup>17</sup> Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.<sup>18</sup> And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

3. List some contrasts between the glory that was evident on Moses and the glory that Paul is speaking of in 2 Corinthians 3. **What words or phrases does this passage use to contrast the two types of glory? Write them under each heading.**

Moses' fading glory		The All-Surpassing Glory
<u>ministry of death</u>	(v. 7, v. 8)	<u>ministry of the Spirit</u>
<u>written on tablets of stone</u>	(v. 7, v. 2)	<u>written on tablets of human hearts</u>
<u>fading glory</u>	(v. 10)	<u>exceeding glory</u>
<u>being brought to an end</u>	(v. 11)	<u>permanent</u>
<u>Old Covenant</u>	(v. 14, v. 6)	<u>New Covenant</u>

Notice that Paul is not making a value judgment. He's not contrasting these in terms of right and wrong. No, both are good and right, but the difference is in the glory that is attached to each one. Both are glorious, but the glory of the Old Covenant is gradually fading away, whereas the glory of the New Covenant is increasing. The glory of the Law is being brought to an end, but the glory of the Spirit is permanent, without end.

Some things that come in degrees can only be truly understood when they are held in contrast to something else. A hardcover, unabridged dictionary by itself can be considered heavy; however, if the same dictionary is contrasted with a cement block, all of a sudden the dictionary seems light. To a six-year-old, her sister turning 13 is very old, until she discovers that her dad is 42—wow, that is so old!

In the same way, Paul is making this contrast here so that we can better understand the glory that he is writing about. If he were merely contrasting something with glory against something with no glory, then there would be no way to understand the degree of glory he was indicating. But when he makes something with much glory as his baseline, and then shows that what is being contrasted has a far greater glory, he helps his readers better grasp the degree of the surpassing glory. (Similarly,

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a 60-watt bulb in a dark room is bright, until you bring a 500-watt flood lamp into the room. The brightness of the flood lamp exceeds the brightness of the 60-watt bulb to such a degree that it can be hard to even distinguish if any light is coming from the small bulb.)

What does this have to do with transition?

Paul is writing here about a major transition, a major change, that was taking place in the history of God's people.

4. What is the change that Paul is referring to in this passage? (What is ending? What is new?)  
The covenant God's people have had with him was being replaced with a new covenant. That Law which had been the foundation of God's ministry to his people was being superseded by the ministry of the Spirit now. That was a major change. People's access and relationship to God was changing too. Where before people only had access to God's glory in a dim way—only as it was reflected on Moses' face and then covered with a veil—now in Christ that veil is removed (v. 16) and God's people can behold the glory of the Lord freely (v. 17). And in fact, because of the transition that has taken place in Christ, the glory that was once uncomfortably bright now seems like almost "no glory at all" because of "the glory that surpasses it" (v. 10).

5. How are God's people being called to respond to this major change? (v. 18)  
Paul is not merely informing the church (including us) of this major change that is taking place; rather, he is calling us to respond in a certain way to that change. So what we need to notice here is that the change that God was initiating between the old and new covenants has a much bigger purpose than merely instituting something new. Rather, that new thing is meant to lead to personal transformation. Verse 18 says, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

God is no longer far off, only able to be known through the mediation of another person. Now that separation is removed and we are brought near, without a veil, to behold and reflect the glory of the Lord (v. 18, see also Ephesians 2:12-13 and Hebrews 6:19-20). And the result of our nearness to the unveiled glory of Christ is nothing less than transformation.

6. How does transformation come about, according to this passage?  
We become like the One whom we behold. That is why children—even adopted children who do not carry the same genes as their adoptive parents—begin to look and act like their parents. For better or for worse, that is what they behold day in and day out, and therefore that is what they become like. Likewise, when we spend much time looking at the beauty and worth of God, we start to reflect a little bit of that same beauty and worth. The glory that is being reflected on our faces, unlike the reflected glory on Moses' face, is *increasing* gradually from one degree of glory to another—and the effects are transformative!
7. What does this have to do with our transition as a church?  
As a church, we also are in the midst of a major transition, perhaps not as major as the transition that Paul is speaking of in this passage, but nevertheless very significant. And what we desire as the outcome of our transition is the same as what Paul is describing as the outcome of that historical transition—we desire transformation. The goal is not that our church would just make it through this

transition successfully—that we wouldn't be pulled apart or adversely affected by this transition. No, our goal is that God would use this transition as a means of transformation in our lives personally and in our life corporately as a church family. We hope not just to survive the transition and come out okay on the other side, but we hope to thrive in the midst of transition and emerge as changed individuals and as a changed people together. We long for the Spirit of God to transform our lives, that there would be a greater degree of glory evidenced in us because of the ways in which we engage with God through this time of transition.

But we see in this passage that transformation is not automatic. Transition is not a formula by which transformation into Christ's likeness just appears. Paul makes it clear that despite the transition that God brought about from the covenant of the Law to the new covenant of the Spirit, the minds of many of the Jews were hardened—and in that sense, veiled—therefore they were not transformed (v. 14). They went through the same transition and yet remained unchanged. Thus the implication is that there is a way to respond to transition—ultimately, a way to respond to **God**—that moves us toward transformation. We get a hint of that way-of-responding-to-God-in-the-midst-of-transition in what Paul says in verses 16 and 18. “When one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed” (v. 16). Transformation is not something we bring about on our own; rather, transformation is something God brings about as we turn to him.

8. What kind of posture do we need as we respond to our transition?  
There must be a posture of humility and a recognition of our neediness that puts us in a place of receptivity to God's work of transformation. And then, with that veil removed, we behold the glory of the Lord (v. 18), and it is in the beholding that we are transformed.
9. What does it mean to “behold the glory of the Lord”?  
To behold the glory of the Lord is to look at Christ, to gaze lovingly on Him, to treasure Him above all else, to search out and celebrate all that is glorious about Him. When, in our worship singing, we think deeply on the truths that we are singing, we are beholding the glory of God. When we are amazed by a sunset over the Grand Canyon, we behold the glory of God. When we speak of our delight in God and help someone else see how wonderful He is, we behold—and display—the glory of God. Even the ways that we respond to God in our seasons of transition—with humility, with trust, with dependence, and with hearts that treasure His beauty and glory—these are the ways of responding that move us toward transformation.

And that is where we are headed with this study. We want our experience of transition to result in transformation. We want to not just list out some theoretical ways of responding to God that possibly might move us toward transformation, but we want to actually and intentionally practice responding to God in these ways. We don't want to just talk about transformation but to enter into transformation by humbly treasuring Christ and turning our focus on him in dependence and trust. So that is what we will be studying—and attempting to practice and apply—in the weeks to come.



# Transformational Transitions

## Session 2 – Understanding Transition: Pray for Wisdom in Tests

### Where we're heading in this session

Our goal in this study is not necessarily to understand transition comprehensively but to understand it biblically. Thus, we're not going to come at it from all the angles we possibly could (psychological or sociological or corporate, etc.) but we're going to focus primarily on what Scripture has to say about transition and about the transformation that can come from it. The biblical category that transition would come under is what James calls a "trial."

Following Jesus does not exempt us from hardship or suffering, but in fact Jesus himself promised us that in this world we will have trouble (John 16:33). As Christians we should expect to run up against difficulties, rather than be surprised when they come. Scripture makes it clear that God permits, and sometimes even brings, trials in our lives in order to test our faith and grow our character toward a greater maturity in Christ.

Transition clearly fits into this category of trials that test our faith. In this session we will examine how Scripture defines and describes trials. We'll also look at what God accomplishes through trials and how we are to respond in the midst of trials. **Just as in an academic setting where we study and prepare for tests so that we can successfully pass them, so also in our lives spiritually, the more that we are aware of God's intent in testing us and the more that we prepare for those tests, the more likely we will experience a deeper level of transformation as a result. Furthermore, just as academic tests are designed to reveal how much of the information we have truly mastered, so also the tests that God gives reveal our hearts. They show us the areas of sin that still need to be transformed as well as the places where we are progressing in maturity.**

The passage in James 1 that we'll be focusing on for this session points us to a particular response in the midst of trials—we are to ask God for wisdom. Certainly also in the specific trial of transition, praying for wisdom is a vital response that opens our hearts to the transforming work of God in us. **Therefore as part of our response time at the end of this session, we will spend some time praying for wisdom.**

### STUDYING THE WORD

In our first session we saw that in a season of transition, our aim is transformation. As Christians, we're not merely aiming to get through a transition but we want to be transformed through the transition.

The idea of being transformed sounds appealing. Who wouldn't want to become something better than their current state of affairs?! In the realm of nature, the metamorphosis of a creepy crawly caterpillar into a beautiful butterfly certainly seems like a change for the good. In the genre of superhero shows, the ability to transform from a basic car into a high-tech robot could definitely save the day. And, in the Christian setting, where transformation means becoming increasingly more like Christ, then even if we're not sure what that entails, we know it's supposed to be a good thing.

However, it could be said that everybody wants to be transformed, but no one wants transition. Though the final *product* of a transformed life is appealing, we often encounter an internal resistance to the *process* of change. The actual changes that would be required in our attitudes, expectations, habits, or desires in order to bring about transformation may feel like a steep price to pay.

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### What is transition?

If we look to experts in the field of organizational management, we find that transition can be defined as: the psychological process that one goes through in order to come to terms with a particular change. In that sense change and transition are not completely synonymous—change tends to refer to a modification in *external* circumstances, whereas transition has to do with a person's *internal* response to those fluctuating circumstances. In that case also, we may desire a change for the better in our circumstances, yet at the same time push back against the internal turmoil that invariably accompanies circumstantial change. To state it simply, we could say: Change is external; transition is internal.

According to one expert, the internal process of transition has three stages. These are not strictly linear, like a step-by-step formula, but usually overlap and sometimes repeat. One stage involves releasing something that is ending. We could call it “Letting go of the old,” and acknowledging the inevitable loss that accompanies the change. Another stage involves entering into something that is new. We could call it “Taking hold of the new.” And then there is an “in-between” stage, in which the old has ended but the new has not yet begun fully; there is much uncertainty and discomfort in this “unsettled” stage in the middle.

1. Transition defined: the psychological process that one goes through in order to come to terms with a particular change.<sup>1</sup>
2. Change is external, transition is internal.
3. Stages in transition:
  - Letting go of the old
  - “In-between” the old and the new
  - Taking hold of the new

1. Definition and stages adapted from: William Bridges, *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*, © 2009 Da Capo Lifelong Books, pages 3-5.

In our particular situation as a church, the change that is coming is that Pastor Cory will be retiring and Pastor Rocky will be stepping into that role of Senior Pastor. That is the external circumstance that will be different. The transition, though, is the internal response that each of us experiences in regard to the change that is happening. Though the external change is the same event, each of us will have a different internal response to that event, based on many factors, such as how long we've been at Evergreen, how well we know Pastor Cory, how well we know Pastor Rocky, what we value about the current structure or programs of our church, what we hope to see in our church, etc. And, in fact, our own internal response

may fluctuate throughout the process of this change in leadership; certain things we are feeling or responding to now may appear less significant later on in the process, and other things which we aren't even aware of now may become very significant in our response later. So the external change is a singular event, but the internal transition is an ongoing process as each of us individually—and all of us corporately—adjust to that change.

Our pushback against transition, then, is a response to the messiness and unknowns of internal adjustments that will come as part of the change we are facing. We may be quite excited about the change itself, and yet still have uneasiness or reservations about the process of adjusting to the change as it happens. But it is through that adjusting process of transition that God brings transformation in our lives. Just like a caterpillar must go through a long process of metamorphosis before it emerges as a beautiful butterfly, so God has also ordained that we as His people must go through a long process of growth before being finally and fully transformed into the likeness of Christ. And in His providence, God uses the uncomfortableness of transition as part of His means of transformation in our lives.

How does this process work?

#### Read James 1:2-5.

<sup>2</sup> Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, <sup>3</sup> for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. <sup>4</sup> And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. <sup>5</sup> If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

James tells us that we are to consider it all joy when we encounter trials of many kinds, because through those trials our faith is tested and proven, and we grow stronger as a result.

#### 4. How does James define trials in James 1:2-3?

When James speaks of “trials,” he has a particular idea in mind. A trial is anything that tests our faith or reveals our need. We tend to think of trials mainly as negative events: circumstances of suffering or difficulty. But in this passage, the word “trial” could be better understood as a “test” or “exam.” In an academic setting we study and learn a particular body of information or set of skills, then we are tested on it to see how well we have learned that information or skill-set. The test gives us opportunity to apply the knowledge or skills that we have supposedly learned, and through that, we are able to see (and the professor can see!) what we have successfully learned and where our understanding or competency is still deficient. Similarly, in an athletic setting we do drills and calisthenics in practice in order to learn skills and plays, and to develop teamwork and endurance; then all those things get tested in the game situation. Athletes prove their skill not by their success in practice but by their competence in the pressure and intensity of the game, especially when it's down to the wire and the outcome of the game is riding on a final feat or play.

James is describing these various kinds of trials as accomplishing the same purposes as academic tests or athletic games:

#### 5. Trials test and prove our faith, and trials reveal where growth is still needed.

James says that these trials are “of many kinds,” therefore we can infer that though oftentimes trials include elements of suffering, there are also some kinds of trials that do not directly involve suffering or difficulty but may instead encompass positive circumstances. Definitely suffering and difficulty are the kind of events that test our faith and reveal our need. But, wealth and comfort can just as easily be the kind of circumstances that test and prove where our faith lies, and they can reveal where growth is still needed. Again, we can easily see sorrow and loss as trials that test our faith and reveal our need. But happiness and success also test what our faith is resting on, and they reveal where we still need to grow. Thus, they can be categorized as a kind of trial as well.

In the same way, we probably don’t automatically think of transition as a trial (because transition is not always negative or painful), yet transition is certainly a process that tests our faith and reveals our need. Thus according to the way James describes it, transition would fit into this category of a trial.

6. What does James state as the outcome of trials and tests?

This is the foundation, then, for how we understand transition biblically: if transition is a trial—a test—by which our faith is proven and our weakness is revealed, then transition becomes a vital part of our growth toward maturity in Christ. James 1:4 states maturity (completeness or “perfection”) is the desired outcome of this process of trials and testing. This is what we looked at last week as well. Our aim is transformation, not just survival. Therefore, as we walk through transition together as a church family, we want to make the most of this opportunity for God to grow our character to become more and more like that of Christ. And, as we walk through our own individual places of transition as well, we want to be intentional about seeking the transformation that God is bringing about through the testing of those transition seasons.

7. How does transition test and prove our faith or reveal needed areas of growth?

In much of the transition that we face, we do not have control over the external circumstances that are changing. In fact, that lack of control is often why there is internal struggle in transition. We would like to just “fix” the circumstances, but we can’t. Our inability to directly control circumstantial change becomes the crucible in which our faith is tested and our need for growth is revealed.

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## Session 2 – Understanding Transition: Pray for Wisdom in Tests

8.

Transition tests us in these areas:	In each of these areas, transition reveals:
Who's in control? Transition tests <u>our trust in God's sovereign control.</u>	Transition reveals <u>our drive to be in control of our own lives OR our rest in God's control.</u>
Where do I get wisdom? Transition tests <u>our trust in God's wisdom and generosity.</u>	Transition reveals <u>our self-sufficiency and pride OR our humility and trust.</u>
Is God good? Transition tests <u>our trust in God's goodness.</u>	Transition reveals <u>our selfish and sinful desires OR our delight in God.</u>
Whom do I trust? Transition can also test our <u>rightly-placed trust in God.</u>	Transition can also reveal a <u>heart that is growing in Christ.</u>

One area in which transition tests us is this: Do we trust that God is truly in control, working all things for His glory and our good in this transition situation?

Transition tests our trust in God's sovereign control.

The idea that God is sovereign and in complete control is hopefully a truth of God's character which we would readily affirm, but the uncertainty of a transition season tests whether we will actually rely on that truth or not. If our internal response in transition is one of paralyzing fear or significant worry, those fears and worries show us that our reliance (our faith) on God's sovereign goodness is still lacking. The test is revealing our functional belief.

Transition reveals our drive to be in control of our own lives OR our rest in God's control.

James speaks of another way that trials, such as transition, test our faith. In verse 5 he says that if anyone lacks wisdom they should ask God, because God is one who gives generously to all. With any kind of change, there are things that come to an end, and there are new things that begin. The internal struggle to let go of what is ending and to embrace what is new is a big part of the transition process. Even when we're excited about the new thing, simply the fact that it is new means we are less familiar—or maybe completely unfamiliar—with it. So in that place of inability or unfamiliarity, will we ask God for wisdom, or will we attempt to figure things out with our own resources? Again here, we no doubt believe that God is wise and is generous with His wisdom, but transition reveals our functional belief about God's wisdom and generosity by testing where we will go to find answers for the new things that are beginning. Our lack of prayer would indicate that functionally we are relying on our own wisdom rather than the wisdom of God, whereas an increased prayer life would indicate a

functional reliance on God's wisdom above our own.

Transition tests our trust in God's wisdom and generosity.

Transition reveals our self-sufficiency and pride OR our humility and trust.

Trials in general, and transitions in particular, test our faith in the gracious character of our God. When the change that is happening does not seem to be immediately resulting in an outcome that we desire, we might start to question God's goodness. Again, we know that God is good, but our faith is put to the test by the transition when what is happening does not appear to be good or we cannot see how it will turn out for our good. If we doubt God's goodness, we might be tempted to arrange for our own good apart from God, and end up pursuing sinful desires. (See James 1:14-17.)

Transition tests our trust in God's goodness.

Transition reveals our selfish and sinful desires OR our delight in God.

Trials, including transition, not only reveal where growth is needed but also where growth is happening, where we are becoming like Christ. As our trust in God's sovereign control grows, a transition season may actually reveal a heart that is at rest and not worried or stressed. In that case, what is revealed is positive character growth rather than areas of sin where growth is still needed. Likewise, as our trust in God's wisdom grows, our prayer life will increase, and we will turn to God more quickly when we don't know what to do. When trials come our way, our dependence on God in prayer will be clearly revealed. And as our trust in God's goodness grows stronger, we can face situations that feel like God is against us and still maintain a confidence in His goodness. Our faith that He is indeed for us, not against us, is revealed by our response in that difficult situation.

Thus, transition can also test our rightly-placed trust in God,

and transition can also reveal a heart that is growing in Christ.

We long for the end product of transformation into Christ's likeness, but that transformation doesn't come apart from trials, which test and prove our faith and reveal where growth is still needed. The internal struggles and adjustments of a season of transition are some of the various kinds of trials that God uses to test whether what we believe about Him will be lived out in the real-life circumstances of change. And transitions reveal where our trust actually resides by highlighting where we seek wisdom for the new changes that are happening.

To sum up, we can understand transition from two different angles. Looking at it from a biblical viewpoint, transition fits into the category of a test or trial, by which our faith is proven and our need for growth is revealed. Looking at it from a functional viewpoint, transition is an internal process of coming to terms with an external change. These are complementary viewpoints, which together give us a foundation of understanding, so that we can successfully navigate the transitions that we face. In the coming weeks, we will be exploring both of these viewpoints in more depth as we think about how to thrive in transition in ways that lead to transformation.

# Transformational Transitions

## Session 3 – Navigating Transition: Lament the Losses

### Where we're heading in this session

We're coming to understand transition as a kind of trial that God brings to test our faith, with the aim of transformation—of growing us toward maturity in Christ. As we think about how to navigate transition, we are not merely considering how to get through the hardship and make it over the potential hurdles, but we are primarily looking at how to walk through transition in ways that grow our faith in Christ and move us toward transformation. So navigating transition is still focused on the aim of transformation, not simply on surviving the potential pitfalls.

In this section of the study, we're going to look at the life of Ruth (and Naomi) in the Old Testament. We'll walk with them through their process of transition and see the ways in which they opened their hearts to God in the midst of the transition that they faced. As with the other passages of Scripture that we're considering, the book of Ruth is not meant to be a lesson on navigating transition; there is certainly much more to discover in Ruth than what we will be looking at. We are simply looking at her story as an illustration of someone who walked through a major season of transition. But as we explore principles for navigating transition in ways that lead to transformation in Christ, and we do so side by side with this narrative of Ruth's life, we can see how those principles were fleshed out in her particular situation. This will help us to apply the same principles in our own varied situations of transition.

The first principle that we need to consider to help us navigate transition is this: Lament our losses. Transition expert William Bridges states this rule: "Every transition begins with an ending."<sup>1</sup> So before we can fully embrace the new thing that is beginning in a transition, we must acknowledge and accept the loss of that which is coming to an end. **As God's people we are not meant to walk through grief and loss alone, even when the transition we're facing is an individual one rather than something corporate. Rather, we are to "weep with those who weep" as a mark of our genuine love for one another (Romans 12:9, 15). Thus, this initial step of lamenting our losses is best done in community. In fact, community is vital in helping us process loss without slipping into bitterness or despair.**

In this session we will look at the beginning of Ruth's transition and see the kinds of loss that she and Naomi experienced. We will look at how Naomi expresses her lament, and think about the place of community in the midst of her grief. We will spend some time in Psalm 142 as a template of biblical lament, and then we'll apply that pattern in formulating our own lament to share within this community.

1. William Bridges, *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*, © 2004 Da Capo Press, page 11.

### STUDYING THE WORD

We've looked at the aim of transition—that God uses seasons of transition in our lives as a part of his transformative work to grow us toward maturity in Christ. We've also looked at what transition is. Functionally, transition is the internal process by which we come to terms with an external change. The biblical category for transition is a test or trial that proves our faith and reveals where growth is still needed. In this session we are starting in to the core of this study: How do we navigate transition successfully? Specifically, how do we walk with God in a season of transition?

Throughout the next several sessions, we're going to look at the Old Testament book of Ruth as an illustration of a biblical character who walked through transition. To give us an overview of the narrative of Ruth, let's watch this 7-minute video from *the Bible Project*: <https://thebibleproject.com/explore/ruth/>. (See Appendix B for a chart of the book of Ruth created by *the Bible Project*.)

1. What are the transitions happening at the beginning of this story of Ruth?

What are the transitions going on as this story of Ruth begins? One major transition is that an Israelite family from Bethlehem went to live in Moab because of the famine in their own land. Verses 2 and 4 say they “remained there” for “about 10 years.” Not only is this a logistical transition of moving to a new place and establishing a new home and new relationships and new routines, but this is also a difficult transition socially—Israel did not have a favorable relationship with the people of Moab.

Paul Miller, in his study on Ruth titled *A Loving Life*, writes this about the Israelite perception of the land of Moab:

The Moabites were the hillbilly cousins of the Israelites, the result of an incestuous relationship between Lot and one of his daughters. *Mo* means “who” and *ab* means “father.” So *Moab*, reflecting its murky origin, is the land of Who’s Your Daddy?

Bad blood grew between the cousins. When the Israelites tried to pass through Moab on the way to Canaan, the Moabite king opposed them by bribing the prophet Balaam to prophesy against them. When that backfired, the women of Moab seduced the Israelite men. The Israelites regularly called Kemosh, the Moabite god, “filth” or “loathsome.” One day Yahweh would crush Kemosh in a pit of manure (Isaiah 25:10-11). Moab meant trouble. And trouble is what the family [of Naomi] found in Moab.<sup>2</sup>

2. Paul Miller, *A Loving Life*, © 2014 Crossway, pages 19-20.

Famine in Israel spelled death, so Elimelech and Naomi had sought life in this foreign land of Moab. But, life was not to be found there—only more death—and Naomi found herself bereft of her husband and both sons (v. 5), left alone with her two widowed daughters-in-law. Thus, another major transition began, as these three women struggled to carry on without their husbands.

To lose a husband to death is tragic for anyone. However, for women in the culture of that time, death of a husband was not only a huge relational loss but also a pronouncement of economic ruin. Naomi has no property, no trade, no means of support, no chance of remarrying at her age. This loss means that life as she knows it is over. That is a bitter pill to swallow!

Though there was doubtless a bond that had formed between these three women because of their shared suffering, Naomi decides to return to her homeland of Israel, and she releases her daughters-in-law from any obligation to care for her by encouraging them to remain in Moab and remarry. Orpah chooses to stay in Moab, but Ruth makes a courageous and sacrificial choice to remain with Naomi and go with her into the land of Israel. In that choice there is another huge transition, as Ruth pledges herself to go with Naomi, to stay with Naomi, to make Naomi’s people her people and Naomi’s God her God (v. 16).

For us reading Ruth and Naomi’s story now, it might be easy to overlook some of their loss and zero in on their loyal love for one another that sacrifices for the other’s good. And, certainly that loyal love is central to their story. But if we step back and allow ourselves to feel the depth of their sorrow and loss, it actually highlights their loyal love even more.

2. The depth of Naomi and Ruth’s losses makes their loyal love for one another stand out. (For a deeper understanding of the Hebrew word for “loyal love”, see Appendix C.)

3. What are the losses that these women are facing?

What are their losses here? For Naomi, she has lost her husband, the one who is her provider and protector, the one who gave her two sons, the one on whom she depends for her livelihood. Naomi has also lost not one son, but both sons—the young men she has nurtured and raised from birth, the ones who would care and provide for her as a widow, and the only chance that their family name would be carried on. Now Naomi likely assumes that she will lose her daughters-in-law also and be left all alone and without any source of support. Possibly Naomi has also lost something of her reputation by living so long in Moab and now returning to Israel without her husband and sons. And, certainly Naomi has lost hope in the goodness and providence of her God; she feels like God is against her. Those are huge losses! Any one of those losses is huge in itself. The combination of all of them together is staggering!

What about Ruth? – What are her losses? She also has lost her husband—her provider and protector and source of livelihood. She has lost her father-in-law and brother-in-law too, and thus is suddenly thrust out of the protection and covering that males provided in their patriarchal society. And though Naomi gives her the choice to remain in her homeland of Moab, Ruth’s decision to stay with Naomi also means the loss of her sister-in-law Orpah and the only home that she has known. As a woman, a foreigner, and a widow coming into Israel, she has almost no hope of finding a better life there.

The narrative doesn’t give us much insight into what Ruth is feeling or experiencing with all her losses. Perhaps because she is younger, the gravity of her situation is not as apparent to her. Or, perhaps God is simply at work in her, giving her a determination to care for her mother-in-law no matter what the cost to herself. (Verse 18 says Ruth was “determined”.)

4. What is Naomi’s response to the losses and change she is facing?

The narrative gives us a glimpse into the raw emotion of Naomi in response to her losses. She says in verse 13 that “it is exceedingly bitter to me...that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.” When she returns to her hometown and sees her friends, she says, “Do not call me Naomi [which means Pleasant]; call me Mara [which means Bitter], for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty” (vv. 20-21). There is an irony in her words, because she left Bethlehem due to the barrenness of famine, yet her perspective is that she “went away full,” and now that the famine is over, she is coming back empty. Apparently there was such a marked grief and bitterness in Naomi that those who knew her in Bethlehem were puzzled at this very different woman who was returning (see v. 19).

If change is the external circumstances that are shifting, then usually we have little control over change. We usually speak of change happening *to us*. But if transition is our internal response to the changes—by which God’s tests our trust in him—then we do have some control over how we respond. Thus, when we speak of navigating transition, we are speaking of how we deal with our *response* to change, not how we deal with the change itself.

# Transformational Transitions

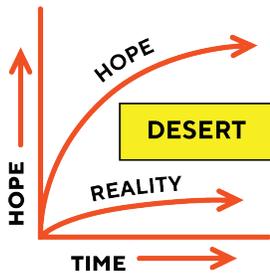
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5. Navigating transition means dealing with our response to change, not with the change itself.

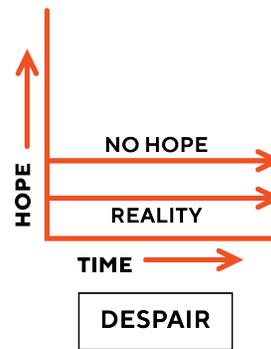
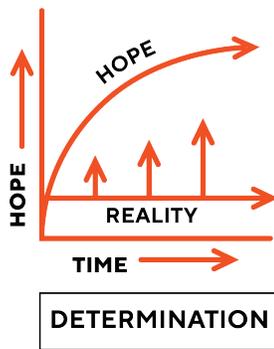
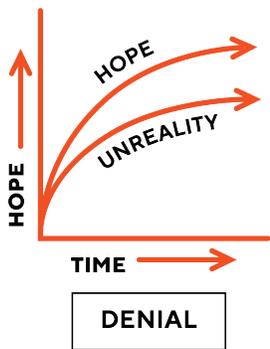
This is important in Naomi and Ruth’s story. They could not undo the changes that had happened, but they did have a choice in how they responded to those changes.

An initial step in navigating transition is to lament our losses. In some types of transition we may not experience as much loss, or as significant a loss, as what Ruth and Naomi experienced; however, all transition does include some kind of loss. Thus it is vital that we consider *what* is being lost, and that we take time to mourn or *lament* that loss.

In his book *A Praying Life*, Paul Miller speaks of the “desert” as that difficult place between hope and reality, where we acknowledge our loss and pain, yet trust that God is present in the midst of our suffering. The desert is the unsettled, unknown, and uncomfortable place that acknowledges both the reality we’re in and the hope we’re longing for.



Miller has several diagrams to show the different ways we respond to loss and suffering, rather than living in that uncomfortable, in-between place of the desert. The first is denial, which ignores reality and focuses everything on hope.



3. Charts reproduced from: Paul E. Miller, *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World*, 2nd Edition, © 2017 NavPress, pages 162-164.

The second is determination, which seeks to force reality up to the place of hope by sheer effort. The third is despair, which erases the line of hope and grovels in the misery of reality. Our response to change could easily end up in denial or determination or despair, rather than in the uncomfortable limbo of remaining in the desert. Thus, acknowledging our losses is a vital first step that helps us see the reality of our situation.

## Transformational Transitions

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What we see implied in Naomi’s situation—and explicitly throughout much of Scripture—is not only an acknowledgement of loss but a *lament* of that loss. Biblical lament is more than simply expressing “sorrow, regret, or unhappiness” (the Webster’s Dictionary definition). Rather, as one person explains it,

Lament defined:

“[Lament] is not just an expression of deep emotion; it is this expression *to a specific person*, God. It is not just a formal expression of sorrow, but it also *calls out to God for action*. And finally, biblical lament contains an unexpected element that differs radically from ‘sorrow, regret, or unhappiness’; it contains sometimes exuberant praise to God.”<sup>4</sup>

4. M. Elizabeth Lewis Hall, “Suffering in God’s Presence: The Role of Lament in Transformation,” *The Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care*, 2016, Vol. 9 No. 2, page 221, emphasis added.

6. Lament is different from cynicism or resignation. Lament does not push us away from God. Rather lament gets in God’s face and expresses *to Him* our loss and sorrow and need. This is what Naomi is doing. Even in her accusatory remarks (God has done this to me!), her focus is on God, not merely on airing her grief. Thus, even in her loss and grief, she can pray for God’s blessing on her daughters-in-law (vv. 8-9), and she can say that it is the Lord who is bringing her back to her homeland (v. 21).

Though in our Western, individualistic mindset we might think of lament as only a personal response to God, in Hebrew culture lament happened in community. Many of the Psalms are songs of lament, which are to be sung corporately among God’s people. Again, this was more than corporate complaining; it was an intentional act of faith that was beseeching God to act according to what they knew to be true about His character. Naomi does this with her friends when she returns. She invites them in to lament with her over all that has transpired in her life, not merely to commiserate with her, but to turn to God with her pain and loss.

7. To navigate transition well, we must:  
For us, if we want to navigate well as we walk through seasons of transition, we need to:

- a. Acknowledge our losses in the transition.
- b. Express our loss to God in lament.

We do that both personally and in community. Psalm 142 is one of the psalms of lament, and we can use it as an example or template to help us express our lament to God as well.

8. Observations from David’s lament in Psalm 142:  
verse 1: Notice that David says this is with his voice, not just in his heart. This prayer of lament is being vocalized, not just internalized.
- verse 2: Notice that David is pouring out his complaint and telling God his trouble. The difference between sinful complaining and honest lamenting is where it is directed. David’s complaint and his recounting of his trouble is poured out “before him [God].”

verse 4: Notice that David’s lament is not necessarily even accurate. In his emotion he is probably exaggerating. He says, “there is none who takes notice of me,” and “no one cares for my soul.” Most likely, there were still some who took notice of him and cared for his soul, but he is expressing his felt experience, and it was okay to express it in such a way to God. Lament expresses felt experience, not theological accuracy.

verses 6-7: Notice how a lament is crying out for God to act on our behalf. David is pleading with God: “Attend to my cry...” “Deliver me...” “Bring me out of prison...”

The title of this psalm says that it is a prayer “of David, when he was in the cave.” Most likely this is referring to either I Samuel 22 or 24, both of which are times where David is on the run from Saul, and he escapes into the wilderness and hides in a cave. So, as he writes this lament prayer, he is literally in the desert—the wilderness—but he is also figuratively in the desert like we talked about earlier—that place in between hope and reality. He knows God has called him to be king—that is the hope—but the reality is that Saul is still king and Saul wants to kill him. So in this desert place, David is not pretending that everything is okay. He is not spiritualizing his troubles and glossing over them with a happy face. No, he is clearly acknowledging his loss and his pain, and he is expressing that loss *to God* in his lament, crying out for God to act on his behalf.

If we are to navigate transition in a way that opens us to God’s work of transformation, we must be willing to enter those desert places in our situations, like David did in his situation. And we must be willing to both acknowledge what we are losing in this transition and express that loss to God. Sometimes that acknowledgment and expression of loss will be only an individual lament between you and God. But sometimes, especially when the transition applies to a community and not just an individual, our acknowledgment and expression of loss needs to take place in that community. Lament can be a vehicle for properly expressing our loss and pain to God, and we’re going to try using that vehicle together in this group.

# Transformational Transitions

## Session 4 – Navigating Transition: Start with Training Wheels

### Where we're heading in this session

Since transition is a process and not an event, we are looking at how to navigate the process rather than merely trying to find the magic formula to get through it all at once. Furthermore, since we are looking at the process of transition with an aim to transformation, then the ways we choose to navigate the process need to open our hearts to God's transforming work.

As we acknowledge and lament our losses in transition, we need to start taking small steps of faith and obedience as God leads us toward embracing what is new in our transition. Initially, these small steps may feel like they aren't accomplishing much. Yet, we must treat them as the training wheels on a child's bicycle, which are necessary at the beginning, but are not the final goal. **Training wheels don't automatically guarantee that a person will learn to ride the bike, but practicing with training wheels helps a person learn the balance and skill needed to eventually ride without that added support. In the same way, we may need to practice some things temporarily in our transition in order to intentionally open our hearts to God's work of change.**

In Ruth and Naomi's narrative, they lamented their loss but did not wallow in the grief. Instead, Ruth took a small step of faith and went to work in a field, to do what she could do to provide for herself and her mother-in-law. God was weaving a bigger story than what Ruth imagined at the time; **all Ruth knew was that she needed a means of financial support so she did what was available for her to do.** But her small step of faith and obedience in pursuing that work opened the door for God to carry out his bigger story in and through Ruth's life.

**We can aim for transformation through the transitions (and other trials) that we are facing, but we cannot cause transformation to happen. We can pray for wisdom but we can't produce wisdom in our own hearts. God alone brings that transformation about. But, the fact that God alone produces change in our hearts does not mean we are completely passive in the process. Instead, like Ruth, we trust God enough to take small steps of obedience, and that puts us in a posture of receptivity to God's work of change in us.**

In I Timothy 4, Paul gives Timothy a similar instruction, not in relation to transition, but in regard to Timothy's role as a young pastor. He tells him to "Train yourself for godliness" (v. 7) and to "toil and strive," with his hope "set on the living God" (v.10). The effort involved in practicing the things that God gave him to do was not the same as earning favor with God, but was the vehicle through which he was opening his heart to the transformation that God alone could bring.

Historically these initial small steps or "training wheels" have been called spiritual disciplines. They are the activities that we can do, which open our hearts to that which God alone can do. They are the small steps of faith and obedience that put us in a posture of receptivity and openness to God's work of transformation. In this session, we will see that transition is not the only time we practice spiritual disciplines, but it is an opportune time to take those small steps to open our hearts to God.

### STUDYING THE WORD

**When Naomi returned to her homeland, and Ruth left her homeland to remain with Naomi, both women entered Bethlehem having experienced significant loss. They did not superficially spiritualize their grief and loss, pretending that everything was okay and praising God for His sovereign control and goodness over all situations. But neither did they grovel in their grief and cut themselves off from community.**

Instead, they acknowledged their loss and lamented that loss in community.

The loss that these women have experienced is very significant, and Naomi’s bitter words give us a glimpse into the anguish of their hearts as they bring their lament to God in the community that they are entering. But Ruth does not get stuck in her pain and loss. Rather, she takes a small step of faith to do what she can to provide for herself and for her mother-in-law. Ruth 1:22 tells us that Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. So Ruth decides to go to the field to find out if she can glean some grain among the harvesters. Verse 2 indicates that Ruth was hoping to find favor with an owner of one of the fields, and verse 7 says that in the field where she ended up, she asked the foreman for permission to gather and glean. Apparently she was at least somewhat familiar with the provision that God’s law granted to her in her situation. Yet even in that, she did not presume that she was entitled to anything; rather, she sought out permission and favor.

### Read Leviticus 19:9-10 and Deuteronomy 24:19-22.

1. What groups of needy people is God protecting and providing for with these laws regarding harvesting and reaping?  
God’s law for His people included provision for the poor, the widow, and the sojourner. It instructed reapers during the harvest to leave the edges of the fields of grain untouched, as well as any grain that was dropped in the process of harvesting, that those in need would be able to gather it and have something to eat.
2. Where do Ruth and Naomi fit in these groupings?  
Ruth fits all of these categories: she is a sojourner in this land, she is a widow, and because of both of those, she is also now poor. Naomi is not a sojourner—this is her homeland—but she is a widow and is poor.

### Read Ruth 2:2-6, 10-13.

3. Where does Ruth stand in the social “pecking order” of the people of Israel in that time? What did you notice in the passage about Ruth’s status as a foreigner? Paul Miller, in *A Loving Life*, lists the hierarchy of social standing in that period and place, and Ruth is on the very bottom:

1. King or judge of Israel	9. Wife (This is Naomi’s status.)
2. Tribal leader	10. Daughter
3. Clan leader	11. Male servant
4. Clan-subgroup leader (This is Boaz’s status.)	12. Female servant
5. Older father	13. Female servant lower class
6. Father	14. Resident alien
7. Eldest son	15. Male foreigner
8. Son	16. Female foreigner (This is Ruth’s status.)” <sup>1</sup>

1. Paul Miller, *A Loving Life*, © 2014 Crossway, page 78.

Ruth was very aware that in the social structure of her day, she was nothing. In fact, because she was specifically a foreigner *from Moab*, she was not only a nobody but was considered an enemy of God’s people (see Deuteronomy 23:3). Thus her decision to go and reap in the fields was not only a step of faith but was also an act of tremendous courage.

The writer of the book of Ruth clues us as the readers in to something that Ruth was not aware of at this point in her story. We are told in verse 1 that Naomi had a relative named Boaz who was a man of noble character. Then we are told that Ruth “just so happened” to end up in the section of the field that belonged to Boaz (v. 3). And then it “just so happened” that on that particular day and time, Boaz came out to his field and noticed Ruth (vv. 4-5). In this, it is clear that God is weaving something together that Ruth and Naomi are completely unaware of at this point. So when Ruth takes this step of faith to go glean in the field, she is not going with the intent to find a new husband and to resolve her and Naomi’s situation. No, she is simply hoping to gather some food to feed herself and her mother-in-law. But it is this little, mundane, courageous step that puts her in a place to receive what God has for her, which is far greater than anything she might have envisioned.

4. It has been said that “the process of change is a growth in humility, because humility is the fertile soil where transformation takes place.”<sup>2</sup>

2. Pastor Kim Kira, Gospel-Centered Counseling Training, 2018.

5. How did Ruth’s work in the field of Boaz demonstrate humility?  
Ruth demonstrates humility by not demanding a better status for herself. Instead, she steps out courageously despite her social status. She recognizes she is not entitled to anything, yet she still steps out to serve her mother-in-law despite the risk. It is this humility in her that puts her in a place of receptivity to the gracious work of God in her life (and through her life, to Naomi).

In the process of transition, lament over what is lost is needed, but lament must eventually move toward embracing what is new. When the loss is sizable, embracing what is new will not happen all at once, but only in small increments. Ruth and Naomi’s loss is huge, thus their transition to embrace the new things God is doing cannot be quick or easy; it must start with small steps of humble and courageous obedience. These small steps of humble, courageous obedience can be likened to “training wheels.”

6. What is the significance of “training wheels”?  
Rarely does a child move directly from running on their own two feet to riding a bicycle or scooter. Usually there are some intermediate steps, starting with a tricycle and then moving on to a bicycle with training wheels. Training wheels are never the goal, just a means toward the goal. They provide the needed stability while the child is learning to balance, but once that balance is achieved, there is no need to continue with them.

As we walk with God through seasons of transition, we will likely need to utilize some sort of “training wheels.” We will need to take small steps of humility, courage, and obedience that put us in a posture of receptivity to God’s powerful work of transformation. Historically, these small steps—these training wheels—have been referred to as spiritual disciplines. But spiritual disciplines encompass so much more than what we typically think of (i.e. Bible reading, prayer, and church attendance). Ruth’s humble courage to serve Naomi was also a spiritual discipline by which she opened her heart to God’s work of change.

7. What do spiritual disciplines require?

Spiritual disciplines, as training wheels, require humility, courage and effort.

a. They require humility because we are admitting that we cannot bring something about on our own, just as training wheels on a bike are an admission that a child cannot ride the bike on their own. Specifically, disciplines admit our need of a Savior—not just that we are unable to perform a certain skill, but that we are unable to save ourselves, unable to make life work apart from relationship with the God who made us.

b. Disciplines also require courage, the courage of trusting God to do what we cannot bring about on our own. A child riding a bike with training wheels has no guarantee that she won't crash or take a tumble; likewise a person engaging in a spiritual discipline is not forcing God to carry out what she wants but is trusting God to do as He sees fit. Trust does not exist apart from courage.

c. Disciplines require humility and courage, and disciplines also require effort. Just as with Ruth, there is a step we are to take, something we can do. We don't bring about the change, but neither are we to do nothing and just wait for magic to happen. No, we expend effort, but it is an effort aimed at trusting the Person we are dependent on, not a self-focused effort seeking to bring about change in autonomy from God.

**Read I Timothy 4:6-15.**

<sup>6</sup> If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. <sup>7</sup> Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; <sup>8</sup> for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

<sup>9</sup> The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. <sup>10</sup> For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

<sup>11</sup> Command and teach these things. <sup>12</sup> Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. <sup>13</sup> Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. <sup>14</sup> Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. <sup>15</sup> Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.

8. How are we to understand *effort* and *growth* in this passage?

In I Timothy 4:7, the Apostle Paul is instructing the young pastor Timothy, and he tells him, "Train yourself for godliness." He compares this training to bodily training or athletic discipline, but says that in contrast to bodily discipline—which will only be valuable while we are in this physical body—training in godliness holds promise for all eternity (v. 8). Notice that in speaking of this training, Paul says it is something for which we "toil and strive" (v. 10), something we can devote ourselves to (v. 13),

something that we can practice and be immersed in and make progress in (v. 15). In other words, this kind of training is certainly not passive, but requires much effort.

Notice too that the effort and training Paul is speaking of here is not an effort to make oneself right before God, but an effort to grow in maturity in Christ for those who have already been made right with God. Spiritual disciplines have nothing to do with somehow earning salvation or gaining a right standing before God, but only in exerting effort toward growth in godliness.

As we walk with God in seasons of change, spiritual disciplines are the little steps of humble trust and obedience that we can take, and those little steps put us in a posture of openness and receptivity to the work of transformation that God alone can bring about. Like Ruth, we may simply take a step to do what needs to be done—like serving someone in need or asking for permission to work—and that humble effort opens the door for God to bring about something beyond what we could imagine.

9. In the transition that we as a church family are experiencing, what disciplines could we engage in, which would open our hearts to growth in Christ?

Here are some possibilities:

- When we feel frustrated by things that are not happening in the same way as before (or maybe not happening at all!), we can practice thankfulness instead of complaining.
- When we have ideas for how we as a church could grow, we can communicate the ideas to the staff and then also offer to help carry them out.
- We can begin (or continue) praying regularly and specifically for our church and for the pastors, that God would lead us as we walk through this transition.
- We can walk in community by asking others how they are doing in this transition, and then listen intently as they share.
- We can memorize a passage of Scripture that reminds us that Jesus is always our chief Shepherd, regardless of what changes happen in our church.

These are relatively small, mundane things, just like Ruth's decision to go work in the fields. And yet, it is small, mundane disciplines like this that put us in a posture of humility and openness to whatever God may want to bring about in our lives.

What about you? What small steps of humility, courage, and effort can you take in your own transition? How might God be calling you to discipline yourself for the sake of growing in godliness through the transition you are facing? We're going to spend some time sharing about these things with one another.



# Transformational Transitions

## Session 5 – Navigating Transition: Hold On to Truth and Hope

### Where we're heading in this session

Hope is vital in successfully navigating transition. To lament the losses of transition without any sense of hope for what is ahead will leave us floundering in despair. To practice disciplines in transition that open our hearts to God's transforming work, and yet have no hope that God will actually bring the change we long for, will sink us into cynicism. As we walk through the process of transition, hope is vital.

But hope must be connected to truth; otherwise, it is only wishful thinking at best and delusion at worst. Therefore, in navigating transition, it is imperative that we not only think and speak honestly about what we're losing and what is ahead, but we must also anchor our hearts in the truth of the Gospel that does not change in any transition.

By the cultural standards of their time, Ruth and Naomi's outlook was rather bleak, and it would not have been surprising if one or both of them had succumbed to hopelessness and despair. But there was a practice that God had instituted many years before their time, whereby a kinsman-redeemer could care for a widow in his extended family; it was the revealing of this truth that stirred hope in Ruth.

In our own occasions of transition, there may not be anything in the situation itself that breeds hope, so if we are looking for hope only in our circumstances changing, we are likely to be disappointed. Even if the circumstances seem more promising, that is not solid enough to anchor our hope in. Instead, we need to look beyond our immediate circumstances to the unchanging truth of God's character and promises. That is the only thing solid enough to truly give us lasting hope.

Romans 8:18-25 speaks of a hope that is solid and sure, a hope that we can wait for eagerly, even though our circumstances cause us to groan. That solid and sure hope is anchored in the truth that we are now adopted sons and daughters of God, and therefore fellow heirs with Christ (Romans 8:14-17)! This means that even in times of transition when we "groan inwardly as we wait eagerly" (Romans 8:23) for what God will bring about, we can hold on to hope because of the truth of our new identity in Christ. In this session, we will explore that connection between truth and hope.

### STUDYING THE WORD

#### Read Ruth 2:17-23.

God is sovereign over all, and in any transition, God is orchestrating things together beyond what we can see or imagine. In this story of Ruth, there is a delightful little drama happening, unbeknownst to Naomi and Ruth, as God works all things together for their good and for the furthering of His bigger story.

1. How much barley did Ruth glean on her first day working in the field of Boaz?  
When Ruth returns to Naomi after a long, hard day of gleaning (possibly 14-16 hours!) and shows all that she has gained (30-50 pounds of barley, enough for several weeks of food for her and Naomi!), Naomi immediately realizes that this is not a typical amount that can be acquired in a day by a gleaner.
2. Why was she able to take in such a large amount? (See Ruth 2:15-16.)  
She asks Ruth where she worked, recognizing that someone (namely Boaz) has been kind and generous to her. The delightful irony here is that Naomi didn't know that Ruth ended up in the field of Boaz, and Ruth had no idea of the significance of who Boaz was.

3. What did Naomi find out from Ruth, which gave her hope?  
The wonderful surprise for Naomi is when Ruth reveals that the man in whose field she worked is Boaz.
4. What did Ruth find out from Naomi, which gave her hope also?  
And the wonderful surprise for Ruth, in turn, is when Naomi reveals that Boaz is in fact “a close relative” of theirs who is “one of [their] redeemers” (Ruth 2:20). The revealing of these truths stirs hope in both women, as they catch a glimpse for the first time of the story God is weaving.
5. What is a *goel* or kinsman-redeemer?  
We do not have a word or an office that corresponds to this Old Testament term of kinsman-redeemer, so in order to understand the significance of what is happening for Ruth and Naomi, we need to explore what this Hebrew idea entailed. The Hebrew word is *goel*, which means “to redeem or buy back.” A *goel* “was a male member of the clan who rescued another member, usually a woman, who had fallen on hard times. One way a *goel* did this was by marrying the widow of his brother... A *goel* could restore property, purchase a relative out of slavery, avenge a relative’s killing, assist in a lawsuit, and ensure that justice is served for a relative.”<sup>1</sup>

1. Paul Miller, *A Loving Life*, © 2014 Crossway, page 111.

Viewed through the lens of our Western culture, this may seem like a strange practice (or even wrong!), but the reasons for it reflected the values and needs of the culture of that time.

Read Numbers 27:1-11 and 36:1-12.

One reason for a *goel* marrying the widow of his deceased brother was so that the land belonging to the family of the deceased would not be transferred to a different clan.

Read Deuteronomy 25:5-10.

Also, this practice kept the family name of the one who died from being blotted out, which was tremendously significant in the Hebrew culture of that day. The commitment to continue the family line through this practice of *goel* was anchored in God’s promise from the beginning that there would be a “seed of the woman” (Genesis 3:15) who would crush the head of the serpent, and in His promise to Abraham of many descendants and great blessing (Genesis 17:6-8). “At the heart of... these promises was the hope of a coming Redeemer. So the responsibility of a brother to produce a child with a deceased brother’s wife was an exercise of faith in the promise of God that a Redeemer would one day come, perhaps from this very family line.”<sup>2</sup>

2. *Gospel Transformation Bible*, notes on Genesis 25:5-10, page 249.

In contrast to the government programs of our country, which may or may not provide much actual assistance to a widow, the Hebrew rule of *goel* provided an actual person to take full responsibility for the well-being of the one in need. It was redemption in the fullest sense of the word—not just throwing money at a problem and hoping it goes away—but entering into the life of the person in need and taking responsibility for her care, not just temporarily but for the rest of her life. A kinsman-redeemer is a very significant responsibility and a beautiful picture of the Gospel!

Ruth had no idea that she had ended up in the field of her kinsman-redeemer (her *goel*). She was simply thankful to have found favor in the eyes of the kind landowner named Boaz whom she had

met, not knowing who he was or what he could provide for her (beyond gleaning in his field).

Naomi got excited when she saw the amount of grain that Ruth brought home with her, and knew that someone had shown her great kindness. She knew Boaz was a close relative and a potential *goel* for her, but she had no idea initially that Ruth had ended up in Boaz's field.

So when Ruth reveals to Naomi that she had worked in the field of Boaz, and Naomi reveals to Ruth that Boaz is their *goel*, hope surges in both of them as they realize the significance of what has happened. There has been great loss and bitterness, lament and sorrow in both Ruth and Naomi, and the hope that is springing up in them is not due to any immediate change in their difficult circumstances, but because of the truth that is brought to light about their kinsman-redeemer.

6. Hope is stirred because of the truth that is revealed.  
At the beginning of the story, Naomi was despairing and bitter from all the loss that she had encountered, and she was somewhat immobilized in her despair. Ruth experienced just as much loss, including leaving her homeland and entering Israel as a foreigner; then she courageously stepped out to do what she could to care for her own needs and the needs of her mother-in-law. Both women were in survival mode. But, when the truth of their kinsman-redeemer was revealed, hope sprang to life and their whole demeanor changed. Hope was crucial for Ruth and Naomi in their transition.
7. Notice that the entrance of hope didn't bring an immediate end to their difficult transition. This is not a Hollywood romance. Rather hope is what empowered Ruth and Naomi to persevere in their transition. Ruth continued to go to the field of Boaz to glean "until the end of the barley and wheat harvests" (Ruth 2:23), which would be about 7 weeks, usually from late April to early June. Gleaning was hard work, and it meant very long days (perhaps 16 hours!), but Ruth kept at it. She faithfully did what she could do and trusted God to provide in the bigger ways that she could not orchestrate on her own. The presence of hope allowed both Ruth and Naomi to persevere in the midst of all the uncertainties, sorrows, and labor of their transition.

How do we take hold of hope in the midst of transition?

#### Read Romans 8:18-25.

<sup>18</sup> For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. <sup>23</sup> And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in this hope

*we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?<sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

8. What certainty do we as children of God long for, which all of creation eagerly awaits as well?  
Romans 8:18-25 speaks of a future glory that the children of God will experience, a glory that all of creation longs for with eager anticipation. However, that eager longing happens in the midst of much groaning. All of creation is groaning (Romans 8:22), and we ourselves—as children of God who have the Spirit of God as a guarantee of the glory that is to come—“groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for... the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:23). There is much groaning in transition, because things are not now as they are meant to be, nor as they one day will be. We are in between.

And yet, it is the truth of what will be—the glory that will one day assuredly be ours—that gives us hope to persevere in the midst of all the groaning. “If we hope for what we do not [yet] see, we wait for it with patience” (Romans 8:25).

9. In what way(s), as the children of God, will we be redeemed by our *Goel*?  
Just like Ruth and Naomi, we are counting on redemption (“the redemption of our bodies,” according to Romans 8:23). We are eagerly awaiting our Redeemer, our *Goel*, who will make us His bride and free us from the poverty and sorrow of this world. This hope is not merely wishful thinking or a strong desire. It is a certainty. Because it is certain, this hope is what the author of Hebrews calls “a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul” (Hebrews 6:19). Biblical hope is not like the things we might put on a Christmas wish list—it is not just a desire (which may or may not happen) but it is a certainty that has not yet come about. We have to wait—it is not yet—but it will for sure come about. Biblical hope is certain because it is grounded in God’s truth.
10. Hope is not something we can directly take hold of by the force of our will. We don’t just squeeze our eyes shut and hold our breath and try to hope this will happen.  
Rather, we take hold of hope by grabbing on to truth.  
Hope is the byproduct of what we believe to be true.
11. What are some of the truths we believe, which give us reasons to hold on to hope?  
Romans 8:16-17  
We believe that “we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.”  
2 Corinthians 4:17  
We believe there is indeed a glory that is awaiting us, in fact “an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.”  
1 Corinthians 15:52  
We believe that “the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.”  
Philippians 3:20-21  
We believe that “our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body.” As we grab hold of these (and many more!) glorious truths by faith, hope springs up in our hearts. Hope is the byproduct of what we believe to be true.
12. Hope is vital to transition. Therefore, truth is also vital to transition.

We must grab onto truth in order to gain hope. Therefore many of the disciplines we do in the midst of transition may not be directly related to the transition at all. Rather, they may be focusing our hearts on truth so that we can have the hope that is needed to persevere in the difficulties of transition.

The reason various elements of this study have been included is to help us take hold of the unchanging truths that provide an anchor for our souls in the midst of the transitions we face. We sing songs of worship because these songs contain truths that we need to hold on to in order to have hope. Songs are so much easier to remember than just information, so singing helps us to rehearse these vital truths constantly. We share in community because we can remind one another of the truths that we need to hold on to in order to have hope. We memorize Bible verses because these Scriptures tell us the truth that brings hope. Scripture memorization is not the same as doing positive self-talk about a transition (e.g. “Pastor Rocky is a great guy. Things are going to be great under his leadership.”). That would be trying to take hold of hope directly. Rather, we rehearse the truths that will give us hope regardless of what happens in a transition.

As we think about our church’s transition, we must recognize that at the end of the day, our hope is not in Pastor Rocky leading our church to new heights (though he might). Our hope is not in Pastor Cory wisely orchestrating this transition of leadership (though he is). Our hope is not in what will remain the same in our church, nor in what might change. No, at the end of the day, our hope is not anchored in the transition at all. Our hope is anchored in the God who loves us and carries us in every season, who has rescued us from sin and death, and who will one day bring us into His very presence for all eternity. That is the only hope strong enough and certain enough to anchor our hearts in the groaning and uncertainties of this transition (and in any other transition we face).

*At the end of the day, our hope is anchored in the God who loves us and carries us in every season, who has rescued us from sin and death, and who will one day bring us into His very presence for all eternity.*



#### Where we're heading in this session

As we navigate the trial of transition with the aim of transformation, we walk through the process of lamenting our losses, opening our hearts to God, and holding on to truth that gives us hope. This is not a linear process or a step-by-step formula, so all of these things may be happening more or less at the same time, and we may end up coming back to them repeatedly throughout the transition. But as we move through a transition, we will come to points where we need to step into something new. Those can be exciting points in the transition process, but they can also be fearful points, because what is new is also unknown.

Ruth came to such a point in her story, where through the coaching of Naomi, she took the risk of humbly seeking Boaz's favor as a kinsman-redeemer, not knowing what the outcome would be but trusting God enough to take that step. Ruth did not have the luxury of planning out her whole transition and putting safeguards in place to ensure that everything flowed smoothly. Instead, she simply trusted God with the one step that was in front of her, despite how risky and scary that step may have seemed at the time.

Both Pastor Cory and Pastor Rocky have taken similar steps of trust into risky and uncharted waters in this transition for our church. And God is faithfully providing and leading! Now God is calling us as a church family to also trust Him enough to take the next step in our journey of following Him, even if we cannot see how it will turn out. Not only in our church's transition, but in our own personal situations of transition also—though we plan ahead to the best of our ability and strategize for success—sooner or later we will be faced with decision-points that will stretch our trust in God. Will we be paralyzed by indecision? Will we retreat in fear to the "safety" of that which is known or within our control? Will we plough forward in prideful self-confidence and try to figure out a solution on our own? Or, will we take a simple step with what God puts before us, trusting that He will provide and lead as we go?

Sometimes the call to trust God means waiting and continuing in the things we are already doing. And that may feel harder than stepping out in faith with something new. That was the situation with God's people in the day of Jeremiah. God reminded them through Jeremiah that He had great plans for their welfare, but those plans to give them a future and a hope were not going to happen for another 70 years. That's why Jeremiah exhorts the people to trust God's promise by settling in to the tasks of everyday life. So for us also, transition may not immediately require new and exciting changes, and our faith will be tested by how well we enter in to the ordinary. In this session, we will explore what is entailed in taking steps of trust, whether those steps are risky or ordinary.

#### STUDYING THE WORD

In any transition, wisdom suggests that we not attempt to rush too quickly into what is new. It is good to give time to lament loss, to open our hearts to God, and to focus on truth. But eventually, laments, disciplines and hope do need to open the door to something new. Otherwise, we will get muddled in merely longing for what is past. At some point in the process (often in many points along the way), we have to take steps of trust and obedience.

We have seen how Naomi and Ruth acknowledged their loss and lamented in community (Session 3), how Ruth opened her heart to God’s bigger work through her discipline to go work in the field (Session 4), and how both women took hold of the hope that surfaced with the truth of their situation (Session 5). Now at this point in their story, the harvest season is almost done, and Naomi has been concocting a plan for her daughter-in-law.

Before Naomi had left Moab to return to Bethlehem, she had sought to “find rest” (Ruth 1:9) for her daughters-in-law by encouraging them to remain in Moab and remarry. Ruth had shown great kindness to Naomi by leaving her home and life in Moab in order to remain with Naomi. Now Naomi again is seeking to “find rest” (Ruth 3:1) for Ruth, which implies that she is attempting to arrange a marriage for her. This is actually a great kindness from Naomi, because a woman, especially a foreigner, in that time and culture, would have a very hard life if she was not married; marriage was not primarily about romance but about provision and security. Thus, Naomi is seeking what is best for Ruth, “that it may go well with [her]” (Ruth 3:1).

#### Read Ruth 3:2-4.

1. What is Naomi’s plan for Ruth? What instructions does she give to Ruth?
  - 1) Wash and anoint yourself – that is, bathe and put on perfume.
  - 2) Put on your cloak – probably not “best clothes” like NIV translates it.
  - 3) Go down to the threshing floor where Boaz is winnowing the barley.
  - 4) Wait for Boaz to finish eating and drinking.
  - 5) Make a mental note of where Boaz goes to lie down and sleep.
  - 6) After he’s asleep, go and uncover his feet and lie down.
  - 7) Boaz will tell you what to do.

2. What are the risks in this plan? What could go wrong?

This was a gutsy, even audacious plan! If your daughter told you this was what she was going to do, you would probably say “No way!” In Paul Miller’s book, *A Loving Life*, he writes:

“What could go wrong with Naomi’s plan? Just about everything. Ruth might be seen. In the dark she might go to the wrong person. She might approach Boaz too early, when he hasn’t fallen asleep and others might still be awake. And when she finally identifies herself to Boaz, he might take advantage of her or reject her.”<sup>1</sup>

1. Paul Miller, *A Loving Life*, © 2014 Crossway, page 120.

#### Read Ruth 3:6-13.

3. How does the plan work out? What happens?

Ruth follows Naomi’s plan, and when Boaz is startled awake at midnight (perhaps because his feet were uncovered and getting cold), he finds a woman lying at his feet! He asks who she is, and Ruth replies with great courage and directness, telling him: “Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer” (Ruth 3:9). This is not a marriage proposal as we think of proposals in Western culture (i.e., as the culmination of romantic love), but rather is a direct request for Boaz to fulfill his role as *goel* (kinsman-redeemer) by marrying Ruth and bearing an heir for Naomi. Boaz is delighted by her request and promises to do for her all that she has asked, but he also lets her know that there is a nearer kinsman-redeemer who will need to be talked with first.

Some commentators read into this bold plan a sexual escapade between Ruth and Boaz. But that interpretation can be rejected on several counts. One commentator writes:

“Those who interpret a sexual relation in the events reflect their twentieth-century cultural conditioning of sexual permissiveness. They fail to appreciate the element of Ruth’s trust that Boaz would not dishonor her whom he wanted for his wife. They fail to appreciate the cultural taboos of Ruth’s time that would have prevented a man of Boaz’s position from taking advantage of Ruth, thereby destroying her reputation and perhaps endangering his own. Biblical writers were not squeamish about describing sexual encounters, but the writer of Ruth has deliberately refrained from saying there was a liaison between Ruth and Boaz. If read carefully and with sensitivity, it becomes clear that he was saying just the opposite. Both Ruth and Boaz acted virtuously in a situation they knew could have turned out otherwise. Chastity was not an unknown virtue in the ancient world.”<sup>2</sup>

2. F.B. Huey Jr., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Volume 3: Ruth, © 1992 Zondervan, page 538.

4. In Ruth 2:1, the ESV says Boaz is known to be a worthy man.
5. Then in Ruth 3:11, Ruth is known to be a worthy woman.  
The only other place where that word (translated “worthy” or “of noble character”) is used is Proverbs 31:10: “A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies.” Naomi’s plan works because both Ruth and Boaz have such worthy and noble character.

Ruth does not have any guarantee that her request will be granted, nor that her mother-in-law’s plan will work. In fact, even if everything works as planned, she has no guarantee of what will happen later on. She has already experienced the pain of her first husband’s death. To request Boaz to redeem her must assuredly bring up significant fears and hesitations: What if he also dies before she does? Ruth is risking much to take this step. But the risk does not immobilize Ruth. She trusts the God under whose wings she has come to take refuge (Ruth 2:12), and she obeys. Paul Miller writes: “It is critical for Ruth to keep obeying. Like a golden thread, her obedience weaves her pilgrimage into a stunning tapestry. When we step back and look at the whole, we see God everywhere—orchestrating, shaping, and redeeming. But without Ruth’s obedience, there would be no unveiling of God in the story. We discover God in the story as we love.”<sup>3</sup>

3. Paul Miller, *A Loving Life*, © 2014 Crossway, page 136.

6. God is sovereignly orchestrating this story, but His sovereign activity does not relieve Ruth of all responsibility. She still has a choice to express her trust in action. Faith does not mean sitting back and just waiting for something to happen. Rather, faith is only truly faith when it results in obedient action. And that is what Ruth does—she acts, in faith.
7. In Ruth’s story, trust was lived out by a step of bold, gutsy obedience to enter a brand new situation. However, we have to be careful not to link trust only with new, exciting, or big changes. Scripture also gives us examples of trust that is shown in the everyday, the mundane, and the small. Jeremiah 29 is one of those examples.

Jeremiah 29:11 is a familiar verse to many Christians: “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” We tend to look at that as a blanket promise that God has good plans for us, and we tend to assume that those good plans are

immediate. Indeed, God does have good plans for His people, but we miss the bigger picture of what God is telling the people of Judah in this passage, and therefore we end up with an incomplete picture of the hope that we have because of God's good plans.

#### **Read Jeremiah 29:1, 4-14.**

*<sup>1</sup> These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders of the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.*

*<sup>4</sup> “Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: <sup>5</sup> Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. <sup>6</sup> Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. <sup>7</sup> But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. <sup>8</sup> For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, <sup>9</sup> for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the Lord.*

*<sup>10</sup> “For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. <sup>11</sup> For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. <sup>12</sup> Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. <sup>13</sup> You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. <sup>14</sup> I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.*

8. Who are the recipients of this prophetic instruction? What is their situation?

This instruction is being given to exiles, to people in captivity in a foreign land. They did not want to be in captivity—they did not like being in exile—but God is actually telling them that He is the one who has sent them into exile (Jeremiah 29:4). Captivity was not a mishap or mistake, but still fit within the scope of God's sovereign will and plan for them. Therefore, God is telling them that their focus must not be on trying to get out of captivity, but on obeying Him in the midst of captivity.

9. How long does God tell His people they will have to wait before He brings them back to their homeland? (v. 10)

God's promise to His people is that He will bring them out of captivity and restore them to their homeland. But He makes it clear that their return to their homeland will not be right away. It will be "when seventy years are completed for Babylon" (Jeremiah 29:10). In fact, the reason God reminds them that He has good plans for them is because they are going to have to wait 70 years to see those plans fulfilled!

For the people of Judah, hope was not to be found in immediate changes to their circumstances, but in the unchanging character of their God, who would one day carry out the promise He was making. In fact, God warns them not to trust the false prophets among them who were speaking of an immediate change of circumstances. Again here, hope has to be tied to truth.

10. What is God instructing His people to do during the time they are waiting?

Because God's good plans for His people will not take place for another 70 years, the instructions He gives them are very ordinary, everyday, seemingly small steps of trust. He says:

"Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." (Jeremiah 29:5-7)

In other words, just live life as you would if you were in your homeland.

For these people of Judah, taking a step of trust in the midst of transition meant settling into mundane, everyday patterns of life. Unlike Ruth's step of trust, this was not a gutsy move into something new and exciting, but may have felt instead like a slide into resignation or despair. Consequently, it took just as much trust in the character and promise of God, even though the step they were taking wasn't as radical or risky as Ruth's midnight request.

In this transition that we are facing as a church, it is important that we don't rush past our losses in pursuit of something new. We need to take whatever time is needed to acknowledge the loss and express our lament, before God and within community. It is important that we engage in the disciplines that are needed to open our hearts to God in the midst of transition, that our hearts would be transformed by God through the things we are experiencing. It is important that we seek out truth in order to hold on to hope—both the truth of what is happening in the transition and the truth of who God is in the midst of all that we are facing. Only then, after we have given time to each of these preparatory tasks, does God bring us to a place where we need to take a step of trust. Whether it is a step into something that is new and exciting, or a step into something more ordinary or mundane, either one requires both trust and obedient action.

Pastor Cory and Pastor Rocky (and their families) have taken risky steps of trust to make this transition happen—like Ruth and Boaz did. For most of us in the congregation, though, the steps of trust we need to make will be more like the steps that God gave to His people through Jeremiah. In fact, we could imagine God giving us a similar set of instructions (as in Jeremiah 29:4-7):

- Keep coming to Sunday worship service every week.
- Sing your heart out during the times of musical worship.

- Give your tithe faithfully, and support a couple of missionaries.
- Engage deeply with the Word of God as it is preached.
- Extend a warm welcome to newcomers.
- Pray for one another in community.
- Eat good food together, and laugh often.
- Serve in a ministry that makes you come alive.
- Get baptized (if you haven't already) and regularly celebrate the Lord's Supper together.
- Attend the Experience Evergreen SGV class and make the commitment of church membership.
- Reach out to your community with tangible expressions of the Gospel.
- Make disciples and equip disciple-makers among all nations.
- Love God with all your heart, and love others as Christ has loved you.

Those don't necessarily feel like big steps of trust, because they're the things we are already doing as a church. They are steps of trust, though, because in doing those regular activities—rather than running away when things are not how we want them to be—we are remaining faithful to this church where God has called us. We may not be the ones initiating change, but we can help in the process of change by our faithful, prayerful presence. Certainly there is a place for thoughtful, wise communication (or even critique) as God leads us to speak truth in love regarding particular elements of ministry that might be of concern to us. However, there is also a place for waiting patiently and trusting that God will work all things for good. Change—even good change that we desire—is not instantaneous. It takes much time. By our faithful participation in the week-by-week ministry and activities of the church, we demonstrate our trust in God's sovereign working out of that change.

# Transformational Transitions

## Session 7 – Navigating Transition: Maintain Perspective

### Where we're heading in this session

Transition is disruptive and can be very messy. In our human frailty it is easy to get flustered and upset by the instability of a season of transition. Therefore, in the midst of transition, it is vital that we learn to maintain perspective. If we are anticipating transformation of character as an outcome of the transition we are in, then a key way to maintain perspective is to be mindful of the pattern God often employs as He moves a person along in a journey of transformation. This is a pattern of life to death to resurrection, a downward path of loss that precedes the upward path of gain.

This pattern of life to death to resurrection shows up all throughout Scripture. We see it clearly in Ruth's story. When she made the decision to leave her homeland and start a new life with Naomi, that new life was not very promising. In fact, in many ways Ruth was giving up her life to go with Naomi. She was entering into a place of death, not life, and could not foresee how it would turn out. And in fact, though God did provide redemption for Ruth, she never saw in her lifetime the fullness of resurrection that God brought to her story, which we can see as we read her genealogy. We see it in Deuteronomy 8, before God's people enter the good land He had promised them, God reminds them of what He has done for them and how He has cared for them throughout their years in the desert. God also reveals to them that in all they have gone through, He was carrying out a bigger story than what they could see at the time. God was humbling them and testing them—bringing them down low—to see what was in their hearts, in order to teach them to depend on Him alone. Then He tells them about the wealth and ease and comfort they will have in the land where He is bringing them, and He warns them not to forget God in that new place. The perspective they needed to maintain was that dependence on God is a good thing.

In the midst of our own stories of transition, we usually do not see the end of the story, nor do we know what God will bring about. But because we see how God has worked in the stories of so many saints who have gone before us, we can have great confidence that He is doing a similar work in our story as well. Thus even though our story may initially be going down into death or loss, we can trust that God's pattern of death before resurrection means He is at work to bring life out of our dead places too. In this session, we will learn about this perspective that gives us hope to persevere in the midst of the hard places of our seasons of transition.

### STUDYING THE WORD

Last week we saw Ruth's gutsy, bold obedience to carry out Naomi's plan and ask Boaz to fulfill his role as kinsman-redeemer. She took a courageous step of trust in God to enter into a brand new season of life. And Boaz gladly reciprocated, committing to do all that she asked, but acknowledging that first he needed to clear it with another relative whose rights of redemption preceded his.

#### Read Ruth 4:1-12.

1. How is Ruth "redeemed" through Boaz's kindness?

Being the man of noble character that he is, Boaz goes to the city gate right away that morning, and he offers the other kinsman-redeemer the opportunity to redeem Ruth. The other man refuses the offer because marrying Ruth would impair his own inheritance—he opts for self-protection in place of loyal love. That opens the door for Boaz then to redeem Ruth, which he promptly carries out. So through his sacrificial kindness, Ruth gains not just a new husband, but as a widowed foreigner at the very bottom of the social ladder, she now receives a name and status and provision. She goes from being a nobody to being the wife of a noble landowner.

#### Read Ruth 4:13-17.

2. How is Naomi also “redeemed” through Boaz’s kindness to Ruth?

Not only is Ruth redeemed through Boaz’s kindness, but Naomi is also redeemed. She came back to her homeland bitter and empty, but now she is full of joy. She had been immobilized in her despair, but now God has given her a grandson who will be to her “a restorer of life and a nourisher of [her] old age” (Ruth 4:15).

Ruth’s story shows a pattern of how God often works in His people: He brings us from life to death to resurrection. Ruth’s love for Naomi is so great that she willingly enters into death in order to bring life to Naomi. This is the way Paul Miller describes it: “In order to give Naomi comfort, companionship, and food, Ruth gives up friends, family, and the possibility of a husband and children—in fact, her entire future. Ruth embraces hopelessness in order to give Naomi a measure of hope. Death is at the center of Ruth’s love.”<sup>1</sup> We read the whole story and see what God does for Ruth, and we perhaps miss something of the depth of her loss. But if we put ourselves in Ruth’s position at that first part of the story, where she is still reeling from the loss of her own husband and has no idea what will happen in the years ahead, we begin to get a sense of the death that she entered into by her choice to love Naomi. The transition she entered into carried tremendous loss and uncertainty. For Ruth this wasn’t just a happy love story but a dark valley of death that seemed hopeless at the time.

1. Paul Miller, *A Loving Life*, © 2014 Crossway, page 40.

3. How did God bring an even greater redemption from this story than what Boaz or Ruth or Naomi knew at the time? (See Ruth 4:17 and Matthew 1:1-16.)

Even when Ruth experienced God’s gracious provision of a new husband and a son, she still only saw a fraction of what we see now. We can see that God not only redeemed Naomi through Ruth’s self-dying love, and God not only redeemed Ruth by giving her such a worthy man as Boaz for a husband and blessing them with a son. But in Ruth’s act of entering into death for the sake of Naomi, God also brought redemption for the whole world—because Ruth’s son became part of the lineage of Jesus. Ruth could not see that level of God’s redemption even at the end of her life, and certainly not in the dark days surrounding the death of her first husband and her entrance into further death through committing to care for Naomi. Her life went down into death before moving upward into new life. It followed a pattern that we see throughout all of Scripture.

#### Read Deuteronomy 8:1-10.

In this passage, the people of Israel are on the brink of a major transition when Moses gives them this instruction. They were slaves in Egypt, then God set them free through Moses, but because of their disobedience they were wandering in the desert for 40 years. And now they are poised to leave the desert and enter the good land that God has been promising to them. This is a huge transition!

4. What was God’s purpose for the desert wanderings?

As they prepare for that transition, God is giving them perspective on why He took them through the desert. What are some of the reasons God gives for their desert wanderings?

verse 2: to humble them, test what was in their hearts, and see if they would obey

verse 3: to teach them dependence on God alone

verse 5: to discipline them as sons/children

verses 7-10: to prepare them for entering the Promised Land

That humbling, testing, and disciplining was not the end in itself though. Rather, all those were aimed at preparing the people for what was coming next. God was teaching them to depend on Him alone, so that they would be prepared for the place where He was going to bring them.

#### Read Deuteronomy 8:11-20.

5. What was the greater intent for all the humbling work of the desert? Verse 16 says that God's intent in all the humbling and testing: do them good (v. 16) in the end. Doing them good didn't just mean giving them freedom from slavery and an abundant land with great wealth.
6. What is the good that God planned for His people through this transition?  
verse 11: The good that God planned for them is that they would not forget the Lord their God.  
verse 17: Also, that they would not start thinking proudly that they had gained all that wealth from their own power. They were to remember God's goodness to them and trust in Him wholeheartedly. The hearts of the people needed to be "brought low" in dependence in the desert, so that their hearts would not "be lifted up" (v. 14) by their newfound wealth and comfort, causing them to act in independence from God. Dependent relationship with God was the good that was to come from their desert wanderings.  
verse 18: God was proving His loyalty to His people. He was confirming His covenant from long before, a covenant of love that He could not break, no matter how rebellious and disobedient His people were. And He was calling them to be loyal as well, by not forgetting Him and assuming they had gained this good land for themselves.

(See Appendix C for more on the concept of God's covenant love, or *hesed*.)

7. The bottom-line lesson from the wilderness: relational dependence on God (not autonomy).

#### Read Luke 14:11, James 4:10, and 1 Peter 5:6.

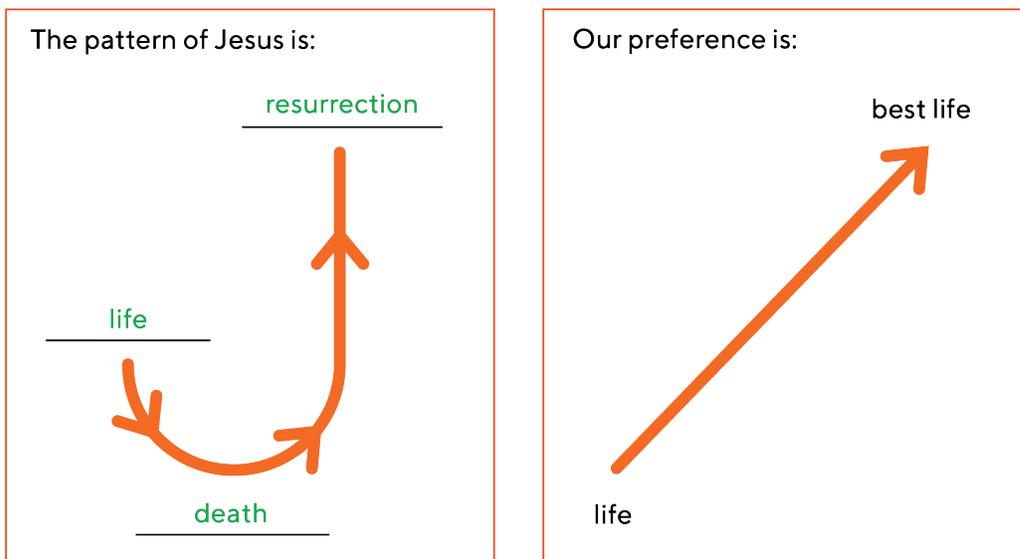
8. What is the pattern in Scripture regarding humility and exaltation?  
Humility always comes first—humility always precedes exaltation. God's perspective is opposite from our natural human bent. When we feel like we're low, we want to immediately move higher. But God's way is not a straight upward trajectory toward exaltation. God's way first goes down even lower into humility and then turns upward toward exaltation.
9. How did Jesus model this pattern in Philippians 2:5-11?  
*<sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue*

# Transformational Transitions

## Session 7 – Navigating Transition: Maintain Perspective

*confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Jesus modeled this pattern for us, and we see it in Philippians 2:5-11. Jesus was “born in the likeness of men” (v. 7). That was very low, for the Creator of the universe to become one of the creatures. But Jesus didn’t go straight from this low position to exaltation. Instead, He went even lower. “He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (v. 8). Then, and only then, did He move to exaltation (vv. 9-11). Humility for Jesus meant not just incarnation but death. The pattern of Jesus was: life to death to resurrection. This stands in stark contrast to how we typically would prefer life to go: from life to our best life now.



Paul Miller, in his book, *A Loving Life*, calls this pattern of life-death-resurrection the “J-curve” because the letter J starts low and goes lower before moving up. <sup>2</sup>

2. Paul Miller, *A Loving Life*, © 2014 Crossway, page 68.

This was the shape of Jesus’ life, as He made explicit in Luke 9:22: “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” But Jesus also made it explicit that this same shape was to characterize those who follow Him: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me whoever loses his life for my sake will save it” (Luke 9:23-24). Again in John 12:24-25, Jesus says, “unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”

Theologian J.I. Packer writes:

“Christ’s way was the way of a resurrection experience following a death experience, and we must expect to find that he is constantly taking us along that same road in one or other of its thousand different forms.”

And again:

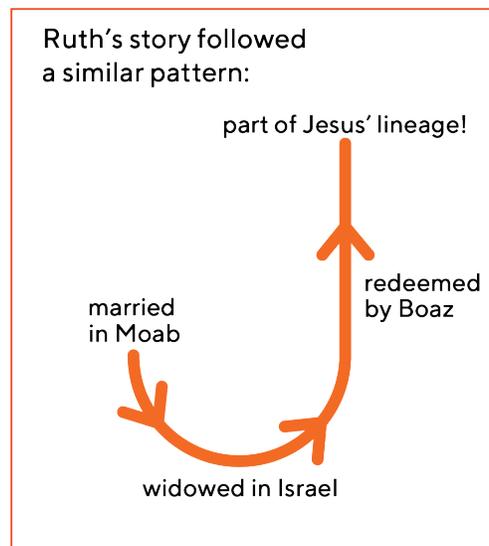
## Transformational Transitions

### Session 7 – Navigating Transition: Maintain Perspective

“For this is to be the pattern of our whole lives. Through the self-negations of love and obedience and the tribulations of pain and loss for Jesus’ sake, we enter into a thousand little deaths day by day, and through the ministry of the Spirit, we rise out of those little deaths into constantly recurring experiences of risen life with Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

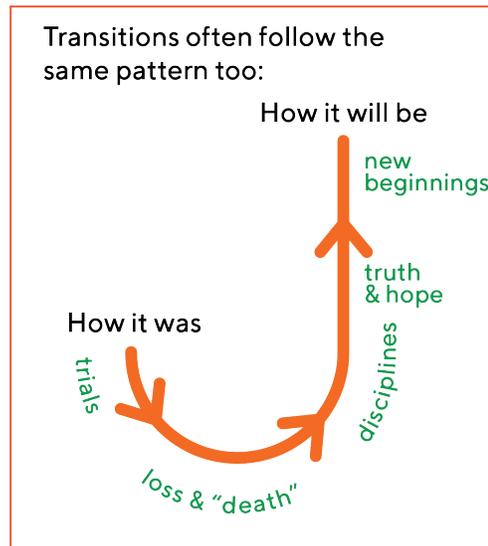
3. J.I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, © 2005 Baker Books, pages 61 and 136.

The pattern of Jesus’ life is to be the pattern of our lives as well. We’ve seen this J pattern in Ruth’s story. Her life was good in Moab, while she was married to Naomi’s son. That good life moved down into death (of her husband) and loss (of her home), as she became a widow in Israel. But death opened the door for resurrection, initially through being redeemed by Boaz, and then finally by becoming a part of the lineage of Jesus.



When we recognize that this J-shape is the usual pattern that God brings His people through in the process of growth and maturity, it helps to give us perspective when we find ourselves in very low places. We need reminders just like Moses gave to the people of Israel in Deuteronomy 8—reminders that God is not absent in the desert places, but He is in fact carrying out a vitally important work in our hearts. Apart from the humbling places that bring us low and make us painfully aware of our limitations and frailty, we would grow more and more independent from God and would think that we could manage life on our own. So even outside of seasons of transition, understanding this pattern of life-death-resurrection is tremendously helpful in maintaining perspective on what is happening in our lives.

But since transition invariably involves loss of some kind, and we are likely to find ourselves in desert places wondering what God is doing, it is especially helpful to be aware of this pattern in transition, so that we do not lose heart in those dark and difficult places. In this study, we’re looking at transition as a means by which God brings transformation to our lives. Therefore, we can expect that transition would follow a similar shape—a similar trajectory that moves downward into “death” and dependence before it moves upward into “resurrection” and new life—because that is the pattern of transformation. Our study, then, has followed this trajectory.



Transitions often follow the same pattern too:

- In Session 2 we looked at James 1 and saw how transition can be a trial or test that proves our faith. “Test” is the same word God uses in Deuteronomy 8:2 and 8:16 to describe what God was doing with His people in the desert.
- Then in Session 3, we started the Ruth story and talked about loss and lament; in that, we are honestly facing the death that comes with transition, rather than glibly assuming that everything will be wonderful and good.
- In Session 4 we looked at the way that Ruth opened her heart to God through a simple discipline of going to work in the field, and we talked about how we also open our hearts to God through disciplines that we practice. Transition *tests* us to see where our faith lies (who or what we are trusting in). Then through the disciplines we *apply* our faith and grow our dependence on our God.
- In Session 5 we saw the vital part that hope played in Ruth and Naomi’s story, and how that hope came alive as they took hold of truth. Hope is necessary throughout the whole process of transition, but especially in that place where resurrection has not yet come.
- And then in Session 6 we contrasted Ruth’s risky steps of faith into a brand new situation with the people of Israel’s mundane steps of faith entering in to the ordinary. In the process of our growth, we do not dictate when resurrection comes. God may bring us to that place of new life soon, or we may have to wait awhile, or we may not even fully realize it in our lifetime.

If transition follows this J-shape, then the testing is the downward slope of dependence, the loss and lament is the death at the bottom, and the disciplines are the small upward steps of faith from the bottom. These are all necessary before we move to the truth and hope of resurrection, and the steps into what is new.

In God’s work of transformation in our lives, if we try to avoid the desert parts and skip over the death, we miss out on vital growth in faith and dependence. And the growth that comes from the desert is foundational for further growth and maturity, because as we’ve seen in Deuteronomy 8, without that growth in dependence, we will not handle the “Promised Land”—the new life or exaltation—rightly, but will assume we’ve done it ourselves and then move toward autonomy from God rather than trustful dependence. So also, in transition, if we ignore the testing and the losses, and too quickly jump to start

something new, we will shortchange the work of transformation God can bring through the discomfort and struggle of change.

Seeing this J-shaped pattern is one aspect of truth that we need to grab ahold of in order to bring hope in the midst of transition, especially when it feels like we're stuck at the bottom of that curve in death and loss. Understanding how God works in our lives to bring transformation out of transition is vital for maintaining perspective. But this perspective is also vital when we're on the upward slope anticipating new and exciting change. Just like Moses' reminder to the people of Israel as they prepared to enter the Promised Land, we need to be reminded of our absolute dependence on God as we look ahead to what is new, so that we don't deceive ourselves into thinking that we have done this with our own wisdom and resources. So no matter where we are in the transition process, maintaining perspective means continually coming back to this truth of our dependence on God, and thanking Him for His mercy and faithfulness to us.



#### Where we're heading in this session

We have been learning throughout this study that transition is a kind of trial that God brings to test our faith, and He does so with the aim of transformation—of growing us toward maturity in Christ. We have looked at how to navigate transition in ways that grow our faith in Christ and move us toward transformation. And we have sought to not just learn information about transition but to practice exercises that open our hearts to the work of transformation that God is bringing through our seasons of transition. To thrive in transition, then, is to *keep on practicing* these ways of responding to God's gracious work of transformation until He accomplishes what He intends through our trial of transition. Though we tend to view discipline through primarily a punitive lens, Hebrews 12 speaks of it very positively. God's discipline proves our status as His sons and daughters and "yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness" so that we may share in God's holiness. But the fruit of this discipline only comes to those "who have been trained by it," who have run with endurance and laid aside sin and focused on Jesus, and have done so continually. To keep on practicing, day after day after day, praying for wisdom, lamenting in community, holding on to truth and hope, trusting in God, and maintaining perspective—that is the discipline we train ourselves in so that we can thrive in transition.

So as we wrap up this study, the challenge is to keep on practicing the things we have been learning. Thriving in transition—and thriving in any other trial we face—happens as we put into practice, day by day, habits of reliance on God and interdependence within the family of God. In this final session, we will explore the purpose and process of biblical discipline and training, which allow us to thrive in any season of transition. There is no guarantee that transformation will come out of a trial of transition; rather, we fix our eyes on Jesus and run with endurance, trusting that God will complete His good work in us.

#### STUDYING THE WORD

1. When you think of the word "discipline," what comes to mind?

If you are a parent with young children, you might think of discipline in terms of correction. When your child is disrespectful or does something wrong, disciplining them means correcting what is wrong. Sometimes that corrective discipline also involves punishment for a wrong done. Discipline as correction or punishment applies not only to children, but to youth and adults as well.

If you have served in the armed forces of our country, or perhaps currently serve in law enforcement, discipline could bring memories of boot camp and basic training. There, not only is your body conditioned and toughened to be able to carry out the rigor of fighting and protecting, but you are also brought under the discipline of rank and structure and orders so that you can work as a cohesive unit.

Similarly, if you play any kind of sport, you have experienced the discipline required of you, not only in practice but even outside of practice: working out, changing your diet, getting sufficient sleep, and so on. Perhaps you've seen teams or individuals without discipline, who won't follow a coach's instructions or who goof off instead of working hard at practice.

In academia, and in some occupations, your area of study or expertise is referred to as your discipline. It is the branch of knowledge which you have mastered in depth, and thus are qualified to teach or practice.

### Read Hebrews 12:1-11.

2. What metaphors of discipline or training does this passage speak of?

Hebrews 12 uses an athletic metaphor and a parental metaphor to speak of discipline and training. For the athlete, specifically a runner, discipline first of all means laying aside every weight. Anything in excess will only slow him down, so his body is lean and hard, his uniform is minimal, and his shoes are ultra-light. You never see an overweight runner in an Olympic race, nor do you see one wearing multiple layers of heavy clothing. All that excess weight has to come off in order to run well.

The runner runs with endurance, even when her legs are burning and her lungs feel ready to burst—she keeps pushing through until the end. A disciplined runner has her eyes fixed on the finish line tape, and she resists looking behind her or to the sides, because that extra movement will only slow her down and distract her focus.

In the setting of a family, discipline is very personal. It is applied only to those who belong in that family. In fact, because parents only discipline their own children, when a child receives discipline, that indicates clearly that the child belongs to them. Thus, there is a reassurance of belonging that comes with discipline in a family.

We think of discipline as painful, as rigorous, or as strict. But we also have a sense that discipline is very profitable and good. We may look at a successful Olympic athlete and think, “There is no way I could live that kind of disciplined life.” But at the same time we admire them for it, and we know that is why they have an Olympic gold medal and we don’t.

3. What is the purpose of discipline according to this passage?

In verses 10-11, the author of Hebrews summarizes the purpose of discipline and the way it accomplishes that purpose. Speaking of the discipline that God provides for His children, the author says, “He [God] disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness” (v. 10), and that discipline “yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (v. 11). The bottom-line purpose of godly discipline is to make us increasingly holy and righteous. So yes, there is pain that comes with discipline. There is endurance required for discipline. There is sacrifice involved in discipline. But despite the discomfort of discipline, we know it’s a good thing, and we desire that our lives would be characterized by discipline. Especially in the Christian life, we believe that sharing in God’s holiness is a very good thing. That is, in fact, the goal of our growth toward maturity in Christ.

4. How does discipline work?

It requires regular training over a long period of time.

Just as a desire for an Olympic medal would only be realized if we entered in to the discipline necessary to gain that medal, so also a desire for a life of holiness and righteousness as a Christian can only be realized if we allow ourselves to be trained by God’s discipline. So if the purpose of discipline is to make us holy and righteous, then the way discipline works is by regular training over a long period of time. Discipline—whether in the realm of athletics or the realm of Christian maturity—is not a quick fix or a simple solution. Rather, discipline of any kind is only effective when it is applied consistently over a long period of time.

Verse 11 makes this clear. In the moment, all discipline is painful. That isn’t just speaking of punishment being painful, but any kind of discipline in its early stages is certainly painful. If you are

out of shape and you start an exercise routine, the first few rounds of exercise can be very painful. It is only as your body adjusts and starts getting back in shape that the exercise becomes less painful—and then it's time to raise the bar and do a harder workout. But if you stop the exercise early because it's so painful, you gain nothing from it except sore muscles. The benefit only comes when that exercise is carried on consistently over a long period of time.

So also, the writer of Hebrews says, it is only “later” that discipline “yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.” That fruit only comes to “those who have been trained by it [i.e., by the discipline].” The goal of God’s discipline—holiness and righteousness—only comes through training that is consistently applied over a long period of time. In other words, maturity in Christ is no more magical or accidental than an Olympic gold medal or a Super Bowl ring. Rather, it comes through discipline that is often painful, and it takes a long time, in fact a lifetime.

5. Three areas of discipline for the Christian:

What is the discipline God brings to us as His children? What is it that we are to be trained by, in order to grow toward maturity? In this passage of Hebrews, that discipline can be seen as at least 3 things:

a. Laying aside sin.

Sin weighs us down. Sin trips us up. Sin is a far bigger issue than we like to think it is. Yes, for us who are Christians, we have been forgiven for all our sin, but until God brings us home to heaven, we will still sin. Thus sin needs to be laid aside, constantly and consistently, over a long period of time. Is this painful? Yes! We live in a world that elevates sin and laughs at holiness. Our flesh—that inborn tendency to live in autonomy from God—resists the laying aside of sin. And we have an enemy of our soul whose aim is to destroy us through sin. So we battle the world, the flesh, and the devil to set sin aside. It is not easy, nor is it comfortable.

What does it look like to lay aside sin? We regularly invite the Spirit of God to search our heart and reveal the sin that is present, but often hidden. We eagerly confess the sin that the Spirit reveals, knowing that our Savior has already paid the terrible price for our sin and now waits with open arms for us to come to Him. We gather in community to share with one another our sins and our sorrows, to remind one another of the truths of Scripture, and to walk with each other in putting off sin and putting on righteousness. Laying aside sin is not a solitary struggle where we have to just “gut it out” on our own; rather we do so as members of the Body who are united to Christ and connected to brothers and sisters in Christ.

b. Fixing our eyes on Jesus.

The discipline God calls us to engage in is first of all to continually lay aside sin. Then secondly, we are to fix our eyes on Jesus. We look to Jesus, not merely with a sideways glance but with a locked-in focus. We look in such a way because Jesus is our prize, Jesus is our example, and Jesus is our hope.

Jesus is our prize.

The runners in a race have their eyes glued on the tape across the finish line. The tape itself is not the prize, but there is a prize awaiting the one who crosses that finish line first. They are not looking up at the crowds in the stands. They are not looking around at the other competitors on the track. They are not looking down at their feet. No, their eyes are fixed on the prize in front of

them. For us as Christians, Jesus is our prize. Jesus is our greatest treasure. He is the one our lives are aimed toward and our eyes are fixed upon. We will not run well if our eyes are wandering all around or fixed on anything other than Jesus. (See I Corinthians 9:24-27.)

Jesus is our example.

Jesus Himself is our prize—we long to be with Him. But Jesus is also our example. Thus we fix our eyes on Him in order to see *how* to run this race we are in. Verse 3 says we are to “Consider Him...” In other words, we are to think about what Jesus has done, and meditate on His example. We can easily get overwhelmed and weary in the race, and then self-pity creeps in and makes us want to give up. But when we think about what Jesus endured for our sake, and acknowledge how small our struggle is in comparison (see verse 4), we find encouragement so that we “may not grow weary or fainthearted” (verse 3).

Jesus is our hope.

Jesus is our prize, and Jesus is our example. Jesus is also our hope. He ran this race ahead of us, and He finished the race. We are called to run and to struggle, but not to bear anything more or different from what our Lord has already completed. The fact that He “is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (verse 2) gives us great confidence and hope in our own struggle. The One who went before us is now with us in our race; therefore, there is always hope!

What does it look like to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus? In a 100-meter dash, it’s a straight shot to the finish line with nothing blocking the view, but the race we are in as believers is more like a marathon, where the finish line is not always in sight, and the scenery is constantly shifting. Therefore to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus requires intentionality and discipline, because it’s very easy to start fixating on other things around us. We have to continually remind ourselves of our goal and keep coming back to focus on Him. Singing songs of worship is very valuable toward this end, as is Scripture memory. Living below our means and giving generously to others can help prevent our hearts from fixating on our wealth or possessions instead of on Christ.

c. Running with endurance.

God disciplines us through the laying aside of sin, through fixing our eyes on Jesus, and finally through running with endurance. Endurance is crucial in a long race. And endurance is crucial in growing toward maturity in Christ. It is a lifelong process, not a quick fix, so we need to endure through all the ups and downs in order to say like the apostle Paul “I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.” (2 Timothy 4:7)

So as we come to the end of our study, our goal is to keep on practicing all of these things we have been learning. Recall our theme statement from the first session:

Thriving in transition—in ways that lead to transformation—comes through everyday practices of praying for wisdom, lamenting in community, holding on to hope, stepping out in trust, and maintaining perspective.

Just as with any area of discipline, if these things are to produce the “peaceful fruit of righteousness” in our hearts, they will have to be practiced continually over a long period of time. Praying for wisdom one time, or even throughout one week, is wonderful and good, but until that practice is ingrained as a habit,

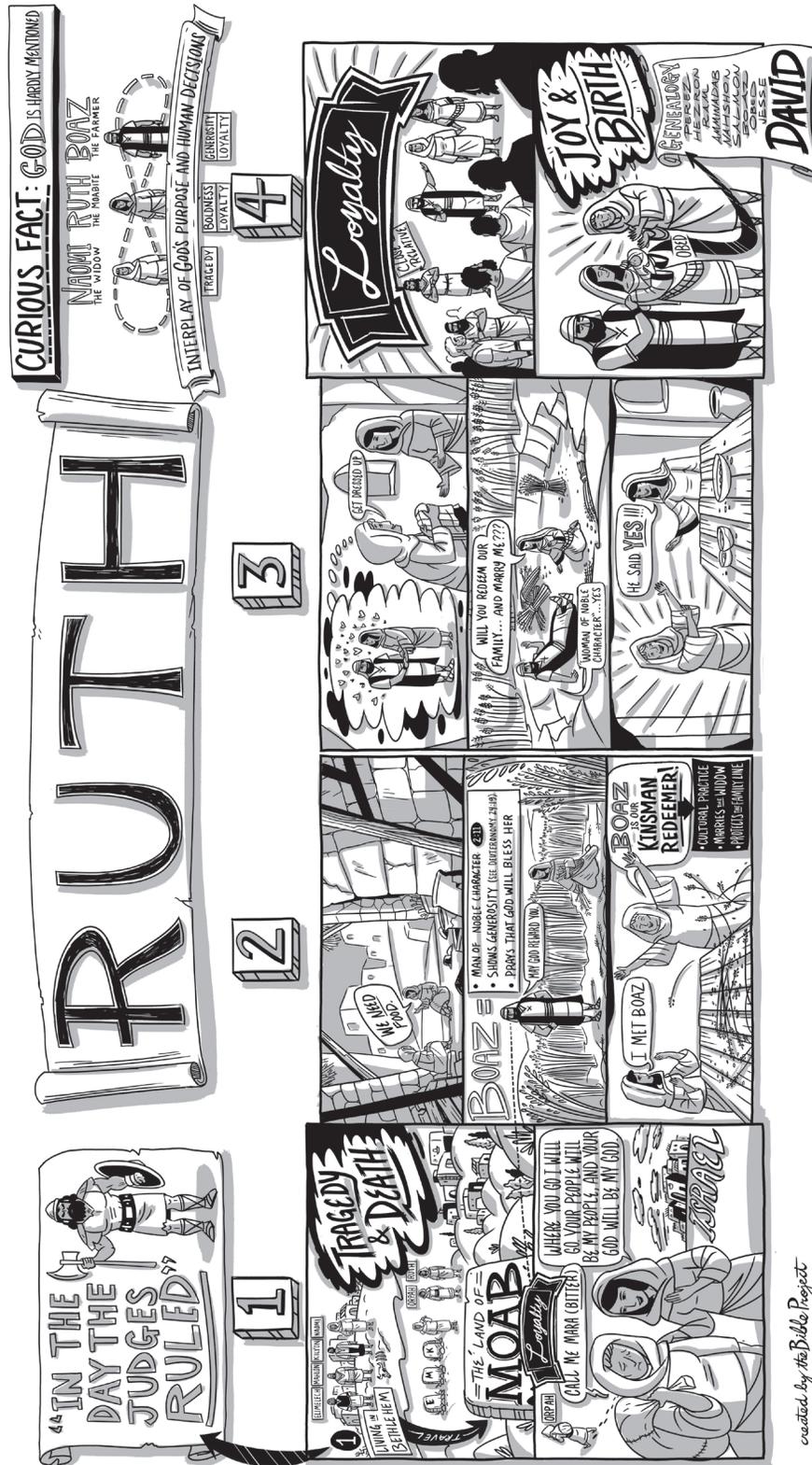
whereby I automatically pray for wisdom, whatever comes my way, it will not be transformative. Each of these practices is the same. We have merely introduced the ideas and tried them out during this study, but they will need to be put into practice regularly if they are to help us mature in Christ, and enable us to thrive in this transition season.

Whether or not we are in a season of transition, these are habits we can be practicing. In fact, it is far better to learn them outside of a transition season, so that in the pressure of the transition, we would already be practicing these habits. What allows us to thrive as we walk through this transition in our church is that we walk with God—and with one another—seeking His wisdom, encouraging each other with hope and truth, and trusting Him as we step into areas that are new or unknown. God is shaping us, “that we may share in His holiness,” and this season of transition is a part of the process by which that good work comes about. So we can walk through it with confidence, knowing that our Sovereign God is carrying on the good work He began in this church, and in each of our lives individually. (See Philippians 1:6.)

Thriving in transition—and thriving in any other trial we face—happens as we put into practice, day by day, habits of reliance on God and interdependence within the family of God. At the end of the day, there is no guarantee that transformation will come out of a season of transition; rather, we fix our eyes on Jesus and run with endurance, through times of transition and times of stability, trusting that God will complete His good work in us as we journey with Him in trust and obedience.



		Review	Participants
<b>Appendix B</b>	<b>Overview Chart of Ruth</b>	52	(59)
<b>Appendix C</b>	<b>Understanding <i>hesed</i> Love</b>	53	(60)
<b>Appendix D</b>	<b>Scripture Memory Resources and Ideas</b>	54	(61)
<b>Appendix E</b>	<b>Recommended Reading</b>	55	(62)



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The English language does not have an equivalent to the Hebrew word *hesed*. It is translated in various ways in the Old Testament: steadfast love, unfailing love, kindness, mercy, faithfulness, and loving-kindness. Understanding *hesed* is key in understanding the story of Ruth, and in the larger picture, understanding God's covenant love for His chosen people Israel. On more than one occasion, Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6—"I desire mercy (*hesed*), not sacrifice"—to show that God is more interested in our loyal love to Him than in merely our acts of religiosity or sacrifice.

It is God's *hesed* for us that gives us stability and confidence in the midst of seasons of transition, because we know that we do not walk alone, but the King who has redeemed us and made us His bride will never leave us or forsake us.

This is what Paul Miller writes about *hesed*, in his book, *A Loving Life*:

Sometimes *hesed* is translated "steadfast love." It combines commitment with sacrifice. *Hesed* is one-way love. Love without an exit strategy. When you love with *hesed* love, you bind yourself to the object of your love, no matter what the response is. So if the object of your love snaps at you, you still love that person. If you've had an argument with your spouse in which you were slighted or not heard, you refuse to retaliate through silence or withholding your affection. Your response to the other person is entirely independent of how that person has treated you. *Hesed* is a stubborn love.

Love like this eliminates moodiness, the touchiness that is increasingly common in people today. Moodiness often begins with accumulated slights or the day just not working. Our inner spirits momentarily give up on life, and we stop caring how we affect people around us. Self is set on hair trigger. If we do *hesed*, that is no longer the case. It doesn't mean that we don't have moments and days when we have the cranks or share how fragile our spirit is; we just refuse to let it affect us. *Hesed* is opposite of the spirit of our age, which says we have to act on our feelings. *Hesed* says, "No, you act on your commitments. The feelings will follow." Love like this is unbalanced, uneven. There is nothing fair about this kind of love. But commitment-love lies at the heart of Christianity. It is Jesus's love for us at the cross, and it is to be our love for one another.

*Hesed* love is a determination to do someone good, no matter what, to be faithful to a covenant regardless of its impact on you. It wills to love when every fiber in your body screams *run*. This determination to love is at the heart of Jesus's relationship with his Father, and at the heart of ours as well. Not surprisingly, Jesus says: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). Paul the apostle says that this death of self united him with Jesus's death: "For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you" (2 Cor. 4:11-12). That is the essence of Calvary love.<sup>1</sup>

1. Paul Miller, *A Loving Life*, © 2014 Crossway, pages 24-25, 34.

Psalm 119:11 says, “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.” We might talk about our need to “be in the Word” (and certainly it is vital that we spend time studying the Word of God), but we talk less about getting the Word in us. If we are to “Let the word of Christ dwell in [us] richly,” and if that word of truth is the source from which we are to be “teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom” (Colossians 3:16), then memorizing verses and passages of God’s Word is a very important discipline in the life of every Christian.

We might recognize Scripture memory as a vital discipline, but as with most kinds of discipline (whether athletic, artistic, academic, or spiritual), Scripture memory won’t happen just from good intentions. We must invest a lot of effort to figure out a system and plan. Consistency and regularity are crucial; even someone with a terrible memory can memorize something if it is repeated often enough.

Here are some resources and ideas to help you develop habits of Scripture memory, not just during this Bible study series, but hopefully far beyond the series as well.

**Verse Cards:** In each session, you will receive a notecard with the memory verse for that session. Place that notecard next to your bed or on your bathroom mirror, wherever you will see it multiple times throughout the day. Simply read the verse once or twice every time you see the notecard. You could also keep the notecard in your pocket or put it in a conspicuous spot on your desk at work. As you accumulate several verse cards, punch a hole in each one and put them on a key ring. Make sure to rehearse the previous ones at the same time that you read the new one.

**Electronic Reminders:** If you’re more tied to electronic devices than to pieces of paper, you could type the verse into a reminder on your phone and set the alarm for 2 or 3 reminders during the day. Then when the alarm goes off, simply read the verse once or twice, aloud if possible.

**CRAM app:** Download this free app (<https://www.cram.com>) and set up flashcards with the verses you are memorizing. The app has multiple options for how to learn and practice the verses, and it can sync with your phone as well, so that you can practice on the go. Get in the habit of rehearsing your verses whenever you check Facebook or email. The app allows you to utilize those in-between moments while waiting in a grocery line or picking up your child from school.

Find other tips and resources in these articles:

<https://www.crossway.org/articles/5-tips-for-bible-memorization/>

<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/how-do-you-memorize-scripture>

# Transformational Transitions

## Appendix E – Recommended Reading

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### **A Loving Life: In a World of Broken Relationships**

by Paul E. Miller, © 2014 Crossway.

If you'd like to learn more about the Old Testament characters Ruth and Naomi, Paul Miller's Bible study of the book of Ruth combines the depth of a commentary with the readability of a devotional guide. But prepare to be deeply convicted and challenged. The kind of love that Ruth's story reveals is not an easy, romantic, self-gratifying love, but is an enduring, uneven love that reflects the love of Christ.

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### **A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World**

by Paul E. Miller, © 2009, 2017 NavPress.

This is not a book on transition, but since it is a book on connecting with God in the midst of the ups and downs of everyday life, it can be an immensely helpful resource in a time of transition. The new edition (2017) has an added chapter on Hebrew Laments (chapter 22), which is worth the price of the book. If cynicism has a grip on your heart, and you wonder whether prayer makes any difference, you need to read this book. In fact, read it twice.

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### **Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes**

by William Bridges, © 2004 Da Capo Press.

The first edition of this wise and warm little book was published in 1979. Twenty-five years later, with over half a million copies sold, this updated and expanded edition offers even greater insight from a man whose whole life has been dedicated to helping individuals and organizations navigate transition. This is not written from a Christian worldview, nor is it seeking to express biblical values; however, there is much truth that can be gleaned within its pages, especially as Bridges describes the transition process itself.

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The following titles are excellent resources for understanding—and engaging in—the process of sanctification. There are multiple factors involved in God's process of transforming the Christian's heart toward greater maturity in Christ, and these books offer some of the best explanations of how that process of change takes place.

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### **How Does Sanctification Work?**

by David Powlison, © 2017 Crossway.

This compact but impactful book shows how multiple factors work together to bring about our sanctification in Christ.

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### **How People Change**

by Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, © 2006, 2008 New Growth Press.

Lane and Tripp present a solid, Gospel-centered model of biblical change through Christian community.

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### **Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ**

by Dallas Willard, © 2002, 2012 NavPress.

If you can wade through the academic level of Willard's writing, you will gain much from this excellent book. If you want just a taste, read chapter 5: Spiritual Change: The Reliable Pattern.

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### **Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us**

by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, © 2005, 2015 InterVarsity Press.

This is not an instruction manual to read cover to cover, but a handbook to use in practice as you learn to open your heart to God's work of transformation through "training wheels" (a.k.a. spiritual disciplines).