

NORTHERN LIGHT

Digest

Grace Communion International Canada / Communion Internationale dans la Grâce, Canada MARCH 2018

Transitions on the Journey to God's Rest land

There's an old joke that says, "When Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden he said to her, 'Honey, we're in a time of transition.'"

There's an old joke that says, "When Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden he said to her, 'Honey, we're in a time of transition.'"

And so it goes. Not all like change. Yet it seems to be our lot in a world moving at the speed of Twitter. Millions and millions of North Americans relocate each year, to which most people in pastoral ministry can relate. After beginning

ministry in Regina, Saskatchewan my wife and I were sent off to Brandon, Manitoba then across the prairies to Calgary before a major move to Toronto and then back across the mighty continent to Vancouver. Finally came the biggest move of all—from beautiful Canada to California for 24 years! Now, seventeen hundred miles later, here we are in a different location once again.

Not that I'm complaining. When hired for ministry I was told by my first supervisor, "Bring your travelling shoes." Such is and was the pastoral life. I also know that so many of my friends in ministry have experienced much much more. I know of one classmate who was transferred from England to Australia and *while his luggage was in transit* he was reassigned to South Africa. That's transitioning.

Social psychologists even map out our life cycle in seven or eight dynamic leaps from childhood, to adolescence, to early life, to mid-life, early old age and then on to old age and retirement. The Bible seems to agree with some of this, mentioning childhood and youth as temporary stages in life's ongoing journey (Ecclesiastes 11:10, KJV).

There's no question about it, the Biblical metaphor of life as a journey hits home hard sometimes. Whether we face the empty nest syndrome, job transfers, forced relocations, aging parents, retirement or transitioning to a care home, we as Christians seem fated to follow the experiences of "the father of the faithful," a man called Abraham.

"Father of the Faithful"

As we know, Hebrews 11 is the faith chapter, the believer's Hall of Fame. It focuses a lot on Abraham as our spiritual forefather, a



As we know, Hebrews 11 is the faith chapter, the believer's Hall of Fame. It focuses a lot on Abraham as our spiritual forefather, a man called to set out "not knowing where he was going (Hebrews 11:8)."

Transitions can be stimulating and exciting. They can also be disorienting and somewhat bewildering, one of the top five counters on the stress scale. At such times we are forced to refocus, rethink our commitments, and prepare to shift gears one more time. All of this of course can lead us to ponder once again on the importance of faith in the Christian life. Like Abraham, the Christian too must ultimately follow God on faith, i.e. the spiritual evidence in his mind and spirit of things ultimately working out for the good. The Bible resounds with this message.

man called to set out “not knowing where he was going (Hebrews 11:8).” It often seems like that in our own lives. Hebrews 13:14 seems apt quite often, “For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.”

Transitions can be stimulating and exciting. They can also be disorienting and somewhat bewildering, one of the top five counters on the stress scale. At such times we are forced to refocus, rethink our commitments, and prepare to shift gears one more time. All of this of course can lead us to ponder once again on the importance of faith in the Christian life. Like Abraham, the Christian too must ultimately follow God on faith, i.e. the **spiritual evidence** in his mind and spirit of things ultimately working out for the good. The Bible resounds with this message.

A Few Biblical Transitions

Isaac, son of Abraham, wandered for most of his life and his son Jacob made a forced departure into the proverbial “far country.” These pilgrim sojourners accepted their lot as “strangers and exiles” and reaped far-reaching blessings for themselves and the people who came after them (Hebrews 11:13).

The military leader Gideon had to trust his physical life to an invisible God’s strange-seeming instructions in fighting the Midianites, a much larger horde. After testing God and being tested he was ready to go on this daring new venture God had chosen him for (Judges 6-7).

Israel had to watch Joshua succeed the mighty Moses and King David made special arrangements for his son Solomon to succeed him. In each case God’s people transitioned into a broader, richer reality. Later, the prophet Elisha took over the prophetic office from Elijah. Daniel and his three friends found themselves abruptly

removed from their home-land of Judah and plunked down in paganized Babylon, epitome of evil. But they transitioned well and became heroes of faith in their strange new homeland with new names, new roles and new opportunities to serve God (Daniel 1).

Even in the New Testament church Jesus passed on from his active physical presence to place his disciples under the superintending care of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13). The missionary evangelist Paul of Tarsus wrote two letters instructing and steadying his young trainee Timothy.

In fact, transitions seem almost the norm in the Biblical record, not unlike regular workplace training and updating are in our typical job situations today.

Remembering this, we can be encouraged by principles in God’s word that can help us make the most of those changes and adjustments. Here are some of them.

He goes before us

First, remember **God has the habit of going before us**. He promised the Israelites in their wilderness wanderings that he would go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Numbers 9:21-23). In the New Testament Jesus had a way of always being ahead of his disciples. He sketched out the details in advance as to how to prepare for his last Passover (Mark 14:12-16) and he had a fire with breakfast cooked and ready on that dramatic beach scene in John 21.

One of the results of the learning revolution in our fellowship is to see how Time and Place mean little to our great unbounded God. He seems to live in the past, present and future at the same time. This reassures us that God is already ahead of us wherever we go. He is the One in Revelation 21:5 who calls to us from the future saying, “Behold I make all things new.”

It seems simple but, wherever we go, God is already there. That is encouraging to a Christian.

A second principle is **a willingness to embrace complexity with discernment and good grace**. When you change houses the bathroom may not work, the neighbor’s dog may keep you awake and the bus routes for school and downtown are all different. And where do you go to pay the gas bill? Here again, we have to build a kind of positive expectation into our daily strategy. Look around. Thankfully there are new neighbors to meet who are willing to show us the ropes. To live by faith is to expect the Great God to send people into your life who can really help you much as Moses wisely listened to his father-in-law Jethro (Exodus 18:17-24).

Seasoned Christians learn to be on the lookout for people God is sending them. This was part of Yahweh’s refocusing message to his stressed-out servant Elijah. When Elijah felt weary and all alone God reminded him that there were seven thousand Israelites who were ready to follow his direction. And more. “Go, return on your way...and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-Meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place” (1 Kings 19:15-18).



“Relax Elijah, I’ve got this covered,” God seemed to be saying. “Your work isn’t over. In fact, the best is just beginning.”

“I’ve got this covered!”

“Relax Elijah, I’ve got this covered,” God seemed to be saying. “Your work isn’t over. In fact, the best is just beginning.” We have to remember these faith-building chapters when we face what has been called “the tyranny of the new.”

A third principle flows from this and that is **to be alert to new growth opportunities**. The prophet Samuel had the demoralizing experience of being rejected by the people he had served for so many years. A hazard of ministry! His was almost a forced retirement. But the never-failing God had a good word for his faithful servant. “Get ready for a big transition, Samuel. Go and anoint David the son of Jesse as the next king over Israel” (1 Samuel 16:1-18).

If we are wise enough to avoid trying to do too much at once in a manic zeal for mastery, if we listen to that still small voice that is often God inside us, we can stay “open” to new friends, new opportunities and new growth in our new circumstances. In this way the patriarch Joseph saw a purpose even in his very brutal transition down to Egypt (Genesis 50:20). Much later in time, Paul and Barnabas clashed over the career of young John Mark but in the end it worked out for good. Paul chose a new partner, Silas, and instead of one evangelistic team of Paul and Barnabas there were now two!

God moves in mysterious ways sometimes and living by faith is being patient enough to embrace his mystery in our lives.

Courage for Daily Living

Fourthly, (and somewhat tongue-in-cheek-like), life demands courage and **we must mobilize the courage we don’t have!** This means to petition and even beg God for fortitude and courage in each new development in our lives or when placed in predicaments we had rather not contemplate. Look at this promise in Isaiah 40:28-31:

“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles: they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not faint.”

The eagle soars above the storm it is said, and there are many storms promised in the Christian life (Acts

NORTHERN LIGHT *Digest*

Vol.7 No.1 March 2018

Gary Moore

Editorial Advisor

Bill Hall

Managing Editor

Layout and Design

Northern Light Digest is published 4 times annually for members of Grace Communion International Canada. Editorial contributions and comments on any issue raised in Northern Light Digest are welcome although unsolicited materials may not be returned. Please address all correspondence to:

The Editor,
Northern Light Digest
101 - 5668 192 Street,
Surrey, BC V3S 2V7

or email us at:
northernlight@gcicanada.ca

The new online edition of Northern Light Digest is available at www.gcicanada.ca

Unless noted otherwise, scriptures are quoted from the Holy Bible, New International Version, © Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers. Photos: © iStockphoto.com
Send all address changes to:
Northern Light Digest
101 - 5668 192 St.
Surrey, BC V3S 2V7
email:
northernlight@gcicanada.ca





The unexpected transitions in life can remind us of something even more important. The church is a Pilgrim Church headed for an eternal rest in the heavenly places in Hebrews 13:18-24. Mount Sinai and the journey to the old covenant were spectacular events, but the journey to the spiritual mountain Mt Zion is infinitely more wonderful.

14:22). St. Paul saw more trouble than most of us will and he counsels us, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, in prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

The man who wrote those words once found himself alone in Athens stranded after much harassment in northern Greece. There he had been imprisoned, wrongfully accused and whipped and beaten. Timothy left him in Athens more or less "on furlough." But being Paul, he could not stand the utter paganism all around him and soon began to speak out in the public marketplace. This opened up a chance to speak to what was the Supreme Court of Athens and to deliver a major address on God's overall purpose in history (Acts 17).

What a lesson for us as we move through the sometimes rough and ready transitions in life.

Remember the Future

Hebrews 11:9 mentions Abraham and his family as sojourners, **spiritual travelers** on the road to an ultimately eternal city God is preparing (11:10). They didn't see that final city but they were convinced of it and as a result had many sub-promises fulfilled along the way. So do we.

The unexpected transitions in life can remind us of something even more important. The church is a Pilgrim Church headed for **an eternal rest in the heavenly places** in Hebrews 13:18-24. Mount Sinai and the journey to the old covenant were spectacular events, but the journey to the spiritual mountain Mt Zion is infinitely more wonderful.

The Gospel teaches us that we already inhabit, in part, the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6). Present tests and blessings are but pointers to that endless life of faith that extends beyond this physical existence. That, of course is the ultimate transition.

But faith works for us in the here and now as well as the future. And for that we can all be thankful.

Neil Earle