



HINGE

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LINDSAY**

**MAKING
THE MOST
OF LIFE'S
TRANSITIONS**

MOMENTS



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APPROACHING THE DOORS IN OUR LIVES

CONSIDERING A CHANGE

*For everything there is a season,
and a time for every matter under heaven:*

*a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up.*

ECCLESIASTES 3:1-3 (ESV)

I WAS SIX YEARS OLD WHEN the floods destroyed my home. We had not been planning on moving, but it is hard to argue with five feet of water. The Pearl River runs from central Mississippi down to the Gulf of Mexico, passing straight through my hometown of Jackson. The rains that caused the flood had fallen upstream of us, out of our sight. Such is often the case with sudden changes: their causes are unseen and often entirely unrelated to us. The comptroller general of the United States eventually determined



that the flooding had been so severe because efforts to fight and mitigate it were “hampered by a lack of coordination among federal, state, and local agencies.”¹ It was not my family’s fault that the rains were three times heavier than normal that spring, or that the Army Corps of Engineers had not communicated with the local authorities. It was not our fault that the flood waters rose higher than estimates predicted and poured into our home. Even though none of this was our fault, one terrible evening it became our problem.

Change is like a flood. It often comes on quickly, and you might not see it coming. But transition is different. Transition is a gradual process that follows a major change in life. If you quit your job and move to a new city to start a new job, that change happens quickly. One day you are working for one company; the next day you are working for another. Or for younger people, one day you are living at home with your parents; the next day you are living at college. These changes are instantaneous and definite. You can circle the day of the big move on your calendar. But it is harder to pinpoint precisely when you will have fully transitioned into the new place. Thankfully, unlike change, most transitions are anticipatable, and we have some measure of control over how they play out.

I became the president of Gordon College by a vote of the board of trustees on March 26, 2011. But if you asked me when it was that I fully transitioned to *being* the president of the school, I could not tell you. I never woke up one day and thought, “Ah yes, today is the day I finally feel at ease in my new job.” But I did eventually enter that state. This is because unlike changes, which are instantaneous and definite, transitions are gradual and imprecise. They are a process, not a moment.

At their core, transitions are the internal adjustments by which we reorient ourselves to new environments, new experiences, and new seasons of life. These changes wear different guises at different stages in our lives, but for many of us the first major change we experience is our graduation from high school. The transition to college life or the job market comes more gradually. No college student feels at home on the first day of classes. But mastering this transition—weaning ourselves from familiar places and habits and embracing independence from our childhood lives—sets us up for future success.

Changes disrupt our lives and move us into new seasons, where we must begin the process of transition. Sociologist Ann Swidler has written persuasively about the difference between “settled” and

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“unsettled” times. Settled times consist of “traditions and common sense; [within which we] refine and reinforce skills, habits, and modes of experience.”² These settled times are where most of us spend nearly our entire lives. They are the familiar and comfortable seasons of life in which our environments and habits are well understood. We are guided within them by routine because that is how we simplify and make sense of life. In the *unsettled* times, not routines but new ideas are the forces driving us forward. In these times, we “create new strategies for action.” These unsettled times are what I usually call transitional periods.

Our lives are an ongoing movement between settled and unsettled spaces. We use familiarity and routine for as long as we can,

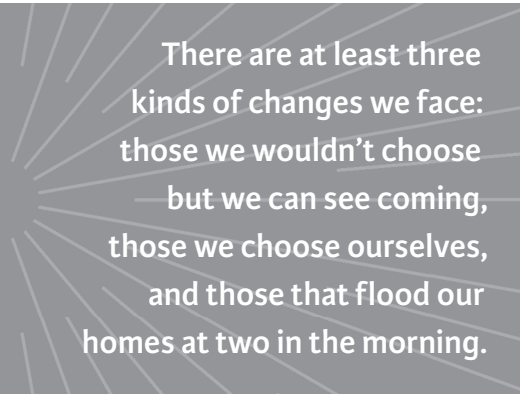


but when change occurs, we are often forced through new doorways and have to adapt to new ways of thinking, new modes of acting. Change moves us out of our previous settled time; transition moves us into the next one. While changes are significant to our lives, it is the success of our transitions that will determine our satisfaction and effectiveness in the days and years to come—whether we will succeed in college or find satisfaction in our new job. This chapter is about discerning how to respond to the unsettling moments when change is around the corner, whether we chose it or not. How well we handle these moments makes a world of difference.

BE PREPARED

There are at least three kinds of changes we face: those we wouldn't choose but we can see coming, those we choose ourselves, and those that flood our homes at two in the morning. The first two offer us some choice about how and when we pack our bags; the third offers us none.

I interviewed Jamie Dimon, current CEO of JPMorgan Chase (the largest bank in the United States) and previous cofounder of the financial services conglomerate Citigroup (the third largest).

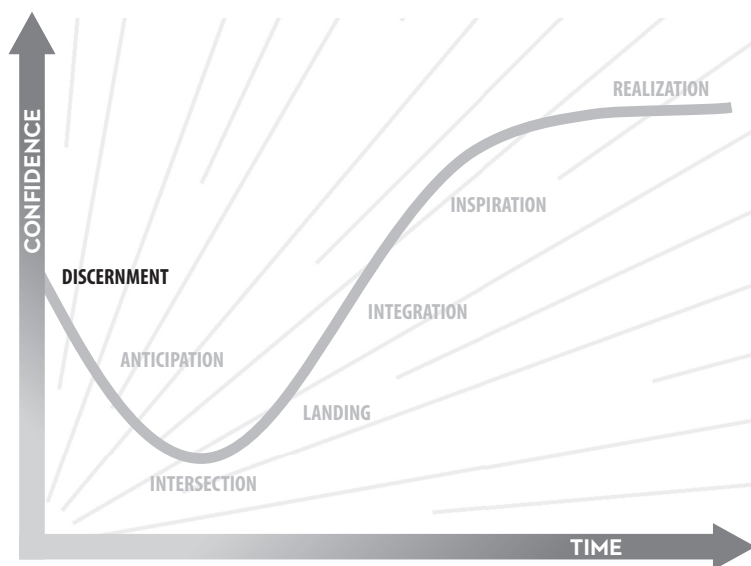


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While at Citigroup, he experienced a sudden, involuntary change. At the time, he was serving as president, the company was growing, and by all accounts, his employees and board were pleased with his work. Yet one Sunday afternoon, a senior executive

reached out for a quick chat—and ended up firing Dimon. He was forced out over a weekend. That evening, as he told his family what had happened, his youngest daughter asked if they would have to move out of their house and live in the streets. Jamie Dimon was certainly not penniless, so his daughter was not going to sleep in the streets. But his story illustrates an important point. It does not matter how successful, wealthy, or good you are at your job: a major life change is never more than a phone call away.

Because of their unpredictability, unexpected changes are often the most difficult to handle. But just because something is unpredictable does not mean it is unpreparable. In fact, the unpredictability of these changes actually makes the scope of preparation quite narrow. The best way to prepare for an unseen transition is to keep in mind how close one could be and to develop the virtues—such as humility, courage, and self-control—we will need to make good choices when the hinge moment presents itself.



In the phase of discernment, we benefit from practices that help still the soul. Silence and solitude, meditation and self-examination are some of the best ways to manage the mix of emotions we feel during this phase of our transition. God speaks most often not through a megaphone or a billboard but through a still, small voice. The clearest way to hear God is to become quiet enough to be attentive. As Isaiah 30:21 reminds us, “Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it.” But God primarily speaks from behind—not in front of—us. That means we usually have to take the first step even when we are unsure of the way forward. And, of course, not every opportunity is one we should pursue. Sometimes moving is not the best move. But before we can reach that conclusion, we have to actively seek the Lord’s guidance and listen for God’s leading in our lives.

When properly understood, the inevitability of future transitions is not a cause for fear but a reason for gratitude for what is and preparation for what will be. We can trust in God’s goodness because we serve a Lord who is familiar with the troubles of this world but who has also overcome them. There are simple things you can do to prepare for the unexpected, such as keeping your résumé up to date or getting a new appraisal for your home. But these preparations will not remove the suffering from a future transition. Such pain does not come from the small tasks we have to complete when we move but rather from the sudden removal of the structures that support us in the settled times of life. Therefore, being mentally and spiritually prepared for changes you cannot anticipate is the best way to take the teeth out of a transition. Spiritual disciplines—such as keeping a daily gratitude

journal or memorizing Scripture—are resources we can draw upon in times of upheaval and uncertainty. Indeed, daily practices that improve our character are the most straightforward way to prepare for the unexpected.

RESPECT YOUR RESTLESSNESS

For those who are made particularly uncomfortable by unforeseen change, there is good and bad news. The good news is that sometimes

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we get to pick the timing of our transitions; the bad news is that sometimes we get to pick the timing of our transitions. Voluntary transitions may lack the sting of unforeseen change, but they bring distinct challenges of their own. Almost always, these voluntary transitions in the lives of my PLATINUM study subjects began with a feeling of restlessness or dissatisfaction. It seems that sometimes if we stay in the “settled times” for too long, we grow tired of the routine and the comfort, and begin to crave something new. A feeling of restlessness is not cause enough to quit your day job, but you should listen to it.

I got to know Bruce Kennedy a year before he died. Bruce had served as the most successful CEO in the history of Alaska Airlines. In less than ten years on the job, he matured the company from an obscure, regional carrier to the nationwide brand it is today, growing its revenue tenfold. And then, all of a sudden, he stepped away:

I started getting restless in about my tenth year . . . and I couldn't quite put my finger on it. . . . Somehow it wasn't



holding the fascination for me that it had. I was on the board of Mission Aviation Fellowship . . . and after the board meeting, we decided to drive over to Palm Springs and just go into a motel [to] read the Bible and pray, for guidance specifically on this issue. . . . I had just a very clear . . . understanding at that time that my time of stewardship with Alaska was coming to an end, and that I was to pass it on, step down. I was weeping, I was just openly sobbing.

Bruce was one of the first people I interviewed, and the story of his deeply emotional response to an oncoming transition struck me. As I interviewed others, I realized that his story was not unique. Time and time again, I saw people who, at the top of their careers, suddenly walked away. For some, it was a way to resolve tensions over work-life balance. For many others, it was a matter of needing a chance to self-renew after many years of long, hard work. A sudden break afforded a chance to undertake something entirely different. And for a few, it was a response to a sense of calling they had been feeling for a while and finally decided to act.

Bruce's story sheds light on how we might approach these voluntary transitions. First, a transition is not always an escape from a bad time or tragic event. Many times transitions come even as the days are good, long, and sunny. But for everything there is a season, and oftentimes a sense of restlessness is the first sign that it is time to move along.

The second lesson from Bruce's story is that he didn't keep his thoughts and deliberations to himself. Rather, he did the two things I found most common among successful people as they were facing a hard life decision. First, he sought counsel. The advice of a trusted confidant is invaluable at the onset of a

transition. For Bruce it was his wife, a very natural choice. But it could also be a mentor, a pastor, a coach—anyone who can serve as a sounding board. Having long-term mentors and trusted friends is essential during these seasons.

There is also another source of counsel and wisdom: faith in Christ. In transition, people of faith know not only that God has ordered their steps but also that he is responsive to petition and prayer. That's why in addition to consulting others, Bruce also prayed for guidance and confirmation. For many, Paul's words to the Philippians are especially comforting in seasons of change: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7 ESV).

Finally, and most soberingly, Bruce reminds us that leaving is tough. It often really hurts. But leaving a settled time opens the doorway to new possibilities, to even more enriching experiences. Bruce stepped away from being one of the best CEOs in the global airline industry and moved to China to teach English to refugees. That may not be the same move you make, but the impulse is the same: responding to a restless heart and pursuing a new season of fulfillment. The sense of restlessness that prompted Bruce to step away from being the best of the best prompted him also to pursue something that gave him an even deeper sense of purpose.

A sense of restlessness can creep up on anyone. So why do we so often try to fit "new wine into old wineskins," as Jesus put it, instead of respecting the new vintage (Mark 2:22)? The answer is obvious: change is hard, and so we fear it.



As we move from the discernment to the anticipation phase of transition, we become filled with a confusing combination of positive and negative feelings. This is why the change feels even harder than it may be; our minds are trying to make sense of the mixed signals we pick up consciously and subconsciously. Our confidence level drops, and we begin to anticipate the many challenges the change will require. It is at this moment that we most need to remain level-headed and remind ourselves that this is the usual way God carries us through the changes of life.

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