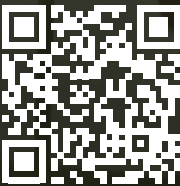


Coaching skills can help you be more effective in your personal and ministry contexts (discipleship, navigating transitions, intentional conversations, etc). Join TDC's Life and Leadership Coaching for three days at The Equip 2024 Conference to learn from highly skilled coaches and strategize how you may integrate these skills into your everyday life.



Help us make *Upfront* even better!

We hope you're enjoying *Upfront* as much as we enjoy sending it to you. To help us continue to make this a relevant resource to your wholehearted discipleship, would you give us your input? Use this QR code and select "TDC Publications." Choose *Upfront* on the next screen, and let us know your thoughts!



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All Scripture quotations from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise indicated.

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RIDING THE WAVES OF TRANSITION

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since starting on staff—had reached their senior year, and they were graduating too. In many ways, we'd grown together, and it was difficult to think of stepping back onto campus in the fall knowing my closest student friends wouldn't be there anymore. Even for those staying in town, it wasn't going to be the same. More and more, I was beginning to realize that even amidst all the things worth rejoicing over in that season, there were also areas for lament. The Lord invited me to step into those places—and then He met me there. He taught me to create space for both joy and grief. It turns out that much of life is learning how to hold those two emotions at once.

Since then, many more transitions have come to pass. First, we moved from Boston to Colorado. Then, I switched from Collegiate to TDC and began at a new church—eventually becoming its worship minister. Later, I stepped down from that position. And by the time you read this, I will be experiencing another monumental life transition: having our first baby. What I have come to learn about change through all of these experiences is this: it can be both exciting and difficult, and it often requires significant emotional and physical adjustment. But by acknowledging the inevitable consolations and desolations that come with change in the presence of God and others, we can learn to ride the waves of life's transitions—whether they're expected, or not. ◀

AN EMPTY PLACE

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mouth" (Deuteronomy 8:3, THE MESSAGE) Often, He Himself brings seasons of hunger, thirst, and loss because "You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you" (Matthew 5, THE MESSAGE).

Emptiness is the key to fullness. In His infinite wisdom, God allows transition seasons to facilitate transformation. In emptiness, we discover God's fullness—a fullness that transcends temporal comforts and ministry accomplishments. And so, as we begin our hunt for a new home, I cling to this truth that sometimes God must empty our lives before he fills them afresh. ◀

upfront

Real-Life Stories and Tools for
Wholehearted Growth and Discipleship



Riding the Waves of Transition

SERENE CHUA
Pastoral Care Team
Train - Develop - Care



Transitions can be hard—especially those that aren't expected. But even the ones we long for come with lessons to learn, emotions to sort out and, most importantly, invitations to meet with the Lord.

When the Lord brought my husband and me together, I could see His beauty and perfect timing in every detail of our story. We had known each other before dating, and after a year we got engaged. We planned to tie the knot a little over six months later, and while I experienced all the emotions you'd expect from a bride-to-be in the months leading up to the wedding, there were also some challenges I hadn't anticipated.

One of the things I hadn't considered was how my new engagement would affect those close to me. For example, one of the women I discipled seemed outwardly happy for us, but from the comments and jokes she made, it was also clear that she was having trouble accepting my impending change from Ms. to Mrs. She later expressed that she felt like I was being taken away and that our relationship would not be the same again. Being a person who deeply cares about others' emotions, I found it tricky to navigate that space. I couldn't assure her that nothing would change, because that would be a lie. But at the same time, I didn't want to make her feel worse. This situation reminded me that as exciting as it was that I was about to get married, the transition wouldn't come without changes to other existing relationships. I needed to learn to acknowledge that—while they would still be important—they wouldn't necessarily be the same.

During that season, I also moved from my position as Staff-in-Training to become a Navigator Representative. It was a celebratory time and I felt supported by my community, but it wasn't without a tinge of sadness. See, my freshman class—the one I'd been with

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Transitions and Thresholds

ELIZABETH DAVIES
Train – Develop – Care



As soon as you hear the word ‘transition,’ a range of images, life stages, experiences, and emotions likely come to mind. Transitions signal the end of one thing and the beginning of something else, but they can also include a threshold: a “space between” that incorporates the ending of the former with the beginning of the new. Transitions and thresholds don’t always happen linearly, they are often nuanced, and they’re deeply personal. Here are some definitions and tips to help you better understand both:

TRANSITIONS: Transitions are described by William Bridges as “the inner reorientation and self-redefinition that you have to go through in order to incorporate ... changes into your life. Without a transition, a change is just a rearrangement of the furniture. Unless transition happens, the change won’t work, because it doesn’t ‘take’” (*Making Sense of Life’s Changes*).

THRESHOLDS: “A threshold is ... a frontier that divides two different territories, rhythms, and atmospheres, [where] a great complexity of emotion comes alive: confusion, fear, excitement, sadness, hope. Listen inward with complete attention until you hear the inner voice calling you forward. The time has come to cross” (John O’Donohue, *To Bless the Space Between Us*).

Transitions can be planned, known, anticipated, unplanned, unwelcome, or sudden. They can include a move, a loss, a shift in life stages, a new relationship, a new birth, or a change in personal health. When you find yourself facing a threshold, may you embrace the threshold and the meaning found in this space. Instead of rushing, experience what God has for you. There is joy, strangeness, mourning, and beauty available to you in this fragile and vulnerable space.

In this *Upfront* issue, you will quickly see that transitions are diverse, very personal, and follow no pattern or formula. May these stories invite you to engage with and journey through your own transitions. ◀

The Reality You Feared: Practical Steps for Making it Through

AUSTIN OLINGER
Campus Director
University of Arkansas



I had been crying for 15 minutes. My wife was mostly non-responsive and lying peacefully beside me in bed. Cancer had been taking her life for over a year, and—at age 38—she was days away from breathing her last breath. I was at the end of myself and had nothing left to give. I couldn’t imagine life and ministry without her, especially with two kids still in the home. But in that moment, God had one last message He wanted to send me through her: in the middle of my loud cries, she slowly lifted her hands towards me. Not sure what to do, I put my head between them, and in a whisper she said, “You’re going to make it through.”

Soon I was living the biggest transition of my life. I craved normalcy and predictability, but I was thrown into an unknown future that felt unbearable. It wasn’t just one transition, but rather hundreds of big and small transitions all at once. It was too much for my body, mind, and soul to comprehend, and as a result, I entered into my own mostly non-responsive state.

The first thing I needed was to take a deep breath and remember that God still loved me and was with me. The transition caused a deep sense of aloneness—like I was lost in a cave with no light. My emotions were telling me I couldn’t go

on, but knowing God cared and was with me helped me to at least make it to the next hour. The loneliness caused me to go to God more than ever, creating a new depth in our relationship.

More practically, I needed everything to be simple and slow. My body, mind, and soul needed time to adjust to life without my wife. I had to redefine my needs and wants. For the first month if it didn’t have to do with me or my kids surviving the day it got thrown into the want category. I needed to make sure I gave my emotions space to come to terms with my new reality. To grieve the past and trust God with the future. Depending on the type of transition, this can be a painfully slow process. The verse I memorized then and still revisit often is Psalm 27:14: “Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!”

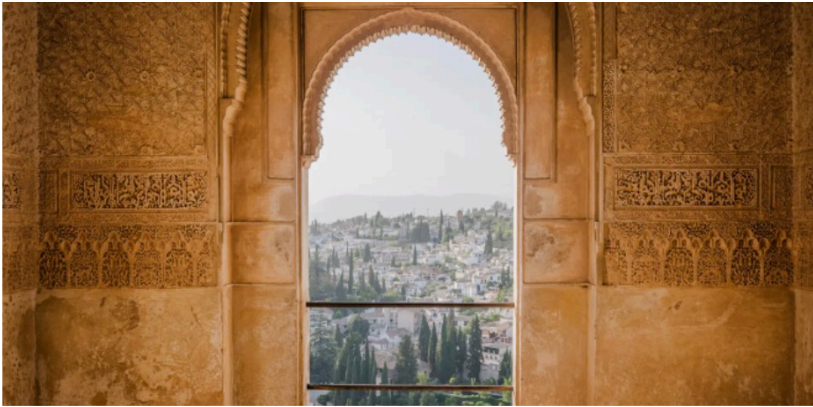
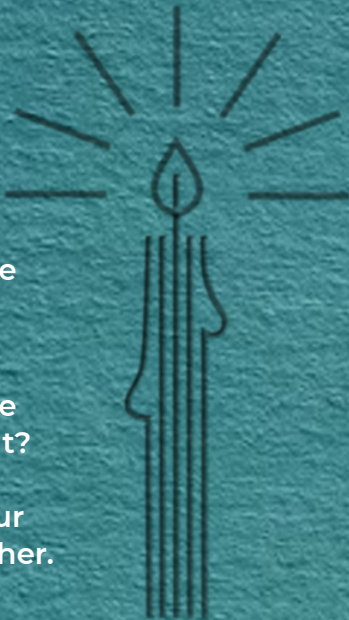
At my lowest points, I made it a habit to reach out to someone—even if it was just a text to tell them I was hurting. I wasn’t looking for advice or a pick-me-up, but I found that the simple act of sending the message somehow helped dissipate the pain and make me feel less alone. It takes humility and vulnerability to reach out to someone, but it also activates the love and care that God purposed for the body of Christ.

One of my greatest fears became my reality. But I have also found that pain and transition are where God does his deepest work—and for that I truly am grateful. ◀

Consolation and Desolation

At the end of the day this rhythm can be helpful to meet with the Lord. During times of transition this process can help you reflect with yourself, God and others.

- ① Light a candle to begin and set this time apart.
- ② Reflect on your day and ask:
 - What part of the day am I most thankful for?
 - What part of the day was difficult?
- ③ Journal or share your response with another.



RESOURCE

Embracing Change and Transition

The journey from point A to point B is rarely a straight line, and lots of unknowns lurk in the in-between time, which seems to stretch out much longer than you might hope. If you’re encountering shifting sands and a lot of questions, maybe there’s a way to settle in for the ride and openhandedly hold the mystery of what God’s doing in you during this season. *Train – Develop – Care* created this resource to equip you to end well, care for yourself and your team, and embrace the transformation of a new season.



An Empty Place

MARK ROOD
Director of Leader Development



With our belongings loaded onto a ship back to the U.S., I find myself sitting among the dust bunnies on the floor of our vacant Tokyo home, pondering the significance of the past 24 beautiful and complicated years.

The farewells are over, our missionary roles are finished, and our friends and co-workers are moving on to form new teams. We don’t belong here anymore, but we don’t belong where we are going either. With our youngest child off to college, the term “empty nest” feels painfully apt. The sudden absence of our children seems to amplify the void within our marriage, echoing the emptiness pervading our house. Oh, how I feel like a hollow shell.

As the breath catches in my chest, I search for an escape from this lonely place. I long to fill my mind with the short-lived satisfaction of streaming and scrolling. That familiar numbness calls out to me, though I know it’s nothing but empty calories for my soul. But what else can I do?

A C.S. Lewis quote springs to mind: “We should attempt a total surrender to whatever atmosphere was offering itself at the moment; in a squalid town, seek out those very places where its squalor rose to grimness and almost grandeur, on a dismal day, find the most dismal and dripping wood...” In short, Lewis is calling us to lean into our pain. And so looking around my lonely and vacant house, my place of “dismal and dripping wood,” I return to the hard floor and cautiously face my emptiness. In the ache of separation and the uncertainty of what lies ahead, I also recall an Asian proverb: “We shape clay into a pot, but it is the emptiness inside that holds whatever we want. We hammer wood for a house, but it is the inner space that makes it livable” (Tao Te Ching).

Despite the loss of all that filled this home and all that will be left behind, this new void is an opportunity. While I hate the feeling of emptiness, I know that God is in it. “He put you through hard times. He made you go hungry. Then he fed you with manna, something neither you nor your parents knew anything about, so you would learn that men and women don’t live by bread only; we live by every word that comes from God’s

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