



“A bend in the road is not the end of the road, as long as you make the turn.”

Unknown

Like most YWAMers, I have a lot of war stories to do with travel. Years ago, Rite and I were leading a team to West Africa and the cheapest flight was with a Russian airline via Moscow. It was before the iron curtain had fallen and so security was very tight. We ended up having to stay in a transit hotel for 3 days, without any access to our luggage and with only the clothes we had been wearing when we arrived at the airport. Calling it a hotel took some imagination, but of course, as a team we made the most of it. However, we were definitely in limbo – not able to go home and not able to go to our destination. We were “in transit”.

Probably right now, when you think of your own life and ministry, the life of your family, the life of your kids, if you have any, there are all kinds of transitions taking place. It’s actually part of life. We all know the slogan, “Change is here to stay,” and on this occasion, I have to agree. I hate to admit it but I am getting older. I still feel 25 inside my head but my body tells another story (so does my wife!). My kids tell me I am a dinosaur or words to that affect because many of my thought processes are from an older generational point of view. So transition is a process that we must accept as we move from one phase of life to another.

The seasons change and with them our way of life. Today it rained here in Spain, and when I say rained, I mean torrential rain with thunder and lightning. It hasn't really rained for six months and so it makes big news and the whole garden and house have to be rearranged to cope with the new weather conditions.

We change jobs or role-responsibility very regularly these days. People move on average every two years. Technology is changing the way we live and communicate on a daily basis. We live in a world in transit. Nothing is stationary. However, some changes are much bigger than others and carry greater implications and consequences if we don't handle them well.

Five years ago, we moved to Spain after having lived in Scotland for 26 years. Everything was different. Every day we were making adjustments to driving on a different side of the road, eating at different times of the day, having constant sunshine (suddenly we couldn't talk about the weather), not knowing where to buy anything, having a different currency, having no friends ... and on and on. These kinds of transitions need patience, faith and a knowledge that you heard right about moving in the first place!

Some personalities deal with change better than others. My wife for instance, thinks about what she can change all the time. When I go on a trip, I can just

about guarantee that there will be something that has changed on my return: - the layout in a room, a reorganisation of certain areas of the villa, ideas of development of the way we do a teaching topic and a hundred other things. I don't mind change but don't look for change on a daily basis! We all vary and so some will be early adopters of change, others late adopters and the majority somewhere in the middle, forming that classic bell curve on the graph.

Every transition we experience leads us through a tunnel – the transition tunnel. Even people who likes change, will need to go through the tunnel process. This is especially true if you aren't in control of the transition and it is thrust upon you. The more traumatic or sudden the change, the more we need to be aware of the following three stages of the tunnel process. There are no short cuts but we can prolong the process. The three stages are: Deal with the ending of one phase, enter the neutral zone and then embrace the new beginning.

1. THE ENDING. As you enter the tunnel, all the light is from behind. This light represents the familiar and what you have been comfortable with. You are moving on from a place of security; from people, places, systems and a way of life that you understood and have grown accustomed to. Even if there were negative circumstances, at least they were familiar to you!

Over this past week our youngest son left home to start a new life in Calgary, Canada. It marks the end of a wonderful year of good fun and having him present with us. It has been a maturing process as we talked through a multitude of topics and formed views and opinions that have been established into a way of life. He has been great company for Rite while I have been travelling and he will be missed. But his leaving causes a transition that we must face. We have an ending of a season to process. So what do we need to do? First of all, *let go*. We are taking time to thank God for the good times we have had, for the blessing of having him this last year and praying blessing on his new life. Secondly, *deal with the loss*. We are asking God to fill the gap, open up new opportunities, use the extra time in the best possible way and change our attitudes and behaviour as necessary.

This ending or bringing closure to the past will involve some or all of the following:

- **Accept** the reality and importance of our losses. (we need to make time to talk about it, see the reasons, recognise our loss but focus on the positives)
- **Expect** and accept signs of grieving like anger, anxiety, sadness, disorientation, depression, etc. (be sympathetic to others in these circumstances and give room and space to them)
- **Compensate** for the losses whenever possible (what can be arranged to bring encouragement – for instance in my case, a trip to Calgary to visit our son or special meals out to help break the sense of loss at home)
- **Define** what is over and what isn't. (it's only one aspect of life and not life itself. For our son we move from a hands on input to a more distanced influence)

- **Mark** the ending (do something to make the ending real. For instance for me; decorating our son's room and packing up his belongings so the room has a new identity)

Two stories come to mind that bring the fear of the Lord upon us. The first is the journey of the Israelites out of Egypt to the promised land. It's the story of a group of people who couldn't bring an ending to their time in Egypt. Whenever there was a problem, they continually looked back to what was better in Egypt. Leeks and onions, homes, meat, water, etc. They were so caught up in backward vision that it became a stronghold and an obstacle to move forward. As a result they wandered for 40 years until they all died in the wilderness. Wow! Why didn't they just break up into small groups and have a time of debrief to deal with the issues bothering them! The second is just as bad. Lot's wife couldn't bring herself to leave her beloved city of Sodom. She looked back with longing and turned into a pillar of salt. These are two graphic pictures to remind us of the need to bring closure to the past.

Having no closure is like reading loads of books and never finishing any of them. The story lines of all the books begin to get muddled and never end. There's no peace, no endings, no clear beginnings, just words, feelings and story lines all confused. Sometimes we don't bring closure to the past because we want to leave an escape hatch open, but unfortunately going back won't be the same as it was when we left either.

2. THE NEURTAL ZONE. As you travel on down the tunnel it just gets darker, but you need to continue to move forward. Slowly, the light from behind gets dimmer as the reality of the ending sinks in. Unfortunately the light ahead is still hard to see. In the middle of the tunnel, you feel lost. There is no light from behind or ahead and you wonder where you are, what you are doing and if you are ever going to get out of here.

We have just gone through a six month neutral zone with our church. We had to move out of a rented villa where the church was meeting due to it being sold. When we heard, we contacted an estate agent and found a restaurant in a great location and started negotiations to rent it. As it happened we didn't manage to process the contract in time so "for a few weeks" we agreed to have the church in our villa. Several months later the contract fell through. We had nowhere to go. So we made the most of it but trusted for something new to arise. Six months later we are just about to sign a new contract for a great property but it has taken patience, faith and a lot of grace. It has give us an experience in the neutral zone.

The following conditions can take placed in this zone:

- **Anxiety rises and motivation falls.** You are in limbo where it's hard to get a handle on anything that is happening. The bridges behind have been burned and the bridge to the future hasn't yet been clearly formed. So a daily exercise is to give your feelings and thoughts to the Lord and trust him to bring clarity, in his time. Trust is proved when we have nothing to hold on to but him.

- **Potential creative time.** If we are able to relax and not worry about the future, suddenly anything is possible. It can be a chaotic time with no clear systems or boundaries but that brings with it an opportunity. In this dark place we can be more open to any new ideas. Anything to bring some light!
- **New connectivity.** The neutral zone can be a lonely place for a season but it can help us to think more clearly what we want and clarify our need of friendships and accountability.
- **Reflective time.** There's nothing like this phase to help contemplation. It's a time to ask all kinds of questions, great for evaluation of what you have been doing and what you would like the future to hold, wonderful to identify the lessons that God has been teaching you and an opportunity to be real and think through your passion and calling.

One of the great needs in this stage is to have someone to share and process with. There are no answers yet, no fixing possible, but there is a place for listening and enjoying God's peace and presence.

3. EMBRACE A NEW BEGINNING. As you keep moving forward, light begins to emerge at the end of the tunnel. The light slowly gets brighter until you step out into a new world with new horizons to explore. You grow accustomed to the new ways, the new situation, the new challenges, and you embrace the new, ready to live more fully once more.

Here are some of the issues as we come into the light:

- **Develop a new purpose.** Thinking processes are usually ahead of our emotional responses so patience is called for. However as we take one step at a time, new possibilities open up and we slowly get excited about the future once again. We stop living in the past, accept the present and now have a picture of the future.
- **Deal with fear.** We want the new but somehow fear it, because it requires a new commitment. Do I have what it takes to give into this new situation? If God is calling us into something new, it always takes faith, which means risk taking. We can't function in fear and faith, so it's decision time once again.
- **New release of energy and passion.** We are flowing again, beginning to function on all our cylinders instead of just a few. We are ready to get into action and do something meaningful.
- **Right timing.** It's good to not be too desperate for the new things to start. We can't force things to open up or take shape but we can create an environment of expectation so we are looking for the right openings and taking them as they appear.
- **Roots then fruit.** When you move a plant, it can't grow roots and fruit at the same time. For instance, when we moved from Scotland to Spain, we of course wanted both at the same time. We wanted life to be as it was before – productive, fun, full of relationships, fruitful and have feelings of settledness and comfort. However these results come from rootedness and that takes time and patience. The farmer sows and waits. That wasn't what we wanted to hear!

Multi-transitioning. If only life would throw one thing at a time at us. I don't go along with superstitions like “trouble comes in threes” but I am aware that we wear multiple hats and there can be transitions going on at the same time in our various roles and responsibilities.

Here is the beginning of a potential list of issues that can give rise to multi-transitions: Graduating from school or university, making Jesus Lord, leaving home, getting married, taking on spiritual responsibility, becoming a parent, having a major illness, having a major encounter with God, having sick parents that need support, kids leaving home or getting married, experiencing the death of a vision, changing job roles, moving from line leadership to influence leadership, having a conflict that causes the loss of relationship, experiencing a new dynamic in your marriage with kids leaving or as you become grandparents....

How do we handle transitions like these when they come from all sides? It can feel like our world is falling apart. In these situations we need good social and emotional support. How important it is to talk and process what we are experiencing with someone who is able to listen and understand. However processing does have to come to a conclusion at some point and decisions have to be made. These decisions include letting go of the past, accepting the present and receiving grace and understanding for the future. Without making these decisions the transition process will continue for a longer period of time.

So are you in a transition? Remember: There's always a process. Make sure you go through each phase. As you journey, receive Paul's encouragement: “Whatever happens – rejoice.”