

“Family Matters - transitions”

Scripture: Deuteronomy 31:1-13; Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, 7:8-11

Graphics: house, family, home, worship, reading, mission, change

Big Truth: Families are important to God, to our communities, to our church, and to us. No matter in what stage you find yourself, family matters are vital to our lives. Sometimes we struggle with our families, but they are still family. Home building allows us to weather any storms for today and tomorrow. Raising children and grandchildren in the faith is our main task. Family finances point our hearts and lives to God’s kingdom work. Discipling our families makes new and stronger disciples of Jesus. Making transitions well leads to peace and joy, as God leads us to new places.

Focus Phrase: Life’s transitions are opportunities to trust God more and live missionally in new ways.

1. Introduction

- A. Pastor Steven J. Cole wrote this, “In his book, *Crisis: the Last Years of the Carter Presidency* (cited in Newsweek [10/4/82]), Hamilton Jordan (Jer-dan), who was President Carter’s Chief of Staff, tells about the jarring transition from being at the center of historic world events one day and being out of office the next day. The day before Carter left office, he and his team were working feverishly to free the American hostages in Iran. The next day, Carter and his staff flew to Plains, Georgia, as Ronald Reagan became the next President.

It was raining in Plains as President Carter and Jordan got off the helicopter. After Carter announced the breaking news that the hostages had been freed, the crowd cheered and a country music band burst into song. But it was over in a moment. Carter and his men adjourned to a barn behind the peanut warehouse where the staff had assembled a woodworking shop for the President. Jordan was struck with how strange it was that the man who the day before had been orchestrating the rescue of American hostages and leading our great nation was now poring over drills, saws, and screwdrivers in an old barn in rural Georgia.

Jordan decided to stay that night with his mother in Albany, Georgia, about 40 miles away. But he hadn’t made arrangements to get there. It had been years since he had to think about such matters. Soaking wet, carrying his briefcase and a suitcase, he wandered around for an hour trying to find someone who could give him a ride home. Finally, he went to the pay phone at Billy Carter’s old service station and tried to call a taxi, but they were all busy taking VIP’s to the airport. He finally found a Georgia State patrolman he knew who agreed to drive him to his mother’s house. He wrote, “It really is over, I thought as I loaded my luggage into his trunk, climbed into his front seat and headed home.”

- Transitions aren't easy. The bigger the transition, the more difficult it is. Going from being the Chief of Staff for the President of the United States, to being an unemployed man from a small town in Georgia, must have been traumatic!"
- B. (pause) We're in our final installment of our worship series entitled Family Matters. Family matters to God. Family matters to our community and church. Family matters to us!
- i. We started our series with building solid foundations...home building.
 - ii. Next, we got some equipping on raising children and grandchildren.
 - iii. Week 3 was about family finances.
 - iv. Last week, we got to the heart of it with family discipleship.
- C. Today, we're finish with **family transitions**. Our homes don't stay the same. Our children don't stay the same. Our families don't stay the same. Our finances don't stay the same. Our discipleship changes over the years.
- D. Maybe it's because I'm 50, or because our kids are grown, married and moved away, but I've become acutely aware that **life changes** - sometimes **a lot** - and those changes are often out of our control, even though they're really good!
- E. Transitions seems to be all we hear about these days! The transition to a new president. The transition to a new way of celebrating Thanksgiving and Christmas. Changes due to COVID restrictions. Changes to the way we work and go to school and even go to the grocery store.
- F. The reality has always been that from the moment we're born, life changes every second. No matter what stage of life you find yourself in, 2020 has been a peach of a year - the year of change...the year of pivots...the year of transitions...the year of "nothing seems like it was and will ever be again."
- G. As we wrap up this series and prepare for Advent and Christmas next week, I pray this message finds a home in your heart...and that **despite** all the changes that we've been through this year **and** throughout our lives, that we'll be equipped for any transitions we're IN or that will come.
- H. AND, most importantly, despite transitions, change, and uncertainty, there is ONE who IS certain and his name is Jesus...who, the author of Hebrews says, is, "...the same yesterday and today and forever." (Hebrews 13:8)
- I. We're going back to Deuteronomy this morning. Last week, we were at the beginning of the book, and today we'll go to the end if Deuteronomy. At the end of Moses' life, a transition was about to take place for the Jewish people - probably the most significant transition in their history.
- J. Let's pray and then we'll read God's Word this morning...
- K. PRAY!**
- L. Great! Let's crack open those bibles to Deuteronomy 31, verse 1...

M. Moses was old...like, 120 years old, and ready to make the amazing transition to life everlasting because of His faithful heart! Let's read...

2. Scripture

A. **READ Deuteronomy 31:1-13**

B. Moses was one wise dude! I think that happens when you're over 50!

C. God was clear to Moses here, "You aren't going over to the Promised Land with your people. But I, the Lord, will go with them...they won't have to fear the enemy, they won't have to wonder who will lead them, you'll write down everything they need to know to get through this transition."

D. So Moses called his young apprentice Joshua - the one who WOULD lead the people into the Promised Land. Moses told him everything God said - be strong and bold, you're the man, you will possess the land God promised, the Lord will go before you, He won't fail you or forsake you, don't fear or be dismayed.

E. Moses KNEW what was coming. Moses KNEW that the transition for Joshua and for the people would not be easy. As much as they didn't like being in the wilderness - sometimes wishing they could go back to slavery in Egypt - they had a rhythm out there, right? They had food and water and shelter and God's guidance and a place to worship.

F. Yet, God wasn't about to fail on His promise to take them to the place where they would strive as a people...and have a home where they could center everything on Him.

G. The transition would not be easy, but it was the only way through to the Promised Land. And it was going to be without Moses. And Joshua couldn't be the leader unless Moses was gone. So until Moses was dead and gone, they couldn't get on with it.

H. Moses told Joshua that they would live in peace and joy in their new homeland. At the end of the day, they would give thanks for all that God had done by worshipping and remembering God's mighty deeds and promises.

I. So, Moses wrote down everything the people needed to do, gave it to the priests for safe keeping in the Ark of the Covenant, and instructed them to read the whole thing to everyone, every 7 years.

J. And, by reading it to the people, the children and grandchildren would also be taught to remember...and they too would give thanks and be ready for whatever God called them to do next.

K. Making transitions well leads to peace and joy, as God leads us to new places.

L. If you're taking notes, here's some truth: Life's transitions are opportunities to trust God more and live missionally in new ways.

3. Application

- A. “The only thing that is constant is change.”— Heraclitus (Greek philosopher)
- B. When it comes to your family life, you could make a pretty long list of the stages of life that change as you get older - from birth to siblings to possibly family dynamics changes like divorce or death of a parent. You may transition from single to married to having children. Those children grow and move out and maybe also get married. Then you have an empty nest and wonder where the time went. Then, grandchildren and even great-grandchildren. Other transitions might be downsizing, moving, losing a spouse, or transitioning to end of life.
- C. Life is always changing. Or, said another way, Life never stays the same. We have seasons of life, just like we have seasons of weather.
- D. Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 reminds us that, “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: to be born and die, to plant and uproot, to weep and laugh and mourn and dance...” and on and on.
- E. We KNOW all that...but it doesn't always make it easier to transition from planting to uprooting or birthing to dying.
- F. Ecclesiastes 7:8-11 give us good guidance, “The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride. Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools. Do not say, 'Why were the old days better than these?' For it is not wise to ask such questions. Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun.”
- G. Trying to stop family transitions or even prolong them is pretty futile. So, the question is not, “How do I keep my family from changing.” or “Why were the old days better than these?”
- H. The question God wants you to ask, like Moses, is, “How can we, as a family, make this transition with thoughtful purpose, following God's lead, and bearing fruit for the future?”
- I. How can you make the transition from being dual-income no kids to kids and then from kids to empty-nesters and so on?
- J. Let me give us some practical equipping:
 - i. #1 - **Prepare for transition BEFORE you're IN transition.**
 - a. Proverbs 25:1 says, “The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty.”
 - b. Be ready! Moses had a plan for what was coming because God told him what to do. You don't always get that word from God, but if you spend some time praying with your family about the transitions you KNOW are coming, then you can be better prepared for ALL the transitions.

- c. Through prayer and making thoughtful plans allows you to be ready for what God will be asking you to do in and through the transition.
- ii. **#2 - God is WITH YOU in the transition.**
 - a. God said to Joshua that He would go WITH him. That's a powerful word. That He would walk with Joshua into the Promised Land... through the transition.
 - b. God does the same for you in all the transitions of life, if you let Him. He never leaves you nor forsakes you. He knows your current steps and guides the next ones.
 - c. Isaiah 58:11 says, "The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail."
 - d. No matter what the transition is, God is WITH you.
- iii. **#3 - God is taking you to a new place through the transition.**
 - a. I love to see new places...when it's my choice. Not so much when it's happening around me. Either way, there's new territory to see.
 - b. When everything around you is changing, it's really easy to look sideways and backwards and lament and grieve for what's no longer the reality.
 - c. Joshua and the Jewish people were being taken to THE place God had promised for decades. There was HOPE because they would have a home to call their own!
 - d. Like a couple that moves halfway across the country in their 90s to be with their family, or a college student who moves out for the first time, you have to remember that because God is with you, there's hope for what's coming!
 - e. Jeremiah 29:11 says, "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."
 - f. There are positive aspects to every change...embrace them! And take time to explore the new place. Which leads us to...
- iv. **#4 - Find Jesus in your new reality and keep going.**
 - a. When I went away to college, I felt an unshakable desire to worship...to find a new church...to connect. And I did. Some of my best college memories were sitting in worship on Sunday mornings - away from the crowds and college life. It gave me a chance to listen to God's call on my life and I'm convinced that was the beginning of my call to ministry.
 - b. Wherever you are, God is with you - providing, saving, and guiding.

- c. Take the time you need, through the transitions, to understand what God is calling you to do next - after high school, after college, after kids, after you move to a new place. Wherever you find yourself, Jesus is there! And...finally...
- v. #5 - **Look back with gratitude for each transition and what it represent.**
 - a. Cultivate gratitude because not only has God brought you through the transition, but the transition was FROM something TO something. You're never nowhere.
 - b. Married couples have made it through the dating years. Parents have made it to parenthood. Empty nesters made it through child-raising (whew!). Grandparents have just MADE IT, I hear! Even transitioning to end of life should give you a profound sense that life has been rich and full and your legacy will live on.
 - c. When a spouse dies, I often hear, "I will miss him or her dearly but I'm thankful for the X number of years we had together."
 - d. It may be different, but you know where you are now and can be grateful for all that has come before.
 - e. 1 Chronicles 16:34 sums it up: "Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!"
- K. Prepare for transition. Remember that God is in it and taking you somewhere. When you get there, find Jesus and keep going. Look back with gratitude because God is faithful and loves you!

4. Conclusion

- A. Hamilton Jordan died in May 2008 at the age of 63 of cancer. I don't have any idea whether or not Mr. Jordan was a follower of Jesus. His obituary doesn't give us any clues about that. My hope is that his time spent with Jimmy Carter at least caused him to explore his faith.
- B. Life's final transition from earthly life to everlasting life is probably the most profound one...AND, one that will be experienced by every single one of us.
- C. John Wesley said that, in that moment, we experience the glorifying grace of God. Transitioning from earth to GLORY!
- D. We can be equipped for every transition of life - birth, growing up, moving out, marriage, children, work, church, grandchildren, retirement, and more...but all the while, we, as followers of Jesus, are called to - like Moses - make sure that final transition is the best one it can be.
- E. Those who put their faith and trust in the Lord will enter into eternity with Him, never to need another transition. The final transition with Christ is the best one.

- F. Every transition is an opportunity to give you life to Jesus anew.
- G. One more homework assignment: next week, we begin preparing for the birth story of Jesus Christ. This week is Thanksgiving. Instead of lamenting that things will be different or worrying about things that are out of your control, **pivot well**, once again, with a heart filled with gratitude and praise for the One who is ready to walk with you and your family through EVERY transition in life.
- H. And if you've spent time building your home on the solid foundation of Jesus, are doing all you can to raise your children and grandchildren in the knowledge of the Lord, have set your family finances before Him, and are growing as disciples together, then EVERY transition will work for good because you love God and are called according to His purposes.
- I. Jesus is Lord! Yesterday, today, and forever. Amen!
- J. Let's pray!