

3 - Preparing for Transition
Pastor Joe Oakley – GFC – 1/22/23

We're in a series called Transitions for Growth. Today I'm preaching a sermon called Preparing for Transition.

We should always be prepared for transition because it happens constantly. Our main Bible verse for this series is Ecclesiastes 3:1 which says:

To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven.

Life is a series of transitions from birth to childhood to adolescence to middle age to older age to death. There's a transition at every grade level in school. Some transition from single to married. Some have to transition from married to single.

Some transition from being childless to having a child. You have to transition your parenting style from parenting a baby to a toddler to a school age child to a college age to empty nest. We are always in transition – changing seasons. And we must be prepared for it. The first thing to do is to realize that transition is always happening. So, don't be surprised by it.

Some transitions we choose and some we don't. For example, sometimes we quit a job to move to a better one – but sometimes the company has cutbacks and lets us go unexpectedly.

A big transition we can all prepare for concerns our career. Many people want to move up in their career, but they aren't positioned or prepared to move up. Many people are too passive to do what it takes to move up. They are just waiting for something to happen and complaining about it when it doesn't.

By the way – if you want to move up in your career, I suggest talking to your supervisor about it. Let them know you want to advance and ask them what you need to do to prepare for that transition.

And at church – let us know if you desire to become a leader or minister. I've had people I've known for years leave the church and on the way out tell me that they had a desire for a certain ministry, but I never talked to them about it so they're going somewhere else to do it. I always say, "But we've had many conversations and you never once talked to me about it." I don't know what's in everyone's heart to do. Please let us know so we can help you prepare for that transition.

Ecclesiastes 10:5-7 says in the New Living Translation:

There is an evil I have seen under the sun. Kings and rulers make a grave mistake when they give great authority to foolish people and low positions to people of proven worth. I have even seen servants riding horseback like princes—and princes walking like servants!

This passage addresses two errors – those who are put in a place of authority prematurely – and those who should be in authority – but who are not. As I preached in the sermon last week, we must be prepared to transition to another position! There is a time of preparation and maturing before you are put in a position of authority. Those who do not submit to that process and that timing end up riding a horse they can't control.

I've seen that many times through the years in my role as a pastor. We've had people in the past who want to oversee a ministry, but who were not ready to ride that horse yet. We try to warn them, but sometimes they just leave and start something themselves and they end up thrown off the horse and trampled! That's why we should lay hands on no one suddenly. That means we do not put them in a position quickly. It takes time.

Only those who are faithful in small things will be given more. If someone doesn't show up for church on time, tithe, and serve in small ways – why should they lead a ministry or pastor a church? The church has seen enough slaves riding horses – people who are not ready for the position they are in.

But we also have too many princes walking like slaves! In Bible times, princes were supposed to ride horses, not walk. Princes who walked were living beneath their position in life. That's why we've been teaching you about who you are in Christ! That's why I taught you last week that transition begins in your mind before you see it in your life. It takes preparation to make that transition.

Jesus taught some important principles in the parable of the unjust steward in Luke 16:1-8:

There was a certain rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his goods. So he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, for you can no longer be my manager.'
Then the manager said within himself, 'What shall I do? For my master is taking away my job. I cannot dig, and I'm ashamed to beg. I know what I'll do so that when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.'
So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.'
Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.'
So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the people of light.

Now Jesus is not commending dishonesty. This man was not stealing from his master or his master would not have commended him either.

What he probably did was remove his commission from the sale in order to win people over so he would have some favors to call in later.

The point is that Jesus says many times people in the world are wiser when it comes to financial things than us. They have their natural affairs in order. Many Christians reduce everything to a spiritual level and don't take care about natural things. Then they wonder why their non-Christian neighbors are more blessed than them.

Well, the neighbors have gotten themselves into a position to be blessed by working hard, taking care of business, finances, health, etc. Ultimately, if they don't get right spiritually, they can gain the world and lose their souls, but they can still gain the world.

People seem to go to one extreme or another – Either only spiritual things are important or only the natural life is important. But, God wants our natural life and spiritual life to both be in order. God is concerned about our whole lives – spirit, soul and body. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 says:

May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through.

May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's wrong for us to think that only spiritual things matter. That as long as we pray, read our Bibles and go to church, it doesn't matter how we take care of our finances or our belongings or our health. Yes, we need to be concerned about spiritual things, but not to the exclusion of natural things. In fact, 1 Corinthians 15:46 says:

The spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual.

With that in mind – Jesus closes the parable of the steward with three principles that prepare us for transition:

He who is faithful with very little will be faithful also with much; and he who is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been faithful with what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?

Three principles for preparing for transition are seen here -

1- You must be faithful with small things before you are given more.

Jesus says that we must learn to be faithful with the smaller things before He will give to us the larger blessings He has planned for us. We see this all through the Bible.

Joseph had to be faithful in Potiphar's house and in prison before he was promoted to the palace! Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers. He was bought by a man named Potiphar and Joseph served him faithfully.

Genesis 39:4-6 says:

This pleased Potiphar, so he soon made Joseph his personal attendant. He put him in charge of his entire household and everything he owned. All his household affairs ran smoothly, and his crops and livestock flourished. So Potiphar gave Joseph complete administrative responsibility over everything he owned. With Joseph there, he didn't worry about a thing...

Joseph was faithful in small things and that got him noticed. Then he was given more authority until he was over everything. Later, Joseph was wrongly imprisoned, but he remained so faithful there that Genesis 39:22-23 says:

So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

You see – when you're faithful no one has to keep looking over your shoulder to make sure you're working. Joseph's faithfulness did not start when he was in the palace – it started in Potiphar's house and in the prison. Faithfulness starts where you are now. Faithfulness starts with what you have now.

So many Christians think, "I'll be faithful in prayer and Bible study when I get out of school or get a different job or get a better schedule." No, you won't! It won't be any easier ever! I'm in full time ministry and I still have to fight to be faithful in my personal quiet time.

Some Christians think, "I'll be faithful in tithing when I make more money or get a different job or get out of debt." No, you won't. In fact, studies show that the more people make, the less they give as a % of their income!

Some people think, "I'll work hard and succeed at my work when they promote me and pay me more money." No you won't. They won't promote you or pay you more until you are faithful where you are.

Don't deceive yourself into putting faithfulness off until the future. Be faithful now where you are. Be faithful now with what you have.

Be faithful in tithing now and God will see that you make more because He can trust you to give.

Be faithful now in the small things at work and you will advance. If your boss does not see what you can do now where you are, you receive no raises or promotions.

If you don't produce where you are, you won't get to a higher position. Faithfulness in small things causes advancement to bigger things.

In church, there are people who want to be in leadership, yet they can't even get to church on time. They don't tithe, they don't help out, but they want to lead. No way!

In the past, I've talked to people who want to be missionaries. I say, "That's great. What are you doing now to prepare?" They look at me with blank stares so I ask questions like:

Are you getting training or reading books on missions? No.

Are you giving to missions now? No.

Are you even tithing? No.

Are you even witnessing to anybody? No.

Then I tell them, "If you're not giving now or sharing your faith now, you'll never be a missionary."

Start now where you are. By the way, the person you are is the person you will take into ministry. Just like the person you are is the person you will take into marriage. Many people think marriage will magically change them. There are men who struggle with pornography and they don't overcome it because they think that when they get married, they won't struggle with it anymore. WRONG! You take the person you are into the marriage.

If you don't overcome the person who are now, you won't overcome then! The first person you lead is yourself! You must be faithful in small things if you want to prepare for transition.

2- You must be faithful with money before you will be trusted with true riches.

I see two things here. First - God wants to bless you with abundance, but if you are not faithful with the money you have you won't be given more.

Second - God wants to give us true riches – but what are true riches? It could mean a lot of money – but I think it means spiritual riches. Also – people's lives – God wants to entrust us with these true riches, but He is waiting until He knows we can handle them.

God's not going to waste true riches. So, if He sees you wasteful with natural things, He won't waste spiritual blessings on you. If He can't trust you with money, He won't give you true riches to waste.

People want to walk in power and anointing, but they don't pay their bills or take care of their possessions. How can God trust you with a congregation of thousands of people if He can't trust you to take care of your house and car? How can you plant a church if you don't even mow your yard? How can you wage war on demons in your city when you can't win the war over your own flesh!

Washing the car, making the beds, washing the dishes, paying the bills, mowing the yard, getting to work on time - are all natural things and they are important. That's why around here - when people want to be in leadership, we want to see if they can serve. We want to see if their natural house is in order.

We've had some get upset and leave because we have the nerve to suggest some natural things like finances needed to come into order. They got mad and left and I thought - I'm so glad we found this out now over natural things before we entrusted them with true riches - you.

We don't take our responsibility to watch over you lightly. We're not going to put just anybody in any position if their lives are out of order. None of us is perfect, but we've got to work on things that are out of order so we can be blessed and the church can be blessed. If some refuse to be trained and leave - we're all better for it. If people cannot submit to authority, they don't need to be in authority.

Get your natural house in order so God can bless you with true riches. There is a biblical principle of sowing and reaping. We must sow *before* we reap. Planting comes before harvest. Giving comes before receiving. And being faithful in handling finances comes before true riches.

3- You must be faithful with what belongs to someone else before you will be given your own.

We see this again in the life of Joseph. He was faithful everywhere he went. Even when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him, Joseph was faithful to God and Potiphar. A faithful man can be trusted with another man's wife and another man's belongings.

We should be the same and do the same no matter who is watching!
 Can you be trusted when no one is watching?
 Are you taking care of your parent's stuff at home?
 Are you taking care of your employer's stuff at work?

Before Deborah and I ever owned a home - we rented five places. Every time we moved out, we got our deposit back. Not only that, but the owners were also amazed because we left that house in better shape than when we moved in. And because we showed ourselves faithful as renters, we eventually became owners.

Before we ever pastored a church - we were members of churches. As members we were faithful in tithing, serving, helping, using our gifts. We did our best to make the pastors successful. At times, that meant submitting to them by serving in areas we didn't necessarily want to serve in. But we started small and proved ourselves faithful. I believe that because we showed ourselves faithful with another person's ministry, we were eventually given our own.

We started this church with 6 people and we had to be faithful with 6 before we got 60 and we had to be faithful with 60 before we got 600.

I worked for a Christian store called the Living Vine when it was sold to Family Christian Stores. I was originally a salesclerk, but I was faithful and got promoted to a department head. There were four department heads and we were all nervous about the transition. We all realized that Family Christian Stores would probably bring in one of their experienced managers to run the store. All of us talked and prayed about what the new manager would be like.

But one day it came to me, “Why not me?” I knew the new company did not know me and it was a long shot, but I put together my resume and a letter to the president of the company about why I was the best person for the job. I showed him how I was prepared for the transition and I got the job. If I had done nothing, I would not have gotten that promotion. Others were just as qualified as me – but I got the job because I overcame inertia and took action while the rest were passive. Faith without works is dead.

Likewise – God has a destiny for you. But listen carefully: whatever your destiny is, God will first give you smaller versions of it. This is so you will learn to be faithful in the small things before He gives you the larger and more important things.

So, do not despise the days of small things. Be faithful with the small things and you will see the truth of Job 8:7

Though your beginning was small, yet your latter end will increase abundantly.

What you do with what God has given you now will determine what He will entrust you with later.

The destiny for your life right now is for you to be responsible with what God has given you. And you have the promise of God that:

When you're faithful in the small things you will be given more.

When you're faithful with finances you will be given true riches.

When you're faithful with other people's things you'll be given your own.

Faithfulness is the key to being prepared for transition. And when you are faithful from the beginning with small things – God will see to it that you will increase and advance in your life!