

UNLOCKING XTRÉM POSSIBILITIES

“PRINCIPLES OF TRANSITION”

Transitions in life or in an organization are often overlooked or botched because they are handled like “change”. Things “change” people “transition”.

Transitions are “wilderness” times where we (re) discover our identity and where God prepares us for the next chapter in our story. If these times rushed by leaders who don’t understand the value of a time of transition, or because the leader is too quick to leave the past and get into the future, everyone misses out on the tremendous blessings that can only be had during these seasons.

Jesus identifies the following Principles of transition in his discourse to his disciples in the 14th, 15th, and 16th chapters of the book of John. By stating these principles in an honest, forthright manner, He diffuses the power of fear that can paralyze during such times. They are:

1. The Principle of Space (“.....I am going.....”John 14:2)

This principle is tied to the person of Jesus Christ, but is not isolated to this scriptural account. Adam and Eve in Eden experience a time of intermittent absence with God. The people of Israel experience Moses being away for 40 days. And St. John of the cross speaks of the Dark Night of the Soul when we find the “sweetness” of God has been taken away.

Our Reaction: Each of these experiences evokes a reaction of feeling forsaken and abandoned. This feeling that God has forgotten us is not uncommon during times of transition.

Appropriate Action: Jesus recommends that during these times his disciples are to recall to remembrance the things that He told them. Reminding one another of the truths and promises of God set forth in scripture creates community, strengthens faith, and invites God’s voice into our transitional season.

Desired Outcome: Jesus makes it clear that he wants his disciples to obey in his absence. And just like with our own children, He hopes that we will prove that we can obey and live by faith even when we are not immediately aware of his presence. The goal of this principle is “maturity” in faith and obedience.

For an organization, it is time to ask, “Will we trust the words and principles of God? How many of our values and policies are built on what God has revealed in scripture?”

2. The Principle of Pruning: (“My father prunes the branches”, John 15:2)

This principle is the work of the father that removes hindrances to growth in our lives and in the organizations we serve. During these times of “letting go” we may lose things that are sinful or

burdensome. But we may also lose things we thought were useful and good. This is why it is very important to trust the wisdom of the father who is doing the pruning.

Our Reaction: There will be a natural sense of grief and loss during times of pruning. These emotions can also lead to anger, frustration and even bitterness if not surrendered to God.

Appropriate Action: The pastoral message from Jesus is that the disciples abide or remain in Jesus during this pruning work. This means times of silence and solitude, quieting ourselves before God to submerge our hearts in His life and love.

Desired outcome: From the onset we are told that the purpose of the pruning is that we might bear more fruit and much fruit. The Father invites us into His Hope for us through this promise attempting to get our eyes off the immediate losses and begin looking toward the coming life.

For an organization, it is times to address what is to be done with ministries and programs that keep hanging on even though they do not produce the fruit God desires. It may even be time to let go of something “fruitful” so that it can be launched for the purpose of multiplication.

3. The Principle of Exposure: (“...he will convict....guide into all truth”, John 16: 8, 13)

The Holy Spirits work of “conviction” happens most deeply during times of transition because we have slowed down enough to hear. Opportunity to see ourselves in a true light is most available at these times. During this season we are most aware of patterns of speech and behavior that bump up against the reality of God’s ways. Our values, practices, and beliefs are all challenged by the loving light of the Spirit.

Our Reaction: Exposure leaves us feeling naked and ashamed. And the natural inclination is to run and hide.

Appropriate Action: When we know how much we are loved (not condemned) we can persevere through this convicting work. And when we do we become deeply aware of reality, we can agree with God about that reality (confession) and we can make adequate adjustments to the truth of this reality (repentance).

Desired Outcome: People and organizations who are honest about themselves are confident and bold. Future change is welcomed and embraced. Pretending ends as these people discover their newer, fuller selves.

4. The Principle of Humiliation: (“.....until now you have not asked”, John 16: 24)

The most obvious reason that the disciples have not asked for anything from the father as of yet is that they didn’t yet understand their own frailty and how much they needed God. Humiliation is the process of undoing whereby the disciple of Jesus discovers the desperate condition of his life and soul. We all want to be humble, but few want to go through the humiliation that leads to humility.

Our Reaction: The tendency is to avoid and resist humiliation. To be exposed before God who loves us tremendously is one thing. To have our frailty displayed before our friends and enemies is quite another.

Appropriate Action: Just as Jesus embraced the cross (willing to give up the right to die on His own terms), those facing humiliation at the hand of God should embrace the experience as well. This is the crucifixion of the flesh that is required of those on their way to true greatness -- the exaltation of God.

Desired Outcome: Disciples who have walked through the fire of humiliation “ask” more readily. A dependence upon God (and His people) to supply abundantly is developed in people and organizations that have come to understand their weaknesses. Even their strengths become saturated with God’s power and life because they are dependent upon Him as the source of these strengths.

If you or your organization is going through a transition, being aware of these principles can neutralize fears associated with these times of unknown and waiting. Since they are principles you can choose to ignore them, but that won’t change the fact that they are working in your situation. Cooperating with them will help you get the most out of the season in which you find yourself. And you will be ready for the joy on the other side.

Jesus used the illustration of a woman in childbirth to encourage those in the midst of transition. He says that your sorrow will soon turn to joy and be forgotten as a new thing is born.

While you are in this season, be reminded of Jesus’ words at the end of John 16: “Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart because I have overcome the world.”

How have you seen these principles at work in a transition in your life or organization?