

## SMALL GROUP LESSON

# Navigating Tough Transitions

The logo for 'hyphen' is located in the top right corner. It consists of the word 'hyphen' in a lowercase, sans-serif font. The letters are colored: 'h' is blue, 'y' is green, 'p' is red, 'h' is blue, 'e' is green, and 'n' is red. The logo is set against a dark grey rounded rectangular background.

### Lesson Aim

To show that mastering a transition in your life is as important as knowing where your life is heading.

### Preparation Necessary

Paper and writing instruments.

### Scripture Text

“Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man. Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil.” -Proverbs 3:3-7

### Additional Scriptures

The book of Ruth records the Ruth story.

Acts 9 records Saul’s conversion on the road to Damascus.

Matthew 14:22-33 records Peter walking on the water with Jesus.

Galatians 1:13-24 records Paul’s time in the wilderness.

## INTRODUCTION

In basketball, the toughest task to teach a team is the transition game. You can have a prolific offense, you can teach fierce defense, but when the plans go awry, when the shots don’t drop, or the ball is stolen or key players are in foul trouble, it is the team that reacts best to the mid-court changes the quickest that will most likely win the game.

So it is in life. At key—often unexpected—points, we find ourselves struggling to create a transition game out of our lives because the unforeseen (or the never experienced) occurs. It could be an impending graduation or wedding, it could be an urgent desire to change majors or even colleges. It could be you’re feeling trapped with the wrong girlfriend/boyfriend or weighing two delectable Summer internships—the one far from home that pays or the one near home that doesn’t pay. Perhaps it’s trying to decide between your responsibilities in a family crisis and a responsibility to complete your education.

Here’s an example: The 20something came over to discuss how God had confirmed to him he should attend college. It was miraculous how God had provided the means to pay off his debt, gave him not one but two verbal confirmations to attend this particular college, and then provided him with the funds to attend. It was amazing how clear God had made this young person’s path.

Within 20 minutes, however, he shared how he was going to exit after only one semester

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at the college. It was dumbfounding! He went on to explain how there were serious family issues that needed to be dealt with. To be honest, they were good reasons, but did that still make the decision right?

We all face transitions, those moments of crisis that petrify our reflexes, freeze our thinking process, and create emotional outbursts and sleepless nights. Still, there are some solid points everyone can trust in to ensure a smooth transition toward success while staying safely within God's will. This lesson will help define those criteria and define a clearer next step wherever you might be in your walk with God.

## THE IDEAS

We're all in transitions, but there are some clear point we can use to triangulate a smooth transition into God's next step for us. This lesson will define those criteria so that your next transition may be fraught with difficulties, but it won't finish in disaster.

### Set the Correct Priorities

Everyone goes through transitions, with some being more fraught with consequences than others. It's not enough to have a goal—"I want a job." "I want to start a marriage." "I need to get a new major, I hate the one I'm in."—you have to set priorities that will help you achieve that goal. In the Bible, Ruth found herself at multiple transition points within a short period:

Should she go with her mother-in-law to a land she had never visited?

Should she go when her mother-in-law told her to return and her sister-in-law agreed to return (Ruth 1:15-18)?

Should she pursue a man to be her husband when tradition dictated that the man must do the pursuing (Ruth 3-4)?

She nailed them all perfectly. (Don't you hate people like that?)

### Others faced different challenges

Peter saw Christ walking on the water and decided this storm was a transition period to deeper faith—and he nearly drowned as a result (Matthew 14:22-33).

Saul was thrust into an unexpected crisis of faith on the road to Damascus, passed the test by recognizing the true Messiah, was blinded then miraculously healed (Acts 9), then spent three years mastering his transition game into a Christian future (Galatians 1:13-24) before emerging into the wider world and becoming the world's greatest missionary.

Esther went from unknown Jewess to queen of the world's largest empire—then found her race threatened with extinction.

Jesus doubted in the Garden, begged that His fate be avoided, then transitioned from humanity into divinity and Savior for our sins.

Setting priorities means focusing in on the new essentials in your life. When the doctor tells you you have cancer, keeping up with who is ranked No. 1 during the college basketball season isn't so important anymore. While that might seem like an extreme example, the reality is many people find themselves facing serious decisions, but keep their lives cluttered with non-essentials that

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saps your focus and energy. Hebrews warns about laying aside every weight that is put upon you. The Austrian psychiatrist and psychotherapist Viktor Frankl said, “ [HYPERLINK “http://thinkexist.com/quotation/when\\_we\\_are\\_no\\_longer\\_able\\_to\\_change\\_a\\_situation/203474.html”](http://thinkexist.com/quotation/when_we_are_no_longer_able_to_change_a_situation/203474.html) When we are no longer able to change a situation—we are challenged to change ourselves.”

Ruth found she had to leave the old habits of her homeland to stick with Naomi. Peter found he had to ignore peer pressure and what he knew about water—you can’t walk on it—to attain the miraculous. (And let’s give him credit, he’s still the only person not named Jesus who walked on the water.) After his conversion, Saul eschewed most human contact to commune with the Spirit for instruction and clear direction.

Our weights might be mundane—friends who beg you to attend this (distracting) social event “just this one time” when you need a night or weekend to prepare for the future; Social Networking Sites (SNS) that sap our time and rob our sleep; A habit of procrastination that’s preventing progress—or more serious—a stubborn streak that blocks flexibility and accepting wise counsel; maxed out credit cards that limit interesting opportunities; an overbooked calendar that saps a wavering prayer life—but they become ponderous when a lithe transition is important.

## Interaction

Have you ever found yourself wanting to achieve an important goal, but found yourself running (figuratively) in place instead? Why was that? Have you ever found yourself needing to drop old habits to transition to something better?

### **Avoid the problems of a poor transition game plan by prioritizing the following:**

Obedience to God’s word—If you’re disobeying Scripture, you’re severing your connection to your most important guide.

Prayer—Allotted an extra amount of prayer to help you make the best decision.

Bible Reading—Scripture is God’s word to us. Ask for a particular scripture that will help guide you forward. Find a Bible character who went through a similar situation as you and study their responses to tough transitions.

Wise counsel—Speak with someone who you admire and/or respect to help you make your decision or give you context for your decision.

Fast—Yes, most people get the munchies when they’re stressed, but fasting attunes the body with the Spirit for more powerful results.

Sleep—Everyone thinks clearer and is more sensitive to the moving of the Spirit when their body is rested.

Eat Well—Yes sugar is more satisfying in the short run, but a healthy diet will fortify your body against the tension of transition.

Yes, it seems like a lot, but mastering each of them will always give you insight and health through the worst of challenges.

## Interaction

Are you more likely or less likely to include God in your life when you’re stressed out by major transitions? Can you make solid major decisions without asking God to help? Why then is it important to include God and his Word in your decision-making process?

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## Create a Safety Net for Yourself

Esther ended up queen of the empire, yet never stopped communicating with her uncle and spiritual guide Mordecai. Ruth and Naomi were constant helps to each other once they chose to return to Israel together—Ruth provided the daily needs, while Naomi directed the social opportunities (and eventual courtship) of her daughter-in-law. Paul was shepherded by Ananias and Barnabas throughout his early ministry. After Christ returned to heaven, Peter paired up with John, each relying on the other throughout their ministry.

Often the stress of a major transition makes us isolate ourselves from others. And while you certainly don't want advice from every well-meaning person who offers it, maintaining a strong network of local friends and family will only strengthen your chances of success. A long-distance friend you text and talk with daily probably isn't going to be strong enough to prevent the inevitable panic attacks at being overwhelmed by unfamiliar circumstances. Allowing the strain to build up without a healthy outlet will only create an opportunity for a meltdown, perhaps even sin, that a long-distance friend will be helpless to prevent. A local friend can be your protector.

The key is to cling to the best friends and/or advisors. They needn't be your best friend, but someone—perhaps your CMI coordinator, a youth pastor, a fellow believer in your group—who understands you and your situation well. A coach, who can watch from the sideline of your life and give you context, advice, and insight as you attempt to master your transition game. *NOTE: Pass out the paper and writing instruments.*

## Interaction

Does stress make you isolate yourself or cling to friends? What are the disadvantages to both methods? Why is it hard to open yourself up to others in times of great challenges? Take a moment and write down three local people and three distant people you could depend on when you find yourself in a tough transition. What would you advise someone who can't list six people who might help them?

## Master the New Normal

Don't end up on the other side of the transition and expect life to be the same. It won't be. A new job generally brings long hours, unusual responsibilities, and a different income level, all of them creating new challenges. A new academic major forces you to take different classes. Ending a relationship with a boyfriend/girlfriend means feeling lonely at the wrong moments is now the norm. Graduating from college forces a lifestyle change. Marriage might make you think about furniture for the first time in your life.

It was no different in Bible times. Esther found herself the queen, which forced an entirely different set of duties upon her. It also gave her an opportunity to save her people from Haman's dreadful law. But there were royal protocols that had to be followed first, even if she was queen. There were allies to gain (the Jews and their prayers) and there were servants to order about for her dinners.

Ruth had to learn a new system of life in her new hometown of Bethlehem. She had to learn how to get food for the two women, then she had to learn the best way to trap the rich and handsome Boaz. Then she was at the mercy of an ancient law that might have ceded her to another relative of Naomi's instead of Boaz. Yet at each stage, she proved flexible and determined enough to master the situation. She ended up the wife of Boaz, a woman from Moab who became a key component in the lineage of king David and then Christ Himself.

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When you're on the other side of the transition, you often find yourself unsettled. You could be susceptible to new temptations—it's hard to be greedy when you're a poor college student, but if you get that well-paying job then suddenly it's easier to allow your thought to center around money and the things it can buy—that never bothered you before. You might find yourself with a different type of peer group that others find puzzling. You might find your daily walk with God deepening—or grinding to a halt as you handle new arrangements. In some ways, the transition never ends, as a hunger to grow in God re

## Interaction

Have you ever seen someone allow success to go to their head and ruin them? Care to share the story? How about someone who shifted smoothly upwards—whether spiritually or economically or academically—and handled the “new normal” with equanimity? Care to share the story? What was the difference between those two groups?

## CONCLUSION

What do Ruth, Esther, Peter, and Paul have in common? They all would've been first team All Americans on the transition teams of life. Each faced individual challenges in their lives that would have destroyed others, yet they adjusted to the unexpected moments in their lives with the help of others, and survived the moment before succeeding. Whether you're in a Ruth, Esther Peter, or Paul transition, or just feel flummoxed by life, understand that there will always be obstacles and challenges that feel like impossibilities. That's when it's time to master your transition game.

## LED-BY-THE-SPIRIT QUESTIONS

1. Name some Bible characters (not in the examples used) that faced tough transitions in their lives. Share what that transition was.
2. What are the sure-fire signs that someone is suffering through a tough transition in life?
3. What are the sure-fire signs that you are suffering through a tough transition in life?
4. How do you know when you've successfully navigated a major transition?
5. What can we learn from Scripture about the best ways to master a transition?

## PRAYER

Lord, help us to live our lives so that we can distinguish your desires for my life. Help us to be wise and to rely upon You. Please provide us with friends and family who will help us make wise decisions according to Your Word. Show us when we're off our game, blindly flailing because we won't listen to Your coaching. Help us to adapt quickly to the challenges of life, so that we can be wiser at every step of the way and you can use us no matter what is happening. We wish to be pleasing in your sight even when we don't always understand your coaching commands. Guide us and direct us so that our lives and our words will be acceptable to You, oh Lord. In your holy name, Amen. ★