

## Change and Transition - Second Session

As we come to this topic for a second time it would be good to review the process that we discussed last session. You could review the summary notes or take some time to read William Bridges book "Transitions, making sense of life's changes". Below is a quick overview from page 80 of the book:-

"Whether the source of the transition is an external change or your own inner development, the transition always starts with an ending. To become something else, you have to stop being what you are; to start doing things a new way, you have to end the way you are doing them now; and to develop a new attitude or outlook, you have to let go of the old one you have now. Even though it sounds backwards, endings always come first. The first task is to let go.

After that you encounter the neutral zone – that apparently empty in-between time when, under the surface of the organisational situation or invisibly inside you, the transformation is going on. Everything feels as though it is up for grabs and you don't quite know who you are or how you are supposed to behave, so this feels like a meaningless time. But it is actually a very important time. During your time in the neutral zone, you are receiving signals and cues – if only you could decipher them! - as to what you need to become for the next stage of your life. And, unless you disrupt it by trying to rush through the neutral zone quickly, you are slowly being transformed into the person you need to be to move forward in your life."

When reading Luke chapter 24 in my quiet time, I became aware of how closely the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus epitomises this experience of transition and loss. It particularly speaks to the area of hopes and expectations, which would be a worthwhile topic to look at in more detail. Take some time to read and reflect on the passage, the accompanying notes may help you.

### **On the road to Emmaus** Luke 24:13-35

This is the third day since Jesus was crucified and although the tomb has been found empty, Jesus' body has not been discovered and no one has yet seen Him. This is the reality facing these two dejected disciples as they walk the seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus. As Jesus comes alongside them they display the characteristics of those struggling with endings and loss. "Their faces are downcast..." (v17), they are confused and discouraged. The intensity of their disappointment is captured in that very poignant phrase "But we had hoped..." (v21). In that short phrase they express the shattering of all their hopes and dreams, that this Jesus was the Messiah that would redeem Israel, and would do it their way!

The very fact that they are walking away from Jerusalem shows that they have disengaged; that the structures and plans they had for what Jesus would do, have been swiftly dismantled. Their dis-identification and disenchantment come across as they speak of Jesus in the past tense and as a prophet, no longer as Messiah or Lord

In verses 22-24 they are typically disorientated. They have heard reported accounts of an empty tomb and visions of angels, but they don't know what to believe. The fact is that there is no body and no one has seen Jesus dead or alive, so they get up and go to Emmaus. Perhaps Emmaus is their home, so they go to somewhere they know, to the familiar, to the apparently secure in an attempt to find stability amid their destroyed hopes and shaken plans.

At this time of need, in this very uncomfortable neutral zone Jesus walks with them but they just don't realise it! As they listen to this apparent stranger and begin to process what he is saying, Jesus reorders their thoughts and perspectives on the past, present and future by explaining that the whole of the Old Testament looked forward to a Messiah who would suffer before entering His glory. He revealed to them that although their plan might be shattered, God's plan was very much on track.

This compresses into a couple of verses an experience that, for us, might take a lot longer and be a lot more complex depending on the transition we are going through. But it exemplifies that much of the work of the neutral zone is internal, in our minds, hearts, spirits and character and this is the place where real change and growth occurs if we will let it.

The New Beginning has not begun yet. In verses 28-29 Jesus leaves the initiative with the two disciples; He does not force Himself on them but waited to be invited in (cf Revelation 3:20).

It is not until verses 30-32 that the new beginnings really start to dawn on them. As Jesus broke the bread "their eyes were opened and they recognised Him". Sometimes a new beginning is right there but we need our eyes opened to see it for what it is.

Then they recalled "were our hearts not burning within us while He talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us?" The evidence was there and as they acknowledged it there came the renewal of their faith and the rebirth of their hope and from this the redirection of their lives.

Although it was evening, dark and they were tired after the seven mile walk from Jerusalem (v33-35) this new beginning so energised them and motivated them, that they got up at once and walked back to Jerusalem excited to share their new joy and hope in the risen Lord with their fellow disciples. This sense of renewed energy, motivation and excitement about a new direction is often one of the hallmarks of a new beginning.

To stimulate your thinking on this topic of hopes and expectations here are some scenarios for you to look at. The idea is not to seek for solutions to the problems described but to identify certain issues that can be relevant to many of us facing transitions in our lives. Although some of the facts are drawn from real situations, there is no intention to imply that they relate to anyone in the group.

As you read think about:-

- What hopes and expectations have been lost?
- Were more than one transition occurring at the same time?
- How did being part of a couple/family affect the transition process?
- Is it the transition itself that shatters the hopes and expectations or how it is dealt with?
- What pressures come to bear on a relationship when one of a couple is going through a significant transition but the other isn't or when the transition benefits one but fails to meet the expectations of the other?

### Scenario 1

Matt and Sandra are at that time of life when their children are preparing to leave home for university. They have looked forward to this time and have prepared them well for independence. But as the time approaches, Sandra particularly is struggling with the thought of them leaving, partly because they don't need her in the same way anymore and partly because she envies them with their lives before them and all the opportunities it will bring. Sandra never got the chance to develop her career since she married early and had children straight away. Matt's job took him away from home a lot, so Sandra carried the load at home. Now to top it all, Matt is really excited about a new promotion he has been offered at work. He wonders why Sandra is less than enthusiastic, when it will mean more money coming in.

### Scenario 2

Dan and Kate had taken early retirement and moved out to Australia for an extended holiday to be with their daughter, who had taken a job there a year ago. They loved the climate and the outdoor lifestyle. They had begun to make friends and to fit in well with the culture. But as time went on Kate started to long to be back home. Their son and his wife had recently had a baby and they hadn't yet seen their grandchild. Also Kate's parents were getting more frail and she felt that she needed to be available to help them. The problem was that Dan talked such a lot about making the move permanent. He was sold on staying in Australia for life. How could Kate tell him how she felt?

### Scenario 3

David and Anita had saved up for some time for a "once in a lifetime trip round the world" when they retired. As the time drew near, David had been working extra hard to get everything at work finished off well before he left, when he suddenly collapsed and died of a heart attack. It came right out of the blue; he had always been so fit and taken such good care of his health. Anita was devastated with grief and shock at the loss of her husband. But as time went by she was also dismayed at the loss of all their plans, hopes and dreams for their future life together. How would she ever cope alone?

### Scenario 4

Peter and Carol had always had a desire to sell up in the city and move to a place by the sea. Now that the children had both married and settled, they felt the time was right, so they put the house on the market. Then the shocking news came that their daughter's husband had left her with a toddler and a baby and moved in with another woman. They were desperately saddened and angry for their daughter, as well as deeply shocked at the news. They had no idea that there were any problems. Their daughter felt that she could not cope alone and needed help with the children. She didn't know how she was going to manage financially, so she asked them if she and the children could move back home for a while. Peter and Carol took their house off the market. That one phone call swept aside their hopes and dreams for their future, as well as their daughter's.

### Scenario 5

Tim and Jane are in their late 60s now. Jane had retired at 60 and had looked forward to Tim retiring at 65. Tim is a self-employed accountant looking after local small business clients, many of whom he has got to know quite well over the years. He enjoys his work, and although at 65 he did cut down his hours he still goes out to work four days a week. Two years ago Tim had a stroke. He recovered quite well with rehabilitation therapy, but the fear of a second stroke hangs over Jane. She gets lonely and bored on her own at home. She would love to downsize from their large house and garden in case Tim becomes incapacitated and she can't cope. She has even had the house valued, but she knows that Tim is not interested in moving from the family home, so it is not going to happen any time soon.

### Scenario 6

Graham and Helen are both foreign language teachers. They love their long summer break, when they can spend time in their holiday home in France. They are looking forward to retiring there in the future, since they love the culture and the lifestyle. Recently, Graham has noticed that Helen has been struggling with the language; she can't bring to mind the right words as she used to. Graham has noticed other lapses in memory and concentration. He was aware of a history of dementia in Helen's family and suggested to Helen that she should get it checked at the G.P. The indications are that Helen is in the early stages of dementia and the prognosis is not looking good. Graham now faces a very different future than he had hoped for.

### Scenario 7

Richard and Joan live in the north of England. They have had busy, fulfilling lives with demanding jobs, bringing up a family and a lot of responsibility at church. The children had left home and settled in other parts of the country. They had retired from their jobs and had felt it was time to hand on their church responsibilities to the younger generation, but they still felt reasonably active with a lot to give, so they decided to sell up the family home and to move to London to be near their daughter and her family. They knew this would be a huge change for them in lots of ways but they had not been prepared for the extent of the transition involved. First off, selling a house in the north of England only allowed them to buy a small apartment in the London area. They missed the size and space of the old family home with all its memories, not to mention not having a garden to sit in. Also they feel completely disorientated where they live now; how does everything work, all the ways they had learned about how to function where they lived before didn't apply here. They missed their friends and hadn't found a church where they felt settled. They were enjoying being near their daughter's family and loved being around the grandchildren who they had rarely seen before, but was it enough! They had prayed so much about this move, but had it been a mistake?

Ponder these scenarios in light of the questions at the beginning and in relationship to your own experiences. You may choose to read them with your spouse (hate that word!), and use them as a springboard for fruitful discussion.

## New Beginnings

“There is no formula, procedure or checklist to map the way ahead or to give us the answers. It is important not to rush things. A comprehensive, gradual reintegration of life in light of the newness that came from the neutral zone must take place, this is in order to protect the fragile new against the power of old patterns or the premature forging of new ones. This may take pastoral input from others to support us.” (Fowler p111)

With this thought in mind, take some time to review the section on new beginnings from the original Change and Transition paper and the other resources and think about these questions:-

- What might alert you to a potential new beginning?
- Think about a new beginning that you made in the past; what brought that to your attention?
- As you have read and considered your past experiences, what words or phrases seem to describe how you feel and respond to an idea when it is the “right” opportunity?
- What can hold us back from pursuing a new beginning?
- What tends to hold you back?
- What can move us forward and encourage us?
- In what ways have you traditionally sought guidance in making life decisions?
- Fowler speaks of the process possibly involving pastoral support. What form might that take? What are the positives and negatives of receiving such input at this point?
- What overarching principles should inform our decisions?

“Imagine that you are really old. Let’s say you are ninety. From that time in the future, you can look back on yourself now. Then you will know what was really going on now and even how things turned out. You may also know how they might have turned out if you had taken a different path. From that vantage point, was this present point in your life a time when it was a good idea to keep on in the same direction, or was it a time that cried out for change? And if the latter, what kind of change was called for? Looking back from age ninety, did you notice signs that pointed to the direction you ought to have taken at this point in your life, signs that may have been hard to see but were there? And looking back from that future, what feelings do you have about your situation now? At ninety, are you sympathetic with your current confusion or impatient with your current blindness? At ninety, are you pleased by how things turned out or troubled by the nagging feeling that you missed a turn in the road back here where you are standing now? Do you, at ninety, wish you could have encouraged your present self to take more risks? Or do you wish you could have made the present you wake up and see all that you already possessed and not risk it for something that was just ego candy?” (Bridges p99)

As Joshua received the commission from Moses to lead the people across the Jordan and into the Promised Land, Moses passed on this promise from God, let Him have the last word:-

“The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.” Deuteronomy 31:8