

# Navigating Transitions

*Embracing the Spiritual Journey*

## Praise for *Navigating Transitions*

Imagine you are standing at one end of a very long and dimly lit hallway. The door you just came through leads back to the safe, secure, structured life you have become adjusted to. But that door has no handle to get back through. You can barely see a door at the other end of the hallway. Somehow, you know that is where you need to go. That door leads to the unknown, unfamiliar place you are going to end up. Along the long hallway are doors on each side. You realize you have no clue where they lead to of course but you also know somehow that you cannot stay in the places they lead to. The journey through that hallway is a traverse known as liminal space; the in-between; transition. You have left what was and are moving toward what is next. There is trepidation to traverse that hallway. There is fear and anxiety too. But there can be joy, excitement, and looking forward to what's ahead; thriving in between.

The book you hold in your hands is Pastor/ Dr. (?) Venter's masterful guide to this journey. He helps us come to the realization that God is in this space (and there can be thriving here). Through the transformation and formation God longs for us all to realize, we can become men and women who desire God's Presence above all else.

Dr. Venter comes along side us not only to journey with us, but to shine light on the growth and transformation available in the chaos and disequilibrium we often find during transitional times.

You may be heading into, smack dab in the middle of, and/or realize you just left a transition time; a liminal

space, but rest assured, you are not alone. This book shows us the courage and strength available from God, our Shepherd, Who is close beside us in the darkest valley and Who's rod and staff can comfort us if we let them (Psalm 23: 4)

So, let us pause and learn from Dr. Venter more about the scared space transitions can become when we are intentional about God's transforming work there.”

*Christina Willman*  
*Spiritual Director with Selah Center for Spiritual Formation.*



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ISBN 978-0-89367-482-3 (paperback)  
ISBN 978-0-89367-483-0 (eBook)

LIGHT + LIFE PUBLISHING  
*A Ministry of the Free Methodist Church – USA*  
Indianapolis, Indiana  
Printed in the United States of America

# Dedication

I wish to dedicate this book to my wife, JoAnne Venter, who has always believed in my pursuit of learning, has partnered in laughter, and loves me more than I understand. To my remarkable children Jeffrey, Madisen, David, and Nicole, you make our lives through transitional formation a joy. I am honored to be called your husband, father, friend, and brother in Christ.

To the amazing church, Cucamonga Christian Fellowship, JoAnne and I have had the privilege of serving at for twenty-five years, you have been on this transitional journey with us, and we could not have asked for a greater community to partner with in the great Kingdom adventure.

To my friend Jill Austin who kept telling me, “Write the book!” And to the excellent editors who have helped sharpen and soften my thoughts as needed – Kelly Meyer, Barbara Hayes, and Brett Heintzman. Writing is its own transition.

And finally, to Jesus, thank you for being my consistent and faithful transition guide. My only regret is that I did not start my journey with you a day sooner, but I am grateful for the many days ahead with you.

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“*Liminality is a place in between two states. It is the state of having left behind what is stable and familiar and structured yet moving into a threshold experience where what is yet to come is unknown and unsure. Liminality is a place of expectancy and hope coupled with chaos and disorientation. It may be characterized by a period of isolation and feel like exile, or it may occur amid seemingly normal human experience while taking a very internal form.*”

*Lori E. Taylor*



## Chapter One

# Why Explore Transitions?

*“It is when we are in transition that  
we are most completely alive.” –*

*William Bridges*

I often jest when responding to the question, “What is your favorite verse in the Bible?” My response is, “The gospel of blank spaces and margins, those white spaces between and beside each verse that you wish you could peer into beyond the ink and see what happened between the poet and the written inspiration. In this space, I read the writer’s lament, repentance, and reward in five minutes. I hope five minutes would be all I needed for the poet’s same inspiration. But unfortunately, it is an illusory time that has never come quickly in my life.” This illusory time is one way to describe the concept of being in a liminal space. Jim Branch aptly describes liminality this way:

So much of this life is lived in between, between the now and the not yet, between arriving and departing, between growing up and growing old, between questions and answers. Lord, help us not to live for the distant day when the in-between will be no more, but help us to have the courage to step into that sacred space of the in-between—knowing that this is a place where life is transformed.<sup>1</sup>

Branch challenges us to recognize both the reality of liminality in our daily lives and the mystery we must face courageously while navigating this sacred space.

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<sup>1</sup> Jim Branch, *The Blue Book: A Devotional Guide for Every Season of Your Life* (Chico, CA: Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016), 189, Kindle.

The word “liminal” comes from the Latin word *limens*, meaning threshold. Yet, when we are in the liminal space, the in-between space, it never feels like a threshold. It feels more like a shut door, a wall, or an unmovable obstacle. In literature, liminality describes the space between an inciting incident in a story and the protagonist’s resolution. It is often a period of discomfort, of waiting, and of transformation. Liminality is when our characters’ old habits, beliefs, and even personal identity disintegrate until they have the chance to become someone completely new. Jeff Goins reminds us that we do indeed become in the waiting, but it is so hard to wait. He writes the following:

Life is waiting. Not just waiting in line at the grocery store or waiting to renew your driver’s license but waiting to love and commit and find the work you were meant to do. Our lives are full of inconvenient setbacks, not due to some great cosmic mistake, but because of some divine purpose we don’t comprehend. In the waiting, we become.<sup>2</sup>

Have you ever been in a liminal space in your life, ministry, and leadership? Have you ever been on what you believed is the threshold, but it takes seemingly forever to cross it? The forever may look like the in-between jobs or paychecks, prodigal children or spouses, the promise of a pay raise or promotion, or the waiting for the doctor’s report. For a leader, forever may look like the goal, the objective, the ministry, the organization’s growth, or the dream or promise that has not yet been realized.

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<sup>2</sup> Joe Bunting, “What Is Liminality and Why Does Your Story Need It?” The Write Practice, accessed January 2016, <http://thewritepractice.com/liminality-story/>

For me, it feels like an often-travelled space in life and leadership, much like hanging in the air between the two trapeze bars. Gail Blanke, in *Between Trapezes: Flying into a New Life with the Greatest of Ease*,

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*We must learn that whatever has caused us to let go of the first bar, we must not so quickly grab what is next without recognizing that in the air between, we have an opportunity to become.*

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states, “For a trapeze artist to grab the next bar, she has to let go of the last one.”<sup>3</sup> However, we must learn that whatever has caused us to let go of the first bar, we must not so quickly grab what is next without recognizing that in the air between, we have an opportunity to become. It is in this liminal space that we can experience and embrace some of our greatest formation. Nevertheless, it is one of the places we try to avoid or move away from too quickly. I would like to boldly state, formation is never fast. Not many things of excellence or sustainability come in a hurry.

I love the following story found in John Ortberg’s book *Soul Keeping*, describing a formative moment in his life to illustrate the importance of pace:

Many years later I had moved to Chicago. Entering into a very busy season of ministry, I called Dallas to ask him what I needed to do to stay spiritually healthy. I pictured him sitting in that room as we talked. There was a long pause—with Dallas there was nearly always a long pause—and then he said slowly, “You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from

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<sup>3</sup> Kim Argetsinger, “What Trapeze Taught Me about Business and Life,” Kim Argetsinger, accessed February 2020, <https://kimargetsinger.com/blog/what-trapeze-taught-me-about-business-life/>

your life.” I quickly wrote that down. Most people take notes with Dallas; I have even seen his wife take notes, which my wife rarely does with me. “Okay, Dallas,” I responded. “I’ve got that one. Now what other spiritual nuggets do you have for me? I don’t have a lot of time, and I want to get all the spiritual wisdom from you that I can.” “There is nothing else,” he said, generously acting as if he did not notice my impatience. “Hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life in our day. You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.”<sup>4</sup>

God’s loving pause during liminality helps us not only to understand that we must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from our lives but also that we must replace it with ruthless pursuit toward a new depth in our formation and leadership found there. This elimination allows us to pause in the sacred place where God can grab our full attention, and we can gain all His intention. Let us remember that we are human, and we were not built to go fast for long periods.

Liminality in our lives, whether intentional or thrust upon us, can lead us to new levels of spiritual formation and leadership development. It is an opportunity for us to lean in, learn, embrace, and not only navigate the trappings found there but also eventually to be a guide for others finding themselves there.

In the following, I want to encourage us to go on a journey to learn how to navigate the often-present liminality in our lives. And to help us, we will employ the biblical narrative describing a particular liminal moment in the life of King David.

The 1 Samuel 18-22 narrative unveiled several life-changing liminal principles. These chapters gave a

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<sup>4</sup> John Ortberg, *Soul Keeping: Caring for the Most Important Part of You* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 20, Kindle.

language and insight for me to better understand both my spiritual formation and transformation. God, in His goodness and grace, was teaching me how to be formed slowly in this midst of living and leading in this space while revealing the importance of recognizing how normal this space would be all the days of my life. Living in liminal space, in the in-between, and learning the language of these transitions forever changed the way I viewed this vital space of formation with God and leadership development.

David is the main character in this narrative and lives in a constant tension of what is and what should rightly be his. Most importantly, he begins to discover who he is and who he is to become. David's liminal space, his in-between experience, would last almost forty years, from the time of his anointing as a shepherd boy until he actually would be ruling the kingdom. In those forty years, he did not sit idly until his rightful moment to rule, but he engaged in his life and faith in the interim. Once David became king, he would experience many liminal spaces through obedience, disobedience, triumphs, and failures.

Brueggeman comments on the life of David in *David's Truth: In Israel's Imagination and Memory*: "This man is public, and any report cannot disregard his public life. If he were not a public man, he would not be so interesting, nor would things be so difficult. What we have, then, is an intimate portrayal of a public man. We learn the truth about him."<sup>5</sup> We recognize this public, heroic David demonstrating freedom and giftedness while simultaneously showing the reality of the temptation to sinful pursuit and its painful

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<sup>5</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *David's Truth: In Israel's Imagination and Memory*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 37.

consequences.<sup>6</sup> David is a king who acts with loyalty to the covenant and yet is fallible in his character with Uriah and Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11).<sup>7</sup>

Considering this study of liminality, the contrast between David's life as a faith hero and a person who was flawed as a witness is essential. It is vital because God sees us in our victories and failures and the in-between found in them, yet He still desires that our lives will pursue what is right in the sight of the Lord and not turn aside from what He commands from us throughout our lives (1 Kings 15:4-5). Holding the tension of God's grace in our failures is vital in the formation journey.

Although we are not looking at the entirety of David's journey through this episode in 1 Samuel 18-22, we will still need God's grace to lead and form us while living in and embracing liminal space. In this space, we often must navigate the life between where we have been and where future promises bring hope of where we will be. In this space, we can often feel confused, perplexed, and discouraged in our faith. Yet, liminality is a normal space where we will discover a new language and insight to embrace toward our formation in Christ.

In the following writings, this startling truth presented by Richard Foster will challenge readers: "Our world is hungry for genuinely changed people.... Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Bruce C. Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim, and David L. Petersen, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. Abingdon Press. ProQuest Ebook Central, 2011.

<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/fuller/detail.action?docID=6122404.24>

<sup>7</sup> All references to the Bible are from the NRSV, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1998), 1, 10.



When we do not rush the in-between (liminal) space in which we find ourselves, and we embrace all that God desires for us to learn and be transformed by, we move toward the depth Foster is describing.

Willard equally convicts with his challenge toward the same goal. He suggests we ask ourselves “about what kind of person you are becoming, and about whether you really would be comfortable for eternity in the presence of one whose company you have not found especially desirable for the few hours and days of your earthly existence. And He is, after all, One Who says to you now, ‘Follow me.’”<sup>9</sup> To that goal, we look forward to “becoming” together.

The importance of liminality (transitions) in the life of any persons and its contribution to their spiritual formation and fruitfulness in community is the goal of this book.

I want to help those who often find themselves in these places without any navigational guides to the feelings, experience, and spiritual crisis/tension that often occur when working through liminality.

Also, as you may have noticed, I am using the word 'Transition' to help express the semantic range of the word liminal. Not that I don't love being a logophile or logomaniac (a person who loves words); however, I have found that I often have to explain what liminal means but transitions is a word so many I have encountered relate to and often use in this time of formation.

In addition, to help us navigate transitions, I want to encourage the reader to take a few moments after each chapter and pause to reflect on what you just read. To help you with the process, I have added some prompting

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<sup>9</sup> Dallas Willard, *Great Omission: Rediscovering Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2007), 17, Kindle.

questions at the end of each chapter that have helped me during my experiences in transition.

On the transition journey with you,  
*Fraser*

## Transition Reflections:

*“God’s loving pause during liminality helps us not only to understand that we must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from our lives but also that we must replace it with ruthless pursuit toward a new depth in our formation and leadership found there.”*

1. Are you sensing the ‘pause’ of liminality (transitions)? If so, what is it?
2. Why did you decide to read this book?
3. What are you hoping to discover about the topic?
4. What are you hoping to learn about yourself?
5. What was important to you in this chapter?