



3. Spiritual "*Dad or Grandpa*"

John describes both of the first two spiritual cycles with three relatively clear, distinct markers. *Not so this 3rd cycle!*

I write to you fathers, because you have known **him who is from the beginning** (1 John 2:13-14, **emphasis**).

So cryptic. So indefinite ("*Him who*" rather than specifically "*Father*" or Jesus like with "*beloved child*"). What a glimpse into the unfathomable debts of the vastness of an eternal Being ("*Him who is from the beginning*"). So inadequate for an inquisitive mind that wants everything spelled out in detail, like me. *Yet so right on!*

John did not identify these developmental cycles as "novice," "intermediate," and "expert" like skill training in sports or video games. He is family-oriented in all three of his descriptions, pointing towards the ideal culture in which to grow. Genuine spiritual development and growth is highly relational and life-on-life.

First, think of this cycle as a "*father of teens*," in contrast to pre-teens. Perhaps this is one reason why it seems rare for a person to enter this 3rd cycle before they reach an age to parent teenagers. I wish I had a wise mentor come alongside when we were raising our teens to model these differences for me. The skills to raise *pre-teens* are more directive, "*warrior*" type skills. To raise teenagers demands that our perspectives change, becoming more collaborative, drawing out more than putting in.

Second, this became even clearer to me as I watched our four children raise our fourteen grandchildren, eleven of them now teens. In John's culture, the word "*father*" represents multi-generational relationships, including grandfather or great-grandfather. As I relate to my grandchildren as "*Poppo*," I have now better learned to adjust how I respond to them.

This 3rd cycle is like a spiritual "*father of teens*" and "*grandpa*."

Encountering the "*Warrior Wall*"

Think for a moment on the cryptic description John provides. "*Him who is from the beginning*." In your mind's eye, follow John's pointer to Genesis 1:1, "*In the beginning God created....*" Now think on Him who is *prior* to creation (God is "*from the beginning*," *before* the "*beginning*" happened, i.e. eternal). Now in your mind's eye, go back to *before* creation. What do you see?

God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit, lovingly relating with one another in joyful, freeing community as they serve the highest and best of each other *from all eternity*. *Eternity* has no beginning or ending. God sees everything simultaneously, with one sweeping glance at one "time" (before time was created).

This seems to be what John points to. For me, this haunting vision is God's invitation wooing me into "*more*," a deeper and fuller experience of the eternal God. I'm certainly not implying that I grasp this intellectually, yet I am encouraging us to experience this personally. Such a vision of our relationship with the eternal

God will take up all the rest of our lives on earth, and on into eternity (Philippians 3:20).

At first glance, one thing strikes me clearly in this 3rd cycle. As we get a fuller glimpse of the vastness of the God we serve, we bump up against a choice. We *either* temporarily lay down the containers of our past accomplishments and failures to enter in *or* retreat to the certainties we have grown comfortable with in our life to date. I wonder if the so-called mid-life crisis stems from this. Most though respond to this crisis with outward counterfeits that never satisfy the call God has embedded into us of Deep calling to deep.

In my imagination, I picture the “*Warrior Wall*” as a nearly transparent, indestructible barrier...with a specific doorway designed uniquely for each of us. Each doorway is *low* and very *narrow*. To enter, we must *temporarily* lay aside all the packages and containers from our past, the good and the not so good. If we don’t, we are unable to pass through the *narrow* door. Then on the other side of the “*Warrior Wall*” we pick up our ministries and occupations again. After reevaluating, we continue most of what we laid down after reevaluating, yet from a radically changed perspective.

I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do:
Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ...I press on
(Philippians 3:13-14).

Paul encourages God’s people to learn to live on our journey in humility as lifelong *life*-learners (also see Philippians 2:3). We realize we have not arrived and are still very much in-process. And also focused on the exquisite allurements of following Jesus in sweet surrender into “*more*.” We willingly leave behind all (the good, the bad and the ugly) so we are stripped for intense action moving forward (I like the word picture in Hebrews 12:1b-2).

I consider everything a loss because of the **surpassing worth** of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain... (Philippians 3:8, **emphasis**).

It seems when believers bump against this see-through “*Warrior Wall*” and glimpse the stunning indefiniteness of the vastness beyond, fear of the unknown often stops them from pursuing. If we don’t move forward on our journey, we tend to drift downward into our comfort zone.

“*Warriors*,” and especially “*warrior-kings*,” have learned to control much of life around them (or become satisfied with the illusion of control). Many successful people grow impatient with the imminent threat of loss of certainty. I wonder if we are able to enter into this 3rd cycle without temporarily laying down our confidence in what we have accomplished in the past.

These following paragraphs come out of a chapter on the divine Vintner pruning branches from a devotional on John 15, “*Jesus Is Enough!*”¹ God not only prunes diseased tissue, but also *healthy* past growth. Are you surprised? This includes many activities and pursuits from which we have experienced spiritual fruitfulness in the past.

Every spring, the earthly vintner cuts the vine branches back to a few stubby limbs, *every* new season. If I were that branch, what pain and despair...and

confusion! He is cutting the beautiful runners and luscious green leaves that produced so much fruit last season!

A vine left to itself always favors size and length over more fruit. Long runners and green foliage from last year’s activities and choices divert from God’s *one* purpose in this season. Our heavenly Vintner yearns for abundant fruit to bring joy to others. God’s purpose is neither busyness nor bigness nor a wide ministry nor popularity. We can *either* have beautiful green leaves from last season’s growth *or* sweet, juicy fruit in the next season.

We just cannot have both.

A low, narrow door as the only pathway into “*more*” seems to align with the idea of pruning even good things from our past.

Paul and Barnabas as Examples

Luke gave us a superb example of the difference between a “*warrior-king*” and a spiritual “*grandpa*” in the book of Acts. Barnabas was Saul/Paul’s spiritual mentor, demonstrating in spades the marks of a spiritual “*grandpa*.” He championed the Apostle Paul in every way, even when others were skeptical. Barney even turned his team leadership over to Paul when he saw God’s hand on him in Cyprus (Acts 13:13).

Paul’s First Missionary Journey lasted about a year, although dating is not an exact science. The church at Antioch had launched the team with Barnabas as team-leader. God blessed their strategy as they traveled to the larger population centers, evangelized, moved on, then cycled back for a short time to strengthen the fledgling churches. After reporting back to their home church, in Acts 15:36-41 both men felt the nudge of the Spirit to go on a Second Missionary Journey. The text continues...

They had such a **sharp disagreement** that they parted company (Acts 15:39a, **emphasis**).

What happened to teamwork? Here’s my take, based on Scripture and some of my imagination. You decide! John Mark was the spark for the “*sharp disagreement*.” He bailed on the team on the First Missionary Journey (13:13). Barney stood his ground when his younger friend, Paul, responded from what he saw as a narrow mindset: evangelism and revival without in depth DiscipleMaking.

The **younger Paul** took a part-for-the-whole approach (a legitimate part lifted up as if it were the whole). As a young spiritual “*warrior-king*,” Paul viewed only his mission call to **evangelize** Gentiles and gather the new converts into churches. Legitimate, yet only the partial (Acts 9:15-16). Paul’s refusal to work with John Mark dishonored him as a ministry partner. “*The mission is too crucial. I must have faithful, loyal team members who meet my standards. Mark must not come!*”

Paul’s narrow-focus on his call led him to erroneously practice a worldly “*end justifies the means*” strategy. He closed his mind to Barnabas’ contrary view, refusing counsel from his wise spiritual father. Even when a call is direct from Jesus, if our vision is no broader than **our** ministry call, what we call unwavering perseverance may be obstinacy. What we call faith may have a heavy dose of arrogance. These can often be earmarks of spiritual “*warriors*,” and especially of “*warrior-kings*.”

Barnabas, the older sage (spiritual “*grandpa*”) approached all of ministry more like this. “**Both the mission and the man are so crucial that we must also patiently**

develop maturity in future influencers. Mark **must come!**” Barnabas, “the son of encouragement,” a true spiritual “grandpa,” would not quit on the potential he saw in John Mark, even with his failure at Perga. Barney risked wider ministry influence and rapport with Paul to bring John Mark alongside. He practiced the same restorative ministry with Mark as he had previously with Paul.

Give Paul his kudos. God used Barney’s responses as a spiritual “grandpa” seemed to trigger Paul’s heart to see God’s broader vision of **both** evangelism and **DiscipleMaking**. The Spirit hemmed Paul in from pursuing ministry in the same way he had in his successful past... thrice (Acts 15:6,7,9), sending Paul to another continent. From this point on, Paul seemed to spend more time at one place, more thoroughly discipling the new converts and working more collaboratively with others. Read Philippians, the warmest of Paul’s letters, later written to the first place he landed in Europe. In 1 Thessalonians, especially note the highly personal, family-based ministry focus in 2:7-13, relating “with each one of you as a father” (1 Thess 2:11).

Paul changed and matured as a leader with a wider *Both/And* vision of both the **man** and the **ministry**. Later Paul highly valued John Mark, asking his friends to bring Mark when he was jailed, “because he is helpful to me” (2 Timothy 4:11b; Colossians 4:10). Wherever Paul went, he now brought a team, training them life-on-life (over thirty different companions). Without Barney, Paul may not have broken through and broadened his ministry approach. And Mark may have slipped through the cracks. Paul was approximately fifty when this happened.² I hypothesize that Paul experienced this radical change as he entered through the “Warrior Wall” through his unique narrow and low doorway.

“Barnabas had that rare and powerful quality of believing in people and seeing their potential” (Bob Logan).

One Catholic psychologist who has explored this extensively suggests that as high as **85%** of Christians **fail** to move from “warrior” to become a spiritual “father.”³ This is especially difficult for “warrior-kings” who have had so much success.

Maybe these qualities would no longer be “rare” among God’s people if more of us spiritual “warriors” would choose to enter God’s Sabbath rest through our unique *narrow*, low door and cease from our own works. God’s invites all.

[Anyone] who enters God’s rest also **rests from their works**, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, **make every effort** to enter that rest....For the word of God is alive and active [and] judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight (Hebrews 4:10-13, **emphasis**).

Exploring the Vastness of “Him Who Is...”

So, be more specific!

I wish I could. I would like to explain this 3rd cycle to you in words that draw you into its unimaginable attractiveness. I wonder, though, if anyone really is able to do more for **you** than to give a few pointers. This cycle seems to be something that must be explored **personally**, face-to-face with the living, Triune God, rather than vicariously through the stories of others. How high is your passion to press in?

In one real sense, this cycle is *not* new. God has probably already given you repeated foretastes while in the other two cycles. God always woos us towards "more" of Him. Not "more" we get. Our Family-of-Three gave us their all the instant we came to Christ. Yet we all possess "more" to experience. So explore your past and gather the glimpses of "more" God has given you as brief windows into this 3rd cycle. And dialog with your mentor or a wise peer friend about your insights. God's Deep constantly coaxes your deep within to enter through your unique, low, narrow door into His Sabbath rest for you. Then we are even "more" fruitful ministering as we cease from our own works (Hebrews 4:9-10 and the larger context, 4:1-13).

God is infinite, endless, inexhaustible. So no wonder I feel indefiniteness. God is Triune, which fries my mental circuits. God is incarnational, which defies my logic. And this One "who is from the beginning," calls me now as His *new creation* in Christ to touch eternity with Him (2 Corinthians 5:17; Philippians 3:20-12), part of a new race of people (Romans 5:15-19; Ephesians 2:14-15). All of which soars beyond my ability to fully grasp. Sit in Colossians 1:19 with 2:9-10 and 3:3 long enough so your head spins as you grapple with God's intent for us. The depth and breadth underlying "one new creation" is breathtaking! Such a view draws me to commit myself to wholehearted allegiance as a lifelong *life-learner* and *doer* in deepening, ongoing self-renewal.

This also leads me to more of a *Both/And/And* approach to life, except for essential, foundational either/or truths from Scripture. God **has** given us absolutes. Don't jettison any of these either/or essentials. And please don't approach the rest of life with an either/or mindset when *Both/And* is called for.

Remember, each cycle is also *recursive*. This niche word means that our experience from a later cycle also circles back, impacting and enriching previous cycles. With change, don't swallow the deceit that the "new" implies a completely new start, discarding the old. Who we are and what we do now is connected with the next season and cycle. This freshness brings increased fruitfulness *from continuity*.

A gravity rests on this 3rd cycle, accompanied by a deeper lightness. One writer calls this a "bright sadness and a sober" joyfulness. I like that! This cycle carries a larger vision of pain for particular people and for the larger world. Along with this is wishing that everyone enjoyed the brightness an authentic "3rd Cycler" regularly does in a growing way. This includes a deep grief when those we love settle.

In this "bright sadness," we may also experience a real loneliness if we say "yes" to change, and our peers do not. The cure for this loneliness, however, is actually snatches of silence and solitude with our Father. As we reflect in solitude with "one foot raised" for action, we unite a contemplative stance with fruitful activity.

For me, the broadest and most flexible theological system to carry the weight of "Him who is from the beginning" returns to the beginning in Genesis 1 and 2. Focus on: (1) a relational Trinitarian, (2) incarnational, (2) new creation worldview of God's restored image-bearers as one new man "in Christ." Embracing the mystery inherent in godliness fuels a passionate commitment within me to keep on learning/doing and changing as His *new creation* "in Christ."

I can only give you a few pointers, and follow them myself. Search for your own and pass along your insights to me. Sharing releases growth in both of us. Labor to

enter into His Sabbath rest through **your** unique narrow and low door. His Sabbath rest releases a growing fruitfulness where we cease from our own works.

Regardless of the actual percentage that pass through the "Warrior Wall" door into the 3rd cycle, I choose to join Frank Laubach and Paul in their passion to rush into the presence of our Family-of-Three, Father, Son and Spirit.

"Can we think God's thoughts all the time? I choose to make the rest of my life an experiment in answering this question"

(Frank Laubach, 3/23/30 journal).

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us (Ephesians 3:20).

What Impacted You?



4. Renewal, Personal & Corporate

Renewal in seasons and rhythms, progress and growth are normal and expected in all life. Look at nature for a reflection of God's design. Daybreak and evening. Four seasons, summer, fall, winter and spring. Oak trees grow six weeks during the summer and solidify in the winter. On still nights, the earth gets a gentle shower of renewed life as dew falls. And God built into our design as image-bearers three progressive cycles of spiritual development along with seasons within each. John touches on these in 1 John 2:12-14, "*beloved child*," "*warrior*" and "*father*."

Golden Treasure

At this point, we must battle the mindset of our instant-access culture. Society wants it now and undervalues process. If we imitate our society, we will remain self-referenced toddlers. But our unchanging God is a God of process. Any time of transition or renewal in spiritual growth can be daunting. And slow, one layer at a time. Yet God compassionately meets us in the mud and muck of our journey to move us upward in unique ways that demonstrate how precious we are to Him.

Don't bemoan whatever struggles we have experienced on our unique journey ...or presently experience. Don't blame circumstances or people. Take personal responsibility for our responses without excuses, even if you can't control what others do to you. God disguises Himself as people and circumstances in order to work good *in us*. And don't wait until you have it all together (that will *never* happen!) Each day we have a fresh beginning, a "*new 24*," since God's compassion is new and fresh every morning.

When my oldest daughter was younger and helping with a church-plant, she sent me a quotation from one of my favorite authors, A. W. Tozer. At the time, change was difficult for her. She wrote how refreshing her time with God has been recently amid change. Her growing understanding of our wonderful and faithful Big God fueled change.

Tozer writes that the law of change belongs to a fallen and sin-scarred world. Men and women of faith can only find everlasting permanence in God since He alone is unchangeable. While still on earth in the "*already, but not yet*" of our eternal journey, change can work *for* the children of our Family-of-Three, rather than against us. Our Team-of-Three work...

"...the changes that occur in them. As much as we deplore the lack of stability in all earthly things, in a fallen world such as this the very ability to change is a golden treasure, a gift from God of such fabulous worth as to call for constant thanksgiving."⁴

Do you personally look at change as a "golden treasure"?

Jesus gave us fascinating insight into change and settling in man-made traditions, using the illustration of old and new wine and wineskins. In those

days, the Jews poured new wine with its bubbling over life into new, flexible wineskins. Over time, the wineskin hardened, becoming stiff, inflexible as old wine loses its bubble. Later Jesus answers the teachers of the law more pointedly about settling in traditions. Jesus candidly states that extra-Biblical religious traditions cause us to “let go” and “set aside the commands of God.” Trusting man-made traditions actually “nullify the word of God” (Mark 7:5-13). Unexamined preconceptions block revelation.

Although I like who I am, the power in the Good News shouts that I don’t have to be the same next month as I am today. Living means change. Change requires that we let go of something before we gain another. Yes, feel the loss of what we let go. Grieve these. This occurs before the transition into the gain. Honestly face the pain and confusion. And also turn quickly to God and the new season He brings rather than marinating in your pain and loss.

As an illustration, the Senior Pastor at the local church I’m a part of just retired, and the new Senior Pastor will begin one week from today. I’m looking forward to the change with anticipation. And in this process of change, I’m also feeling heavy about some of the “endings.” Change is tough for many. Yet transition increases awareness of God’s footsteps in our inner life.

On one hand, we are made in the image of the unchangeable God. We long for unchanging perfection. We **only** find this solid rock in God Himself. It makes sense then that change often chafes since God designed us in His image.

On the other hand, we live in a fallen world since Genesis 3. Embrace this paradox in the *already but not yet*” of our eternal journey. Which of us would want to be the same person next month as today? I want to become all God has called me to become, and spiritual growth demands change.

So change is not easy, often pulling us toward inner conflict. However, to grow we must at least make peace with God’s process as we work towards learning to celebrate the change process as a good friend. Spencer Johnson’s “[Who Moved My Cheese](#)” might be a good place to start. This short allegory is a simple, enlightening and amusing story. Johnson illustrates profound truths about possible internal responses to unexpected change.

The key question seems to be: “Do you **personally** believe that this Sovereign God always invites us to respond to His presence and love...and it’s **good**?”

Begin with...and return quickly to...God’s grace-stance toward us. His arms are outstretched like the Father toward his prodigal son (Luke 15:20). Our inner spiritual compass must point to our “True North.” Only **one** place of absolute stability exists in our lives, our true home in our Family-of-Three. Press into this stability as we live in an unstable world. The unchanging God is the same yesterday as today, and always holds us safe and secure in His hands (John 10:28-29).

*Do you **really** believe this?*

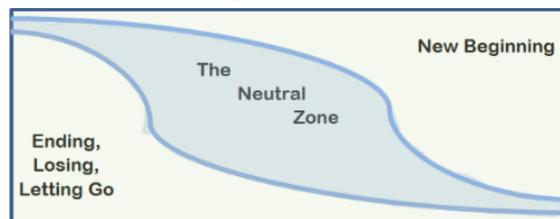
Then nothing makes sense except to yield our lives to Him, lock, stock and barrel...now and forever in sweet surrender towards wholehearted allegiance. And this view of life thrusts us onward toward ongoing renewal and change as lifelong *life-learners* and *doers* since God is always “*more*” than we know.

Change: Endings & New Beginning...& Transition

In his excellent book, “*Managing Transitions*,” William Bridges provides me with a helpful framework for change and transition. He writes specifically to the business-world to aid in their transition process. In our rapidly changing world today, however, the underlying principles apply to all transition, including a personal life-crises, local church transition, and Christian movements.

Check out the diagram below, depicting the sequence of this process. Time moves from left to right, although overlap most always exists.

Recently my Aunt and Uncle needed to sell their house of 30+ years and move into an assisted living apartment. As I’m writing, they are



physically in their *new beginning*, the apartment. They are still dealing with *endings* (selling their house) and feeling the stress in this big-time *transition*. This process has overlap, rather than being neatly sequential. Please don’t neglect or short-change any part of this *Both/And/And* process.⁵

The change process begins with identifying and processing our “*endings*” well before we move through “*transition*” to the intended outcome, “*new beginnings*.”

But **one** thing I do: **Forgetting** what is behind and **straining** toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me... (Philippians 3:13b-14a, **emphasis**).

A single-minded focus (“*one thing*”) includes a compound response (“*forgetting & straining toward*”). In order to reach and press toward the “*new beginnings*” before us, **first** “*forget what is behind*.” This includes previously squeezing out and holding onto the life lessons, both what limited us and also our successes.

What people or circumstances do we feel limit us because we have not fully forgiven so we are free? God designed us to live in such freedom. After forgiving, I “*treasure hunt*” to squeeze all the good life-lessons from these experiences. Since God causes even bad things to work for good in His people (Romans 8:28), I know beyond doubt that God has good gifts for me, even in the midst of tragic events. I deliberately hunt to discover this good like a treasure hunter seeks valued treasure. Then I take this “*treasure*” of good and “*reframe*” any painful “*ending*” with it. Store these costly treasures where we can retrieve them easily.⁶

Then in reference to those painful events, choose to “remember no more.” This is **not** forgetting, but courageously refusing to use this **against** the person in the future (1 Corinthians 3:5)

Over time if the “*ending*” comes back to mind again, the treasure begins to loom brighter than the pain from the event. Because of Romans 8:28, this is not make-believe. This is one way I honor my past. If we do not process our painful past “*endings*” thoroughly, we are prone to pendulum responses in the present.

Normally we do not move from where we are into the better God has for us with no inner wrestling or time lapse preparing for self-discovery. Focus on these three aspects of the process: Endings. New Beginnings. Transition sandwiched between the two. Here is a brief summary of these three stages.

First, something ends, perhaps we lose or let go of something valuable. Some change is thrust on us. Other times we choose ourselves. Regardless, God longs to use this for good in our life. Letting go of the old ways and the old containers normally creates a sense of loss in us and/or in others. For healthiest change, these losses must be identified and processed, grieved or celebrated, depending. What are you experiencing during these *endings*? Be candid with yourself.

Take time to journal, process and reflect. Discover fresh artesian wells for this season, those things in your life that bring spiritual refreshment. And discuss with a trusted friend.

On one island, the natives discovered a foolproof way to capture a monkey. They drilled out a smallish hole in a coconut shell and put the monkey’s favorite nut inside. The monkey reached in and grasped the nut in its fist. Now the monkeys were trapped. Their fist was too large to withdraw and they would not let go of the yummy nut.

Some of us also hold onto the yummy things we presently experience. This entraps us from pursuing what is best. *Endings* demand a letting go of some present attachments to make space for what is next. And not everyone processes at the same pace. As we relate to others in the change-process, leave space for the quick processors and also for the slower processors.

Second, transition is that time between the ending or the lessening of the old, but before the new has become fully formed or operational. William Bridges calls this the “*neutral zone*.” The *neutral zone* is the time when crucial psychological realignments, reevaluation and new patterns take place most quickly. These renew and recalibrate our inner spiritual compass.

“*Transition*” also demands extra time and energy so prioritize the essentials and let non-essentials slide. Since “*transition*” is so fluid with much on the table, the *neutral zone* is where our Philosophy of Life may be most powerfully challenged and reoriented. God designs this season as an opportunity to form new values for maximum LifeChange. Knowing the LifeChanging power in “*transition*” draws out from me a stronger desire to embrace “*friend transition*” more quickly, even with the uncertainty and the pain.

Third, new beginnings are the experience of the anticipated positive change. Change now begins to work powerfully for us with renewed energy

and vision. We experience this in our “*new beginnings*,” although the in-depth preparation takes place during “*transition*.” A seed must fall into the ground and die before new life springs forth.

During the process, all three aspects are often together simultaneously. Each vision of a “*new beginning*” begins with the majority of focus on what will *end*. The process then moves through the *neutral zone of transition* as the focus for much of our time and energy. Finally, dawn casts light on these *new beginnings*, the final cycle in the process.

An Illustration

I heard a story about an old horse trader from Missouri. This true account helps me unpack some of the necessary ingredients for ongoing change and renewal.

When the horse trader bought a horse, in the final negotiation he asked if the seller would throw in his old harness. To the seller, the harness was worthless because the leather had hardened over time. A brittle, inflexible harness is unusable.

The patient horse trader took the old, inflexible harness and soaked it in brine for several days. Then every night he sat on the porch and rocked as he patiently and persistently rubbed saddle soap into the old leather. Night after night he consistently worked the leather in small, incremental change towards his goal of renewed pliability and usefulness. It was now valuable, ready to fulfill its harness-purpose. I hope my quick reflections stimulate your personal thoughts and insights.

1. Ongoing Self-renewal Springs from a Vision of “More:” The old horse trader began with a vision in his mind of what that old harness could **become**. He began with the intended end in mind. This *brittle*, inflexible harness once again fulfills its intended design because it carries potential for renewal within.

“I want and I choose what better leads to God’s deepening life in me.”⁷

2. Ongoing Self-renewal Requires Awareness of the “Gap:” The horse trader honestly assessed the current state of the bridle and also what it could become. This “*gap*” motivated him to patiently work towards the best for the old bridle. With the vision of what could be, he monitored progress with effective “*feedback loops*” that highlighted incremental change. Desperation fuels the necessary hard work needed to close the “*gap*.”

You are unique. Personally develop a way that effectively works for **you**.⁸ So how can you regularly realign your life-responses with your core-values and spiritual DNA without becoming introspective or stuck in past tradition? Learn to develop a Sabbath-lifestyle, scattering little Sabbath-rests in God’s presence throughout your everyday life. Daily, weekly and monthly life-rhythms keep us aligned with our God-Assignments for this season in life. Over time this Spirit-led self-discovery develops self-awareness. Without this, our lives tend to drift, like a rip tide persistently pulls swimmers off course.

3. Ongoing Self-renewal includes both Continuity and Discontinuity:

The Missouri horse trader began and ended with the *same* harness. Continuity. The harness was also different, restored to a state where it could be used again for its intended purpose. Discontinuity. With renewal, don't swallow deceit that the "new" thing implies a completely new start, discarding the old. Who we are and what we do now is connected with the next season and cycle.

4. Ongoing Self-renewal Demands "True Grit"... Passion with

Perseverance: The Missourian committed himself to the time and extended effort to bring about incremental renewal. His passion for a good harness kept moving him. His perseverance kept him steady, even before he knew with certainty what the final outcome would be. *Transition* normally demands time and patience, although at times God may certainly change us quickly.

Growth is messy and confusing. I don't enjoy either, yet they drive me in desperation to utter dependence on Him so I don't settle. As we grow and mentor others, give ourselves and others space to learn on the fly. And *risk-taking* means space for *mistake-making*, like we all have experienced.

Healthy answers to our three essential, inseparable questions lead us into a deeper abiding: "What is God like?" "How does this God see and know me?" "How will I exercise the authority I carry for my God-Assignments in this season?" In knowing God, we come to know ourselves. If we know God and ourselves, we realign our inner spiritual compass to "all-in, sweet surrender toward wholehearted allegiance to Jesus." Quickly choose to do His will as soon as we know it.

I don't want to be tomorrow what I am today when God yearns to give me "more" spiritual growth. God's abundant grace through this threefold developmental cycle meets us where we are on our chaotic journey. This perspective provides a very flexible, agile approach within broad guidelines.

If you are in a season where you are currently struggling in a major transition, you may want to explore more. I amplify on this a bit in the bonus blog in the Appendix, and William Bridges book, *Managing Transition*, is exceptional.

What Impacted You?

APPENDIX

The Change Process, Expanded

Some people asked Jesus about religious traditions. Jesus seized the opportunity to provide a fascinating insight into change, using wine and wineskins (Mark 2:22). Jesus was preparing His disciples for the ends of the world. It was crucial that they were not constrained by provincial, extra-Biblical, man-made traditions that can quickly degenerate into deadening legalism.

In those days, the Jews poured *new* wine with its bubbling over life into *new* wineskins. They were flexible and thus adapted to the change inherent in new life. Over time, however, the wineskin hardened, becoming stiff, inflexible as old wine loses its bubble. If new wine were poured into the container of the old wineskin, the bubbling new life in the wine would burst the inflexible wineskin, ruining both.

Later Jesus answers the teachers of the law more pointedly. You will find this in Mark 7:5-13. Please stop now. Take time to read this powerful, convicting passage. Focus on what Jesus said about the danger inherent in unexamined religious traditions as you allow the Spirit to search your personal life.

The Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders?" [Jesus Replied,] "you have **let go** of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men." And he said to them: "You have a fine way of **setting aside** the commands of God. [You] **nullify** the word of God by your traditions that you have handed down" (Mark 7:5-13, **emphasis**).

Jesus candidly states that extra-Biblical religious traditions cause us to "*let go*" and "*set aside the commands of God*" so they actually "*nullify the word of God.*" Unexamined preconceptions block revelation. These good traditions derived from how God moved in the past can dull our spiritual sensitivity to keep asking the ongoing question: "*What is the Spirit of God doing today?*"

As Christians, begin with God's heart and mind. Soak any stiff religious traditions in the "*brine*" of Scripture. God always has "*more*" for us, not more to *get*, but more to *experience* of what we **already** received at salvation. Rest fully satisfied in God's presence, even with a desperate longing for change. This desperation often provides the thrust to break out of encrusted beliefs and values, habits and practices. Be alive in God's presence as we contemplate with "*one foot raised*" in anticipation of responding.

On our journey, each of us needs an inner spiritual compass that points to spiritual "*North.*" The religious leaders had become inflexible, old wineskins. They needed their spiritual compass recalibrated because it no longer pointed through Scripture to God Himself. Instead, it pointed to their religious *traditions* and practices forming around Scripture. Unfortunately over time, the excellent practices that at one time flowed from our values become our new values...to our hurt.

So, what hope do we have to become lifelong life-learners and doers if we have become "old wineskins"?

Each new season we lay our life out on the table and discern what is best for this season, whether our spiritual winter or summer, spring or fall. We hold it all with an open hand to grasp the new possibilities. The power of the Good News in Jesus shouts, "*I do not to have to be tomorrow who I am today!*"

Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22).

"In the Beginning God Created..."

I also want to begin with God's intended end in mind. This helps align our spiritual inner compass, and gives us a point of reference to realign when we get off course. In order to scope in on what God intends for His people, I'm convinced we must begin "*in the beginning*" before the Fall and with Jesus, the "*Second Man.*" These two provide the only accurate view of humanity without sin.

Although the horrific changes stemming from Genesis 3 brought death to humanity, Jesus came to redeem and to restore. God's original Eden-intent never wavered, nor will it since none of this caught God by surprise. God has not changed His mind about how lovable **you** are!

So, why did our relational God create?

Certainly *not* because **He** lacked anything in Himself. From all eternity, God is relational at His core, neither lonely nor solitary. He lives in equality as one God with life in common and also in an incredible diversity as Father, Son and Spirit, yet also in deep unity.



This equality with diversity in unity expresses a rich and abounding relationship of utter oneness. So this Family-of-Three has always existed in perfect cooperation as a deeply intimate, joyfully satisfied, mutually serving, intrinsically good, gloriously creative, outwardly focused, peaceful, pure and powerful relational Community...lacking nothing.

This pulsating co-love and life between the Father, Son and Spirit would not permit this supremely good Family-of-Three to keep these riches to Himself. At His core, God yearns to bless by pouring out His life and love. He is a Giver at His core. Such bubbling-over life and love could not be contained!

Love is creative. Life will find a way. Love must multiply.

Such passionate Self-Giving launched God's desire to multiply His other-centered life and love by "going public." God's *goodness* catalyzed His *generosity* to create out of His *greatness*.

Before time, they decided to fashion humanity in an amazing way, man and woman, as much like the Uncreated as a created being could ever be (Genesis 1:26; Psalm 8:5; 2 Peter 1:4). So He created us in **His** image and likeness as outlets for His extravagant, initiating *first-love* and overflowing blessings. God designed us to receive from God then pass it along to others.

"Overflowing with the generosity that comes from the abundance of real love, He creates us to share in the joy of this heroic intimacy."⁹

The stunning truth is that this relational Triune God determined to open the circle of His intimate relationship and share His unending life and love with those fashioned in His image. The Bible calls His life "*eternal life,*" emphasizing the unique quality of full life without beginning or end. God formed the first man from the ground and breathed into him the breath of life with face-to-face intimacy

(Genesis 2:7). Imagine the first glimpse Adam snatched of his new world as his eyes opened, staring face-to-face with the Living God.

I see this as the one, eternal reason for the creation of the world and of human life. God's heart yearned to enjoy intimate relationship with you and me as His image-bearers. He enjoys working together. So partners with us in His adventures, which provides both our *identity* and *authority*.

And when Jesus came to restore relationship, He did not come alone! The Father, Son and Spirit all worked as a divine Partnership-of-Three (Acts 10:37-28; Mark 1:9-11). Jesus' life and death, resurrection and ascension, will also bring God's plan to its final consummation. God will never veer from His Eden-intent. He values His Bride **so much** that He freely, willingly, and joyfully pays such a steep price to restore intimate relationship with us...the death of Jesus.

One measure of the value of any object is its purchase price. The God who knows everything was acutely aware of the coming defection of mankind at the Fall, even before He created. What "return on investment" (*ROI*) could be great enough for God to pay such an immense price to ransom humanity?

This immeasurably high cost of Jesus' death restores us to participate in God's eternal Eden-plan. And it demonstrates how highly our Family-of-Three values His restored image-bearers. Jesus *joyfully* paid this price because He anticipated the results, bringing many sons into the Family of God (Hebrews 12:2; 2:10). Look at the cross. Jesus' death defines *how very much* the Father loves **you!** Ongoing change begins when we value ourselves in the same way the Father, Son and Spirit value us.

The Father, Son and Spirit delighted to design us and to restore us like Jesus, God's image-bearers, unique in all His creation. As new creatures, our lavish Giver calls us to fulfill our destiny. Through us, He has now multiplied channels for His life and love and light. As we freely receive, give it away freely to serve others.

Now What?

As we reflect back on these broad, powerful three cycles of spiritual development, allow me to remind us of these essential concepts.

- "Know God's part and our part."
- "God initiates and we respond."
- "Our lifelong focus is (1) to abide in God's presence, (2) to hear His heart, and (3) to **do** His will, regardless of personal cost or gain.

Our Three-in-One God has our best on His heart...**always**...even as He furthers His Big-story according to His plans before the foundations of the world. *Lean into Him in every season of life.* This does not mean we experience smooth sailing. Sailors learn to sail with the wind behind them in their sails by unfurling the sails, and with the wind in their face by tacking. Change demands both a letting go and an embracing, as Paul envisions our focus (Philippians 3:14).

Out of His free, boundless and energetic love, God found His pleasure in creating us lovable, like Jesus. It's who He is. He acts. He blesses. He initiates to reproduce because it's His nature.

So now through His people God's plan multiplies this bursting-forth life and love and light to flood all of creation with His presence...**through us.** Our new home **is** resting in the Father, Son, and Spirit, the place from which we participate in His epic faith adventure.

What Impacted You?

¹ Available on Amazon.com, *Jesus Is Enough* by Jim Fredericks. If God is stirring you at this time to abide more deeply in God's presence, I also wrote a meditation called *Enjoying His Presence* also on Amazon.com books.

² Best guestimate for Paul's birth is between 5BC and 5AD. His Second Missionary Journey launched in 49 AD. So between 44 and 54 years old.

³ James Fowler, a Catholic psychologist, has suggested this **85%** number for Christians fail to move to the final stages of development. From my observation, I would not be surprised if his estimate may unfortunately be close.

⁴ Quoted earlier from A.W. Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1961), pp. 51-52.

⁵ The diagram above comes from William Bridges' book, *Managing Transitions*. I like the simplicity, yet the depth, of this diagram.

⁶ I summarized what I understand as the best understanding of "forgiveness" from many sources. See chapters two and three in *Times of Refreshing*, available on my website: www.JimFredericks.com

⁷ From Ignatian spirituality.

⁸ On my website under "[Christian Growth Tools](#)," I pass along what has been helpful for me.

⁹ Brent Curtis and John Eldredge, *The Sacred Romance*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), p. 74.