

Renewing

Cycles

For Spiritual Development



Growing as Christians on our Lifelong Journey

By Jim Fredericks

Dedication

As I write, I'm simply joining a stream of others in this God-fueled restoration of a more relational view of the relational Trinity, the incarnation of Jesus, and a high view of redeemed humanity as His new creation.

This began in the last twenty years of the 20th century as a trickle among a few scattered theologians. Now it has become a deluge in the 21st century, moving from the theoretical into the practical life of everyday Christianity. This worldview or mental map releases God's stunning vision of a high view of how God sees and knows His people, and how this impacts every aspect of our daily lives.

I give special thanks to those over the years who have taken the time to meet with me around Scripture to openly share our lives with each other.

What I have written here is the first *layer* of grasping this big-picture, panoramic view of how our Big-God relates and partners with His image-bearers. After reading and reflecting and doing these short blogs to follow, God may be stirring you towards more, either as a "*beloved child*," "*servant-warrior*" or "*spiritual dad*." I wrote a larger rough draft available online, kind of an inventory to gather my thoughts. My thinking may stimulate yours and I would enjoy hearing from you. It's on my website, ***JimFredericks.com*** under the "Freder's Favorites" tab," called "[*Cycles for Lifelong LifeChange.*](#)"

Enjoy the journey!

Jim Fredericks

Yorba Linda, CA

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1. Spiritual "*Beloved Child*"

Think on spiritual development on our journey as Christians!

God continues to infuse us with His initiating *first-love*, our fuel for lifelong LifeChange. Fundamentally, we must see God's Big-picture view to naturally prepare us for life and ministry flowing from the spiritual seed or DNA with which God designed us.

Take the cable car to the top of the Schilthorn Mountain in Switzerland. Seat yourself awestruck in the 360-degree rotating restaurant, *Piz Gloria*. The one time I was there, I felt like I was sitting on the top of the world in the Swiss Alps, in the center of the panoramic beauty of the surrounding peaks.

Similarly, gaze with breathtaking awe at the panoramic Big-picture perspective on our journey of spiritual development as Christians as the Apostle John describes in 1 John 2:12-14. Sixty years after Jesus' death and resurrection, the Apostle John provides a glimpse into a flexible, progressive strategy for personal spiritual growth on our lifelong, transformational journey. Together these three cycles of growth lay a healthy, synergistic framework for ongoing Christian development as lifelong *life-learners* and *doers*.

Big-Picture of Spiritual Development

Since the Christian life is *progressive*, each cycle builds upon the previous one. Don't skip any. It's also *recursive*. This niche word means that the experience from a later cycle also circles back, impacting and enriching previous cycles. For instance, we don't grow out of "*beloved child*," never to return again. Additionally, our current experience cycles back and provides additional light and depth to earlier experiences. And God often seems to give us quick glimpses of cycles we have not yet reached.

So John sketches out three essential, developmental cycles for personal spiritual growth, beloved *child*, young adult (*warrior*) and a reproducing *father* (more like how a "*father*" raises teenagers or a *grandpa* with his grandchildren). Please don't approach this as an ironclad mold to wedge our lives into. God calls us on a *way*. Not a formula. Not simply dogma. It's a process with an incremental pathway centered in relationship. Enjoy our three divine Friends on the way.

Each cycle has its unique lessons of the trail to be learned and challenges to overcome as we follow hard after Jesus. Each cycle can also be cut short or stalled, leaving our inner person underdeveloped, like a Bozai Tree with a stunted root structure. This has profound implications for our understanding of spiritual development, and how God works in various seasons of life.



1st Cycle: "Beloved Child:" Overview

For the 1st cycle, a "beloved child" in the **Family** of God, John opens up brief glimpses into three essentials for healthy growth during this initial cycle as sons and daughters.

I write to you, dear children, because your **sins have been forgiven** on account of **his name**...because you have known the **Father** (1 John 2:12-14, **essentials**).

1. **Because** of God's full forgiveness ("your sins have been forgiven"), He fully **accepts/affirms/appreciates** us. God's forgiveness deals with all our sin and its accompanying guilt and shame so we have free access into His presence.
2. **Because** we know the Father's heart of initiating love ("have known the Father"), we experience **belonging** in His Family. Are you as overwhelmed to be a spiritual "beloved child" as the Apostle John was (1 John 3:1-2)?
3. **Because** Jesus is our Model ("on account of His name"), He begins to train and outfit us with the basics to battle in the **Kingdom** army. We partner with Him from the get-go in little *adventurettes* to build experience and **confidence**.

Since all three are crucial and deepen over a lifetime, I call these the *ABC's of identity/value/worth* resting in our Team-of-Three (Acceptance, Belonging, Confidence).

John also opens this cycle up to progress within growth during this cycle by using two different words. The first is a young child and the other what we call a "tweener." As a "tweener," we first begin to discover our own way in the world as we search for our **identity**. Growth is dynamic, not static.

1. Accepted/Affirmed (Full and Final Forgiveness)

Forgiveness is remedial, removing *all* that stands in the way of relationship with the Father. The Father showered His love onto the whole world by sending Jesus to take on Himself the sins of the world. His death is *sufficient* for all, yet only *efficient* for those who personally receive it by faith. The blood of Christ shed on the cross pays for our sins **in full** and restores relationship. This also removes all our guilt (for what we **did**) and shame (for who we **are**) since both are attached to separation from God (spiritual death). The hard things that used to keep us from God, the bad things we were ashamed of, Jesus removed **all** these barriers through faith in Christ. Trust the sufficiency of the completed work of Christ on the cross.

With the barriers removed at the moment of personal faith in Christ, we are now fully **accepted, affirmed and appreciated** by our Family-of-Three. Faith in Christ's work shatters the locks on the door into the Father's presence. He invites us to rush into His presence and bounce on His knee on His throne as often as we wish.

This is our **identity**. God makes us worthy because worthiness always flows from His presence, "*accepted in Christ*" (Romans 15:7). In Jesus our Lord, this free and full forgiveness delivers us from the downward spiral of sin and from our default to a poverty mentality based on shame and guilt. We now have what it takes, returning back to our true home in our Father, Son and Spirit.

If our life is not firmly grounded on this rock-solid assurance, we develop elaborate defense and coping mechanisms to block out pain and gain a fragment of

counterfeit acceptance and significance. Look at Adam and Eve in Genesis 3, coping with separation from God by hiding and blame-shifting. Our growth gets stuck as these false strategies to secure counterfeit life actually block authentic life.

Satan’s schemes are always deceitful like this.

We attempt to use people and things to gain worth to meet what we feel we lack. Such counterfeits will never satisfy our deep inner thirst for relational intimacy and purpose with the Father. It’s not enough to just simply “*let the past go.*” Painful past events must be processed so that we experience the promised freedom and times of refreshing from the Lord.¹ Forgiveness breaks off our poverty mentality (“*I’m not enough*” “*I’m not able*”). Also the false bravado of self-confident individualism.

Have you fully embraced Christ’s payment for every single one of your sins?

2. **Belonging: Our Father Cares for His Kids**

In Genesis 1 and 2, God fashioned humanity in the safe home of God’s surrounding Family-love. Home was walking in relational care and provision with God in the Garden. Adam and Eve experienced a freedom from restrained responses toward God and each other.

In Genesis 3, our ancestors aligned themselves instead with Satan, a deliberate choice to go rogue and enter into bondage. All humanity then became wanderers from our true home in God’s presence, separated from God and from one another by our sin, and its accompaniments, guilt and shame, condemnation and judgment. Full forgiveness through faith in Christ is the only way to remove all the barriers in order to restore relationship.

Since as worshippers “*we become what we behold,*” let’s choose to behold truth in Scripture as our identity, not any of the many wounds and temporary coping devices we accumulate in life. Soak in the unconditional ***belonging*** God has given us as His *beloved child*. The Good News shouts: “*we are not what others have done to us.*” God has a much better way.

You may have heard that the way our physical father treated you limits how much you are able to embrace our heavenly Father’s love. Thankfully, early on my Christian journey I realized that my father-figure does **not** need to come from my earthly dad. I have a choice. And this is life-changing! It’s our caring Father’s good pleasure to gladly adopt us into His forever ***Family***. Jesus takes us by the hand to lead us into His ***Family*** to also enjoy the Father and Spirit. Experience the wonder of ***belonging***, perhaps for the first time. We are now His sons (Romans 8:15) ...forever.

Since there is only **one true** Father-figure, I advise you to ***fire*** your physical dad from the “job position” you may have given him as your father-figure. Then replace your former father-figure with the **one and only true** Father-figure, God the Father.² He is the ***only*** perfect Father (Matthew 5:48). Now forgive your dad’s imperfections and embrace him as dad... *only!*

Perhaps this is tough for you to hear. If so, it may help to ***first*** learn more about your heavenly Father through double-negatives. “*My caring Father will never, ever...*”

- ...neglect or reject me;
- ...abandon or ignore me;

- ...control or abuse me;
- ...be absent, push me aside or withhold from me.

God the Father chose to fashion and re-create each and every one of His people to abide in this divine **inter**connectedness.

“The living God is a relationship, a community, a Trinity. And this God draws near to us to draw us near to himself within the circle of his knowing and loving of himself.”³

An inner spiritual homesickness draws new believers to finally return home, to our true home, infused by our Father’s love. *You were born to be loved by your heavenly Father!* Doesn’t it make sense that our creation-design would include within us a desire for what He already yearns to give us? God hard-wired us to love Him.

This is so crucial to believe that God designed us for the purpose of connecting with our Father. Studies show that people without a father are often adrift, feel alone and abandoned. Jesus Christ comes to fill that void, by bringing you by the hand to our caring Father, our only **true** Father-figure. Resting in His presence **is** our true home. Christianity begins and ends with relationship, first upward to God and also outward to people. We yearn for connectedness since we are born into an environment of disconnection ever since Genesis 3. No wonder our aloneness is so devastating!

Because our Father has fully forgiven us through faith in Christ, no barrier any longer blocks access into His presence for His “*beloved child*.” Talk about freedom! Have you watched a young child with a good, earthly father? The child is free as a bird in his/her father’s presence.

In a similar and much higher way, our Father fully welcomes us into the **Family** of God, our true, original dwelling place. With His loving eyes, God fastens His gaze on **you**, lovingly on each of us individually. He honestly whispers: “**You are my favorite**.” We are prized as the apple of His eye, lovable as His beloved child, lovely in His sight. God imbeds His love deeply into our hearts. We now belong...forever!

“*I see you!*” “*You are noticed, adored by Your Father, even like the Father noticed Jesus.*” “*You matter to Your Father.*” “*You are prized as His new Family.*”

3. **Confidence: Jesus Trains for Epic Adventure**

It all began in the Garden. God doesn’t like to work alone. So when God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, He sent them on a daring adventure **with Him** into uncharted territory to discover and subdue the mysteries of His Garden. God’s universe came alive for them as they explored its wonders and embraced the daring adventure with His God-given authority. They were a force to be reckoned with. Adam and Eve also came alive with growing **confidence** as they became more competent partnering with God, as we do today (2 Corinthians 3:4-6).

Jesus is the great Explorer, the “*Second Man*,” that is, the first completely human being since Adam fell in Genesis 3 (1 Cor. 15:47). Moms and dads in a family have the responsibility to develop and mature their children, preparing them for effective life. The **Family** of God prepares all God’s children for the “*Family Business*” of **mission** and **DiscipleMaking**.

Another aspect of our **identity** is as a child of the King of all kings and Lord over all lords. I am not only a child in the **Family** of God, but also a warrior-prince (or-princess) in the **Kingdom** of God. As such, we are not only raised to love and trust our Father, but also we begin to train as part of His warrior-army.

So from this safe place in the **Family** of God, we go out on short forays in adventuresses that stretch our faith, **confidence** and skills to battle spiritually in His army. Just like in training children, any good parent gives them enough to challenge, yet not more than our child can handle. Good parents also expose their children to a variety of activities so they can discover how they are wired. Developing trust and faithfulness under the eye of a coach leads to more challenging adventures.

This is the time to learn these first lessons in the field and build **confidence**. Launch little adventuresses with Jesus. Try out a variety of different ministries to see what fits. Lay the foundation to partner with our Team-of-Three in the epic, lifelong adventure to which our King calls us. Don’t settle, but *risk-take* (which makes space to “*mistake-make*”).

Why?

Because we all live in a war torn country. An invader usurped our homeland in Genesis 3. We must be trained as the **Family** of God at war. And God is outfitting His **Kingdom** army from those in His **Family**. So we teach all the basics of any family in this first spiritual cycle. Character and integrity. Kindness and loving compassion. Boldness and courage. How to brush our teeth and pick up our room (of course, the spiritual equivalents). And how to prepare for a long, fruitful life.

What Impacted You?



2. Spiritual "*Servant-Warrior*"

Engage God's presence both as our caring Father in the **Family** of God and also as our conquering King in the **Kingdom** of God. If you have settled by limiting your identity to a "*beloved child*" of God, this chapter on a spiritual "*warrior*" may rock your boat. It's true. We will always be our Father's "*beloved child*." It's just not enough. God has "*more*" for **you**, partnering with Him in His **Kingdom** army.

I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one (1 John 2:14b).

Why Warriors?

"Jim, the text states 'young men.' How did you come up with 'warrior' as your chapter title?"

In common usage of that day, this word translated "*young men*" described a man from about eighteen up to forty years old, at peak strength. After 40-ish, he entered a new phase of life. I use "*warrior*" because John may have had Israel's history in the back of his mind when he wrote. The young men in Israel were the strong warriors who go to battle, using their strength for others, like Isaiah 40:30-31. "*Young men*" are compared to those who renew their strength for battle.

I also use "*warrior*" because Jesus calls us to join the battle launched at His baptism to free the captives. Jesus calls us to yield our own personal little kingdoms to unite with Him. His conquering **Kingdom** prepares us to fulfill His unique God-Assignments.

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work (1 John 3:8b).

The instant we were born again, we were ushered into the **Family** of God as a "*beloved child*" to know for certain we are forgiven and cared for by the Father. And also into the **Kingdom** of God as His "*servant-warriors*." *Both/And*. Our Commander-in-Chief gives us our lifelong marching orders to do what He did, and to pass this along to others.

"I will build my church [**Family of God**], and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" [*the conquering Kingdom of God*] (Jesus in Matthew 16:18).

The **Kingdom** of God expresses God's regal presence and authority to make what is not right, right according to His view of rightness. The **Kingdom** of God disrupts, breaking in to challenge any harmful status quo. God's **Kingdom** takes the offensive. It counterattacks evil to free people and societies from the strongholds of bondage to lead them back into freedom.

No lesser or greater exists in the **Kingdom**, just our specific God-Assignments. These assignments cover the whole depth and breadth, whether hospitality or home making, whether at work or in school or at recreation. God calls us to be a spiritual "*warrior*" right where we are, battling with **His** weapons of warfare, love and

compassion, authority and boldness, sensitivity and perseverance. Notice, John gives us three clear marks of a “*servant-warrior*.”

1. Strongly Reliant on Jesus Christ (“*because you are strong,*” *cmp. Eph. 6:10*)

This 2nd cycle builds upon the great variety of adventettes begun in the 1st cycle as our *confidence* to be builders and battlers grows stronger (Luke 14:28-32). We are the *Family* of God, trained as “*warriors*” and sent into war against an invader who has taken over our homeland. This demands universal military service for all. Our strength for battle comes from Jesus Christ as we rest in Him, not as we trust in ourselves.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power (Ephesians 6:10).

We acknowledge that our true strength is only found in Christ and perfected in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Yet this strength is also developed from within, just like soldiers train hard over time to develop strength and skills for battle. Many heroes were very normal people who quietly developed “grit” over time (passion with perseverance). When a crisis arrived, they stepped into the gap, as farmers or shepherds, as teachers or plumbers, from the business or religious world.

Doing always flows out of *being*.

This season possesses enough energy to vigorously engage any highly involved life projects. These are the years of our strength when we have a measure of maturity. And yet we still sufficient energy to work hard at what is truly important. Typically, young adults begin with boundless energy, all the answers, confident in their strength, trusting their ability, and flush with a vision to change the world. Even when this can-do energy is misplaced or expressed in unhealthy ways, God actually uses this for positive gain. It seems to be part-&-parcel with how God develops young people. It’s also why young people benefit themselves when they invite spiritual moms & pops to come alongside.

Spiritual mentors, please be careful to keep in mind that young adults often come with a different vision than you had...or still have. Don’t squelch their passion, especially by squeezing them into your mold. Failure can be a great teacher so give space. To be a *risk-taker* means we need to be OK when they are a *mistake-maker*. Cultivate a culture of high-risk, no-shame. “*Everyone gets to play.*”

Look at Jesus’ 1st century ragamuffin band of Apostles and David’s misfit “mighty men” (see 1 Samuel 22:2 for a description of who gathered to David, those later called his “mighty men”). God wired, trains up and transforms to place us into that unique, strategic God-Assignment that best fits us to further His *Kingdom*.

A healthy spiritual “*servant-warrior*” is anyone who has a God-given passion towards their unique God-Assignments. She/he pushes into Jesus with sweet surrender and with *grit* to see it done regardless of cost. The God-Assignment can be anything flowing from His presence. Parents raising children. Spouses supporting one another. Office workers bringing Jesus’ presence naturally into the workplace as salt and light. Cement workers and accountants, students and teachers, and those who serve in our armed forces or on the playground. After all, He is King and strategically places us where **He** needs us to serve Him in our unique “*garden plot*.”

God designed us for significant purpose. Our Team-of-Three patiently trains us to give away our strength incrementally in small ways at first, gradually growing our

otherly-focused spiritual muscles. Confess now to the Lord: “*My strength is perfected in weakness*” (2 Corinthians 12:9). And believe it! As a “*warrior*,” we now work hard partnering with the Lord to develop our spiritual strength to serve others.

Like anything spiritual, however, we can also degrade our freedom to fulfill our fleshly desires (Galatians 5:13-14). Our healthy **confidence** to be builders and battlers takes over and *becomes* our **identity**. We then pervert His great gifts, abilities and opportunities to our own ends. With this twisted end, we now build our own “containers” and neglect the otherly “*servant*” aspect of this 2nd cycle call. In the eyes of society, we may even become successful as we attempt to fill our own desires. Yet please ask, “*Am I responding like my Master who came to ‘serve and give His life’*” to others (Matthew 20:28)?

Such a choice to divert our strength from His purposes brings spiritual lethargy. A fleshly excitement often masks this spiritual dullness as we build our containers of what this world considers valuable. When a Christian “*warrior*” recognizes this detour, the pathway back is repentance. This is our “*change of mind*” about the source from which we seek satisfaction, value and meaning in life.

The greatest danger, however, comes on “*warrior-kings*” who are highly gifted and successful. Over time, what they **do** may subtly take over who they **are**. “*Warrior-kings*” tend to arrest their own spiritual development once they have gained skills and experience. This plateauing spiritual may go side by side with a thriving ministry from an outside look.

It’s tempting to interpret ripening skills and abilities driven by measurable objectives as an indication that a “*warrior*” is producing lasting fruit based on a skill set or unique ministry approach.⁴ And to take the next step of believing these are measurements of deepening spiritual maturity. In Reality, the opposite is true according to Jesus.

“Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me...I chose you...to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last” (John 15:5+16).

Success in the Christian life only flows from a deep and deepening union with the true Vine, Jesus. As “*servant/warriors*,” build from our desperate longing to be His “*presence people*,” drawing on strength from Him. This is the time to reflect and ask fundamental questions of ourselves about how we can select the best from other good options.

Do I really want to live in all-in, sweet surrender toward wholehearted allegiance to my King? Or am I spiritually content to plateau or even drop out and settle? Do I merely talk a good talk or does my walk align with my talk? Who do I have around me who will be frankly honest?

This choice **now** is about your future.

2. Choose Scripture as our Authority for Life (“*the word of God lives in you*”)

The word “*abide*” or “*lives in*” describes how familiar and homey our relationship with Scripture becomes. The word means to settle into a place of rest. A traveling salesman visits one hotel after another on his sales trips. By contrast, this person “*abides*” as he comes home, unpacks his bags, kicks off his shoes, gets

comfortable and enjoys family. We are in that place of rest and refreshment, comfort and rejuvenation. This is the welcoming familiarity a spiritual “*servant-warrior*” develops with God’s Love-letter to become spiritually vibrant (1 Thessalonians 1:6b, 2:13).

Without this approach to life, we will either slide back or settle spiritually, losing our bearings without Scripture to guide our choices. We may have great passion, yet an inward spiritual compass calibrated to Scripture is equally crucial. On a journey, we need both acceleration (passion) and correct direction (an accurate inner spiritual compass).

In order to develop strength and abide in God’s Word with a bias towards **doing** it, it’s crucial to develop a regular practice. Star athletes develop their inborn talent through a regular exercise regimen fit for their unique sport and aptitude. It’s not easy for an athlete to rise early, work hard, and say no to distracting outside influences that undermine effectiveness. Yet they have a fading prize in mind; we are destined for an unfading prize (Philippians 3:14).

The difference between those who influence and those who plateau or dropout is “*deliberate practice*,” according to studies by Anders Ericsson. Even without any special aptitude or training, “*deliberate practice*” under the watchful eye of a coach aims at continuous improvement to avoid getting trapped on learning plateaus.

Many admire the level that *others* operate on, yet fewer are willing to invest the time, energy and *grit* to grow ourselves. Persevere with patience to get to the edge of our abilities through whole-person responses as we get one key book of the Bible after another under our belts, like in the design of my *DiscipleMaking Companions*.⁵ Develop the kind of passion that Psalm 119 models. This abiding life in Christ is “*the expulsive power of a new affection*.” As we internalize this higher passion of Jesus Christ, our lower passions begin to melt away.

We don’t read or listen to God’s Word or sermons or books explaining the Bible to gather knowledge. We desire to **do** it **so that** we grow in our friendship with the God of the Word (Ephesians 1:17). Knowing our Family-of-Three better is our primary aim, not any mechanics of Bible study.

Scripture forms and informs our entire spiritual life, whether worship or mission, community or character development, whether follow-up of young Christians or mentoring, whether social justice issues or compassion to the poor. We will be hard-pressed to find godly men and women throughout history who have not been people with a passion to know the Bible with a bias to respond in order to better know the God of the Bible.

God’s plan is to release such a strong passion for LifeChange that each of His followers will do whatever is necessary to pursue Him. We must have a relentless commitment to relate the truth of Scripture to our lives. Do you desire to know God’s will so you can *vote* on whether to do it, or simply to **do** it, regardless? The first leads to spiritual sterility, even if you spend hours each day studying the Bible. The second is a mark of spirituality.

3. Overcome Evil as a Pattern of Life (“*you have overcome the evil one*”)

For what end are we “*thoroughly equipped*” through Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17)? God calls us into a victorious struggle that fuels our personal growth. We **are**

overcomers. Oh, not always immediately and often not without struggle, but ultimately. And often it will not look like our dream of overcoming since God's thoughts are higher than ours.

First, Jesus Himself is the Overcomer. In the world we will have troubles and trials. Jesus overcame the world, the devil and our flesh through His life and death, His resurrection and ascension (John 16:33). Jesus is **the** Servant-Warrior, the Strong One, who now battles through us. As Commander-in-Chief of His *warrior*-army, He delegates His authority and brings His “with you” presence as He calls His servants into the fray *with Him* (Matthew 28:18-20).

Second, spiritual “*servant-warriors*” are learning to depend on Jesus’ strong provision to overcome the evil one *in their own lives*, without becoming demon-centered. We have a growing confidence in the power of the blood of Christ to cleanse. We openly testify to others in everyday connections how Jesus impacts our life. And we are learning to live with an all-in, wholehearted allegiance so we give our lives freely to our specific God-Assignments, come what may. This threefold response is crucial for every “*servant-warrior*.”

They overcame the [accuser of the brothers]
by the blood of the Lamb and
by the word of their testimony:
they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death
(Revelation 12:11).

To overcome evil in us demands awareness of and acknowledging previously unwelcomed parts of ourselves. The problem is that many of these parts are blind spots, unknown to us, but known to others. I like the “*Johari Window*” and its 2nd Room as an illustration (see [Wikipedia](#) if this is unfamiliar). We therefore desperately need people who accept us as we are and love us toward maturity in community to acquaint us with what we are blind to. “*Jim, meet Jim.*”

Satan has lots of names in Scripture, one being Beelzebub, which probably means “*Lord of the Flies*” (Mark 3:20-35). Think on this. Flies breed and flourish in garbage and in corpses. Events from our past may lie buried in Room 4 of the *Johari Window* (where we hide from others). These carcasses and garbage of undealt with addictions, relationships or brokenness open the door wide for the “*Lord of the Flies*” to attack. As a “*warrior*” in God’s *Kingdom* army, I long to become the change I want to see in others.

Third, spiritual “*servant-warriors*” also partner with the Spirit in the ministry of helping others to overcome the evil one in their lives. We do this when they come to faith in Christ through *evangelism* and as they grow towards Christ-like maturity through *DiscipleMaking*. As we deal fiercely with our own garbage, we are in a place to gently help others with theirs as healthy models partnering with Jesus (Philippians 3:17).

Wrapping It Together

In my imagination, I picture a “*Warrior Wall*” as a nearly transparent, indestructible barrier as the entryway into the 3rd cycle. It blocks our way into entering the 3rd cycle. This “*wall*” has one, specific doorway designed uniquely for each of us individually. Each doorway is *low* and very *narrow*. To go through, we

must temporarily lay aside all the packages from our past. If we don’t, we cannot pass through the *narrow* door into the 3rd cycle.

One Christian leader says that each of us must experience a threefold conversion, to (1) *Christ*, to (2) His *church* and to (3) His *cause* of worldwide expansion. How deep is your passion for Jesus in sweet surrender to His will? Have you fully embraced God as caring, compassionate Father? Does your time and energy reflect the importance of God’s people as the Family of God as expressed through your local church (first cycle)? How deeply are the marks of a “*spiritual-warrior*” ingrained in your life?

Have you been converted to all three? Both/And/And. If not, the “*Warrior Wall*” may be *impossible* for you to enter through ***at this time***. And you have also identified your next God-Assignment for this season.

Some who teach on leadership postulate that the best a “*warrior*” can aim towards is confluence. In confluence, all our skills and abilities intersect at the object of our ministry. A “*warrior-king*” then feels satisfied. This could be one reason why one writer estimates that **85%** of Christians never enter into the 3rd cycle. Settling in *confluence* locks us out of the 3rd cycle.

John woos God’s people toward “*more*” than a satisfied “*warrior*” with the following haunting words that coax us into becoming a spiritual “*dad*.” **Know “*Him who is from the beginning*.”** Not “*more*” that we receive or achieve. God did not hold out on us when we first came to Him by faith in Christ. Yet “*more*” that we experience of what He ***already*** gifted us with when we first connected through faith in Christ so we know Him more deeply.

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

What Impacted You?



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, We continue most 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!*”⁶ 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.⁷ 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*.”⁸ 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 Cyclor*” 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."⁹

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?*

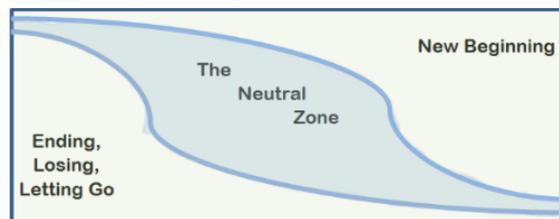
Then nothing makes sense except to yield our lives to Him, lock, stock and barrel...now and forever in sweet surrender towards wholehearted allegiance. And this view of life thrusts us onward toward ongoing renewal and change as lifelong *life-learners* and *doers* since God is always “*more*” than we 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.¹⁰

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.¹¹

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.”¹²

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**.¹³ 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."¹⁴

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?

END NOTES:

¹ 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

² If you struggle with this idea of the true Father-figure, I would encourage you to read the Gospel of John through, particularly chapter 14. Focus on just one idea: how did the Father and Son relate to each other.

³ Darrell W. Johnson, *Experiencing the Trinity* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2002), p. 69, but I encourage you to read this whole idea of “co-love” developed in a life-releasing way in pp. 64f.

⁴ Bobby Clinton writes on this, estimating that only 1/3 of all leaders finish this warrior stage well. Here is a PhD work based on his work.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280742225_Negotiating_the_Doing_to_Being_Boundary_in_J_Robert_Clinton's_Leadership_Emergence_Theory

⁵ I have an eight-part series, each for five or six weeks. This will get you directly into Scripture with a bias towards doing His Word, preferably in small groups. It’s called *DiscipleMaking Companion*, and is available on Amazon.com, books, for a small charge.

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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.

⁹ Quoted earlier from A.W. Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1961), pp. 51-52.

¹⁰ The diagram above comes from William Bridges’ book, *Managing Transitions*. I like the simplicity, yet the depth, of this diagram.

¹¹ 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

¹² From Ignatian spirituality.

¹³ On my website under “[Christian Growth Tools](#),” I pass along what has been helpful for me.

¹⁴ Brent Curtis and John Eldredge, *The Sacred Romance*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), p. 74.