

The Labor of Transitions

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*For everything there is a season,
and a time for every matter under heaven.*
Ecclesiastes 3:1

Early in the morning after our first child was born my husband called his parents to tell them that they had a new grandson. Upon hearing this news his father said, "Well before you know it he will be eighteen and leaving home!" This interesting response speaks to some of the realities of life, namely that change and transition are part of the process and occur regardless of how we may feel or how prepared we may be. September is a time of change for many of us. We get caught up in the transition from summer days to school days no matter the age of our children. It is hard work.

The writer of Ecclesiastes knew something about transition and change. He spoke a truth with which we can identify as he names many of the rhythms we experience in our living. His words ring so true that they became the basis for the song *Turn, Turn, Turn* by the Byrds!

For several years I was the director of a preschool. On the first days of the new year as I greeted them at the door I could see the eagerness on the children's faces and the anxiety on the faces of the parents. After all some of them were leaving their most precious gift with someone besides family for the first time! The transition of sending their children to preschool was perhaps the first major change in their relationship. We as a preschool staff took seriously the trust parents placed in us to take good care of their children. We also sought to help the parents by offering support in a variety of ways.

In an age of "helicopter" parenting we often find it difficult not to hover too closely. The ongoing breakthroughs in technology allow us to be ever more accessible to one another; to be very involved in many aspects of our children's lives. It is perhaps easier than ever for the lines to blur between their lives and our own, making transitions even more challenging.

Many parents devote their time and energy to searching out what they believe is best for their children. This includes a host of things such as finding a quality preschool / childcare environment, enrolling their children in sports and other skill building activities, setting up play dates, carefully monitoring the level of difficulty of high school classes, and encouraging youth to enhance their record with numerous extra curricular activities. We want them to be the best, do the best, and go to the best. Much of this is done in anticipation of the future yet when the future is suddenly the now we find it difficult to let go.

In a *Washington Post* article "Orientation 101 for Parents and Freshmen: Letting Go," (Sunday, August 26, 2007), Susan Kinzie highlighted the major transition of taking children to college and actually leaving them there! The article noted that parents often linger longer even as colleges are trying to send clear messages that it is time for them to leave. In the case of our son, we dropped him off one day and then returned the next for a special induction ceremony into the university. As he and his classmates walked out of the service they passed through a column of the professors as a rite of passage into the academic community. The transition was clear. It was time for him to move forward on his own and it was time for us to go home.

For us as parents this letting go and moving on may be very difficult. Suddenly a major focus of our lives is gone. The known world gives way to the unknown and we may be at a loss of what to do. We may experience an identity crisis. Feelings of sadness for a while are normal. It is important that we acknowledge how we are feeling and that we take care of ourselves through these transitions. It is also good to know that help is available. Pastoral Counseling of Northern Virginia offers help when difficult times arise. You do not have to labor alone through the transitions of your life.

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