

Thriving in Transition

Selected devotions from
Lam Kok Hiang's *Moorings* to help you
through life's transitional challenges.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS INCLUDED

SELECTED DEVOTIONS

THE FEAR OF BAD NEWS

NAVIGATING LIFE'S TRANSITIONS

RUNNING ON EMPTY

RESTORING YOUR FIRST LOVE

HEART RENOVATION

GOD'S PURPOSE WILL PREVAIL

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The Fear of Bad News

Most of us fear receiving bad news. As a parent, I dread the thought of receiving a phone call from my son's school informing me that he has either gotten into trouble or been involved in an accident. Another is receiving a call in the middle of the night regarding an elderly parent's medical emergency.

The fear of bad news can cause us to be distracted and lead to sleepless nights. For example, the waiting period for the results of a medical test can be excruciatingly long and filled with anxieties. It does not help that our minds tend to wander and we imagine the worst possible outcomes.

We are not shielded from bad news. Most of us have had and will have bad news come our way. How then should we respond?

In Psalm 112:7-8, the Psalmist writes:

“He will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord. His heart is secure, He will have no fear; in the end he will look in triumph on his foe.”

The Psalmist's response to bad news was not one of fear but steadfastness. He continues to trust the Lord even in the midst of life's adversities. He exudes a quiet confidence in overcoming the situation. The key to the Psalmist's response is found in Psalm 112:1, “Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who finds great delight in His commands.”

Our utmost duty as a Christian is to fear God and obey His Word. This is our heart's best defense and preparation for bad news. The fear of the Lord gives us wisdom to understand and to embrace the realities of a given situation. The Word of God is an anchor when we are buffeted by oscillations between hope and despair. It also gives us direction when we are pressed to make decisions during such situations. Instead of being driven by fear, we remain steadfast in our hope in God.

When bad news hits, it is natural to experience emotions of sadness, grief, and fear. Yet in the midst of the confusion, we can remain steadfast in our Lord who cares and will be with us as we face bad news.

When bad news come our way, let us seek the Lord like David who testified:

I sought the Lord, and He answered me; He delivered me from all my fears.
Psalm 34:4

Reflection

Are there any situations currently that you need to commit wholeheartedly to God? Surrender your fears to the Lord.

Read Psalm 34

Navigating Life's Transitions

Transitions are inevitable. Some transitions are anticipated because we had made decisions to effect change. At other times, we may find ourselves struggling to navigate through unexpected circumstances.

Transitions can strip us of the scaffoldings in our lives. We feel like we are losing control of things that are familiar and cherished. The stress experienced with a loss of familiarity or sudden feeling of emptiness in our lives during a transition, makes us realise that so much of our identity is based on what we were before. Our long-held expectations and assumptions no longer work as we find ourselves having to unlearn old methods and learn new ones.

In navigating life's transitions, we desire greater clarity but often have to live with ambiguity. The lack of answers can cause us to become irritable and anxious. On the other hand, too many options may result in frustration when we do not have a clear purpose and direction in life.

Both our physical and emotional energy levels may fluctuate as we cope with a transition. New parents suffer from lack of sleep but their joy of caring for their newborn gives a new surge of emotional strength. Those recovering from the sudden loss of a family member or a traumatic experience will take a much longer time to replenish their energy levels.

It is not uncommon to lose our spiritual bearing in the midst of a transition. The

stress of adapting to new environments and challenges, anxiety caused by uncertainties and fluctuations in energy levels can affect our spiritual health. Some respond in anger to God for the pain and disappointment, while others adopt a passive wait-and-see attitude.

How then do we smoothen the journey as we navigate life's transitions? Firstly, we need to have good closure – with those who are involved, with ourselves and with God. Proper closure allows us to let go of our past and gives us peace to start afresh. Secondly, we need relational support from our God-given community of friends and family members. We need not walk the journey alone. Thirdly, we may need to acquire new knowledge and life skills for the next phase of our life. Fourthly, we need to maintain a posture of humility and wait on Him.

The Latin word for transition carries the idea of “going across”. As we navigate life's transitions, let us cross over to Jesus and let Him lead us.

Reflection

What transitions are you undergoing this season in your life? How are you committing them to God?

Read Psalm 71; Psalm 40:1-4

Running on Empty

The blinking light on the fuel gauge serves as a warning sign that the car needs a refuel. The consequences of ignoring that warning light can be disastrous. In life, we must not ignore the warning signs when our emotional, physical, mental and even spiritual tanks are running at dangerously low levels.

When our emotional tanks are low ---, we become irritable and hypersensitive to people around us. This causes us to be edgy over minor issues and to overreact. At the other extreme, our fear of being overwhelmed may cause us to disengage emotionally from people and situations around us.

When we are physically tired ---, we find it difficult to engage in any physical activity. Our fatigue diminishes our energy and may even affect our daily routine activities such as eating, sleeping, exercising and building relationships. Consequently, our avoidance of such life-giving activities make us even more lethargic.

When our spiritual tanks are empty ---, our worship of God will be affected. Our hearts become lukewarm towards spiritual matters. Engaging in spiritual discipline is no longer a priority. While we are able to go through the motions of life and ministry, we remain disconnected from who we are and the destiny that God is calling us to.

The depletion of our tanks will result in a loss of joy and zest for life. An insidious

critical spirit may even find its place in our hearts as we adopt a dark perspective of life. In such a state, there is nothing we can offer to others and to God.

The “empty tank syndrome” does not occur overnight. All of us may experience the tiredness that comes with juggling work expectations, demands on the home front and ministry commitments. It is the prolonged neglect and lack of constant refueling that leads to physical, emotional and spiritual fatigue.

If the light of your fuel tank is blinking, heed the warning signs. Take time to re-examine your life and develop a refueling plan. This may mean altering your pace of work, or even taking extended leave for this season to create a rhythm of work, rest and play. Engage in life-giving activities such as regular exercise, investing in healthy relationships, and spiritual disciplines like keeping the Sabbath and meditating on His Word. Be accountable to friends who can journey with you.

Reflection

Are you heeding the warning signs? What is your refueling strategy?

Read Psalm 51:16-17; Psalm 62:5-7

Restoring Your First Love

Some of us may remember singer Paul Simon's classic song Slip Sliding Away:

We work our jobs, collect our pay, believe we're gliding down the highway, when in fact we're slip sliding away. Slip sliding away... slip sliding away... you know, the nearer your destination, the more you're slip sliding away.

The church in Ephesus (**READ REVELATION 2:1-7**) was commended for her good deeds and persevering faith in the midst of hardships. They thought they were doing well until Christ pointed out to them the reality of their hearts:

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.
Revelations 2:4

The Greek word for "first" means "first in priority". We have lost our first love when Christ is no longer the first in priority in our lives. There are many competing distractions that may dislodge Christ to secondary priority – the pursuit of career opportunities that consume too much of our energies, key relationships in our lives that we cannot seem to surrender to the Lord, or our over commitments in Christian service that leave us worn out. We think we are doing well but actually we are "slip sliding away". This is so subtle that we may not even notice it ourselves.

How can we restore our first love?

Firstly, we must come before God to repent from allowing seemingly good things to

become substitutes for our first love. We need to reevaluate the priorities in our lives so that our love for God is unrivaled (**READ LUKE 14:25-33**). When we live in sin, we have forsaken our first love. We must repent and ask God for forgiveness.

Secondly, recall those moments when we first encountered Christ and celebrate again our salvation story. Share it with your family members or friends. Rekindle the excitement of being a child of God and the youthful abandonment in serving Christ when we were younger. Remove the dross of dullness and ask God for a new heart.

As we mature in life and perhaps attain material security, it takes even more effort to maintain our first love for God. But Christ deserves and demands supremacy in all areas of our lives.

If Christ is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all.

Reflection

Have you forsaken your first love by allowing seemingly good things to become substitutes?

Read Revelation 2:1-5; Isaiah 43:22-28

Heart Renovation

Sometime ago, I took leave from work to attend to a long overdue home improvement project. Things in the house were beginning to fall apart, and needed to be replaced, removed and repaired.

The process of home improvement is not unlike that of a “heart renovation”, which we need to check periodically to ensure our heart is in the right place. The condition of our hearts determines our worldview, decisions, and actions. Life in the fallen world has a way of taking an immense toll on our hearts, resulting in weariness of the soul. We can take a leaf from the wise man who said:

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.
Proverbs 4:23

Initiating a heart renovation involves three principles:

Firstly - **Remove**. Over time, we had accumulated much junk that cluttered our home. So we either disposed of them or gave them away. Likewise, our hearts may be cluttered with unwanted junk that needs to be removed. Clutter can take the form of sin but may also include seemingly good things that have become a distraction. Such clutter can choke our hearts and hinder our worship, or prevents us from deepening our relationship with God.

Secondly - **Replace**. We had to replace the air-conditioning system in our home

which had broken down. A new system provides efficient use of energy and costs less to maintain. Likewise, we should replace the junk in our hearts with godly attitudes.

Philippians 4:8 says: *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.*

Thirdly - **Repair**. The wear and tear in several of our appliances meant that they needed servicing to ensure that they continue to work. In the same way, our hearts may require repair and servicing too. Our weary and wounded hearts will need the healing touch from the Lord. This can come in the form of rest, reflection and acquiring new perspectives and attitudes.

Renovation brings with it beauty, but it does not come without discipline and diligence. Likewise, heart renovation can be messy and inconvenient, but it results in a transformed heart that is able to worship God wholeheartedly.

Reflection

Is there any junk in your heart that needs removing? What attitudes are you harbouring that need to be replaced?

Read Psalm 26:2-3; Jeremiah 17:10

God's Purpose Will Prevail

1 Kings 22 gives an account of King Ahab of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah joining forces to go to war against the King of Aram at a place called Ramoth Gilead. Ahab had been warned by the prophet Micaiah that he would be killed in the battle. Going against the advice of the prophet Micaiah, Ahab disguised himself and went into battle incognito, hoping that the enemy forces would not single him out.

“But someone drew his bow at random and hit the king of Israel between the sections of his armor.”
1 Kings 22:34

This is an intriguing account that provides us with several points for reflections:

A random arrow in the hands of God accomplishes His purpose. In the midst of the battle, a soldier drew his bow at random. An arrow hit Ahab at the precise opening where he was not protected by the armour. What is random to man, can be used by God to accomplish His purpose. From God's perspective nothing is random. Everything happens within the permissive will of God. Nothing happens by chance. God is sovereign, and He will prevail over man's plans..

God uses ordinary people to accomplish His purposes. It was an unnamed soldier, not a known general, who drew his bow. Although it is not explicitly stated, there is a high likelihood that the soldier did not even know that his random arrow had hit King

Ahab and accomplished God's purpose.

Sometimes we wonder if our contribution will make a difference. Like the soldier, we may not be aware how our contribution fits into the bigger picture of God's plans, but what matters is that God knows. He is the chief architect of His eternal purposes. Just give of your best in whatever you do and God will use it for His glory.

God's purpose will prevail. Ahab revealed his lack of wisdom in thinking that he could thwart God's purposes. Proverbs 19:21 aptly states, “Many are the plans in a person's heart, but is the Lord's purpose that prevails.”

In Isaiah 50:10-11, the prophet Isaiah warns us not to light our own fire when we are fearful and uncertain about the future, but to continue to trust in the name of the Lord and not hinder His work in our lives through our arrogance and disobedience.

Reflection

Looking back, what were the “random incidents” in your life that appeared puzzling but accomplished God's purpose in your life?

Read Isaiah 50:10-11; Romans 8:28

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