**Life and Leadership Transitions**

**By Dr. Paul G. Leavenworth, the Convergence group**

Terry Walling (*Stuck: Navigating the Transitions**of Life and Leadership*) has identified three major life transitions and four stages of transition from his study of Clinton’s leadership emergence theory (LET). His three “generic” transitions (p. XII) are:

1. **Awakening**transition (usually occurring in the 20-30s age range)
2. **Deciding** transition (usually occurring in the 45+ age range)
3. **Finishing**transition (usually occurring in late 50s or early 60s age range)

These transitions are characterized by “a prolonged period of restlessness, self-doubt, lack of motivation, job stagnation, diminished confidence, lack of direction, distance from God, isolation, relational conflict and tension, lack of effectiveness, and struggle to stay focused and motivated” (p. 8).

*Awakening transition* - The primary purposes that God initiates during this transition (which generally takes place during the inner-life growth stage) include (adapted from Walling, p. 65-66):

* The surfacing of past issues that need forgiveness and healing
* The surfacing of passion and potential for leadership and ministry
* The establishing of commitment and an initial understanding of life purposes
* The shaping of character (being) and influence (spiritual authority)
* The establishing of healthy accountability relationships
* The launching of a lifelong journey to experience all God has in store

*Deciding transition* - The primary purposes that God initiates during this transition (which generally takes place during the ministry/leadership stage) include (adapted from Walling, p. 77-78):

* The further surfacing of past issues that need forgiveness and healing
* The discovery of uniqueness and life message
* The identification of core values
* The further clarification of calling
* The identification of unique leadership methodology based on gift mix
* The initial insights necessary for living intentionally (focused living)

*Finishing transition* - The primary purposes that God initiates during thistransition (which generally takes place during the life maturing and convergence stages) include (adapted from Walling, p. 87):

* The further surfacing of past issues that need forgiveness and healing
* The clarification of unique calling and commitment to its fulfillment
* The discovery of humility and brokenness as a primary influence base for life transformation
* The commitment to intentionality for focused living
* The discover of unique ultimate contributions and legacy
* The empowering of others through spiritual authority

During these transitions we have an opportunity to go deeper in our relationship with God which will better prepare us for future challenges and opportunities. Walling describes four stages that we must endure through in order to gain the maximum benefit from these life transitions:

1. **Entry**
2. **Evaluation**
3. **Alignment**
4. **Direction**

E*ntry* *stage* - This stage can take us by surprise. Sometimes it comes gradually and at other times it may come suddenly. Either way, we find ourselves in a situation where what worked yesterday does not seem to work today. What we enjoyed yesterday is not as fulfilling today. How we viewed ourselves yesterday is not how we see ourselves today. Something has changed and there is no going back (even though we may try to go back - for a while).

*Evaluation stage* - Entry is disorienting, but it can lead to a time of soul searching and an honesty that opens us up for deeper evaluation of our life and leadership. If we can take our disorientation to God, sooner or later, he will begin to reveal to us new insights about ourselves that can lead to greater freedom, clarity, focus, and intentionality (Walling, p. XV). The critical issue here is submitting to God rather than trying to get out of the transition.

As leaders, we are problem solvers, we make things happen. During times of transition, we can make things happen, but we may miss God’s greater purposes if we do. We need discernment here. Wise counsel, a mini-retreat, or a time of fasting and prayer might be in order to better discern if God is initiating a major life transition or something else is going on. Be careful here – you do not want to miss out on what God can do in life transitions by trying to take a short cut!

A*lignment* *stage* - This stage occurs when we have heard from God about his purpose(s) in this life transition and we are willing to submit to him. This may involve dealing with deep seated issues in our lives or a major transition in role or location. Usually, there is a process of dying to self that takes place as we align ourselves with God’s purpose(s).

*Direction stage* - Out of alignment come a sense of direction (sooner or later). We may have to wait on God longer than we are comfortable with, but the wait will be worth it. God will open up new opportunities and fulfill his promises in ways that gives him glory and increases our faith and effectiveness as a person and leader.