

Transitioning Through Transition – Bishop Felton Smith

I remember my first romantic heartbreak. I actually recall crying myself to sleep on multiple nights because I was moving away from my girlfriend. I didn't want to do it, but my parent's decision to move was above my pay grade and I had no choice in the matter. She was the girl of my dreams and I was head over heels in love but I had no choice but to leave her.

I was only in the second grade when that particular family move seemingly destroyed my romantic life. Although it was difficult I eventually got over it and learned to move on with life. Yes, I am being facetious, but in reality this early event taught me that times of transition are sometimes very difficult for everyone involved.

Much to my chagrin it seems as though transition is a major part of my calling. I am one that is sent by the Lord. At this time my wife and I currently find our selves in the midst of another major transition of virtually everything in our lives. I cannot think of one single aspect of life that is not undergoing radical change right now. The toll on strength, stamina, emotions, spirit, finances, relationships, and on and on, has been excruciating. It is easy to find myself vacillating between highs, lows, depression, and joy. Each day can bring mood swings, new fears, and a barrage of questions in search of answers. Yet even as we transition we have to maintain our integrity, our ministry, meet our commitments and obligations, and on and on. This myriad of challenges equate to a lot of pressure.

There are times that life simply requires certain people to change virtually everything in their life. It is during these times that it is easy to lose our equilibrium.

Can you relate? If so this article is inspired for you.

Transitioning through transition is a process in itself. In other words you have to make modifications and adjustments because the very act of transition exacts a tremendous toll on human strengths and weaknesses. Transition can be difficult at best, but the following 10 tips can enable you to transform the transition experience into a positive event.

Accept the fact that things are different. Don't expect things to be the same because they simply will not be the same. Embrace the newness. Carry pictures and memories with you but move forward with a determination to accept your new environment. Don't dwell on the way things were but speak of the way things are and how they will be in your new future.

Allow yourself some time for emotional transition. Ecclesiastes 3:4-6 says there is, "A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing. A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away". You must give your self the permission and the needed time to grieve and then to move forward.

Separation anxiety is normal but it is okay to move on. Our lives are defined by our

relationships and experiences. If you were happy where you were, and had meaningful friends and relationships there, separation will be difficult. Discover ways to stay connected to those you know you need to stay connected to. Moving on doesn't mean you have to sever precious relationships and connections. Instead use the new separation as an opportunity to strengthen lifetime relationships.

The unexpected stress needs to be compensated for. The change and pressure of everything involved in transition can potentially cause stress at unprecedented levels. Watch for warning signs including mood and energy swings. Find intentional ways to relax and relieve stress during the transition. Be equally sensitive to the effects of stress on other family members making the transition with you regardless of their age. Change and transition greatly effects children and teenagers.

You need to rediscover the small things. Rediscover the things that really matter. Look for the small victories and acknowledge them. Do random acts of kindness. Plan your work, work your plan, and celebrate accomplishments. Talk to those you love. Open up to and with those involved in the transition with you. Notice the new things: new smells, sights, views, people, and so forth.

Cultivate your dependence upon God. You can try to do this on your own or with God. It always works out for the best when God is included in the process. Make time for prayer, meditation, and God's Word. Anytime a snag happens and something isn't going the way it needs to, try stopping and praying specifically about it. Don't tell God how to do it, but be careful to praise Him as you watch Him make a way where there seemed to be no way.

Take heed unto your self and those who are in transition with you. (1 Tim. 4:16). As you and those you love go through the upheavals and turmoil of change and transition, pay close attention to the most important thing and that is each other. Guard each other's physical, mental, and spiritual health and wellness. Be patient with and try to understand each other. Allow each other to have their "moments" and be patient and longsuffering when they do so.

Be realistic in your expectations. Don't overpressure yourself and others to make the impossible happen within an impossibly short amount of time. Pace the transition and allow things to happen in the proper order. This is a good time to learn to not sweat the small stuff. Don't go overboard with perfectionism. Set goals, but don't set every goal to excruciating standards. Learn to roll with it because transition can have its unstable and unexpected turns and twists.

Regard your health. Watch for unexpected pains and changes in body functions. Be aware of things like shortness of breath and paleness. Use caution when lifting and practice safety as necessary. Don't allow weariness to cause you to have a needless accident. Pay equal attention to other family members involved in the transition. Rest appropriately even if you have to make yourself do it. Guard each other's health.

Renew and revive. When the initial transition is over there will come a natural tendency to relax. You may feel totally drained and exhausted. It is vital that you take the time to renew and refresh. Find a way or an outlet to do this, and make sure it is not another exhausting experience. It is imperative that you renew and revive physically, emotionally, routinely, relationally, and spiritually.

PREPARING FOR THE INEVITABLE – WHEN HE’S GONE

I was a wife, a pastor's wife, and a General Board member's wife. My remarks will be from that perspective but these remarks have to do with **every wife** and the kind of preparation that is needed when her husband dies.

As Pastors' wives...there is an added element, the CHURCH, and how that plays into our life. We have some Pastors who have poured financially everything they had into the Church, and nothing was really left for the wife. There are prominent churches, beautiful churches that have no insurance to bury the pastor, and nothing to help the first lady.

Whether you have been married for five years or 25 years, this applies to you.

Your marriage could be new or older; there is something you can do to help prepare for your life without him.

There is always something you can do. First, you should know the business of the home. That seems like a given, but you will be surprised to know how many wives do not know anything about the monthly bills.

You should know where all the pertinent documents are located in the home or the church that pertains to you and your household.

As the first lady, you must help determine your fate. You must help your husband determine your fate. You must be prepared. He must financially prepare for his departure; whether it's through independent insurance policies and/or agreements with the church.

When that day comes there will be many questions.

Questions such as; how will life be for the First Lady as a single person in the church? Who will she be then? Where will she go?

She may want to remain at the church because she and her husband founded the church, or she'd been in that church for the last 15 years after his first wife died.

Where will she sit? What will they call her now that there will be another first lady?

Will they continue to recognize her as the founder's wife? **I was told they would treat me like any other member in writing.**

You understand more than anyone, that the first lady is only First Lady if she is married to the Pastor. It is a life that depends on being connected to your spouse. Sometimes that can be very hard. Your entire life is centered around this one man; people acknowledge you, and give you accolades, but what happens when he's gone?

There are so many horror stories when the pastor dies. Sometimes the first lady is left with nothing. Some wives have never paid a bill. Every utility is in her husband's name, so when he dies and she is asked to apply for an account in her name it is a daunting task. Although she has been an indirect customer of the utility company for 30 years, she has no credit. So, make sure there is at least one utility bill and one credit card in your name, based on your credit.

Once the notification of death reaches the banks, all of the credit cards you enjoyed will be canceled because nothing was in your name. You only had the privilege of using the cards in your husband's name.

It doesn't take that much time to make sure there is adequate insurance or arrangements with the church. This is how the first lady should be treated. Pastors get so busy with the Church; they sometimes give everything to the church and forget the first lady.

When I wrote, "**When is the First Lady ever First?**" I came to the **conclusion that she is never first.**

It doesn't matter how old he is or how old you are, make sure you and your husband have adequate life insurance because when God calls him home, you are responsible for the funeral expenses. At a minimum, get a policy for your husband's funeral. Make sure you have gravesite plots for both of you, insurance that covers both of you, money for your caskets, limos, flowers, and everything that is needed for the funeral.

Was he in the military at one time and received a DD214, proof of military service that helps with burial benefits? We sometimes forget to take care of ourselves because we are so busy taking care of everybody else.

You also want to make sure these plans are taken care of before he passes because no one wants to be asked about arrangements only moments after their loved one transitions. It's never too late to take care of this, make some inquiries, talk to someone in the congregation that has this type of expertise and have them start on this right away.

Some first ladies have never thought about this nor have they ever talked to their husbands about these kinds of things but this is a significant part of your life.

Some Pastors and older husbands are old-school; they don't like to talk about these types of matters but if it is approached as a conversation about your care and well-being instead of his transition, he should be open.

Find out what documents are in place. Ask about the utilities and credit cards and explain your concern. Take steps to make sure one utility is in your name and at least one credit card is based solely on your credit in your name. Someone told me she and her husband had a gas and electric account for over 30 years, but she was mistaken, he had an account, and when he died, she had to apply.

This is why it's so important to not only be prepared when this day comes but be prepared for the life you want to live once you are no longer the First Lady.

Many first ladies have always been the first lady and have no other skills. Many at this time in their life would be retired. Although you may not have a vocation or any known skills, make sure your husband takes care of you financially so you will have some income when he's gone. There are some of us who have vocations as, nurses, lawyers, teachers etc, and may be able to do something else. But of course, so many of us may be at retirement age and don't intend to do that kind of work again.

A life insurance policy can at least get you started, and/or a monthly annuity. Be proactive, so you don't have to worry about your future.

Make sure you have a **Will**, especially if there are children from another marriage or your husband has brothers and sisters. That Will determines where your husband's personal things will go. For example, what if he bought property before he married you? That would be considered separate property, like his home, a will would determine where he would want that separate property to go. Without the Will, his brothers and sisters and children from a previous marriage can become involved and they may be entitled to a part of the separate property; it could be 50%. It could be the home you are living in.

Let me give you an example:

Your husband has a house with his first wife...and she dies without a will, your husband will receive 50% of the house which is his share, and he is entitled to 25% of her share, and 25 % is left for children, or his brother and sisters if there are no children.

Now, if his first wife had a will that said all her interest in the house would go to her husband when he dies, his will should say that all interest

in the house, which is considered separate property in your marriage, should go to you, his present wife.

A Will is Very Important

POWER OF ATTORNEY

Make sure there is a **power of attorney**. Being given power of attorney gives you the authority and responsibility of taking care of him while he is still living and making decisions for him if he is unable to do so. He can give you the power of attorney when he is competent. For example, if he gets dementia, he can't give you a power of attorney because the person has to be of sound mind.

Power of Attorney is only good when he is alive.

MEDICAL DIRECTIVE

Make sure there is a **medical directive**, directing the medical providers of your husband's wishes when it gets close to the end. This is used when your husband becomes incapacitated. For example, you can decide if there should be a DNR directive, 'Do Not Resuscitate'.

BANK ACCOUNTS

Make sure you are on all **bank accounts**, if you are not on all bank accounts, make sure you are **the beneficiary on the accounts**. **This speaks outside the will**. Make sure you are the **beneficiary on all insurance policies**; check all the old policies to see if his first wife or his brother and/or sisters were the beneficiaries. When he dies, those funds are going to the beneficiary who is named on that account.

INSURANCE

Premiums can be paid by the church or premiums can be paid by you. The Board of Directors can put it in the bylaws that they will take care of the widow by paying the premiums on the pastor's insurance. This is a good thing to do. It may not happen but it is a good thing to have.

It would also be great if there was more detail, she would get a Sunday each month. Each month we will give her one day. She would receive this as long as she lives or as long as she is single.

SAVINGS

Now, one of the things we don't think about is saving. Many pastors and bishops have days during the year designated by the church or the jurisdiction where they are honored with monetary gifts. You could easily take half of that money every time you get a large sum and put it away; you will be surprised how your money will grow. **You must be disciplined.**

We must plan for our future when he's gone. Some churches will make plans for their first ladies and somewell...will treat them like any other member. Let's just be prepared.