

# The Between-Times

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## **Introduction:**

For many of us here we have all experienced times of change in our lives. There are many lessons to be learned in those seasons; like learning patience and avoiding presumption. To some degree or another, the changes we all encounter form the character that is developed in our lives, whether good or bad. We transition for being a child to a young adult, or from schooling of some sort to the work force. Some of us are newly married and now expecting – you are experiencing change (soon you will be changing diapers) and some of us are getting more mature and ready for the end times of retirement, just kidding. One thing is sure in this life, taxes and change...

This morning I want to introduce what I am calling the “between-times”. To the best of my ability I want to unpack the transition the catholic or universal church is confronted with today. I want to do so by sharing with you my personal journey of the last few years regarding the Lord’s leading of our lives as a couple. Secondly, I want to help us understand the concept of “new wine in new wine skins” while looking at the Scriptures for confirmation and insight. In the coming weeks we will look at how these changes will change the way ‘church’ looks and the way spiritual business is accomplished.

## **Personal Journey:**

1984 – I was called to spiritual leadership and learned several key lessons.

- Leadership is humble and serving-hearted...
- Leadership is about dying to one’s rights while maintaining one’s responsibilities...

1987 – Becky and I were married.

- Learning to lead together...
- Communication...

1988 – Ordained to pastoral ministry.

- Leaders are developed through tough times like rejection and betrayal...
- Learning to trust in God and love people...

1995 – We pastor our first church.

2001 – We pastor our second church.

All during these years we have been developing as leaders and gaining character and wisdom through the seasons of change.

A key point of understanding for today's message is this – the church has been changing as well. The leadership of the church has changed and the way we do church has changed. We have moved from hymnals to overhead projectors to power-point, we have moved from snail-mail to email, from pens and paper to typewriters and now to computers. Now we even have “web churches”. Change has not only affected us in these practical ways, we have also experienced spiritual changes as well. Here are a few examples that I have seen; the Jesus people of the seventies and eighties, the prophetic and healing ministries, faith and prosperity, just to name a few. In the span of 50 years or less the Body of Christ has changed and at the focal point of all this change is leadership. John Maxwell has stated, “Everything rises or falls with leadership”.

In my personal journey with God I have journaled for many years, sometimes more faithfully than others. One of the key messages I heard from God had to do with the way I journaled, more like a record of my short-comings before a holy God. One day the Lord spoke to me “I did not save you from your sins into a gospel of personal sin management”. This was a paradigm shift in my thinking and approach to God. Another time of shifting for me as a leader had to do with “who was my boss” – the church or God. This led me into a season of prayer before God and boldness before people. Most recently, the Lord has been speaking to me about my leadership within the church moving from being pastoral to more apostolic. As a result of these seasons of change there have been times of questioning God about leadership in his Kingdom and questioning people about leadership in the church.

### **New Wine and New Wineskins:**

We see in the Scripture **Luke 5:33-39** Jesus is questioned by the religious leaders about his disciples who were feasting and John's disciples who were fasting. Jesus responds with several analogies and in each case the two things do not mix: feasting and fasting, a new patch and an old garment and new wine and old wineskins (new wine is not put into old wineskins for as it ferments it will break the old skins, which have lost their elasticity). In essence Jesus is saying that his way and the way of the religious are completely unmixable.

There is a great caution in this interaction for us today. We must be watching and ready for when God releases new wine to his church. In light of this new wine, I believe we are in a season which I am calling the “between-times”. Between-times by my definition would describe the journey from old wineskins to new wineskins. It is a period of the life where things are adjusting within the church in several ways. Let me describe this to you. We are moving from church to Kingdom thinking; rather than programs, policies and procedures (church paradigm) we are changing to the Presence of God, Prayer and People (Kingdom paradigm). Therefore things are going to look different in the church and in leadership; moving from the way things were to the way things are.

## The Between-Times:

There are numerous examples of biblical characters caught in the between-times. They are waiting for the coming of God's promise and yet must to some degree endure the formation of their character and the things that need to change. The change of name and destiny of Abram to Abraham is a classic example of the between-times. Moses was the Prince of Egypt who became a desert dweller and eventually a leader of God's people. Saul the Assassin becoming Paul the Apostle is a classic New Testament example of God apprehending and transforming a life.

An Old Testament example is **2 Sam 3:1** – **“The war between the house of Saul and the house of David lasted a long time. David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker.”** These rivals had varying success and over a long period of time David's significance grew while Saul lessened in importance. The struggle was not limited to David and Saul personally but grew into a family feud between these two dynasties.

## Lessons we can learn from David and Saul:

- God takes the unheard of with a heart after God and makes them well-known.
- God makes people into his workmanship exposing the jealousy of others.
- God's process of forming a person's destiny involves rejection, betrayal and sometimes running for your life.
- God's blessing will be on the fugitive with integrity rather than the king lacking integrity.
- The only way a fugitive can become king is to grow in the qualities of patience and humility.
- A nobody shepherd boy became a somebody who became a fugitive who then became a king and then forgot that he was accountable to God for all his actions

David lived in a period of transition – letting go of shepherd's fields and taking hold of his coming kingdom. In that shift he found himself learning lessons about himself and others that he would never be able to accomplish in his own effort. As well, he discovered more intimately who God was especially on his behalf. David reveals new wine and a new kingdom forming. The kingdom of Saul represents the old wineskin which had lost its ability to retain its elasticity.

To some degree, this is seen in the New Testament in the battle between the flesh and the spirit; **Gal 5:16-17 - But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.** <sup>17</sup> **For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do (ESV).** The flesh is religious self-effort – old wine, while the Spirit is the new wine...

## Metamorphosis

Another way to look at what is happening to the church today is through the eyes of a caterpillar or should I say butterfly. Metamorphosis is the series of developmental stages insects go through to become adults. Butterflies and moths have four stages of life:

- The egg is laid by the butterfly.
- The larva or the caterpillar stage.
- The pupa or the cocoon phase.
- The adult.

As an example, the monarch butterfly completes this life cycle in just 30 to 40 days.

I believe the correlation between the church and a butterfly is this; we are in a season of being transformed into something new. The caterpillar does not do this of itself as a butterfly before or during the cocoon stage. In the chrysalis stage there is a complete transformation to the caterpillar; its organs change, it grows wings and new antennae. It is no longer a butterfly.

This is the point where some analogies break down. Even though the church is going through transformation while stuck in a spiritual cocoon, the church will still be the church when she emerges. However, the way the church looks will change. The way leadership is accomplished will be changed. And for the most part we do not fully know what the emerging changes will look like or develop into.

## In Conclusion:

Hopefully I have identified in the Spirit this season of life we are in as a church today; not just our congregation but many congregations across the city and country. The voice of the Spirit is speaking and the church must be watching and ready... For this reason we are emphasizing a season of “soaking in the Lord”; the abiding, waiting, wondering, meditating and dwelling in His Presence. Next Sunday I want to help us understand that all this waiting on the Lord is not without activity. While we wait we are still called to serve within the church and to share our lives and faith with the lost.