

lesson three

APRIL 13–19

Preparing for **Change**

“Righteousness will go before Him, and shall make His footsteps our pathway” (Ps. 85:13, NKJV).



There was no better way to represent change than pregnancy. This is one of the most important experiences in a season of a family because it affects every aspect of marriage. Nothing stays the same after a child is brought into the world. The focus of the husband and wife is now transferred from each other to a third party.

Gen. 16:1, 2, 5, 6;
 Eccles. 3:1;
 Matt. 20:20–22;
 Acts 5:1–10;
 1 Cor. 10:1–13

Introduction

Where's Your Umbrella?

There was a little town that had been experiencing dry weather for years. Trees had lost their leaves, and the river that once flowed with fresh, clean water was dry, leaving a bed of clay, cracked in a checkerboard pattern with gaps as wide as a foot. The only birds in evidence were the vultures that circled the town, looking for carcasses. Even people walked about as thin as sticks, barely surviving. Having exhausted all their options, the citizens held a meeting. “Let us pray,” suggested an elderly woman. “Only God can help us now.” They decided to hold a grand prayer meeting that night, and

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everyone was invited to come out to pray. Among the people gathering for prayer was a little girl holding on tightly to an open umbrella. The gathered crowd could not help but wonder what was going on. Some were curious, others were annoyed, and some others were even furious as they were constantly being poked by the spokes of the umbrella. Finally, a curious bystander asked, “Why did you bring the umbrella? Can't you see there is no rain and we have come here to pray for rain? Only a foolish person would stand on a clear night like this with an open umbrella.”

The little girl replied, “I came to pray too. I am certain that our prayers will be answered, and it will rain. That is why I brought this big umbrella.”¹

Life is characterized by change. Ecclesiastes 3:1 states, “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens” (NIV). Therefore, in life, we can always expect change. More so, change is something that can occur unexpectedly, and many times it would seem as though the default position to be in when change occurs is “unprepared,” sometimes even for the changes that we have been expecting or praying fervently for. One can therefore even argue, “If life is full of changes, how can we always be surprised when it finally happens?” The key is to have the same mind-set as the little girl who came to pray for rain—preparation and faith—because even when we are unprepared, where change is especially concerned, faith is the Christian's best friend.

Change is practically inevitable, and we can approach it in different ways. We can choose to be unprepared for the changes; or we can be like the little girl, who came prepared for the change in faith.

1. Adapted from Professor Nazeer Ahmed, “The Child Who Brought an Open Umbrella for Prayer,” *History of Islam*, <https://historyofislam.com/the-king-learns-the-secret-of-happiness-from-a-child/the-child-who-brought-an-open-umbrella-for-prayer/>.

Logos *Beauti-fly*

Deut. 31:6;
Judg. 13:7;
Ps. 139:14;
Mark 1:35;
Luke 1:13–17;
1 Cor. 10:1–13

The Birth (Ps. 139:14; Deut. 31:6)

Butterfly eggs are laid on a particular leaf or plant, the choice of which is determined by mama butterfly tasting the leaf with her feet. This tasting will tell her whether her babies will use the leaf for food when they escape their shelled homes. Isn't this amazing? The butterfly is preparing for her delivery and even preparing for her children in the changed environment that they will encounter. As time progresses, the larvae within the eggs constantly nibble on the shells, and eventually those shells become their first meal before they venture unto the host plant (their food) that mama butterfly sensibly laid the eggs on. Is this natural instinct that's laid within the butterfly's brain?

When preparing us for changes in our lives, God creates within us the natural instinct to deal with life changes.

Consider pregnant females: their bodies change to adapt to new life within them. Even their brains, according to developing research, change “to help cater to the needs of their infants.” A neuroimaging expert says, “Being a new mum is hard and you have to adjust an awful lot. Your brain is going to be able to respond to that change and it is going to make it so that you can take care of this newborn bundle of joy.”¹

Aren't mothers blessed to be “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14)? The new mother's brain adapts so that she can be a great parent. When preparing us for changes in our lives, God creates within us the natural instinct to deal with life changes. He never leaves us on our own to fight (Deut. 31:6).

Let's Molt as We Nourish (1 Cor. 10:1–13)

In the butterfly scenario, larvae escape into the unknown world and may stay on the exact plant or leaf, constantly feeding on it. They need to eat as much as they can so that they can reach the next developmental stage. This constant eating, however, causes the caterpillar to grow very fast, but its exoskeleton doesn't grow with it. As a result, this exoskeleton sheds, or molts, four or more times during this stage.

As humans, we grow older every day, not just physically but mentally too. We learn basic life skills from our parents, schooling, neighborhood, church, and other influences that are present. All of these influences feed the outcome of our attitudes and character. But just as with the caterpillar, some are exoskeletons that we just can't grow with anymore. If we are preparing for that stage in life, even eternally, we have to molt certain attitudes, and at the same time we will have to take certain foods constantly in order to be better prepared. Read 1 Corinthians 10:1–13. The children of Israel were all drinking the spiritual

drink (verse 4), and they were growing; but not all of them were shedding the sins of this world, and God was not pleased (verses 5–10). Second, consider Zachariah and Elizabeth's child, John the Baptist (Luke 1:13–17), and Samson's mother (Judg. 13:7): they both were commanded not to use strong drink and unclean foods because God was preparing them for something great. Greatness needs sacrifice, and if we believe it's too hard to give up something, 1 Corinthians 10:13 states that with every temptation a way of escape is provided for us. This may not be easy, and similar to the four or more times the caterpillars molt, we, too, will have a repetitive period to remove just one sin.

It's Time to Pupate! (Mark 1:35)

There comes a time when we need to escape the world and concentrate. We still don't know our exact outcome, just like a caterpillar who doesn't know that it will be a butterfly. But we can lay the unknowns of our changes in God's known hands, for He knows everything.

While we make that escape, many will think we are resting, just like the outer world looks upon an inactive cocoon where a world of wonders are taking place. Within the cocoon, the caterpillar is digesting itself. The juices that were used to digest its food at the larval stage are now digesting the caterpillar's body. This digestion turns the body into cells. These cells will transform and make the new body. This process can be as fast as two weeks and as slow as months.

Similarly, we need to give way to the Holy Spirit, who is willing to be released within us but never can be until we accept and realize that we need Him in order to become changed. The Holy Spirit will break down what we ate, especially from the Bible, as we prepare for life changes. Take note that this process may take a while, but what better approach do we have but to set aside time to communicate with Heaven; Jesus did it (Mark 1:35), and who am I not to? There Christ received His preparation and skills to face His challenges.

The Release

From the birth to the pupate stage of a butterfly's life cycle, there isn't an actual butterfly. That is because at the completion of these three stages, a butterfly does not appear. However, these forms are the process needed to become a butterfly. Only at the end is the butterfly formed and released.

As humans our butterfly is released after we go through a series of changes. These changes are made possible and less stressful when we prepare. When we realize our glorious end, we will be willing to prepare for change so that we will be beautiful individuals.

REACT

1. What major life change(s) am I soon to face, and how am I preparing?
2. How am I preparing for my heavenly citizenship?

1. Peter Dockrill, "Pregnancy Changes a Woman's Brain Structure for at Least 2 Years After Giving Birth," Science Alert, Dec. 20, 2016, <https://www.sciencealert.com/pregnancy-changes-a-woman-s-brain-structure-for-at-least-2-years-after-giving-birth>.

Testimony

Take Your Time and Peel Your Pine

1 Cor. 13:4-8;
Gal. 5:22, 23

“Marriage is something that will influence and affect your life both in this world and in the world to come. A sincere Christian will not advance his plans in this direction without the knowledge that God approves his course. He will not want to choose for himself, but will feel that God must choose for him.”¹

“There are thousands that are mated but not matched.”

“Few have correct views of the marriage relation. Many seem to think that it is the attainment of perfect bliss; but if they could know one quarter of the heartaches of men and women that are bound by the marriage vow in chains that they cannot and dare not break, they would not be surprised that I trace these lines. Marriage, in a majority of cases, is a most galling yoke. There are thousands that are mated but not matched. The books of heaven are burdened with the woes, the wickedness, and the abuse that lie hidden under the marriage mantle. This is why I would warn the young who are of a marriageable age to make haste slowly in the choice of a companion.”²

“Here are things which should be considered: Will the one you marry bring happiness to your home? Is [she] an economist, or will she, if married, not only use all her own earnings, but all of yours to gratify a vanity, a love of appearance? Are her principles correct in this direction? Has she anything now to depend upon?”³

“Before giving her hand in marriage, every woman should inquire whether he with whom she is about to unite her destiny is worthy. What has been his past record? Is his life pure? Is the love which he expresses of a noble, elevated character, or is it a mere emotional fondness? Has he the traits of character that will make her happy? Can she find true peace and joy in his affection? Will she be allowed to preserve her individuality, or must her judgment and conscience be surrendered to the control of her husband? . . . Can she honor the Saviour’s claims as supreme? Will body and soul, thoughts and purposes, be preserved pure and holy? These questions have a vital bearing upon the well-being of every woman who enters the marriage relation.”⁴

REACT

1. Will this union help me heavenward?
2. If you knew you like you know you, would you marry you?

1. Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 43.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

4. Ellen G. White, *Messages to Young People*, p. 439.

1 Kings 2:1–4;
1 Cor. 15:24–26

Evidence

The Last Funeral

“Death is a universal human experience. It is like the unavoidable ‘gravitational’ pull seeking to have its way without prior consent. Death is a crisis that all families encounter, and it is recognized as the most stressful life event faced by families. . . . The occurrence of death though inevitable can be significantly disruptive and upsetting to the family system and the network of relationships of the dead person.”¹ Suffice it to say, humans will never get accustomed to death.

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“Many will argue that death at certain ages (especially the elderly) is a normative event over the life course. However, Lavee, McCubbin and Olson opined . . . otherwise. They explained that regardless of when it occurs, death is actually non-normative. This is because it remains an unexpected and largely undesired event. It must be understood that it is not the actual dying that determines whether it is normative but the context and effects of the death. For example, the death of an [82-year-old] man who is the main caretaker or guardian of a [15-year-old] boy may be ‘normative’ for the man but would be very disruptive for the adolescent boy.”²

David had reigned for thirty years as king of Israel. After many years of battles, political intrigue, multiple wives, and many children, he was now an old man. Scripture records that his days “drew nigh that he should die” (1 Kings 2:1). David’s family would have to make significant adjustments after his death, including adjusting to the leadership of a new king.

We are reminded throughout the Bible that death came as a result of sin. Death is an enemy to humans. From the moment Adam and Eve sinned, death came upon all humankind (Rom. 5:12) and has caused irreparable damage to countless families throughout the existence of humankind.

The good news is that Scripture assures us that death itself will one day be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26). One day death itself will have a funeral. That funeral will be the last one. So while human beings are subject to death on a planet filled with sin, there is hope we can hold on to: Jesus has already defeated the enemy called “death” through His own death on the cross and subsequent glorious resurrection. Jesus declares that He has the “keys of hell and of death” (Rev. 1:18); therefore, in preparing for death, we must have a relationship with the giver of eternal life.

1. Oladayo A. Afolabi, “Death, Grief, and Family Dynamics: The Impact of Family Member’s Death and Delayed Grief Resolution on the Family System,” May 2, 2014, p. 1, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2826483.

2. *Ibid.*

How-to *Prepared for Birth or Parenting?*

Judg. 13:7;
1 Sam. 1:27;
Luke 1:6, 13–17, 39–55

It is said that if you fail to prepare, you're prepared to fail. Well, in parenting it's no different. When we look at parenting in our society, it appears as though parenting is just preparing for the birth of a child, thus failing to acknowledge that it's a lifelong investment. Life is precious; it's a divine gift and blessing from God.

Many families grapple with the thought and reality of not having children of their own. Could it be a curse? Could it be a blessing in disguise? Could it be a moment of waiting? Whatever the reason, the Bible tells us of a woman named Hannah who prayed earnestly to God for a child (1 Sam. 1:27), and by God's grace, her request was granted.

Stay connected to God and model a Christlike character.

Many times, after the birth of a child, parents relax on daily earnest prayers for their children and fail to firmly and lovingly instill right Christian standards from early childhood, paving the way for great sorrow. Here are some steps to preparing for parenthood, both prenatal and postnatal:

Pray and listen to God's guidance. Samson's mother was given clear instructions in the upbringing of Samson: "But he said unto me, Behold, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and now drink no wine nor strong drink, neither eat any unclean thing: for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death" (Judg. 13:7). God speaks to us through His Word; and as Samson's parents heeded God's commands, so should all parents.

Stay connected to God and model a Christlike character. Actions speak louder than words; and as such, parents should remain in close relationship with God to model the Christlike character they desire in their child or children. Like Elizabeth and Mary, the parent's relationship with God should spur natural praises to Him for His blessings (Luke 1:37–55).

Keep on training. Deuteronomy 6:7 reminds parents to never give up teaching and guiding their children in the ways of righteousness. And by so doing, the light of God's presence will radiate in the lives of both parents and children, and souls can be won for the kingdom of God.

REACT

1. Why is there a dire need for God's guidance when preparing for and during parenting?
2. How can we better prepare ourselves to be the best parent we can be?

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Gal. 6:7,
Ps. 71:17, 18

Opinion *Life Expectancy (expect-N-see) . . . Are You Ready?*

Where I am from, the young go to school and those advanced in age work to take care of the young and seldom get time to look after themselves. In speaking to a senior citizen one afternoon about retirement, he relayed that, for the better part of his life, he had worked to save money so that when he retires he can enjoy all the benefits of his hard labor. He firmly believed in the Bible verse that declares, “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:7). We usually speak of retirement plans that compensate for houses, lands and savings, and the things that we wish to experience in life—we basically store up treasures in this world—many times not even considering God’s will. We are rarely ever concerned with influencing the lives of

We are called to be prepared throughout our lives.

others positively by sharing God’s goodness in our lives. The sad fact is that today, many persons do not live with the intention of growing old; rather, they live with the sole intention of surviving in this world from day to day.

In Psalm 71:17, 18, King David acknowledges God’s steadfast hand throughout his life from his very youth and pleads with God in his old age to continue to guide and help him. He asks God to allow his life, even in his old age, to be a testimony of God’s grace and mercy. David, rather than asking God to preserve him so that he may enjoy his riches on earth, asks God to allow his life to paint a picture of God’s goodness: “O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works. Now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to everyone that is to come.”

We are called to be prepared throughout our lives, from its beginning to its very end, knowing that God has a grand plan for us. It is with this hope that we should plan our lives boldly, ensuring that we leave room for God’s will to manifest. While we plan our lives and prepare for our old age, we, like David, should aim to praise God and share Him with those who will come after us. It is the work of every Christian to be like David and work to impart the love and knowledge of God’s goodness and grace by simply asking God to let our lives be a testimony.

REACT

1. How does preparation for old age prepare an individual for heaven?
2. How do your life expectations prepare your mind for the Second Coming?

Exploration

Comfort and Change

Isa. 43:19;
Jer. 29:11

CONCLUDE

Life is a journey of turmoil and unexpected events; adaptation and growth. Our human existence is characterized by and will always be fashioned by our choices and our response to change. For unbelievers, it is merely living to die, existing to experience only perfect bliss while being seemingly independent creators of their own destiny, disconnected from the Almighty. However, for Christians, God expects us to be in a constant state of faithful readiness for each phase of life's journey. Though we will never get accustomed to the inevitable, God has created us with a natural instinct to deal with our challenges by staying connected to Him and trusting Him to decide our paths.

CONSIDER

- Creating a chart titled "My Future Under God." The chart is to follow a course of ten years and consist of goals to be accomplished within that time frame. For each goal, seek God's direction by asking Him whether that is the path He wants you to follow.
- Listening to the song "My Life Is in Your Hands" by Kathy Troccoli, which reminds us that we are not without hope when we place our future in God's hands.
- Thinking about all the sacrifices that you'll have to make when choosing to trust in God.
- Engaging in the "Comfort and Change" exercise with friends. Ask friends to cross their arms. When they are comfortable, ask them to cross their arms the other way. Once they've done this, ask them why the second attempt might have left them feeling uncomfortable, even though it's basically the same action.
- Making a list of areas of your life that you think may be too difficult to accept changes in and asking God to grant you peace should changes in these areas ever materialize.
- Making a list of all the positive changes that have occurred in your life over the past year and thanking God for them. Recognize that God knows best and His goodness ought to be acknowledged.

CONNECT

Numbers 23:19; 2 Corinthians 4:16–18; 2 Peter 3:9.

Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, section 14: Thoughts and Their Influences, chap. 72, "Thought Habits."