



CALLED TO COMMUNITY

"It's 12 a.m, just completed the assignment, one down and two more to go.... The printer whirled into life as it churned out the finished product. Hmmm.... Tired from the mental exertion, wonder whether my good friend is still awake. Probably is... and probably on the net. Will SMS him to see if he wants to go to 'mamak'. That's what great friendship is about, can always count on him to be there... or drop in to talk, share (and sometimes pray together) or simply to 'waste time'. Thank you, Lord for friends. Hmmm... That reminded me, will check on Jenny on how she is coping with her sore throat and flu..."

For many, the scenario above is not something uncommon. Friends have never been so accessible, close and real. They are our closest friends, sometimes even closer than our own biological family members. We like to think of them as our community. In fact, we consider them to be almost like the community the Bible speaks about... well almost. What is biblical community, anyway?

Richard Lamb, in his book "Following Jesus in the Real World", suggests that there are three fundamental, yet not exhaustive aspects of biblical community.

1) COMMON COMMITMENT - ACCOUNTABILITY

This is built on a set of COMMON CONVICTIONS about how to relate to God and to one another. Accountability implies a recognition of and commitment to the truth. A requisite for accountability in community is SUBMISSION - TO ONE ANOTHER, TO LEADERSHIP and TO CLEAR TEACHINGS OF SCRIPTURE. Unwillingness to submit to the accountability of the community is the most certain way of effectively eliminating yourself from the community. If unwillingness to submit is a characteristic of the entire community, it will neither offer nor receive effective accountability. The idea of "common commitment" is important as accountability means nothing if you ask someone to hold you to some value that you do not share. And we will hardly welcome accountability if people try to exhort us to live as we have no intention of living. This is why any thriving community must examine Scripture regularly. Common Scripture study allows us to call people to commitment to the authoritative Word of God.

2) COMMON VISION - PARTNERSHIP

It is critical for the Christian community that the members be involved in ministry together. Ministry gives purpose to the common commitments and paces the development of the community as a whole.

3) COMMON LIFE - FELLOWSHIP



The common life of a small group is perhaps its most visible feature. This is often what makes a community either attractive or oppressive, depending on how it functions.

It TAKES TIME to build a community. There is no shortcut; there is no bureaucratic or institutional replacement for simply spending time together. A household of people must decide to share meals and set aside regular time for one another if their living arrangement is to be a Christian community.



- Look at your own unique blend of community.
How is your community in campus like? How would you describe it?

- In what way(s) is your present campus community like, or unlike, the community suggested by Richard Lamb?

- In what ways have they been significant to your spiritual pilgrimage or journey?

For many, college and university days were days best remembered for the many and close friendships formed. Yet community in post-college days WILL be different. In most cases, we must seek to integrate into a new community. And God has called the church to be this community.

In Ephesians 4, Paul describes a clear vision for the church involving both "**common cause**" and "**common destination**." Paul depicts a community of people who thrive, grow and progress together as each contributes his / her part.

Paul expresses the **common destination** of the church in various ways:

- ☞ "until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (v13)
- ☞ "we must grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ" (v15)
- ☞ "promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love" (v16)

and the **common cause** of the church :

- ☞ "there is one body and one spirit, just as you were called to the hope of your calling" (v4)
- ☞ "the gifts He gave ... to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ" (vv11-12)
- ☞ "the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament" (v16)
- ☞ "as each part is working properly" (v16)

AS EACH PART IS WORKING PROPERLY...TAKING OUR PLACE IN THE CHURCH



Let's face it ... integrating into a new church community will not be easy! However, what attitudes can help, or make it more difficult for us to integrate into church...

1) ***A Consumer versus A Participant ...***

The consumer attends a church and rates it in a way a reviewer may rate a movie!

The participant views the church service or activity as much more than just something to be enjoyed or evaluated. The participant expects to contribute (and hence enjoys the experience much more). The participant contributes his/her effort for the sake of Christ's church.

2) ***An Attender versus A Member ...***

The attender makes numerous decisions whether to attend meetings or services according to one's schedule or convenience.

The member makes a commitment to join in the life of the church in certain ways. He organizes his schedule around his church involvement and his priorities fall in line with the commitment made to and with his church community.

3) ***A Critic versus A Partner ...***

The critic keeps a mental scorecard of the church's strengths and weaknesses. He analyses how people perform in their roles. In his evaluations, he makes it clear that he is on the outside looking in, making critical remarks (both positive and negative). He keeps himself standing apart from the people of God.

The partner also makes critical evaluation but uses it differently. As a partner, he wants the worship service, the small or big experiences and even the fellowship time to be the best it can be. He makes conscious effort in playing his part so that the church of God may grow and minister effectively. He looks for creative ways to encourage or to give ...

Participant, member, partner : adopting these attitudes / postures toward the church makes taking a place in the church both satisfying and rewarding. These attitudes and approach make it possible to experience true community in a church setting.

LOOKING AT RELATIONSHIPS IN TRANSITION - COMMUNITY



Perhaps one of the best ways in our preparation to move on is to recognise this reality of CHANGE in our relationships. Let's explore some of them...

- What may be some of your fears and concerns as you think about your re-entry into the local church scene? Have you been away from your church during your campus days? What may be some expectations you foresee, if you are returning to your home church?

- What postures may be hindering or encouraging you as you take your place in the local church? What may be some difficulties in adopting these postures?

Biblical community will need time to grow and mature. It is, therefore, unrealistic to expect this new community to function in the same way as your campus community. Yet, it is into this community we are called. A long term involvement will be both realistic and achievable.



- What are the differences you may expect as you think about this new community (compared to the community in campus)?

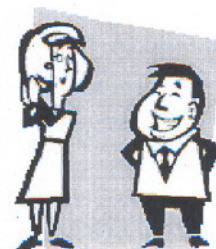
- Even as you give yourself time to integrate into the church, you will need close friends to keep you accountable, to give support and encouragement in your faith. Can you think of a few friends who will journey with you through this period of transition? At least for the first 1-2 years?

- What creative ways can you use to encourage each other to be faithful and to persevere with regards to church?
**It is not uncommon of Christian students, even the leaders, to drop out of church and from active service once they are out of campus!*



Possible Strategies for Involvement in Church

1. Look for a small group
2. Get involved in relationship-building structures, e.g. a mentor-mentee relationship
3. Take initiative in relationships
4. Join an existing ministry
5. Enter as a servant
6. Consider ministry to the least of all
7. Don't enter into leadership too quickly
8. Don't hop around
9. Pray for the church
10. Be patient and expect God to work
11. Keep your youth in proper perspective – give respect where respect is due
12. Look for people from whom you can learn
13. Be prepared to learn from many different people
- 14.
- 15.
- 16.



RELATIONSHIPS IN TRANSITION – CAMPUS

- Who are the people closest to you in campus? Coursemates? Roomates? Members of the Christian Fellowship?
- Who have they been to you? Or how would you like to remember them?
- List down some friends whom you truly treasure. Why?
- How do you see your friendships after campus? How would the nature of the friendship change after graduation? What may be some realistic ways of keeping in touch or growing in that friendship?

Put a little thought into how you want to say your 'GOODBYES'. Plan ahead. Don't wait until the last day!

RELATIONSHIPS IN TRANSITION - AT HOME



- Think about your family members, each one of them. Try to describe them before you entered college / university and now that you are graduating. You may start by picturing their physical appearance, spiritual journey, financial status, your relationship with each of them and the family as a whole.

- Some of you are returning to your hometown. There, you will probably be staying with your family -perhaps back to your same ol' room. What are the changes you can expect or anticipate?

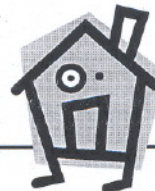
- Perhaps expectations from parents will be different. Are you expected to help to finance your younger siblings' education? Or take on the role as sole breadwinner? Take time to explore them.

Remember, it was YOU who had left home for a couple of years while your family remained. Things will never quite be the same!

A Prayer for my Family ...



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CALLED TO MOVE ON



PRINCIPLES IN TRANSITION

- Checking on My Coping System and Ability

What comes to your mind when you think about waking up every morning to go for lectures? How about going to a place you are unfamiliar with? What about shifting to a new neighbourhood, or with new housemates? Are you more excited than nervous? Do you look forward to it, or do you find yourself reluctant to go through the change?

Change takes place more than we realize. Some of it is so insignificant that it has become routine or a part of us (e.g. waking up or eating different kinds of food each day), yet others may be too overwhelming for us to handle (e.g. leaving family or losing loved ones). In fact, as the saying goes 'nothing is constant - change and impermanence are fundamental features of life'. All that you see now, all that you have or are will not be in due time. The question is, "How do we handle these changes in our lives?" How change impacts us is largely dependent on how we handle / cope with change.

Handling Change

Check out the table below to see how our personal style and other factors may make change favourable or difficult for us to handle.



FACTORS AFFECTING THE IMPACT	OUR PERSONAL STYLE	
Our personality	Find change invigorating and tend to welcome it	Prefer stability and view change as unsettling and disruptive
The desirability of the change	View change from the positive side of it	Think change is always for the worse than the better
The measure of control we have	Expected the change coming	Change that caught us by surprise
The number of change events	Compounded change event	One or two isolated change event
How long does it last?	Short shelf life change	Change is prolonged



Low Degree of Impact



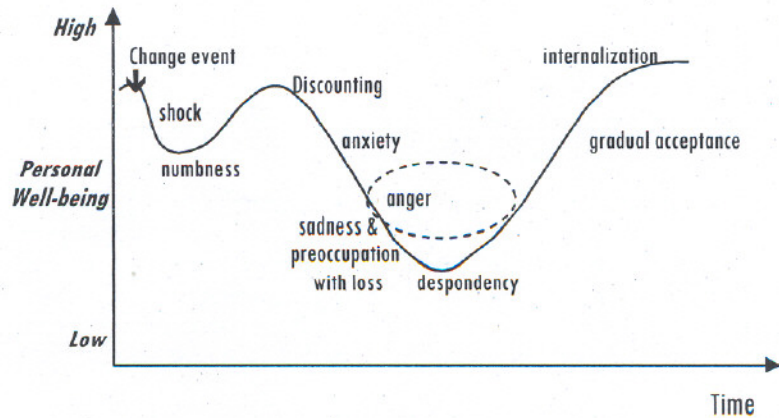
High Degree of Impact

TRANSITION is defined as **a change from one place / state to another**. This change can involve emotions such as fear, anxiety, sadness and anger, as well as excitement and joy.

Each of these emotions needs to be acknowledged and expressed if we are to move through the transition.



CHANGE – THE TRANSITION CURVE



(after Hopson et al, 1992, reproduced in Jones 1995: 50)

The transition curve above helps us measure personal well being against time during a period of change. It is comforting to know the transition curve has its ups & downs! Hey, you are normal after all! Many factors contribute to where we are on the curve, e.g. our personal style, coping mechanism, etc.

Some will take longer time than others in the different emotional phases identified and described above. Therefore, this process is not always linear; one can revisit phases, or sometimes get stuck and struggle to come to terms with the change.



All of us would have made some transitions (e.g. when you first entered college / university, leaving home for the first time, change in a relationship, becoming a Christian, etc.).

Think of one transition that you have made.

- a. What are some of the points in the transition curve that you may be able to identify with?

- b. During that period of transition, what were some things you did which helped / did not help you in coping with the change?
(E.g. When I left for university, I went through a period of feeling lost and anxious. I felt homesick and complained much about the university system, lecturers, cafeteria food, etc. After some time I made a decision to work on friendships and I found the CF to be helpful. Then I set some goals in my studies. I also joined sports that I used to play in my school days. I consciously made the choice to go home less to help myself grow up.)



- c. What does all this tell me about my coping ability?



PRINCIPLES IN TRANSITION

- Called to Move On and Embrace Change

A. You are called to move on

a) Called to bless others

We may view graduation as untimely and feel reluctant to move on. Do keep in mind that the God who calls us to follow Him is also the One who calls us to move on. Just as He calls Abraham into the unknown and to bless others, so, He calls us now. (Genesis 12:1)

Ecclesiastes 3:1 'To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heaven.'

b) Truth about the One who calls us

When coping with change, knowing who our God is and what He is and can be to us is very crucial.

i. He is the Trustworthy Refuge

Psalm 18:2 'The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.'

Psalm 31:14-15 'But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, "You are my God." My times are in your hands; deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me.'

ii. He is the Guide

Nehemiah 9:19-21 'By day the pillar of cloud did not cease to guide them on their path, nor the pillar of fire by night to shine on the way they were to take.'

iii. He is Our Hope

Isaiah 40:30-31 'Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary and they will walk and not be faint.'

B. View change as a means of growth

Often times we could move on because we can or choose to see that there are new possibilities or exciting challenges awaiting us from the change. It helps tremendously in lifting our heavy limbs to take the first step into the unknown.

Growth involves pain but also brings joy and excitement as we see ourselves mature and transform.

APPROACHES TO HANDLING CHANGE



There are at least 4 ways change is handled:

- a. **IGNORE**, and assume it will go away by itself
- b. **OPPOSE** blindly or standing up for a cause
- c. **ACCEPT** blindly or for the convincing good
- d. **EMBRACE**, i.e. facing it, becoming involved in it and harnessing the good from it



Which attitude would you want to adopt as you think about graduation?

Do perform the self-check below frequently. It will help us to keep healthy in transition. Not to forget the Unchanging God, He is in the journey with us!

Am I...

- ☐ FACING change and helping to SHAPE it
- ☐ GRIEVING the loss, then LETTING go
- ☐ Keep GOING in between times



- ☐ Looking FORWARD (Isaiah 43:18-19)
- ☐ Being HOPEFUL (Psalm 31:24)
- ☐ TRUSTING everything is in GOD'S HAND (Psalm 31:14-15)

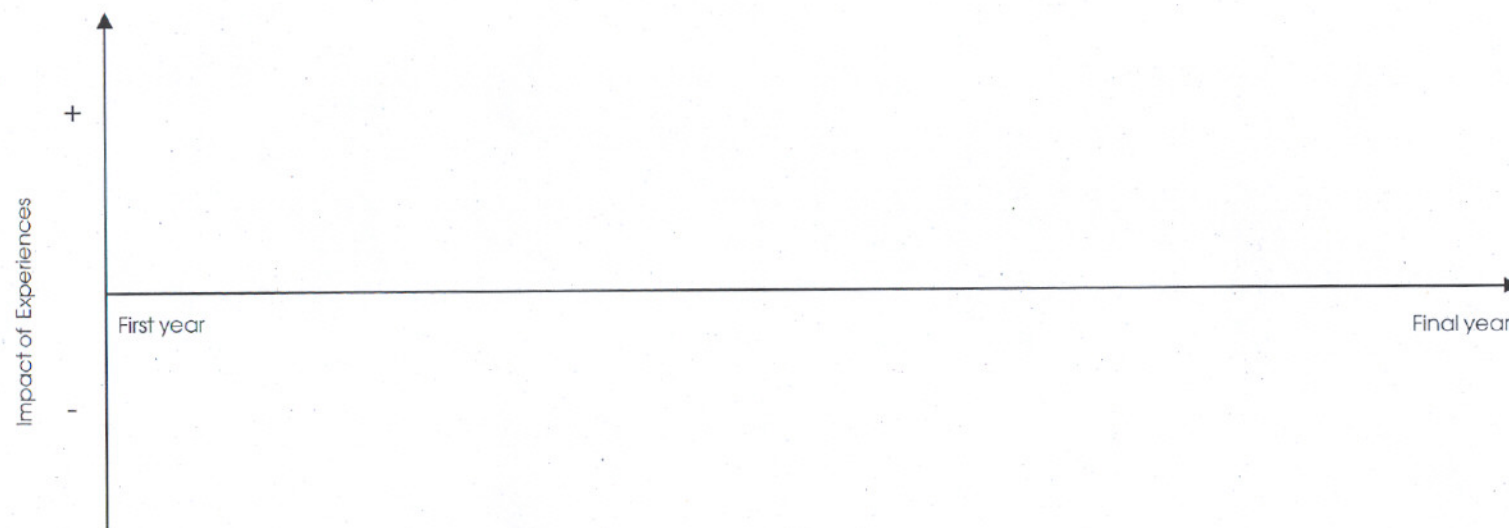
'Being a Christian, my hope is not rooted in my ability to solve a problem but on God's love, God's righteousness and on God's promises.' Parker Palmer

Resource: 'Riding the Roller Coaster', All The Hours God Sends? by Peter Curran, IVP 2000 pp102-110

CLOSING A CHAPTER OF YOUR LIFE - Looking Back

Looking back & forward is an important step to close a chapter. Take some time to reflect on the past ____ years in campus. You can start by looking at the significant events that have happened and their impact on you. Plot in the graph based on the intensity of the impact (positive and negative impact).

1. Significant Events



Having looked at these events, decide then which memories you would like to KEEP and which to LET GO.

2. Saying Goodbye & Letting Go of...

<u>Persons</u>	<u>Regrets</u>	<u>Failures</u>
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3. Keeping a Treasure Chest of Good Stuff

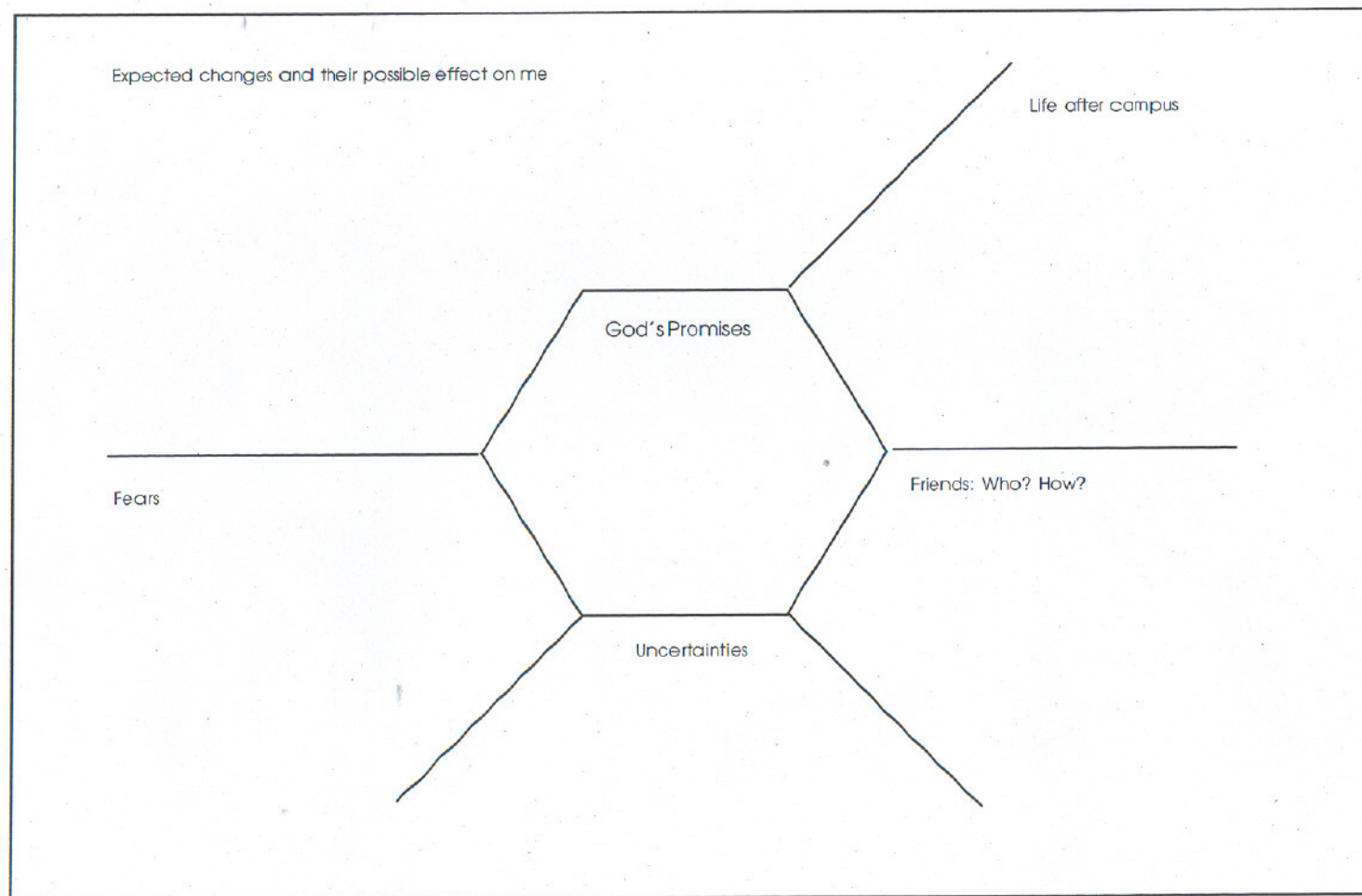
a. Friendships	b. Turning points or growth lessons	c. Encounters with God
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4. Give a name to your campus experience

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CLOSING A CHAPTER OF YOUR LIFE - Looking Forward

As you look forward to LIFE AFTER CAMPUS, what do you see ahead of you? What are the CHANGES you expect? What are your FEARS? What things are you uncertain about? Who do you think are the friends you will make? What are some of GOD'S PROMISES which you want to hold on to as you move on? Take some time to think through and jot them down as a reminder.



Now, Go FORTH in CONFIDENCE and NEW ENTHUSIASM. God is waiting for you to join Him in yet another phase of life. He has brought you thus far and will surely lead you into the UNKNOWN future.

Closing Prayer

(This litany is based on the four aspects of prayer: praise, thanksgiving, sorrow, petition.)

I give you praise, God of my journey,

for the power of love, the discovery of friends, the truth of beauty
for the wonder of growth, the kindling of fidelity, the taste of transformation
for the miracle of life, the seed of my soul, the gift of becoming
for the taste of the little dyings which have strengthened me for this moment
for the mystery of journey, the bends in the road, the pauses that refresh
for the faith that lies deep enough to permeate discouragement and anxiety

I give you thanks, God of my journey,

for all I have learned from the life of Jesus of how to say goodbye
for those who have always stood near me and given me spiritual energy
for your strength on which I can lean and your grace by which I can grow
for the desire to continue on, for believing that your power works through me
for being able to love so deeply, so tenderly, so truly
for feeling my poorness, my emptiness, my powerlessness
for believing that you will care for me in my vulnerability

I ask forgiveness, God of my journey,

for holding on too tightly
for refusing to be open to new life
for fighting off the dying that's essential for growing
for insisting that I must be secure and serene
for ignoring your voice when you urged me to let go
for taking in all the goodness but being reluctant to share it
for doubting my inner beauty
for resisting the truth of my journey home to you

I beg assistance, God of my journey,

to accept that all of life is only on loan to me
to believe beyond this moment
to accept your courage when mine fails
to recognize the pilgrim part of my heart
to hold all of life in open hands
to treasure all that is gift and blessing
to look at the painful parts of my life and to grow through them
to allow your love to embrace me on the empty and lonely days
to receive the truth of your presence
to trust in the place of "forever hello"