

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak this morning. I was approached by Jeff to share an extended version of a brief reflection that I shared with a small group of Southridge staff a couple of months ago. The topic of which was navigating change that occurs as a result of life transitions.

I've been thinking about change a lot recently. Many of us are in seasons of change or transition right now. Some of us will have attended graduation ceremonies in June and have celebrated academic accomplishments and will be anticipating next steps. Others of us may be preparing for a move out of current housing or a move into new accommodations. Jobs that are beginning or ending or a shift in roles within a job. Family dynamics are constantly evolving and changing. Caring for aging parents and seeing the mark of time in our own bodies. Change really is an inevitable part of life.

When I think of change, rightly or wrongly, I envision a long dock on the shore of a lake. Its a summer day and I picture someone running, picking up speed and hurling themselves off the end. Cue the first picture! These girls are two of my daughters on Canada Day 2002. Note the joy on their faces and imagine the abandon with which they launched off the dock and into the cool waters.

As a metaphor, this excited and enthusiastic action, may not be true to real life and might not be a super helpful visual representation of navigating change. However, to sit with the metaphor a moment longer, I would have to admit that I generally don't approach entering a body of water with the same enthusiasm as these girls. I am the girl looking for the ladder on the side of the dock, dipping my toe in and considering how much I really want to cool off. I might splash a little water on my legs, slowly make my way in, yelping and holding my breath before slowly lowering my self and and submerging my head. And, of course, re emerging with shrieks and squeals of protest.

Recently, I have experienced a fairly significant life change. Actually, it has to do with those two girls. Over the 24 years since those pictures were taken, they have gone through a number of life changes that many of us have experienced....graduations, living away from home, first job, first home and both of them are now moms. And...a couple of months ago, both girls had baby girls. Cue the next picture! Audience participation encouraged! On the right is Callie Jane born to Laura on April 27 and on the left is Tessa Kelly born to Madeline on May 17. Yup, two babies less than 3 weeks apart. Talk about a change! In the late Fall of 2025, when we learned these littles were going to be joining our family, I made the decision to retire from my job as a coach at Southridge

shelter. I have been a coach at the shelter since September 2020, so this felt like a bit of a big deal to me.

Side bar, bonus content: For those who may be interested, there are a couple of teams that work at the shelter. The coaching team consists of 3 coaches and two diversion workers. Each resident at Southridge shelter has a coach tracking with them as they set goals and attempt to leave emergency shelter as quickly as possible. Coaches meet with their residents weekly and work on housing goals as well as tasks such as securing income, completing taxes, connecting with community based resources, individual housing searches and anything else required to have a productive and successful stay.

Back to the main idea... I let my supervisor and my co workers know of my decision to retire in March and set a retirement date of May 29. As I contemplated this upcoming season of change, I did some reading and listening and tried to prepare myself to navigate this change well.

You see, in my life, I have found change to be hard. In preparation for my good bye celebration at work, I turned to a favourite podcast and found a 2 episode piece entitled “Life Transitions” The following talking points are

taken from this two part talk on The Abiding Together Podcast, Season 16, episodes 15 and 16.

The remainder of our time together will be spent considering a template that has proved helpful to me for transitioning through the last few months and for going forward. I have thought a lot about the following actions and find myself jumping back and forth as I go through this transition period. The actions are:

Remember with thanksgiving
Release/relinquish with trust
Redeem with hope.

As this 5 ½ year long season of working at Southridge shelter has come to an end, I have done a lot of remembering with thanksgiving. I have recently begun an exercise that I call “treasuring”. I was reading Luke 2, which is a chapter that largely records events post Jesus birth and his boyhood. Twice, Mary, his mother, is recorded as reflecting and treasuring events that occurred. After his birth and the shepherds depart Mary is said to have “treasured these things in her heart and thought about them often.” Again, at the end of the chapter, after 12 year old Jesus is found after having been missing in Jerusalem for three days, Luke says “his mother stored all these things in her heart”.

In the last year or so, I have begun writing down things that I am thankful for and for ways that I experienced God's presence and action in my day. I use both a spiral notebook for writing and I collect quotes, cards and write out scripture in a scrapbook style book. I remember events sometimes large but often small that I feel have been gifts or reminders from Jesus that He is with me.

The list of things I am thankful for that have occurred as a result of my job at the shelter would be very long. So many God moments and quiet miracles and housing wins and meaningful conversations. Encouragements and laughter and shared stories and discovery of things in common. Hugs and prayers. Dad jokes and puns at morning meetings, discovering God through daily devotions and new things learned. Surviving technology and joyful move outs to housing, friends coming back to visit or volunteer, many wonderful people and, did I mention laughter?

Not to say that there haven't been many sad and sometimes tragic circumstances. But even in the hard times, God has always provided me with a community to debrief and share grief and sadness and frustrations and loss with.

Remembering is a recurring theme throughout the story of the Bible. God is often beseeching his followers to remember His love, His faithfulness, His trustworthiness, His strength, His ability to save and so much more. When I remember these qualities as I read the Bible, my perspective seems to often shift and I can see God at work in my life and circumstances and come up with many reasons to be thankful. This practice of gratitude has helped me to avoid falling into despair and discouragement on days when the giants are looming and the land of milk and honey feels distant.

Next is release or relinquish with trust. This is an important action in order to transition well. It's a two part action. At the same time, I am unclenching my hand to give God this part of my life and also trusting that I will receive something back. I can't receive anything more if my hands are full and yet, the act of letting go is to trust God with the next step. Back to Luke 2, I think about Joseph, Jesus' earthly father and the betrothed of Mary. Now there's a man who had a change of plans. Instead of a traditional engagement period and wedding, Joseph chose to play his part in a drama for the ages. The gospel of Matthew sheds some more light on Joseph and details several dreams where angels appeared to give Joseph guidance. Clearly Joseph was called to release his notions of what marriage and parenthood would look like

and radically trust God to guide them. Last December, I copied a quote that I had read about Christmas. The idea was that Christmas could be summed up in one word and that word is “yes”. Mary said yes to the angel from God, Joseph said yes to Mary and Jesus said yes to everything that was to come. Releasing with trust is about us saying yes to God and all that He wants to do in our lives.

Some of the bravest and best examples of radical relinquishing and trust, I have witnessed close up are with friends I have met through Southridge shelter. People who chose to start fresh and/or were forced into a change when circumstances had crumbled and yet still believe life is good. And those who release old habits and lifestyles in order to adopt healthier and more sustainable ways to navigate life’s challenges have inspired me. And the many friends over the years, who have embraced Jesus and continue to be transformed by his love are real time examples to me of the trustworthiness of God.

As for me in this life transition, I have been able to identify the things I have relinquished as I ended my job. Things like collaborating with coworkers, office laughter, being part of a team, learning new things. I trust God. My future is in good hands!

Finally, there is redeeming with hope. Redemption is the story line that weaves its way through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. God is a specialist at taking our

small, messy offerings and transforming them into something beautiful. In keeping with the Christmas in July theme, Jesus is identified in Isaiah as Immanuel, God with us. In an interesting way, if Jesus resides in me in the person of the Holy Spirit, then He retired from the role of a coach at Southridge shelter along with me. And together, we will keep moving forward to new things that God has in store. As Christ followers, we can all be hopeful that God is accompanying us on our journeys and we can rely on his trustworthiness and faithfulness. Hope also weaves its way through the story of the Bible. I am hopeful about my future. I trust that God can use all of my experiences as a coach at Southridge shelter for future good. How will this happen? A friend once suggested to me that it is easier to steer a moving ship. So I will continue to attend ladies coffee, devotions, pop in to visit staff, come for patio lunches with my co workers and be open to saying yes to opportunities that come along to serve or engage in Kingdom building. And, of course, time to be a Nana. Speaking of saying yes, this August marks 10 years since our family moved to St Catharines from outside of the Region. During that season of change, moving to a new community and literally knowing no one and not being familiar with the city at all, I decided I would say yes to every opportunity that came along. So I was able to begin friendships with people from church who would say, "you should check out this park or this is the best donut shop

around” And I would respond by saying, “that sounds amazing, do you have time to go this week?” And, amazingly, people often said yes. I have dubbed this current new era, St Catharines 2.0 and I am excited to see what doors might open as I reengage in my church and community. So I retired Friday May 29 and , as usual, I attended Ladies coffee the following Tuesday June 3. Before I had even started my tea, Jeff Martens approached me and asked how retirement was going. I responded that it hadn’t officially really started yet since it was Tuesday and my first day of not working would be Wednesday. He continued saying that he was hoping it wasn’t too soon to be asking me to do something. Oh oh. And he proceeded to pitch the idea of sharing this life transitions blurb. Double Oh oh. As per my usual style, I said I would think about it. But, honestly, I knew I would say yes because, after all , I am in my yes era.

As I conclude, I’d like to revisit the metaphor of change that I started with. That is the image of taking a running leap off a dock. I suggested it probably isn’t the best or most realistic image. Upon thinking further, I came up with another image or idea that might be a better representation of the change process. Cue the next picture! Author James Clear wrote that “Many situations in life are similar to going on a hike: the view changes once you start walking” I love this image of my family walking

together. A couple weeks ago, Sidney referred to the title of a song called “Walking Each Other Home”. As we experience life’s transitions, its so comforting and reassuring to be accompanied by others. Those who have travelled the same road, those who are in it with us and also to become guides and companions for those who follow.

Finally, I would like to pose several questions for our consideration.

- 1) What do I need to remember with gratitude and what has God shown me about his character in a previous season?
- 2) Is there anything that God is asking me to release from a past or current season?
- 3) What is something new that God is doing in this current season of my life?

I’ll end with a blessing from Romans 15:13

“May the God of hope fill you with joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit”