

Caring for One Another

Life Seasons: Changes & Transitions



Opening Questions (select 1 or 2 questions)

- What book or movie has been a source of insight into your life?
- What is one task or project that, if someone did it for you, would reduce stress or worry in your life or it would feel like an act of care?
- Describe an “A-ha!” moment of discovery that you’ve experienced.

What Does the Bible Say?

Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths
for his name’s sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
my whole life long.

Think About... (optional, depending on time)

- What does Psalm 23 teach us about how God cares for us? How might this be a model for how we care for one another in community?

What Do Others Say?

The spring after my husband and I got married, we traveled to Oklahoma to help my mother-in-law down-size her belongings as she prepared to move cross country to Indiana. When we arrived, she had a list detailing what she hoped we would accomplish ready and waiting for us. One of my responsibilities was to go through the books her late husband had accumulated in the decades he served as a parish pastor and make recommendations for what might be sold and what should be donated.

As I sorted volumes, I came across a relatively recent book on clergy self-care that piqued my interest. Flipping the pages, I found a quiz for assessing one's stress level based on life changes experienced in the last 12 months. Curiosity won out. I grabbed a piece of paper and a pen and started tabulating my score. Got married—check. Death of a parent—check. Addition of a family member—check times 10 (I gained four adult kids plus their spouses and kids). Change in living situation—check. A family member with significant health issues—check. The list went on and on. Check, check, check. When I thought about it, I knew the year had held a lot of change. I had been feeling so stretched and more than a little off balance. My through the roof score brought all that into focus and helped me understand why. It also reminded me that even positive change adds stress to our lives.

Disruptive change is a term used to describe events or circumstances in our lives that interrupt the way we've been accustomed to living and force us to do things in a new way. Disruptive change can be positive—like the addition of a person to your family or pursuing a new job opportunity, or negative—like the diagnosis of an illness or the death of a loved one. Disruptive change comes through choices we make and through circumstances that are thrust upon us. The truth is, there doesn't have to be a high volume of change for it to be disruptive. Any disruptive change can feel isolating and any one of the items on the list that I checked off would have been enough to cause disequilibrium in my life. Any which way it comes, living through disruptive change involves a learning curve as we adapt to the new circumstances of our life and process the loss and grief that accompany even positive change.

One of the gifts of knowing other people and being part of a community is that we have an opportunity to care for and support one another in seasons of stress and change or when life makes us feel off balance. We are a community called Incarnation. Our name gives us a clue for how we can live together and in the world as a caring community. In the incarnation, God showed up in bodily form as Jesus to show us more clearly what God's love looks like in real life. We are all growing in our understanding of how to live this out, yet the ways we show up for one another in the joys and sorrows of life will likewise help others to experience God's love and presence. It is something each of us can do for those around us - when we are paying attention. Similarly, paying attention to how others are trying to show up for us can help us to feel less alone in a difficult season.

Learning to do this well takes practice and a willingness to be vulnerable with one another—both in naming our realities and in being fully present for one another. The path is not always clear but the one who leads and guides us in this work is. We worship a God who is all about being present, naming what is real (even when it's messy) and loving us no matter what. It is this God's Spirit who will show us the way

—Reflection written by Jeanne Hartfield

Think About... (select one or more questions)

- How can a positive change be a disruptive change? What kinds of loss might people experience, even in a positive change?
- What are some of the disruptive changes that others might be experiencing, but may not be visible or obvious to those around them? How can we make a difference, even when we don't know what is going on in another person's life?
- In what ways have you experienced disruptive change in your life—either positive or negative? How did people support you in that season? What was most helpful to you?
- What qualities and actions make a community caring and supportive? How does the community of Incarnation already live these out? How might Incarnation as a community live them out more effectively?
- As you think about someone in your life who is experiencing a transition or challenging circumstances, what are some ways that you might support or care for them? How might you pray for them (or someone in a similar situation)? If the situation is sensitive, you might respond more generally to protect the person's privacy.
- What might it look like to support one another in challenging times over the long haul? What words or actions are helpful when disruptive change is new? What words or actions are helpful when the season of loss or change lasts for a long time?

Prayer

The Lutheran Prayer of Good Courage (LBW p. 153)

Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Connecting Faith with Daily Life...

(for individual reflection & action)

- Pray the *Lutheran Prayer of Good Courage* before you leave home each day.
- Send a note of encouragement to someone who could use care and support
- Consider how you might be more attentive to layers of life concerns that are invisible. Next time an interaction with someone leaves you frustrated, unsettled or concerned, ask

yourself: *What hurt or change might be disrupting their life and impacting their words or actions? How does that change my perception of the situation?*

- What is something from this reflection and discussion that you want to remember?

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This devotion is part of the Caring Community initiative of Incarnation's strategic plan.