

## Chapter 3

### Leaving

Preparing for reentry begins when you first think seriously about returning to your passport country. Of course, everyone thinks or dreams about going “home” from time to time, but there comes a time when returning becomes a real factor in one’s life. This leaving stage begins when you first seriously consider leaving and ends when you actually walk out the door on your way to the airport.

#### Part 1: The Longest Reentry

The Israelites chafed under the ruthlessly oppressive behavior of the Egyptians and called upon God to deliver them, but the years passed and nothing seemed to be happening. Decades passed after those prayers, but God still did not seem to be doing anything. The Israelites continued on in their familiar, but difficult, circumstances—not really seriously considering returning to their passport country. However, during this time God was preparing one of their own, Moses, to lead them back (Exodus 2-4).

We can pinpoint the time when the Israelites entered the leaving stage. Moses and his brother Aaron called a meeting with the Israelite leadership. At that meeting Aaron told the leadership what God had said to Moses and performed miraculous signs right before the people. At that moment the people believed, and they bowed to worship God. They knew that God was concerned about them; they were actually going to leave (Exodus 4:29-31).

Of course, the leaving stage takes time, and during it

people may face many obstacles as seen in Exodus 5.

- Moses and Aaron told the King that God said, “Let my people go...” (v.1).
- The King replied, “I don’t know God and I will not let you Israelites go” (v. 2).
- Moses and Aaron said, “Our God has met with us. Let us go for three days...” (v. 3).
- The King replied, “Get back to your work...” (v. 4).
- The King then ordered the Egyptians to stop supplying straw for making the bricks but not to reduce the quota—to make the work harder (vv. 6-14).
- The Israelite foremen appealed to the King (v. 15).
- The King said, “You’re just lazy! Get back to work” (v. 17-18).
- The Israelite foremen went to Moses and Aaron and said, “May God judge you. You have made us a stench to the King” (vv. 19-21).
- Moses came to God asking, “Why? Why? Why?” Moses pointed out that his obedience had only made things worse saying, “You have not rescued your people at all” (v. 22-23).
- God gave Moses wonderful promises and specific instructions. However, when Moses told the Israelites, they would not listen because of their discouragement (Exodus 6:1-9).

During the next year or so Moses and Aaron, now in their 80s, did exactly what God commanded, and the already discouraged Israelites lived through the period of the plagues, averaging about one a month. The Bible (Exodus 7-12) is not always clear on how much the Israelites were affected by the plagues; however, it does say that God, beginning with the fourth plague, made a distinction between the Egyptians and the

Israelites on more than half of the plagues: The Egyptians suffered, but the Israelites did not. Even though the Israelites were not directly affected by many of the plagues, it still must have been a stressful time for them.

During the last plague the Israelites had to take specific action to avoid being affected by the plague. They had to kill a lamb, put some of its blood on the sides and top of the doorframes, and eat the roasted lamb and bread made without yeast. When God saw the blood, he passed over that house without harming the firstborn within (Exodus 12:1-13).

In the next verse (v. 14), God tells them to remember this for generations to come, and the Israelites have done so for thousands of years. Closely related to this day of Passover is the sacrament of communion celebrated by Christians for nearly two thousand years.

That very night permission was granted for them to leave, so the Israelites quickly packed for their reentry. They took some of their own possessions and asked the Egyptians for items as well.

- Flocks and herds (v. 32)
- Dough before the yeast was added (v. 34)
- Silver and gold (v. 35)
- Clothing (v. 35)

Then we read that the Israelites “journeyed from Rameses to Succoth. There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children” (Exodus 12:37). Although it sounds like they were at the end of the leaving stage that is not quite the case. Note that ALL of them left together, but that rarely occurs today—you just cannot get 600,000 men plus wives and children on one flight. The Israelites have yet to say goodbye to their teammates, and since traveling together that separation does not happen until years later. Today most

people leave their teammates and other friends as they leave their host country, so in the next chapter we will jump ahead in the Bible to the place where the Israelites leave theirs.

## **Part 2: Reentry Today**

When you begin the leaving phase, you start living in “two worlds.” Of course, you are still in your host country, but thoughts of your journey home and of your passport country become more frequent. It may be a temptation to essentially “check out” of what you are doing in your host culture before you actually complete your work there. In addition, as just noted with the Israelites, things may get worse before they get better.

### **Finishing well**

It is important to be sure that you complete whatever is left of your task in your host country in the time you have left. Such completion takes different forms depending on the nature of your task. Sometimes the form is obvious, but at other times it is not so clear.

If you are a teacher, your task is to finish the semester or academic year you agreed to teach and turn in grades. Teachers may continue to meet classes but spend little time in preparation. They may receive papers or tests and just put grades on them without supplying helpful comments for the students. Finishing well means staying fully involved until everything is over; otherwise the teacher is like the student who works hard until the week before the end of the semester then does not turn in the term paper and fails the final exam. If your task is a continuing one with your agency, such as serving as treasurer, finishing well means training your replacement for the task. Delegating your work to others is like

passing a baton to the next runner in a relay race—your task is not completed until the next person is carrying the baton. If your task is a one-time thing, such as building something, finishing well means completing what you are building—or delegating that work to others if you have not been able to complete it in the time you have, which is often the case in countries where supplies may not be readily available. In the space below, write down what you have to do to finish well.

Four months to go:

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Three months to go:

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Two months to go:

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One month to go:

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### **Stress**

During the leaving phase stress nearly always increases. One reason for this is that more things demand your attention—you need to make preparations for your return to your passport culture. In addition, something may occur in your host culture to make completing your task more difficult, such as we saw with the Israelites in Exodus 6. They had to make just as many

bricks, but with no straw supplied. Then they had about a year of being present when God sent the plagues upon the Egyptians. Many times things get worse before they get better. Additional tasks such as filling out your agency debrief form and having an exit interview with your director take additional time. You may find that the person delegated to take over your task really has other interests, and you realize that your project may get lost in the change. You may find yourself becoming critical of your replacement and then feel guilty for being critical. The list of stressors that arise may seem almost endless, but list some of them below.

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### **Discouragement**

After seeing things get worse and experiencing the stress, people may get so discouraged that they will not even listen to God's wonderful promises, just as the Israelites would not listen to Moses. As they delegate responsibilities to others and finish their tasks, people may find themselves left out of discussions about what will be done in the future. Although this is done because they will not be there, some people feel left out, rejected, and unappreciated so they become discouraged. As people withdraw more and more they may become disillusioned with the whole enterprise in which they have been involved and wonder whether or not their effort was worth it all. This may develop into resentment toward other people or their agency. In the space below write down some of your discouragements.

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## Memories

God told Moses to begin a festival that would remind the people of the good things God had done for them. This time of stress and discouragement is a good time to gather things that will bring back good memories. Take some things with you that will remind you and your children of good things that have happened in your host country. These may be small objects that you carry with you, recipes for favorite national foods, recordings of favorite national music, and so forth. If you do this, when your children are asked about moving into a new home, they will be able to say, “We have our home with us. We are just looking for a house to put it in.”

In this digital age, you can carry thousands of pictures and hours of video on DVDs, CDs, and flash drives. Take pictures and video of people, places, pets, and favorite things of all kinds. List below some of the items you want to collect to take with you as well as things you want to take pictures or videos of.

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## Time Orientation

The present is now viewed as somewhat temporary and the future begins to demand more attention. Rather than living primarily for today and devoting your energy to that, you begin devoting more and more of your energy to tomorrow and plan for what you will be doing then.

The further you progress in the leaving stage, the less you focus on the present and the more you focus on the future and what you will be doing then.

## Spiritual Characteristics

As you enter this time of change, remember that God is the unchanging anchor of your life.

- I the Lord do not change... (Malachi 3:6).
  - He will never leave you or forsake you (Deuteronomy 31:6).
  - Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).
  - I am the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End (Revelation 22:13).
- When you sense yourself being overwhelmed with the changes, make a specific point of centering your life in God’s stability.

## Social Characteristics

During the leaving stage you are socially separating yourself from the people around you and disengaging from the roles you have been filling. You are closing a chapter in your life and going through ceremonies to bring closure to this period of time. People give recognition for what you have done and make presentations of token gifts that you can take home as memories. As you loosen ties with friends and coworkers, you sense them withdrawing from you because they now see you as being a temporary person in their lives, one who will soon be leaving. As you are excluded from more and more things, you may feel less and less part of the work going on.

## Psychological Characteristics

Though you may have looked forward to less responsibility as the end of your time of service neared, you may interpret what is happening as rejection and come to resent it. You no longer feel

needed, but you feel more and more in the way of the action taking place.

You also begin to feel the loss of many things that have been important to you during your time in the host culture. The grieving process begins as you mourn the loss. Finally, as your colleagues take over some of the roles you have been playing, you may feel guilty for adding to their already heavy loads.

This stage is “messy” and filled with conflicting feelings. You are happy as you anticipate seeing family again but sad as you say goodbye to friends; relieved to have responsibility taken by others but anxious about what you will do when you get “home,” and so forth. All of this is normal. Everyone feels this way during the leaving stage, and your ambiguous feelings indicate that you are OK.

The leaving stage includes many things that you have to do, so the next chapter is really a continuation of the leaving stage. It includes many actions you need to take.