

Hope...for the uprooted woman

Lost in the Woods: Navigating the dark, winding road of uncertainty

by Ann Kelley; Director of Communications for Just Moved Ministry

We were desert dwellers from Arizona hopelessly lost in the dense woods of Pennsylvania late at night. As the navigator on our long car travels (this was before smart phones and GPS), I had always prided myself on being very map-savvy, but it was obvious that I had caused us to make a wrong turn somewhere along the way. My husband and I were grateful that our young kids slept peacefully in the back seats and were oblivious to our anxious whispers. I knew Doug was silently praying as fervently as I was.

The dark, towering trees lining both sides of the two-lane highway seemed to press in on us and created an impenetrable maze from which we felt we'd never emerge. With each bend in the road came the hope that the lights of civilization would welcome us as a beacon.

Turn after turn after turn served only to draw us farther and farther into the forest's dark depths. As if this wasn't enough, our old van had developed a loud rattle and, on one of the many sharp curves of the highway, we heard a metal part go *ting, ting, tinging* away into the black night. My husband and I looked at each other with the same thought, *Was that the one part that was holding the van together?* It was the first time I was more worried that a rattle on the van had *stopped* than that it had existed at all.

My mind raced with all kinds of dreadful scenarios: The van would break down and we had no way to call for help. We would run out of gas before finding civilization. Doug would leave us to find help and be eaten by wolves.

Rational thought is not my strong suit in the middle of the night.

Needless to say, that night on an unfamiliar, winding rural road in Pennsylvania was nerve wracking and scary. The good news: the metal part that broke loose from beneath the van was not enough to cause the van to break down — thank goodness!

I held back tears of relief when we eventually found the old inn, carried the kids and luggage inside, and fell exhausted into bed.

The morning broke bright and clear and the forest that had seemed so menacing the night before beckoned with life and beauty. With neighborly helpfulness, the proprietor of the inn directed us to a nearby auto repair and within an hour or two we were back on the road.

I sometimes think of that night when my life's journey enters a stage of uncertainty and apprehension about the future. Instead of a predictable and straight road with a view to the horizon, life becomes a dark, twisting mountain road filled with steep climbs and hurly-burly descents.

Imagined fears invade my thoughts. Did we make the wrong decision that brought about this change? Will my kids be scarred by this change? Will the better life we envision become a reality?

Too often, when my days are easy and breezy, I become spiritually lazy and lose any sense of God's presence and direction. But when the future becomes unsure and, frankly, a bit scary, my awareness of needing God deepens, broadens, and becomes foremost in my mind. As uncomfortable as uncertainty is, it serves as a reminder to me to invite God into my experience and to trust Him with my uncertain future.

The past year has been fraught with uncertainty for everyone. How long will the pandemic last? Am I safe? Will I lose my job? When can the kids return to school? Will we have to move? Keep this issue of Bloom to be encouraged and to be better equipped in times of uncertainty. Keep it as a reminder of God's presence and His deep love for you.

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Walking by Faith by Miriam Dixon

I never have stepped into my vehicle, turned on the engine, and started to drive without first having a clear sense of where I am headed. When I plan a journey, I begin with a destination clearly in mind. And I communicate it to other travelers. God does not, apparently, share the value of this logic.

Notice how Luke 1:8 begins the story of [Zachariah]. He describes an older couple who have served God faithfully all their lives, yet been denied the one thing they desired the most: a child. Now, as they near retirement, Zachariah is visited by an angel who announces that God is about to answer their prayers.

What? Now?! Are you sure? Aren't you a little late?

The scene shifts to a small, obscure village in the hills of Galilee. The same angel appears to a young girl to announce, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you. ... you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ... The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God" (Luke 1:28, 30–36). Astonished, Mary questions how this can be? In the end, she assents: "Let it be with me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

Two announcements predicting two miraculous births. Elizabeth and Mary begin a journey with neither a clearly defined path nor destination.

It is tempting to think that this approach was out of the norm, but even a cursory reading of God's story reveals that this experience is more common than not. Noah "bobbed about on an oceanic flood," clueless as to when his ordeal would end; Paul and a half-starved shipload of travelers dodged shoals in a storm off the coast of Malta (Genesis 6 ff.; Acts 27). All they could do was wait it out. Wait, and as it turned out, do one other thing. At Paul's urging, they broke bread and gave thanks to God. Under the circumstances, it was a crazy thing to do. But they were strengthened by this faithful act and made it through the long night. As dawn glowed crimson in the east, the ship shattered on a reef, yet all on board made it safely to land.

In the uncertainty and suspense of not knowing, we learn to keep our eyes wide open, scanning the horizon of our experience for evidence of God's leading. Like Noah we may have to do this for a long time before at last a spring sprig signals that there is land ahead. Like Paul and his near-sinking boatload, we would be wise to feast ourselves again and again on signs of promise and hope even as we are tossed about on the sea of not knowing.

Read the entire article at renovare.org/articles/walking-by-faith

Trusting God in the Unknown by Sara Horn

It was 11:30 at night when my cell phone's ring woke me up. Cliff's Navy Reserve unit had been in Iraq for a month and life for both of us finally seemed more routine. He called and e-mailed a couple of times a week. I felt good—things were more predictable.

Then Cliff mentioned that he and some of his friends were getting dinner at Taco Bell.

My heart stopped. This was the code word we agreed to use if Cliff ever had to leave for a mission. The base was the only place he'd worked since arriving and I'd convinced myself he would stay there for the entire deployment. But I was wrong. He was going outside the wire and I had no idea what was next.

Tears fell down my cheeks. The confidence I felt just a moment before was completely gone. My husband was on the other side of the world, heading into parts unknown, facing real dangers, and there was nothing I could do. I felt helpless and lost.

Before he hung up, we prayed together. When it was my turn to pray, trying to keep the emotion out of my voice, I asked God to watch over Cliff, to protect him until he came home. I asked, but in my heart I was telling God in no

uncertain terms that He would protect my husband and He would bring him home safe. Or else.

After we said we loved each other and Cliff promised to call as soon as he could, I put the phone down, leaned back on my pillow, and cried.

That's when I sensed God ask me a very important question. "Am I in control?"

Feeling very convicted, I said "Yes."

"And don't you think I am with your husband in Iraq just as I'm with you right now?"

"Yes."

"Then trust Me. And remember that even if you don't know what will happen tomorrow, I do."

We don't know what tomorrow will bring. Whether we face it in a deployment or a performance review or a health scare or financial crisis, we don't know what will happen. But God does. Jeremiah reminds us, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV).

From *Faith Deployed*; daily encouragement for military wives by Jocelyn Green.

7 Strategies When Faced With Uncertainty by Christine Carter, PhD

1. Don't resist

There's no doubt: We are living through challenging times. But resisting this current reality won't help us recover, learn, grow or feel better. Ironically, resistance prolongs our pain and difficulty by amplifying the challenging emotions we are feeling. There is real truth to the aphorism that what we resist persists.

Instead of resisting, we can practice acceptance. To practice acceptance, we surrender our resistance to a problematic situation and also to our emotions about the situation. For example, you might find your marriage to be particularly challenging right now. Instead of criticizing or blaming your spouse — two tactics that are about resistance — you could calmly accept your marriage for the time being.

To be clear, acceptance is not the same as resignation. Accepting a situation doesn't mean it will never get better. We aren't accepting that things will stay the same forever; we're only accepting whatever is actually happening at the moment.

2. Invest in yourself

The best resource that you have right now for making a contribution to the world is YOU. We humans don't do well when we defer maintenance on ourselves. We need to sustain the relationships that bring us connection and meaning; we must get enough sleep and rest when we are tired; and we need to spend time having fun and playing, just for the joy of it.

Don't be confused: Self-care is not selfish.

3. Find healthy ways to comfort yourself

One of the most important ways we can invest in ourselves is to comfort ourselves in healthy ways. When we feel uncertain or insecure, our brain tries to rescue us by activating our dopamine systems. This dopamine rush encourages us to seek rewards, making temptations more tempting.

Think of this as your brain pushing you toward a comfort item ... like an extra glass of wine instead of a reasonable bedtime. Or the entire pan of brownies. Or an extra little something in your Amazon cart.

Make a list of healthy ways to comfort yourself. Can you put on a mask and go for a hike or walk with a neighbor? Schedule a call with a friend? Reflect on what you're grateful for? Let yourself take a nap? Watch a funny YouTube video?

4. Don't believe everything you think

Perhaps the most essential stress-reduction tactic that anyone has ever taught me is not to believe everything I think. In uncertain times, it's particularly important not to believe thoughts that argue for the worst-case scenario.

Instead of buying into every stressful thought, we can actively imagine the best possible scenario too. We can find silver linings to replace ruminations. This counters our natural tendency to overestimate risks and negative consequences.

5. Pay attention

The opposite of uncertainty is not certainty; it's presence. Instead of imagining a scary and unknown future, we can bring our attention to our breath. From there, we can check in with ourselves.

Even when it feels like everything is out of our control, we can still control what we pay attention to. We can turn off our alerts to keep the news or social media from hijacking our awareness. We can drop our ruminations and negative fantasies by attending to what's actually happening in our inner world, right now, right here in the present.

6. Stop looking for someone to rescue you

When we act as though we are powerless, we get trapped in narratives that leave us feeling angry, helpless and trapped. And we start hoping other people will save us from our misery.

Rescuers tend to give us permission to avoid taking responsibility for our own lives. On the other hand, emotionally supportive friends (or therapists) see us as capable of solving our own problems. They ask questions that help us focus on what we do want instead of what we don't.

7. Find meaning in the chaos

When we see something that needs improvement, our next step is to recognize what we personally can do to be a part of the solution. What skills and talents (or even just interests) can we bring to the issue? What really matters to us, and how can we be of service?

Don't just wait for this ordeal to be over. Don't be resigned to your misery while we wait for a vaccine or for the pandemic to ease. What have you always wanted to do? What outcome are you hoping for? How can you make a real life during this time? Live *that* life.



One Day At a Time by Susan Miller



I listened to Karen's story as she recounted the details. They just moved to a new city. It was a new beginning, a new job, and a chance to start over. She settled her children in their new school, her husband started his new job, and they even found a new church home. All seemed right with their world.

Karen's husband started having severe headaches and she finally talked him into going to the doctor. After numerous tests, they discovered he had a brain tumor in the worst possible place in his brain. Surgery removed as much as possible, but not all of the tumor. Then another surgery . . . and another.

He could no longer work. He spent most of his days in bed or at a doctor's appointment. Within months, their whole world had changed.

When I spoke to Karen, her voice was calm and strong. I sensed a peace and inner strength that could only come from a deep faith and trust in God. "My husband is in God's hands," she said. "We are depending on God one day at a time...."

One day at a time. Isn't that what we all aspire to? Take life one day at a time? Depend on God to get us through each day?

Only the knowledge that God is with us in all things will keep us out of the pit of despair. It is only through the power of God that we have the strength to take the next step and resist discouragement and hopelessness. Being aware of our need for Him when the unexpected happens connects us to His presence and keeps our focus on Him rather than on our circumstances.

This is how Karen faces each step of their journey with illness.

This is how you can get through difficult times too, by depending on God, one day at a time....

Join an *After the Boxes Are Unpacked* study group!

When you're new to your community, it's common to feel disconnected and isolated without local friendships and support.

An *After the Boxes Are Unpacked* study group connects you to other women who have been uprooted by a move, gets the conversation going about emotional realities, and offers practical ideas and paths to spiritual growth as you begin a new stage of life in a new town. Going through the study with others who understand what you're going through is a lifeline when you're new in town.



Get Connected!

Join the Just Moved Community and the Just Moved Community Facebook group

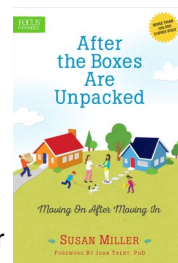
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Connect with other uprooted women at www.facebook.com/groups/JustMovedCommunity

THE essential resource for every woman who's been uprooted by a move

For more than 25 years, *After the Boxes are Unpacked* has helped thousands of uprooted women face a move with greater peace, hope, and trust in God.

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