

MINISTERIAL INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

SEMINAR I

**Theme: “The Mission and Ministry of the
Pentecostal Church”**

Today’s Christian Woman in Transition

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INTRODUCTION

Many women are profoundly aware of the world of change in which they are living out their lives. The many changes which have taken place since 1940 show two distinct faces to contemporary women, with the faces looking in opposite directions.

One face of change is negative and could be called “the destroyer.” In this aspect, change brings loss, grief, depression, and anxiety. The other side of change is positive and could be called “the transformer.” In this aspect, change brings the hope of new beginnings and the excitement and challenge of new opportunity and new experience.

Most women find themselves confronted by both aspects of change, often simultaneously. In many life experiences—having babies, sending the last child to school, passing a fortieth birthday, entering or leaving the labor force, or becoming a grandmother—women often feel strongly both the loss of the familiar and the anticipation or anxiety of the new.

These times of transition are the best times for some and the worst times for others. Therefore, the impact of change upon the mental health of women is varied. It is a time of exodus in which women must select what to keep and what to leave behind. In such a time of change, deciding what is significant is sometimes confusing. The emotional cost of living in

these times of transition is very high for women. Women face tension and dilemma from several issues of change and transition. These issues cluster around work, education, and family.

There is much in our lives over which we seem to have little or no control—the family into which we were born, the way we were reared as children, the lives and choices of those nearest us, the inevitable advance of age and death. The Biblical promise “We shall all be changed” sometimes sounds more like a threat than a promise!

First, we will look at the predictable transitions and the pains of progress, then we will look at the prescription for the pain of overloaded lives and the prognosis of a new paradigm for Christian women.

I. The Predictable Transitions

Nothing in our lives ever really remains the same. We seem always to be enmeshed in a process of change, sometimes traumatic or unexpected, sometimes welcome and refreshing. With alarming regularity, our lives shift purely by the passing of time, but the increasing pressures of modern-day life make it difficult to find stability anywhere we look.

Picking up the pieces of our shattered dreams and painful memories is difficult. It is predictable that as we live out our “life scripts” and move through the passages of various stages of life, we will be confronted with all sorts of change.

As children, we are able to see life as full of wonderful opportunities for growth and change. As adults, we need a faith in God that will enable us to face the coming

changes with hope and encouragement. Life is a mixture of the old and the new; the stable and the dynamic; the changing and the changeless.

Unless we prepare ourselves spiritually and emotionally for the transitions of life and ministry, we will become stuck in pain, disappointment, and depression. I am convinced that it is God's desire to "do infinitely more (for us) than we can ask or think..." (Ephesians 3:20).

Certain events or situations in life are predictable based on our choices. Our daily lives revolve around making choices. Many of these choices may seem insignificant even though they are far-reaching. We need to take care that the choices we make change our lives for the better.

There are three (3) typical or predictable responses to change. Our response can be to resist (a resister); to tolerate (an adaptor); or to embrace change (an innovator).

- ***A Resister***

We dig in our heels and refuse to accept change. There is a time and place to be a resister and never compromise principles or support some changes.

- ***An Adaptor***

We must know when it is right to tolerate and even adapt to change. The changes we accept and adapt to must never be changes which will violate our conscience or destroy our purpose in life.

- ***An Innovator***

An adaptor will embrace change and seek to be transformed for the better. An innovator will bring about positive change and leadership to encourage others to follow.

Emotional maturity and resilience is necessary in order to adjust to the transitions of life that are difficult but necessary for our growth. People are living longer, facing more career changes, and modifying their expectations of what it means to live a productive life.

Typical Times of Transitions

We bring more away from high school than our senior yearbook. We carry into our adult lives many of the patterns and beliefs we gain between the teen years and young adult life. High school reunions may cause us great anxiety. Flora Wuellner wrote, "Only the very rich and very thin actually want to attend their school reunions."

Each decade of life tends to generate in people a different sense of purpose. For example:

- Young Adults – Questioning and challenging the status quo
- Thirties & Forties – Building for the future
- Fifties & Sixties – Preserving tradition

Morris Massey says that what we are is where we were when we became an adult. He says that the way we relate to change is influenced by what decade we turned twenty years old. If we reached adulthood in the:

- **1950s – “The Suspicious Decade”**

You were taught to be suspicious of change.

- **1960s – “The Angry Decade”**

The sedate world of the fifties was turned upside down by civil rights, Vietnam, flower power, and the Beatles. The philosophy of nonconformity and “do your own thing” turned many people away from churches and religion. For those now in their forties, change means looking for stability in life.

- **1970s & 1980s – “The Money Decade”**

These decades brought a return to materialistic values. The seventies saw young adults seeking money to fill the emptiness brought about in the sixties. People lost confidence in what change could do and they became filled with apathy and greed. The seventies led to the “Me Decade” of the eighties when Americans complacently pursued self-centered goals of pleasure, immorality, and materialism while the world was radically changing.

- **1990s – “The Electronic Decade”**

For young adults, the nineties brought perhaps the most dramatic changes ever with the internet, cell phones, examples of great financial

successes such as Bill Gates, Sam Walton, Oprah Winfrey. The nineties raised the level of moral issues by the examples of people like Madonna, Howard Stern, Ellen DeGeneres, and Bill Clinton.

In the 1990s, young adults were looking for some way to establish and maintain meaningful relationships as evidenced by the most popular television shows of the nineties: Cheers, Seinfeld, Friends, ER, Frasier, and Home Improvement.

By the end of the nineties, in the United States, violence had become a key issue for young adults. By the year 2000, in the USA each day an average of fifty-three died by homicide, eighty-four committed suicide, three hundred attempted suicide, and 18,000 are assaulted.

The United States has ten times the number of homicides each year than the combined total of France, Canada, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Finland, and the United Kingdom.

Developmental research has clearly identified the following three (3) typical times of transition:

- **Young Adults (17-24 years of age)**

During young adult years, people begin to seriously explore and define values like commitment, fidelity, intimacy, and integrity. These qualities begin to influence their lives more and more.

- **Adults (24-40 years of age)**

It is during this stage of life when the multiple challenges of having children and managing the many changes and complications of parenthood are experienced. Parenthood increases conflict, stress, anxiety as well as increased financial pressure.

For a woman the stresses of this stage of life usually come primarily from the responsibility of motherhood along the possible career changes or interruptions. A woman's stresses are sometimes increased because of marital conflict and possibly divorce. Divorce puts the mother into the role of single parent often with the unfair burden of the primary financial support of a child or children.

During the early adult years, men often put their work before the needs of their family and women often put their children above their marriage. Therefore, the husband/wife relationship becomes sick and couples grow apart.

Husbands and wives must seek to:

- cling to love after reality strikes
- childproof their marriage
- recognize failures and unrealistic expectations
- renew their marriage contract
- maintain reasonable expectations
- commit to never give up trying
- maintain an individual identity along with the marriage identity

- overcome the now-or-never syndrome
- practice true forgiveness
- maintain a loving and intimate relationship

- **Midlife (40s & 50s)**

At this point in life, we look at what we have achieved and begin to reflect on its meaning, both for the present and for the future. Part of the task of midlife is to discover that we can change the self-destructive patterns of behavior, rather than simply resign ourselves to the negative consequences of these behaviors.

The classic example of midlife crisis is the middle-aged married man who tries to make up for the lost romantic opportunities of his youth by pursuing intimacy with a much younger woman. Women often take a second look at their options as well. Many assert their independence and creativity much more strongly during this time of transition.

Midlife can destroy all a person has lived for up to that point or it can help define the success which lies ahead. A person close to, or in, his/her forties needs to realize the following important idea about adult development:

The greatest time of productivity and impact begins at about forty-five years of age.

A person under forty-five, is in a time of preparation and training for his/her greatest years of productivity.

- **Late adult years (60s)**

These late adult years are a time of reflection and consolidation of experiences and planning for a life of quality in one's elder years. Transitions will continue to take place in our adult lives regardless of age, education, or background. And don't expect smooth sailing! Be prepared for white water rapids, all the way!

II. The Pains of Progress

America has been a place where men and women have enjoyed the best of everything available in the world. Yet our failures are also many. We have the highest rate of divorce, teenage pregnancy, illicit drug abuse, crime, homicides, AIDS, immorality, and more garbage than anyone else.

If progress is so wonderful, why are we so plagued with problems? Forty years ago, the discipline problems in school were talking, chewing gum, etc. Today it is rape, robbery, assault, and drug abuse. Some forty years of progress!

Eighty years ago we had no national debt. Today, we have a 7.4 trillion dollar debt (September 04) that is out of control. Our modern world finds itself tumbling from crisis to crisis.

Progress has not brought us fewer crises but more crises. Each day we awake to a world that appears more confused and disordered than the one we left the night before. It seems that our solutions create even greater problems.

Many Christian women today feel overwhelmed with the pains of progress. Many are depressed, stressed and exhausted. Some are desperate for help! Their jobs are

insecure, their finances are in crises. They are over their heads in debt (2004 average card debt per household is \$8,400). Their marriages are in trouble (forty-three percent of marriages will end in divorce). Their sons are using drugs, and their daughters are getting pregnant. These women don't know what to do or where to turn. The promise of progress has soured into epidemic pain.

To lay all the blame for our woes on progress is unfair. Most of the blame belongs on us humans. If progress gave us the gun, we pulled the trigger. Perhaps the question is "Are we building a better world – or simply nourishing evil?"

Progress has given us new ways to express our hostility; our cynicism; our greed; our decadence; our discontent; our lust; our pride. Trying to solve humans' problems by giving them more power is like trying to tame a wolf by letting it play with a lamb.

The biggest failure of progress has been its inability to nurture and protect right relationships. Progress has brought wealth, technology, knowledge, and materialism to the world. But our pains result from our relationships, our emotions, and our spiritual needs.

The problems facing Christian women today are real, systemic, serious, and unprecedented. Without the power of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives, we have no hope of dealing with the pain we face.

Christian women who are in ministry or whose spouse is a clergyman need to be aware of how some leaders are more a part of the problem and pain than the solution. Some leaders quickly grow impatient with the talk of stress, burnout, and depression. Instead of helping, they challenge the weak to quit the whining and get with the program.

They love stress and seem to thrive by living on the edge. They eat, breathe, and sleep adrenaline. Productivity and numerical growth are the goals, not living. Even these driven leaders have their limits, as they will eventually learn.

III. The Prescription for the Pain of Overloaded Lives

One of the common things that happens to us human beings is that we try to avoid pain and we are drawn toward pleasure. We need a sense of purpose at all times. If we have purpose, we are able to put pain and pleasure into proper perspective. We will be able to see the profit in pain, and at the same time, not feel guilty about enjoying pleasure. Perspective gives us that balance. But we can't have perspective without a clear and positive purpose or reason for living.

James 1:2-4 tells us that we should develop a positive view to the trials and tests which come into our lives. These very trials and tests produce in us stability and maturity. Pain can have a positive benefit and produce something in us that pleasure never can.

There is no painless entrance into a new phase of life. Each transition in life can be to some degree an upsetting or traumatic experience. The prescription for the pain of overloaded lives in these times of transition is to increase our **margin** and **balance** in life. Increasing our margin means to increase our spiritual and emotional reserves. Also, it is learning to always hold in reserve strength, time, energy, and patience for unexpected contingencies or situations. This requires developing the power of resilience and optimism.

It has now become urgent and essential that Christian women create a margin between themselves and their limits. We can't keep living in a state of overload. If we were equipped with a flashing light to indicate "100 percent full," we could better gauge our capacities. The problem is that we usually don't know how overextended we are until we feel the pain. It is rare to see a life prescheduled to only eighty percent, leaving a margin for responding to the unexpected.

A. Power Minus Load

We have, probably, all heard of the "Peter Principle" which says that a person can be promoted to a position beyond their strengths and abilities.

Power is made up of factors such as skills, time, emotional strength, physical strength, spiritual vitality, finances, social supports, and education. **Load** combines internal factors such as personal expectations and emotional weaknesses and external factors such as work, relational problems and responsibilities, financial obligations, and community/family involvement.

When our load is greater than our power, we enter into negative margin status and we are overloaded. When these stresses are endured long term, we might experience burnout.

B. Margins Needed in Four Areas

1. Margin in Emotional Energy

When we are emotionally resilient, we can confront our problems with a sense of hope and power. Emotional overload saps our strength,

paralyzes our resolve, and maximizes our vulnerability, leaving the door open for even further stress related complications.

We begin each day with a certain measure of emotional energy. For some, this energy reservoir is huge, while for others it stays near empty. One thing is certain, the amount of emotional energy within us is finite. No one has an infinite capacity for emotional stress/pain. When our reserves are depleted, they are depleted. This is why a life of faith and trust in God is so important. However, if we fail to turn to Him in the moments of weakness and distress, we will pay the consequences.

It is our responsibility to trust God and to keep a margin in our lives so we will not experience failures of self-control during times of emotional distress. The use of tranquilizers has become so prevalent that for decades they have been near the top of the list of most widely prescribed drugs. As one observer commented, "Millions of suburbanites seems to find that, 'the good life' is only endurable under sedation."

When major tranquilizers appeared on the scene in the 1960s, there was great hope. Finally, there was a prescription to soothe our frazzled nerves. The disillusionment came when we realized that while these drugs did assist in controlling symptoms, they did not cure the underlying problems.

What can a woman do when she finds that her emotional energy is gone? How can she get it back? The following are prescriptions that work; take as needed.

- **Rx #1 – Cultivate a network of social support**

Cultivate an interpersonal network of support within a loving church and within our families.

- **Rx #2 – Reconcile relationships**

True reconciliation is one of the most powerful of all human interactions. For the child of God, there is access to the healing power of the Spirit. Through our brokenness, emptiness, and humility, God comes ever close to us as we yield to him and confess our wrongs.

- **Rx #3 – Serve one another**

Doing nothing for others is the undoing of one's self. If we are not by nature kind and generous, we miss out on the best part of life. Altruistic behavior improves the quality of our lives.

- **Rx #4 – Rest**

Be with people and serve them, but be sure to get away from them occasionally. Escape; relax; sleep in; take a nap; unplug the phone; enjoy a walk and don't take your beeper.

When we feel emotionally exhausted, we need to find a quiet solitude and time to rest. These times are just as important as productive times. Remember, rest restores.

- **Rx #5 – Laugh**

Humor is a medicine. It tastes better than pills, it works, and it costs less. Four year old children laugh on an average of ever four minutes. Try laughing every four minutes, we need it.

- **Rx #6 – Cry**

Sometimes we laugh so hard we cry. Other times we just cry. Crying can be a form of healing and emotional release. According to some studies, those who cry more often get sick less often. A good cry usually lasts six or seven minutes and releases a burdensome load of emotional pollution.

- **Rx #7 – Create appropriate boundaries**

The inability to say no and to protect our privacy robs us of our margin. It is wise to understand that some people simply are not sensitive to boundaries. There can be an absence of malice but a presence of self-centeredness.

To be able to say no without guilt is to be freed from one of the biggest monsters in our overburdened lives.

Boundary deficits are disabling. People with unclear boundaries can find themselves making commitments under pressure that they would never make with a clear head. If we do not learn to say no, we will never regain proper margins.

- **Rx #8 – Envision a better future**

We must have a transcendent vision: a hopeful, spiritually valid expectation of what the future holds. We all must have a purpose bigger than ourselves for which we can live. Today, so many people have lost a sense of vision and tend to live aimlessly in a black hole.

- **Rx #9 – Offer thanks**

We have much for which to be thankful because we have a loving God watching over us. If we really look around, we can see a lot of beauty, love, kindness, and nobility. Remember, gratitude fills and discontent drains. The choice is truly ours.

- **Rx #10 – Be rich in faith**

The faith of Godly fathers and mothers that has successfully withstood many great trials is the same faith that leads us safely through contemporary dangers, toils, and snares. Faith in God can withstand anything. When the

hammers of doubt have rusted, the anvil of faith will yet endure. When all else fails, faith remains. Perhaps the most vital ingredient of resilience is faith!

2. Margins in Physical Energy

A large percentage of Americans are sadly out of shape and have diminished physical energy reserves because of poor health. Many mothers suffer from chronic sleep-deprivation due to children and jobs. Others are in poor health due to obesity, injuries, or disease.

The Center for Disease Control estimates that more than fifty percent of all deaths are related to lifestyle choices. Self-destructive lifestyle pathologies (such as severe stress, sexually transmitted diseases, drug abuse, smoking, or alcohol abuse) makes medicine a secure profession.

Some prescriptions to help us take steps to reverse our self-induced body deterioration include the following:

- **Rx #1 – Take personal responsibility for health**
- **Rx #2 – Change our habits**
- **Rx #3 – Choose to get enough rest/sleep**
- **Rx #4 – Don't oversleep**
- **Rx #5 – Take naps**
- **Rx #6 – Decrease intake of fat and sugars and maintain a healthy diet**

- **Rx #7 – Avoid overeating and drink a lot of water**
- **Rx #8 – Exercise wisely and often**
- **Rx #9 – Get a complete physical**
- **Rx #10 – Seek to know our body**

We need to give our bodies a chance! Be patient and persistent in exercise, weight loss, and diet.

3. Margins in Time

Thirty years ago, futurists peering into their crystal balls predicted that one of the biggest problems for coming generations would be deciding what to do with their abundant spare time. Some time back, they stopped talking about this idea. According to a Harris Survey, the amount of leisure time enjoyed by the average American has decreased thirty-seven percent since 1973. Progress was believed to be leisure-permitting and time-gifting. The opposite has been true. The spontaneous flow of progress is toward decreasing stress complexity and overload. It is to consume more and more of our time, not less; to consume more of our margin, not less.

The marginless lifestyles and their resultant chronic time pressures are particularly devastating to our relationships – even our relationship with God. We jump at the alarm of a clock, but we sleep through the call of the Almighty. Progress tricked us into trusting it—then it exhausted us.

But we are not helpless. Time margin can be built into our lives if we take the following steps to restore sanity to our schedules.

- **Rx #1 – Expect the unexpected**

Nearly everything takes longer than anticipated.

- **Rx #2 – Learn to say no**

- **Rx #3 – Turn off the television**

The average adult watches up to thirty hours of television per week.

- **Rx #4 – Prune some activities off our schedule**

- **Rx #5 – Practice simplicity and contentment**

- **Rx #6 – Develop long-term vision**

Living from week-to-week is like a dot-to-dot life.
Make some long-term goals and plans.

- **Rx #7 – Get less done, but do the right things**

- **Rx #8 – Build and relish positive memories**

- **Rx #9 – Don't rush wisdom**

We do need to be wise and decisive. However, the more important the decision, the slower it should be made along with deliberations.

- **Rx:10 – Create buffer zones, and plan for free time**

Remember, life is a journey not a race. God never intended for time to oppress us, dictating our every move. Regaining margins in our use of time is one way of restoring freedom from overloaded lives.

4. Margins in Finances

There is a serious financial crisis in our world today. The federal government, state governments, and families are all swimming in the same red ink. Median family income (adjusted for inflation) has been stalled for three decades, according to the United States Department of Commerce. It is little wonder that the lack of money is the leading stressor among families.

What has happened is that income has stagnated while expenses kept rising. The financial margin of many families has vanished, along with many dreams.

Many people see no way out. They have been treading water so long that they can't remember what it was like to have money left at the end of the month. With God's help and wise actions there is hope. Here are some prescriptions to help restore margins to our finances.

- **Rx #1 – Put first things first**

We must first of all settle the issue of Lordship by putting God first in our lives.

- **Rx #2 – Determine to live within our income**

We must learn to live within our boundaries and find contentment with what God sends our way rather than pining for greener grass on the other side of the fence.

- **Rx #3 – Discipline desires and re-define needs**

Our true needs are few and basic. Much of what we call needs are really desires. God is generous and gracious to give us many of our desires. We need to focus on godly priorities.

- **Rx #4 – Decrease spending**

One of the wisest and quickest ways we can increase our financial margin is to reduce our spending, especially on excessive finance charges of credit cards.

- **Rx #5 – Increase income**

Increasing our income usually requires working longer hours or a second job. This may be necessary for a time, but remember it will be at a high price of any discretionary time you now have for family and yourself.

- **Rx:6 – Increase savings**

Most people fail God by not saving and keeping a cash reserve for times of need. Probably only a few are

guilty of hoarding money. God does want us to be channels of blessings with a giving spirit. Without question, it is a fact that too many people have large debts and little, if any, savings.

- **Rx:7 – Make a budget and stick to it**

- **Rx:8 – Don't abuse credit cards**

Only use credit cards if the balance can be paid in full each month, in order to avoid paying high interest.

- **Rx:9 – Don't mortgage the future**

Most people have a house payment and car payments; the key is to be careful to buy and finance only what you can afford.

- **Rx:10 – Resist impulses and fashion games**

Resist impulsive buying and getting caught in trying to keep up with what others have obtained. Learn to shop less, use what is in the freezer, and wear out what you have in the closet. A plaque on Grandma's wall said, "Use it up. Wear it out. Make it do. Do without."

IV. The Prognosis of a New Paradigm for Christian Women

In the midst of this changing and complex world, Christian women must find a lifestyle of faith, contentment, and spiritual strength. These require that we live by a new paradigm—one that creates a margin in all areas.

Discontent is a destructive driving force that will bankrupt us eventually. Contentment is not only a good idea, it is our duty. God commands us to be content and says that contentment with godliness is great gain.

Often our quest has not been for contentment but for more material possessions. This carnal, materialistic quest causes us to covet and lust for things. What we all need is what so few ever find and that is “godliness with contentment.” Contentment is not complacency, but peace.

CONCLUSION

There are those predictable transitions in a woman's life and deep pains of overloaded burdens. God has given us prescriptions for the pain and a pattern for stability and contentment. He calls us to live out a new paradigm designed to bring satisfaction and peace.

You may ask, “How do I achieve this contentment and implement these prescriptions?” Start with making these actions a matter of priority. Priority thinking requires balancing our lives and our use of time. Insist on the cooperation of your spouse in making the necessary changes.

Ration time wisely. Learn to say no and avoid overloads. Get control of life and place God at the center of all things. Find balance in life and allow those around the freedom to achieve God-honoring balance and margins in their own lives.

Balance is necessary and attainable, but not easy. We will work hard to please the Master, resting confidently knowing that He understands our condition and our needs.