

*"Gail's insightful concept of CrossWise Living
changed the way I think about
trials and life transitions."*

— LYNN VINCENT
New York Times best-selling writer
of *Same Kind of Different As Me*

— Living — CrossWise

hope and help for navigating transition

GAIL BONES

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INTRODUCTION

*Beware of harking back to what you were
when God wants you to be something you have never been.
— Oswald Chambers*

Stories of heartache and hardship flooded my inbox. Not the kind you might receive from a stranger in Nigeria who misspells the word money as he asks you to send him lots of it, but real stories told by real people. I received more than a hundred responses to an anonymous survey in which I had asked a series of questions about life's most difficult transitions. Whether fresh out of school or way past retirement, each person shared painful details about the tough times they'd been through. I was astonished by the enormous struggle and emotional turmoil these good people had endured in the course of an ordinary, middle-class life. I remembered some advice I'd seen on a classroom poster: "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle." Here was some solid evidence that this was true.

Loss of loved ones, unemployment, moving, illness, adjusting to an empty nest, and caring for aging parents figured heavily in the pain of adjustment. Not surprisingly, divorce had caused the most destruction because it hurt not only the spouses, but their parents and children as well. Even happy changes, like graduation or marriage, produced unexpected challenges.

This much was clear: Change is hard. Life is uncertain.

While their sorrow touched my heart, their responses to my other questions stirred my soul. How had they managed to cope with life's hardships? While their songs may have been sung in a minor key, I could still hear the ringing overtones of hope. My other questions—What did you gain? What did you learn? What helped you most during your transition?—revealed a universal thread. Supportive relationships had enabled them to survive and even to thrive. Mentors, friends, and family members loved them through the turmoil and helped them grow.

Even more important, those who had turned to God found him to be their "refuge and strength," their "ever-present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1). In story after story, their lives illustrated the truths expressed in Ecclesiastes 4:9, 12:

“Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed” and “A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.” Simply put, we all need help, both human and divine.

Life in Transition

No one escapes it. You will always be recovering from, experiencing, or facing life-altering changes. Of course, not all transitions are tough; sometimes you welcome a new season, rejoicing that God is doing something fresh and exciting in your life. If it is your good fortune to be sitting in that enviable seat today, I urge you to make the most of these fleeting moments because, as Robert Frost reminds us, “Nothing gold can stay.”¹

More often than not, however, in times of transition difficulties predominate. When the change you are experiencing is one you neither expected nor desired, your life is “going crosswise”—moving in a manner contrary to what you’d intended. Flux and uncertainty often generate confusion, anxiety, or fear. This is true even if your faith in God is strong. Have you ever noticed how many times in the Bible we are told not to be afraid or worry? Jesus spoke these words of reassurance because he understands that even his most devoted followers wrestle with fear and doubt. If you’re struggling as you face the unknown and unfamiliar, you’re not alone.

Getting Your Bearings

Where are you now in life’s ever-changing journey? Do you feel as though you’re sailing on a dark sea with no clearly marked paths or even stars to steer by? Do you sincerely desire God’s will, but feel confused about what that might be? Are you waiting, tired and discouraged, wondering where this is all going to end?

Maybe you’ve already learned what lies ahead. While it’s not the port of call you had hoped for, you must now learn to accept, endure, and embrace it. You’re looking to God for answers that will help you understand how to carry on despite difficulty or disappointment.

Or perhaps you’re still exploring the possibility that the Bible is true. Is there really a living Savior who loves you? The uncertainties you face draw

your attention to Jesus. This difficult transition may well be the time when you experience a peace that transcends human understanding.

Living CrossWise

One day, out on a sailboat, I stumbled on a new way to look at transition. When I lost my job, my life's direction veered sharply from the path I had thought would lead me to happiness, and I felt discouraged that my life was now going crosswise. However, during my first sailing lesson—a new hobby I was taking up to console myself—I learned an entirely different meaning for that term. I discovered that in order to reach my destination, I needed to turn my vessel crosswise, which in this case meant, “on the diagonal,” to the wind. In this context, going crosswise meant I was making progress! Intrigued by the dual meaning of this word, I consulted a dictionary and was delighted to find yet a third meaning: “in the shape of a cross.”

Suddenly, it came to me like a fresh breeze—when my life starts going crosswise, living CrossWise will enable me to get crosswise to the winds of the Holy Spirit so I can continue making progress toward God's destination for me.

According to *Strong's Concordance*, the Greek word *pneuma* can refer either to the wind or to the Holy Spirit. When we live CrossWise, we open our lives to the Holy Spirit, like sails unfurled and empowered by the wind. As you read the breeze and trim your sails, you will also be relying on one fixed point, one North Star, to guide your difficult journey. As you navigate changing tides and stormy seas, you can cling to God's promise: “When you go through deep waters, I will be with you” (Isaiah 43:2 NLT).

I have traveled a zigzag path from high school cheerleader to homeless hippie to evangelical college professor. God moved me out of a musical career singing in bars and gave me new songs of praise and a ministry as a worship leader. As a new Christian, I met a godly man and we've been married now for more than thirty years. The strength of our vows has been tested; we've been richer and poorer, endured debilitating, life-altering sickness and enjoyed renewed health. God's grace has truly been sufficient.

In the pages ahead, I illustrate some of life's stages with stories about my own transitions—times when I could most clearly see God at work in my life. I hope by telling them to bring him glory. I am wearing my heart on my sleeve,

simply going first, so that you will feel free to open up and share your stories with those taking this journey of discovery with you. I pray that your reflections and discussions will underscore the truth that God is always working in your life for your good.

Welcome Aboard

God's Word contains an extraordinary promise: "Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name" (Malachi 3:16 NIV). I hope you will feel a rich sense of God's pleasure as you begin this journey. As you take the courageous step to launch out into these deep waters, I pray that his Word will encourage your heart and renew your strength.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

PART ONE of this volume includes a 12-week Bible study/discussion guide for use by small groups, mentoring pairs, or individuals.

PART TWO (INWARD INVENTORY) provides exercises for personal growth and clarity during times of transition.

PART THREE (CROSSWISE CONNECTION) contains the Leaders Guide and questions for intergenerational CrossWise Growth Groups.

CORE CONCEPTS OF LIVING CROSSWISE

Three Kinds of Questions, Three Essential Practices

Standing straight and tall, lift both arms straight out to the side so your body forms the shape of the cross. Tilt your head back so your gaze is skyward. Three aspects of this pose will help you recall the three essential practices of living CrossWise.

1. Asking God Through *Pinpoint Prayer*

As you stand in this position, with your eyes fixed on the heavens, you acknowledge God as the provider of all you need. James 1:5 (NLT) says, “If any of you lack wisdom, ask our generous God and he will give it to you. And he will not rebuke you for asking.” The first element in living CrossWise is described in chapter 2, “Pinpoint Prayer,” which will help you start a very specific kind of prayer journal.

2. Asking Yourself Through *Inward Inventory*

Next look to your feet and the ground where you stand. Most of your body will be visible as you sweep your gaze downward. This is a reminder of the importance of self-examination. Jeremiah 6:16 says, “This is what the LORD says: ‘Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.’”

The second element in living CrossWise involves self-reflection. What paths have brought you to the crossroads you face today? Are your feet planted on a firm foundation? What roots lying below the surface are holding you fast, making it difficult for you to move forward? What options can you consider as you face this particular crossroads? What practical steps can you take to move on? In this step, you will review your past, analyze your present, and seek a vision for your future. Through the discipline of directed journaling, you will

answer questions enabling you to systematically sort through your concerns. These activities are located in Part Two.

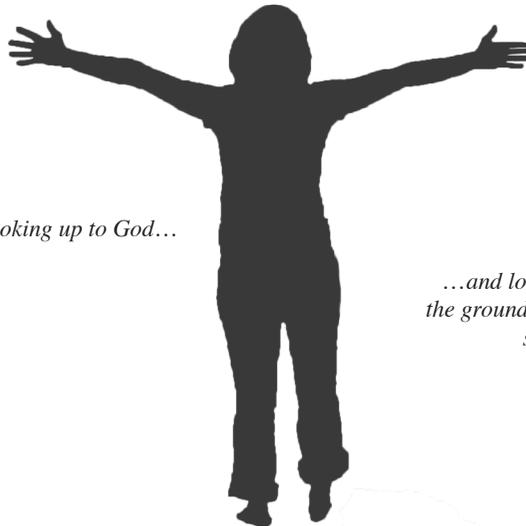
3. Asking Others Through *CrossWise Connection*

Finally, as you stand with your arms outstretched, you are reaching in opposite directions. The third element in living CrossWise involves extending both hands—one to the generation that has gone before and the other to the generation that is coming behind. Each group has something to teach you, and you have something to teach them. The biblical model is to mentor and be mentored. Many of the stories in this book illustrate the beautiful way God uses the love and wise counsel of others to enrich our lives.

Living CrossWise encourages you to form cross-generational relationships. In this book you will find instruction on how to start and structure CrossWise Growth Groups. Becoming part of such a community enables you to bring your concerns to people committed to helping each other navigate times of transition. You will learn a powerful method for seeking and sharing godly wisdom called CrossWise Counsel. The questions for your CrossWise Growth Group are in Part Three.

*Reaching out to those who
have gone before...*

*Reaching out to those who
are coming behind...*



Looking up to God...

*...and looking down to
the ground upon which we
stand.*

9

A SIMPLE FEAST OF FRIENDSHIP

*May the meals that I prepare be seasoned from above,
With Thy great blessings and Thy Grace, but most of all, Thy love.
So bless my little kitchen, Lord, and those who enter in,
May they find naught but joy and peace and happiness therein.
— Kitchen Prayer*

It's the day after Thanksgiving. Hordes of bargain hunters have set their alarms for the wee hours of the morning and have arisen with a mission. Although I'm not above such frenzied commerce, today I nod in its direction and pass it by. This day off is a blank check, and I will not spend it in spending.

I'm thinking about last week's sermon about the brevity of our lives. As I consider my options, I am wondering: What can I do today that will count for eternity? The rest of my family has scattered, having places to go, people to see, and things to do. I just have the rare gift of an unscheduled day stretching before me. I want to use it wisely and well.

I spend a few moments writing in my prayer journal, hoping for some specific leading from God, and then drift down to the kitchen to deal with the turkey leftovers. While I chop and slice, I enjoy the virtuous feeling of using leftovers to create a giant pot of fragrant and savory soup. Turkey bones make a much richer broth than anything that comes in a can, so this soup could quite possibly be remarkable. I'm not using a recipe; I'm creating something out of what I have available, tossing in a pinch of this and dash of that. There has never been a soup exactly like it before, and I could not reproduce it if I tried.

I do the same with the bread. Having pulled the bread machine out of deep storage, I mix whole-wheat flour with other ingredients I think will be beneficial—a dab of honey, a handful of oatmeal, a sprinkle of Parmesan.

Then it dawns on me that the result of my hours of labor—making a soup, a loaf, a salad—will be gone by nightfall. After having intended to spend my day

doing something of lasting value, it turns out I've used up all my discretionary hours back in the kitchen, a place you'd think I'd want to avoid the day after Thanksgiving. I ruefully predict that we'll eat in a hurry and quickly move on to our evening's activities. Did I waste my day after all?

Dinner Is Served

I decide to set the table in the dining room, to use the china and tablecloth I like best, and to add flowers and candles. The feel of this meal starts to change as I find just the right instrumental CD. The arrival of two unexpected but exceedingly welcome guests turns this simple meal into a splendid occasion. As we all squeeze in together around the table, we give thanks to God for both the food and the gift of friendship.

My young visitors, students I've been mentoring, offer up their bowls for seconds, and together we eat every slice of the two loaves of bread I've made. The heartiness and warmth of the meal, coupled with the aesthetic atmosphere, create a moment of intimacy. This makes room for rich conversation about deep matters of the heart and spirit.

The guests leave, and I'm alone again in the kitchen. I review the day—was my effort fruitless after all? What about my lofty plan to spend my time on something that would outlast me? What did I actually accomplish?

The answer comes quickly: nothing tangible, but something meaningful—making a memory, sharing love—celebrating the good gifts of the Lord.

The Story Continues

A few years later, the phone rings and I hear the voice of Mandy, who was one of my visitors on that pleasant evening in November. Married now for two years, she's back in San Diego with her husband, David, for a short visit and wants to drop in for a few minutes that morning before they leave town.

Mandy and David arrive several hours later with their new baby, Judah, who has both a full diaper and an empty tummy. Things always seem to be going crosswise when there's a new baby, and they're running late. I suspect they might be hungry, as it's way past lunchtime, and I'm pleased that they accept my invitation to join Jeff and me for a quick bite before they have to be on the road again. Fortunately, I've developed a new habit now that I'm cooking for just two—whenever I make soup, I double the batch and freeze it.

I dig through the freezer, and find a spicy squash-carrot-red-pepper-onion puree I can quickly defrost. I try to inspire them in the art of thrifty and creative cookery when I tell them I made it one day by just using up every vegetable in my fridge that wasn't green. I call it *Vegetative Virtue* and serve it up steaming hot and topped with a dollop of non-fat Greek yogurt. I hunt down enough goodies to make an interesting salad and manage to find some rice crackers that have not gone stale. Honestly, I couldn't have made anything more ambitious, interesting, or tasty had we planned this meal in advance.

Our conversation is as nourishing as the soup and just as impromptu. We've been building this friendship for years. Mandy had originally been my daughter's friend, but as lovers of literature, we found we were kindred spirits and liked to spend time together hiking or just talking over tea. When she and David started dating, I'd prayed with her about their possible future together. Later, we frankly discussed the real struggles married couples face. And today I'm thrilled to see her glow with maternal joy. She's happy to be at her husband's side as they face the last lap of his long journey toward becoming a missionary doctor. I have abundant reason to thank God for answered prayer.

Jeff and I ask them how their marriage is going. As an older couple who have invested time in this young couple, we feel a responsibility to ask the deeper questions. They look at each other and smile. No, actually, they beam!

They tell us they've been intentional about planning a date once a week where they ask each other certain specific questions. Hearing this, I say, "Great! Demonstrate! Let's do it!"

Two couples, thirty years apart in age, listen and learn from one another as we share our answers to such questions as: What have I done to make you feel loved this week? How can I pursue you romantically this week? How can I pray for you in the week ahead?

Had Jeff and I spent time with another midlife couple, we probably wouldn't have had such a transparent and helpful conversation about marriage. I relish the refreshing openness I find when I spend time with younger people. When members of different generations sit across from one another at an open table of Christian fellowship, all parties stand to gain insight and perspective. When we deliberately cultivate cross-generational relationships, we find the benefits and enjoyment are mutual. To demonstrate, I asked Mandy to write her side of this story.

Mandy's Perspective

Gail is my mother's age, but she is not my mother, an important distinction that means she is able to give me words of wisdom without hanging on my every move to ensure follow-through, and I can give her mine without seeming pert. It is in this safe place of sharing that we have become friends, beginning in my college years, on through my awkward single years, to marrying my ideal husband. Today is important because I am bringing my newborn son for the first time, as well as two full years of marriage to lay on the examining table. But this is not a table swept clean and sterile with scary metal instruments on it. This one is always ready with a meal and steaming cups of tea, the perfect place to dissect a soul.

She and her husband have taken us in at a mealtime, far past when we were supposed to arrive, but her years of warming a house into a home make the full table look effortless. My husband and I with our two years of marriage experience share candidly about a tool we've used to stay connected each week, and get to hear as their thirty-plus years of knitted-together flesh try it on for size. We are all delighted to find: it fits.

While there is no agenda, today's conversation is guided by our stages in life and the projects dearest to our hearts. I am fresh with mothering insight and haven't lost enough sleep yet to feel defeated. She is finding focus in her writing and mentoring in the idea that we flourish when we are rooted in relationships with the generations above and below us.

She calls it crosswise. I get chills as she tells us this—myself and our husbands and my napping baby—perhaps because she is describing my relationships during my happiest seasons, but also because it is happening as we speak. We are crosswise, with our three generations and our intersecting lives. But the moment is not a crescendo to be followed by lesser notes. It is a tree watered and pruned, bearing fruit each season. I never imagined that I would have a fat baby and marriage

lessons to bring to the table, but it is that season for me. Theirs is the season of an open schedule and an open home, without which we would never have had the chance to intersect. But here we are, three generations feasting on the fruit of shared living.

And we are all delighted to find: we fit.

You can enjoy more of Mandy's (Amanda Gervasi Thomas) writing at <http://livelylaughgrow.blogspot.com>

CHAPTER 9: DISCUSSION/JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. What struck you about this week's reading? Talk about any passages you may have underlined. Have you had any similar experiences or felt similar emotions?
2. How do you respond to unexpected guests? Or to the news that in-laws are coming to stay for a while? How willing are you to entertain strangers? In what context would that be appropriate?
3. Write about a time when you were deeply blessed by another's hospitality. What made this occasion so memorable?
4. Are you more like Martha or more like Mary? Do you worry about wasting time? When are you most tempted to waste time? Or are you overly concerned with being productive? How hard is it for you to relax and enjoy simply visiting with company?
5. How do you observe the Sabbath? What are your convictions about how God would want you to spend your time on that day of the week? Is spending time resting and enjoying relaxed meals with loved ones a priority?

CHAPTER 9: BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS

While the story in this chapter discusses hospitality within the ministry of mentoring, the Bible calls for an even more sacrificial form of hospitality.

DAY ONE

1. Read Luke 10:25–37. What acts of service did the Samaritan perform?

2. What lessons about true hospitality do we learn from this story?

DAY TWO

1. Read Luke 10:38–41. What is your reaction to this story?

2. What does Martha do that is, in fact, necessary or commendable?

3. How does Jesus challenge her? How do you imagine his tone of voice as he speaks to her?

4. If Martha were your friend, and she called you to tell you that Jesus and his entourage would be coming to stay for awhile, what practical advice would you give her?

DAY THREE 

1. What do the following verses say about true hospitality? Explain how you could or, perhaps already do, implement these principles in your life.

Romans 12:13

Luke 14:12–14

Hebrews 13:1–3. Have you ever encountered, or wondered if you had encountered an angel?

Acts 2:42

DAY FOUR 

1. Read Luke 7:36–48.

What lessons do you learn about true hospitality from this passage?

What lessons do you learn about loving God from this passage?

What do you learn about Jesus in this passage?

2. Read Matthew 25:34–46.

What lessons do you learn about true hospitality from this passage?

What lessons do you learn about loving God from this passage?

What do you learn about Jesus in this passage?

DAY FIVE



1. What do you learn about true hospitality from each of the following verses?

Matthew 10:40–42

Isaiah.58:7

Mark 9:41

Proverbs 31:20

2. Make a list of concrete ways you and your family or friends could begin to implement some of the practices God calls for in these passages. Come up with a plan to do at least one of them in the next few weeks.

WORDS OF WISDOM

“Hospitality is one form of worship.”

– JEWISH PROVERB

“To give our Lord a perfect hospitality, Mary and Martha must combine.”

– TERESA OF AVILA

“Hospitality means primarily the creation of free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines.”

– HENRI NOUWEN

RELATED READING

Mark Buchanan. *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath*

Edith Schaeffer. *Hidden Art*

Joanna Weaver. *Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World*

MEMORY VERSE

“Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.” (1 Peter 4:9)