

I've faced numerous times when I pondered a transition, either related to graduation from school, a new job possibility, or an invitation from a congregation. Each time I have encountered these potential transitions, I always faced the question, "Will I go...or will I stay?" While I'm considering the possibilities, my family and friends may have asked a similar question, "Will you go...or will you stay?"

When any of us face a possible transition in our lives, our decision ripples into the lives of those around us—those who may rejoice in the transition and new possibilities, and those who mourn the change and sense a loss. I struggled with the question "Will I go or will I stay?" for several months as I considered when to retire, torn between a desire for the flexibility to travel and visit my soon-to-be granddaughter and my love for all of you. It's sometimes hard to choose between two good options.

Moses also seemed to struggle with the transition that he faced, along with all those who had escaped with him from the slavery of the Pharaoh in Egypt. They encountered many challenges—running out of food and water, facing complaints when things didn't

go well, nostalgia that things seemed better before they left, and feelings of insecurity as they made a golden calf to worship.

Transitions are filled with challenges, even if the trip is a short vacation. I remember the times on trips with my children when "Are we there yet?" echoed from the backseat of the car. When I responded that we weren't there yet, the next question was, "How long until we get there?" No matter what answer I provided or how many books I packed for them to read as a distraction from the long car ride, sooner or later one of them would say, "She's looking at me" or "He took my toy" or a similar phrase. You've probably heard such comments, right?

After trying to encourage them to get along, sooner or later I would say something like, "Don't make me pull over to the side of the road." Sometimes I would stop at the nearest exit, just to give myself a chance to get out of the car and walk around, wondering why I even began the trip with two young children.

God and Moses seemed to also experience a similar frustration with those traveling through the

desert, with both God and Moses wanting to pull over alongside the road.

After Moses came down the mountain from receiving the gift of the Ten Commandments from God, Moses found that the people had formed a golden cow to worship as a replacement for God. They had grown tired of waiting for Moses to return.

In response, first God decided to pull alongside the road by telling Moses, “Leave this place and go to another land. I will send a messenger to guide you, but I am not going with you.”

In response, Moses may have wondered, “Will you go with us, or will you really stay here and abandon us?” Moses then needed to pull over and ponder what to do, so he met in a tent for prayer, a place set aside to experience the presence of God. He said to God,

“Look, you’ve been telling me, ‘Lead these people forward.’ But you haven’t told me whom you will send with me. Yet you’ve assured me, ‘I know you by name and think highly of you.’¹³ Now if you do think highly of me, show me your ways so that I may know you and so that you may really approve of me. Remember too that this nation is your people.”¹

Do you feel Moses’ sense of frustration? His weariness at leading these people? God replied, “I will go with you. I will give you rest.”

Think of those times when you’ve felt like pulling alongside the road. Recall those transitions when you’ve wondered, “Will I go...or will I stay?” It can be a confusing time as you sort out all the options and choices in front of you. At these various intersections, how many times have you wondered if God will be with you, especially if you make a mistake or wrong choice of direction?

If you’ve ever wondered whether God will go with you, you’re not alone, for the Bible is filled with stories of faithful people who wondered the same thing. Throughout the Bible, God was always reminding people, “I will be with you.”

In the opening book of the Bible in Genesis, Jacob deceived his brother and father by claiming a blessing that wasn’t his. As he ran into the wilderness to escape, he slept with a stone for a pillow and dreamed of a ladder reaching to heaven. God comforted him, “I am with you and will stay with you wherever you go.”²

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After Moses died and Joshua became the leader of the people, I imagine he felt overwhelmed with the task, but right away God said, “I will be with you; I will not fail you or leave you.”³

Generations later, when God invited the prophet Isaiah to bring words of hope to people in Exile, God offered several times words of promise:

Don't fear, because I am with you;
don't be afraid, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you, I will surely help you;
I will hold you with my righteous strong hand.⁴

And again:

When you pass through the waters, I will be with
you;
when through the rivers, they won't sweep over
you.
When you walk through the fire, you won't be
scorched and flame won't burn you.⁵

In John's Gospel, when Jesus offered his final words to his disciples about many rooms in God's house, he promised to send a Comforter, the Spirit, “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I give to you not as the world gives. Don't be troubled or afraid.”⁶

In Matthew Gospel, after Jesus died and returned to life, he told his followers, “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I've commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.”⁷

When we face those transitions of life, when we fear we may make the wrong step, over and over again, God has promised, “I will be with you”—a promise not just for those of long ago, but a promise for us here today and into the future. Wherever we go, even through the darkest valley, God goes with us.

¹ Exodus 33:12-13, CEB

² Genesis 27—28.

³ Joshua 1.

⁴ Isaiah 41:10, CEB.

⁵ Isaiah 43:2, CEB.

⁶ John 14:27, CEB.

⁷ Matthew 28:19-20, CEB)