



What a Yearling!

Two years ago, as my daughter and I finished reading that semester's literature book, *The Yearling*, my voice unexpectedly left me, mid-sentence. I tried again, but the words were pushing the emotion from my eyes and my voice refused to cooperate. I rolled my eyes at her while I took a deep breath, and she tolerated my pause. I had tearlessly made it to the final sentence and was as surprised as she was as I struggled to speak. It wasn't really the final sentence that stood on my vocal cords, daring me to croak out the few remaining words. It was those words from earlier in the chapter that gripped my mother-soul, and the remembrance of them overwhelmed me.

Yes, I was touched with the significance of that moment, my last child finding her own way from childhood to young adult like the protagonist in the story, but it was more. Yes, the storyline overwhelmed me with the sweet reminders of the other child-to-adult transformations of her siblings, but the ache that caught my heart in my throat was still something else.

The above excerpt, written in 1938, was an uncanny description of that season of our lives: this timeless alone-apart, something where we all feel like we are leaving something we loved but are not sure we treasured enough, while we are wary of what new thing may be ahead. We hang "suspended in a timeless space" where we are not in control of the tempo or the choreography of this dance through present history.

We found ourselves in uncharted emotional, physical, and spiritual waters when we were all pushed into the deep end of "distance learning" and "together-apart" and "shelter-at-home." We faced new first times, scary transitions and questions demanding answers when we had few facts on which to base our replies. In some ways, we sent out a corporate SOS and weren't sure who was going to hear us.

Like tightrope walkers, we had left the security of where we were as a community, with all its beauty and purpose as well as struggle and weaknesses and were headed on a tightrope toward the unknown, whatever was before us. A wire taking us from what we knew, to what was ahead, could only hold us with tension. Rarely do we see transformation in one simple step, and never have I seen it without tension.

We can use that tension and decide that what we left behind was left behind us. No one makes it across the tightrope if she clings to the place she just left. We need to grieve our losses in order to fully celebrate whatever our new normal will be. Goodbyes are hard, but they're harder if one refuses to acknowledge them. The Biblical call to forget "those things which are behind" doesn't mean ignore them (Philippians 3:13). Take the time to close the door on what was, be it a specific grade, an event that was canceled, or the people you've missed.

Stepping across this transition-tightrope with confidence is difficult when we don't always perceive that it is a choice. There will be a surprising crosswind or unexpected gust to make us catch our breath and question whether we can make it through. We know the walk will build our endurance (James 1:2-3). We have the God who knows all the hairs on our heads, and He can show each of us how we ought to educate our children.

One of the satisfactory moments in *The Yearling* is when Jody chooses to selflessly step into his role as a household provider instead of clinging to his irresponsible childhood ways. From the hardships he and his yearling created, a young man emerges and begins to take his place serving instead of being served. Each of us has transitions we must "walk across." May we keep our hearts set on the true prize before us, and remember, even though "transitions may be ugly," there is the opportunity for grace and new maturity for each of us as we live into the person God created us to be.

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