



MOVE

an invitation to notice the movement of God

by Megan Pedersen



INTRODUCTION

God is on the **move**.

He is not stagnant or static. Unchanging, yes. But not asleep. He is never stationary. He desires to move in our lives in mighty ways toward the full, abundant life that he promises to those who place their trust in him.

God is on the **move**.

We sing it. We teach it. We preach it. But do we really believe it? As ministry leaders, when was the last time we stopped to notice **where God is moving** in our own lives?

God uses prophets to call his people to pay attention to where God is moving. He speaks through ordinary people like you and I to bring the message of hope and restoration as people return to the Lord. In the Old Testament, we read over and over again that Israel has moved away from the Lord. They have not kept his commands and decrees. In sin, they have stepped toward idols instead of the Lord. God uses the prophet Isaiah to speak words of truth, wisdom, and hope, encouraging his people to return to the Lord and live in the abundance that he has promised rather than the futility of their life apart from him.

As ministry leaders today, do we not have a similar role? To call people to return to the Lord? To seek his face and follow his ways? But how often do we miss what God is trying to do in our lives because we are so weary or distracted by the demands of leading others?

God desires to **move** in our life, to change our hearts, and for us to experience the abundant life—a resurrection life marked by freedom, forgiveness, rest and peace.

Over the next 40 days, during this season of Lent, let this weekly reading be a space for you to reflect on how God is moving in your life. Pay attention to what he is doing. Ask him what he wants to do in you and through you. Spend time seeking the Lord asking this question. “God, where and how are you moving in my life this week?”

God is on the **move**.

And it is a privilege to be on this journey with you. At Youth Ministry Consultants, we believe that God is moving every day. You will find a thought for each week, a Scripture reading, and questions to reflect on that encourage you to move towards the Lord this Lenten season.

week one

MOVE

From sin to forgiveness

Read: Isaiah 6:1-8 and Matthew 3:1-6

As we open ourselves up to the movement of God, we begin in a posture of acknowledging our sin. Easier said than done, isn't it? It's an uncomfortable posture, to say the least. I would much rather be the ministry leader standing up front asking others to write a prayer of confession on the notecard carefully placed on their chair than to write one myself while the quiet music plays. That is my own sin of pride getting in the way.

When we are honest with ourselves and with God, we acknowledge that we are just as messy and broken and in need of forgiveness as the people we lead. Can we lead people to a place of confession if we aren't willing to let the Holy Spirit lead us there first?

Here's the truth, fellow leaders. If we don't let God move us from sin to repentance, we cannot lead others.

Recognizing the sin in our lives starts with seeing the holiness of God. In Isaiah 6, the prophet has a vision. Isaiah is standing before the Lord in his holy Temple. In the presence of God's holiness, he is overcome by his own depravity. As the entire building fills with smoke, Isaiah cries out to the Lord.

“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.”
(NIV)

The Lord hears him. A seraphim flies to him with a burning coal from the altar of the Lord and it touches his lips. Isaiah’s guilt is removed and his sins are forgiven. And then, God sends Isaiah to bring his message to the people. A message calling people to turn from their sin and move back towards God. This is the same message John the Baptist is given when Jesus arrives.

How do we move from our sin to embracing God’s forgiveness? Confess and repent.
This is the message of Jesus as he moves in our lives today. Confess and repent. For God is on the move.

Reflect: What sin in your life do you need to confess and repent of today? What is keeping you from fully moving toward God’s offer of forgiveness?

week two

MOVE

From hurry to rest

Read: Isaiah 30:15, 40:29-31 and Matthew 11:28-30

In some traditions, it is common to give up something up for the forty days of Lent, fasting as Jesus did during his forty days in the wilderness. The students and leaders I worked with were well aware of my daily coffee consumption. I was often asked if I was going to give up coffee for Lent. My response involved a laugh and a smile and a hard “no”. I felt like I needed the caffeine intake if I was going to survive, not only the cold Minnesota winter days, but the never-ending to-do list that involved looming retreats, camps, and mission trips, not to mention weekly programming, leader trainings, end-of-year celebrations, and of course, “other duties as assigned.” I couldn’t imagine life without this artificial energy for forty days, much less life marked by rest instead of hurry. But that, friends, is actually the life God has for us.

In Isaiah 30:15, the Lord speaks a very clear message to Judah, a land caught in sin and facing captivity in Babylon.

This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says: “In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it.” (NIV)

The people of Judah have rejected repentance and the rest of God in exchange for idol worship and choosing their own way. This sounds all too familiar.

As a ministry leader, it can be easy to let hurry and busyness become an idol. We buy the lie that if we are serving God, then there is no time for rest. After all, isn't the harvest plentiful and the workers few? Then the few of us better get to work! And so, we get busy doing and forget to simply rest in the Lord. But, I realize that as you are reading this (if you've made it this far), your list isn't getting any shorter. You might have twelve tabs open, like I do, and you are reading this while you are in a hurry.

So, how do we actually move away from hurry toward rest when everything in our being and in our world is demanding that we move at a faster pace? We have to intentionally practice Sabbath rest. For a while in my life, that looked like yes, enjoying a good cup of coffee, and time in my Bible on Friday mornings. Sabbath practices can look different for each of us because we have unique life circumstances and we are wired to rest in different ways.

God is on the move. And if we are in such a hurry that we never stop to rest, we will miss it. There is a Sabbath rest for the people of God, and that includes the leaders of his mission.

Reflect: What would it look like to practice Sabbath this week? What is keeping you from enjoying the rest of God?

week three

MOVE

From anger to peace

Read: Isaiah 11:6-9 and Matthew 5:21-25

Have you ever been so angry with someone and then within a few minutes, you can't even remember what you were angry about? On the flip side, have you experienced the loss of a relationship because of anger that didn't just last days, but weeks, months...even years? Anger has the power to divide and destroy us. When it takes root in our hearts, we can easily become bitter and resentful.

We don't lead for long in ministry without experiencing conflict and criticism. It can cause us to shut down and withdraw or let our anger rise to the surface. A church member once told our lead pastor, among many things that were wrong with the youth ministry program, that I wasn't a very fun youth director. That same weekend, I had been on a student retreat and participated in a live cricket spitting contest. (No crickets were harmed.) The person's critique rolled off my back pretty quickly, but there were others that did not. Criticism was coming from many directions and I found myself becoming more and more angry and defensive.

As leaders, we will face criticism. How we handle it matters. It is so easy to respond in anger. God wants to move us from a place of anger to a place of peace. During the time of Isaiah, the nations are in conflict, but God's desire for them is to live in peace. He paints an incredible picture of this future peace in Isaiah 11.

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. (Isaiah 11:6 NIV)

Animals who are normally predators instead exist together in harmony. The wolf lies down with the lamb. The leopard can sit with the goat. It's completely outside of the natural order. Yet, it is possible because Jesus, the Prince of Peace, is coming. He will restore all things.

God is on the move bringing peace to broken relationships. How do we enter into this peace? Jesus teaches that before we come to the altar for worship, we are to go and be reconciled with the person we are angry with. It takes sincere apologies and difficult conversations. It takes the grace of God, his wisdom, and our willingness to be instruments of peace.

Reflect: Who are you angry with this week? What steps do you need to take to move toward reconciliation and experience the peace that God offers?

week four

MOVE

From despair to hope

Read: Isaiah 43:16-21 and Matthew 9:18-26

God is on the move, bringing hope to the hopeless. Maybe today, there is a situation in your life where you feel like you or a loved one is up against the wall. You can't see a way out. You might feel a sense of despair over the news headlines. You are discouraged by the reality that students you have ministered to have walked away from the Lord. Maybe you are feeling burned out this week or you are asking yourself, "Does it even matter?"

Jesus knows what it is like to feel discouraged. He feels the heartbreak of his children walking away from him. He knows the darkness of despair. And he went to the cross so that we might experience the hope of the resurrection.

Isaiah was speaking to people who couldn't see a way out when God gave them messages of hope, including this one.

"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland." (Isaiah 43;18 NIV)

God made a way when he sent his Son, Jesus. In the gospels, we see Jesus restoring hope as he heals people who are blind and those who cannot walk. He touches a bleeding woman and she is made well. Healing for our wounds is also found in him. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross brings hope. In him, we also have a new identity, a place to belong and a purpose.

One way that we lean into hope is to proclaim the promises of God. One of the most powerful ways we do this is through song. Maybe you have a gift for leading others in song. I definitely do not. But the Lord loves it when his people, as Isaiah writes, "proclaim his praise" (Isaiah 43:21). This week, find a song that proclaims who God is and let it be a way to lean into the hope of God. Bring whatever is on your heart that is weighing you down and talk to the Lord about it while you listen to words of truth and hope.

Reflect: Where is God doing something new in your life? Where do you see evidence of hope in the midst of despair?

week five

MOVE

From fear to joy

Read: Isaiah 55:8-12 and Matthew 28:1-10

What if no one shows up? What if this doesn't happen the way I expect? What if no one likes me? What if I fail? What if I don't fundraise enough money for the trip? What if I can't find parents to drive kids to camp? In ministry, leadership, and in life, the what-if's pop up constantly and can consume us.

Fear, especially of the unknown, can steal our joy. This is not what God desires for us.

When the women run to the tomb to find Jesus' body missing, they meet an angel instead who says to them, "Do not be afraid." They left the tomb, "afraid yet filled with joy." On their way to tell their friends the news, they actually run into Jesus, who once again reminds them to not be afraid.

The same God who stood alive outside of an empty tomb is the God who holds our fears.

In Isaiah 55, the Lord reminds his people that their thoughts are not his thoughts and his ways are not their ways. So many of our fears come from our thoughts that we let spiral out of control instead of bringing them to God. In our limited perspective, the fears seem bigger than the solutions, but God's plan is always greater than our fears.

One of the primary ways God speaks into our fears is through his promises in Scripture. Spend the next few minutes reflecting on the character of God. And spend time in his Word. It will not return empty. Let his word dwell in you richly. Not the what-ifs.

God is the good shepherd.

God is trustworthy.

God is sovereign.

God holds all things together.

God is with you always.

God is mighty to save.

Reflect: What are the fears that are stealing your joy today? What Scripture has God used in your life to remind you of his presence when you are afraid?

week six

MOVE

From surviving to thriving

Read: Isaiah 43:1-7 and Matthew 12:15-21

Do you find yourself in “survival mode” this week? We have all been there. Those weeks when the urgent side of the to-do list doesn’t fit on the page and you wonder how you will ever get through. Maybe the mental exhaustion alone of everything on your plate has you feeling like you can barely get out of bed in the morning. For those serving in ministry in any capacity, Easter can feel incredibly exhausting instead of life-giving as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. We believe that once we “get through” Easter services and egg hunts, then we can live the life God intended. At least for a few days before summer planning begins.

This survival mentality is not the kind of life God wants for us. He wants us to flourish. Watch the spring rains revive the earth. The sunshine feels warmer now and the plants are beginning to peek out from beneath the ground. God does that growing work in us too.

Isaiah 43 reminds us that we are God’s dear children. Like Israel, we too are loved by God. We are precious to him. He made us for his glory. We reflect his glory more and more as we grow more and more into his image.

“Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth— everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.” (Isaiah 43:6b-7)

Jesus shows us what God is like. Matthew explains that Jesus is the servant prophesied about in Isaiah. He shows us what it means to live and move and have our being in this world. Jesus reveals God’s love to us and we get to see the qualities of God’s character in action—his justice, love, and mercy on display.

Over the last few weeks, we have reflected on the ways God desires to move in our lives. He wants us to live in the freedom of his forgiveness, not the chains of sin. God invites us into a life of rest, not constant hurry and exhaustion. He wants to take our anger and replace it with peace. Jesus came and died on the cross so that we would know hope in place of despair. God doesn’t want us to live in fear, but in the joy of his salvation. This is the radical way of living. This is resurrection life. This is Jesus’ way.

God is on the move.

Reflect: Where are you seeing signs of spring that remind you of resurrection? How are you seeing God move in your life?

ABOUT MEGAN PEDERSEN



Megan has been serving in youth ministry for over 10 years in a variety of contexts and serves as a coach with YMC. Megan lives in a suburb of Minneapolis with her husband, Jeff, and their 2 boys. On the weekends, Megan and her family can be found outside on the trails, hiking, biking or skiing.

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