**Steve Spilde:** Today, I am happy to welcome Marcia Bentley back to the podcast. Marcia is a friend, a colleague and a fellow spiritual director. Today, I invited Marcia to talk about her recent move. I think people underestimate how much energy is involved in a move – physical, emotional and spiritual. Marcia, can you tell us about your recent move and what triggered it?

**Marcia Bentley:** Good question, Steve, as always. What triggered it was that I had been thinking that as I’m approaching 70, I probably needed to find the place where I wanted to live the rest of my life. Whether it be short or long term, I didn’t know, but there also were some physical reasons. I have some arthritis, and it was becoming increasingly difficult for me to live where I was living in an apartment building where I had to carry things up and down the steps, shovel snow around my car – things like that that just had me thinking that I needed to start facing those situations and make some choices for myself.

**Steve:** Where did you move to?

**Marcia:** I moved from a two-story apartment with stairs to a condo building – I actually bought a condo – and this building has elevators and it has a parking garage. I don’t have to shovel snow anymore, and I can do elevators rather than carrying things on the steps. My body is already thanking me for that decision.

**Steve:** I’m sure a lot of people listening come from a variety of situations. They may not live alone, [and] they may not be 70, but yet the experience of moving is common to all of us – sooner or later, we end up moving. Moving is demanding in many ways. First of all, there are the physical demands. What was the most physically challenging aspect of the move for you?

**Marcia:** Physically, it was partly because of the physical challenges I was already experiencing that I decided to move. And then, I did a lot of the moving myself [and] I had to carry all these things down these steps, so it was like this kind of torture to my body in a very intense sort of way for a limited period of time. It reinforced my idea that I needed to do this, but boy, there were some days it was tough.

**Steve:** People are oftentimes prepared for the physical demands to move, and that’s why people hire movers. That’s why “Two Men and a Truck” is in business, so people can farm that out. People I think oftentimes are surprised by how tired they are during a move, and they chalk it up to all the packing and the moving of things. But I think there are also other things involved in that. Part of that is an emotional experience. I would guess you’ve had a surge of emotions. Part of it is positive emotions; you’re excited about the move. What excites you about this change?

**Marcia:** Whenever you decide you’re going to purchase something or make a change, I come up with a list of things I would really like to see. In this case, it was, what would be my requirements for a new apartment or a condo? I came up with a long list of things, and this new place that I found meets almost all of them. That was really exciting for me to just find the right place. As soon as I stepped into this condo when I was doing the showing with my Realtor, I stepped in and I knew immediately this is the place I want to call home. It just felt comfortable and warm and very quiet, so there was that excitement of, I have found my space [and] this is what I’ve been waiting for, and just little things I’ve found since then besides being very quiet, which helps my life of prayer. It’s in a friendly building; I’ve met a number of my neighbors. One of my neighbors, when he saw me parking in a numbered parking space, yelled out, “You must have been the one who bought John’s condo. Welcome to the building.” I thought, you can’t beat this: people actually saying, “Welcome.” There are also some lovely trees on the property, and I discovered this tree right outside my living room and the leaves are turning red. It’s a maple tree, so I get this glorious view of this gorgeous tree changing colors. So, there’s all that positive reinforcement of, I made the right decision. This is a beautiful and friendly and comfortable place, and so for that I’m really glad. It is truly exciting.

**Steve:** You and I are friends. We get the chance to chat on a regular basis. One of the struggles that you’ve mentioned to me is really how nice it is, and that’s brought up some emotional work for you, correct? This is a beautiful place, but I’m spending a lot of money. Am I worth it? Shouldn’t I go for something a little more simple? Talk about the dynamics of your inner voice and your inner critic and whatever that is.

**Marcia:** All of that is so true. I was processing this whole experience with my spiritual director. She laughed and she said, “This is just something you have to do, isn’t it? You just have to second-guess yourself and work through the dynamics of that process.” But it is true. When I first saw the place, I said, “I would love to live here.” And I really did feel called by God and by my own spirituality and my own values to make the move before somebody else had to move me. Those are all things I had really reflected on and had made good decisions on. But when I actually decided to purchase the condo, it was a really fast decision because the market is pretty crazy. I had to do something way out of my comfort zone, which was [to] pounce on it right away. I had been looking for months and I had seen many places. I just had this really good feeling that this was the right place. But then all those questions came afterward, like, I could be feeding people with this money and I could be doing other things – have I really thought this through? Was I in my right mind, or did I just get caught up in the moment? I had to work through those; those were questions I just needed to ask myself. I didn’t feel worthy. I felt like, this place is too beautiful [and] I don’t deserve this. Then I realized, there was a statement from Dostoevsky in *The Brothers Karamazov* when he said, “The world will be saved by beauty,” and Dorothy Day loved that. In fact, her granddaughter, Kate, wrote a book about her and called it *The World Will Be Saved by Beauty.* I realized it was OK for me to have beauty in my life. It wasn’t going to help anybody else by my not appreciating the beauty. I did work through it, but it was a challenge, and I hadn’t expected it to happen.

**Steve:** Don’t you see that sometimes with the people that you see in spiritual direction – not the spiritual direction’s unusualness, but people really give us a glimpse into their interior dialogue and we really hear how they talk to themselves. A lot of people really do wrestle with giving good things to themselves, correct?

**Marcia:** That is true. That is true.

**Steve:** Oftentimes, people, I think, they settle for unhealthy relationships. They settle for unhealthy jobs or abusive job relationships. At some level, they don’t believe that they’re worth more than that. What’s your experience with that?

**Marcia:** I have had that same experience, and sometimes it just boils down to when the person processes it, that they were brought up with this feeling or this image of a punishing God or an angry God, and that they had to constantly be earning God’s love and that they really weren’t deserving of anything good. In our spirituality, that is just a very incorrect view of this loving, kind, unconditionally loving and playful God, even. We often limit who God is by our own responses and emotions, when we have this God that we believe is infinite and created all this universe and knew each one of us before we were formed in our mothers’ wombs and knew what we would do and created us and loves us anyway. That is something that we have to work through with people. Has that been your experience, too, that you feel people that are unworthy?

**Steve:** Yeah, and I think the other piece, as I was listening to you [asking] am I worth this, my thought was, grace would say that you are. Grace would say, “Marcia, I love you. I want you to have a nice place.” And I know you. You have a very graceful sense of God. I think that’s been an uncovering throughout your life; you’re still growing into that. This is an example there where you do have an understanding of grace, but yet at times like this, the parts that are unfinished in you kind of emerge and [say], “I guess I have to work on that. I’ve still got …” Shame was a big topic with me; I think there is kind of an emergence of that voice of shame [asking], “Do I really deserve this? Who do you think you are to have such a nice place?”

**Marcia:** We do wrestle and wrangle with those. And what I do find – and I know you find from previous conversations – is that we continue to wrestle with those same issues in our life. As we grow deeper spiritually [and] as we grow closer to God, we encounter those questions from a deeper place, but we still have to revisit them. It’s a spiral; they’re going to come around again and again. If they’ve been issues in your life, you probably will never completely resolve them.

**Steve:** I do like the image of being born again, and I think there is a necessity for us to have these conversion experiences in our life between how I was and how I am now. But I think the trip-up, though, is we really do expect the experience of being born again to be a one-and-done experience. But the reality of it is we have these experiences where the door is open to something new, but then that never feels natural, so we spend the rest of our life getting reconverted on a daily basis. [We say], “There it is again. There’s that old voice, the one that I want to let go of. Here is a new opportunity to let go of that voice yet again, yet again, yet again.”

**Marcia:** One-and-done, doesn’t that sound simple? It would so be easy then, wouldn’t it? But if you make that commitment to want to grow in the spiritual life, then you have to be open to new opportunities, and you can’t be in control. You have to recognize we’re not in control. We have to let go into it and realize we’re human and we have weaknesses and we have our shadow sides, and that’s just part of our everyday experience: just recognizing that and dealing with it.

**Steve:** I think that’s why I wanted to have this conversation with you today about moving, because I think moving is a unique experience when we can kind of get into a routine and a habit and we start to live our lives on autopilot. When you move, just as you take all of your belongings and they’re all spread out through the house and you’re putting them in boxes. Everything gets pulled out of the closet and everything gets reshuffled and resorted, and you have to look at everything. Not only is that happening with our possessions, [but] I think it’s [also] happening kind of with our life experiences. We start to pull things off the shelf and we remember, “Oh, yeah – I bought that on that trip 20 years ago,” and, “Oh, yeah – that’s a picture of this former time in my life.” It really causes us to reassess and re-examine. Is that what you found?

**Marcia:** Yes, absolutely. There’s this myth that, I don’t have this much stuff because it’s all put away and you don’t see it. But when it comes time to move, you have to move every single thing, and that is so overwhelming. I remember passing a man as I was loading things into the truck, and this man said, “Oh, moving. I’d rather have a root canal than have to move.” I think that’s most of our attitude because like you said, it hits us on every level. It’s not just physical; it’s emotional and spiritual. For me right now, [it’s] letting go of another phase of my life. I only lived in that apartment five years, but it was home and it was a good home, and there were things I really liked about it. I liked my neighbors. Having to let go of things – things we attached dreams to – maybe those dreams were fulfilled [or] maybe we never got around to them. But all of these things cause us to reflect back on our lives and on the promises, and on the things that don’t get fulfilled. It can take a really heavy toll.

**Steve:** As you know, I moved about two years ago, my wife and I and my daughter. We moved out of a larger house and downsized into a condo. I was surprised by how emotional of an experience that was. I had long said, “Jeanette, I hope that you outlive me because I don’t want to have to move from this place,” just because I knew what a horrible, physical task it would be because we had way too much stuff and we’d have to sort everything. What I wasn’t ready for was all of the emotional stress of that move. Like you said, it was acknowledging I was moving out of one phase of my life and moving into another phase. The emotion of that really did catch me by surprise. People know that my daughter has some disabilities [and] that she’s on the autism spectrum. What that was going to look like wasn’t clear when we moved into that house, and we had dreams of how we might use the yard. We had all this equipment that we bought, baseball equipment and softball – all these sorts of games I imagined that I would be able to play with Sophia in a yard that she would play with friends and the parties that we might hold. So many of those things did not happen, and that kind of snuck up on me. But it was in the move that I had to acknowledge the dreams I had with a younger Sophia [and] the dreams that I had of what my life might look like in my 40s or early 50s, that didn’t happen, and now I was moving on to some new chapter. Yeah, there is some real grieving that goes along with that.

**Marcia:** How did you deal with that?

**Steve:** It snuck up on me. I just remember one day in particular … We were really blessed, because where we moved to was only a couple miles from where we lived before. We could move things in pieces; we didn’t have to have one day where we loaded up the whole moving van. I remember it was a Saturday. I went over to the old house and I was packing up some things by myself, and I found some games that we had bought for Sophia that we had never played, and I was just filled with just these really weird feelings. I was there by myself, and I could take the time to really feel those emotions. It was emotions of grief and regret. This wasn’t what I expected, [and] I allowed myself to grieve that. I realized in that moment that was part of the reason why the move was so physically demanding: not only was I spending every available moment moving heavy objects, but I was also feeling these heavy emotions of grief and sadness. Some of that grief I’d never processed before.

I imagine maybe your emotions are different, but as you talked about a new phase in your life, I know that when you moved into that apartment, it had not been so long since George had died. You were still getting adapted to being a widow, which wasn’t something you had planned for or expected, and now you’re moving into this new phase of your life. Describe that transition for me.

**Marcia:** My husband died 12 years ago. I stayed in our house for another year and then decided that was just really too big of a place for one person, plus I really wanted to go someplace where I could be of more help. I actually moved from the Twin Cities to Madison. When I moved out of that house, I had to do a lot of what you just described. I was moving from a house to an apartment, and I had to literally get rid of maybe 75 to 80 percent of the things that we owned – many of them being George’s things. He had only been dead for a year, and I was having to part with sports equipment [and] clothing – things that other people could use. I knew that they would go for good use, for people to be warm during the winter, and for children to have an opportunity to play with things. But still, that emotional toll was heavy, but because I was under a very tense time constraint when it initially happened, I just had to make some decisions, and it just got easier and easier. Did I make some mistakes? Oh, yeah. There are some things I got rid of that I wish I hadn’t. Then gradually, over these past 10 years I’ve had to get rid of more things every time I moved because I don’t want to put someone else in a position of spending months cleaning up after me when I’m no longer here. So yeah, those emotions are there, and I agree [that] the grieving is there.

I’ve had to grieve every place I’ve left because I’ve always loved where I lived. I’ve had to grieve leaving behind friends and neighbors. I think it helps to name that, and I think it helps to take some time to do the grieving, even if you have to set it aside for a while because of the demands of the move, but to not let go of it and to say, “I need to spend half an hour or half a day or a week just dealing with saying goodbye to those things and saying goodbye to those good memories knowing I still have all the stories. The stories never go away; they’re still here with me.” But then letting go and moving on to a new time in your life. I still have a foot in both of those worlds right now, Steve. It’s only been three weeks since I moved. Not everything is unpacked, and life certainly is not back to normal. But gradually it’s getting back there, and it’s a new normal and it’s a good thing.

**Steve:** I think part of the challenge too is facing ourselves with clear eyes. You had described the reason you had picked this condo in part was you were 70, or 70 was coming up. You weren’t young like you used to be, and your hip was bothering … all these things. I see this all the time, particularly when I was serving as pastor in a church where so many people that needed to move that really resisted the reality of aging. [They would say], “I like living in a home.” You liked the stairs when you were 40, but you’re not 40 anymore, and yeah, you liked mowing the lawn when you were 45, but now you’re 75 and that’s not working for you. Admitting the losses that have already come [such as] the loss of health … People living in this big house, it was great when they had a houseful of kids, but they don’t have a houseful of kids anymore. This takes more energy than it’s worth.

**Marcia:** It is a dilemma, isn’t it? I even look at St. Rose Convent, where the sisters have had to change rooms multiple times as the different phases of construction happened. And even just moving the few things that they have, for some of them it was very difficult because they were accustomed to a room. They liked the window, they liked the shadows – there are all kinds of things that we grow close to in our immediate environment. I think it will be a dilemma that will always be with people; it’s difficult to move. But I think it helps if you look at those things up front and just say, “I’m not going to be able to move myself when I’m 90. How about if I think about doing that right now? And as a result of that, I’m moving to a place where I can enjoy it while I’m still young enough to enjoy it.” I moved to a neighborhood where there is a grocery store within walking distance. My bank is across the street. There’s a Target down the street. My clinic is close by. I was trying to do all that planning for the future, too, and it just feels good to know that those things are in place and that someone else won’t have to do that for me. That makes me feel more independent, not less independent. That’s huge for me.

**Steve:** I hear someone who is very spiritually healthy. I hear a lot of ability to let go. I don’t know Buddhism real well, but what I do know is a lot of releasing attachments and not being overly attached to things. I hear your willingness to do that when you moved out of your house in the Twin Cities; like you said, you got rid of 70 to 80 percent of your things. You were able to do that. You weren’t clinging. Even your relationship with George, I think that’s why sometimes people don’t move either, because they’ve got so many memories in the place [and] they hate to let that go. But like you said, the memories are in you [and] they’re not in the place, so you could take those with you. But yet, I think some people haven’t done the spiritual work, and so they live in denial. It’s like, “OK, as long as I stay in this place where George was, I’m staying connected to him.” That can become unhealthy because he’s not there. He really is in your heart – wherever your heart is, there he will be. Then you could make that move to a place that was better for you. It was more based in reality.

**Marcia:** I like how you started that with surrendering and letting go – it’s never easy, is it? I don’t know that it gets any easier. It’s like anything else: If you practice it, you are more able to relinquish things. My spiritual director once said to me I had lost something that I held very precious. I told her the story about why it was so precious. She listened, and then she said, “The object is gone, but you’ll always have that story.” That has made such a difference to me. It’s kind of saying in another way what you just said, Steve, but we do. We always have the stories. No one takes those stories from us, and it’s those stories that are important [and] not the objects. So, as I pare down and as I get older, it’s OK. I’m grateful for all these experiences. And quite frankly, I look forward to the new things that I have yet to learn. I don’t know what this new condo has in store for me. There will be new neighbors, new adventures – things I can’t even imagine. So rather than dwell on my grief, I acknowledge it [and] I processed it. But now I’m getting more sleep, and that helps. But I’m also looking forward to just [discovering], what are the new adventures God has in store for me?

**Steve:**  I think that’s part of the gift of letting go of the attachments: then we have the freedom to move into new possibilities. It really becomes a gift to ourselves.

**Marcia:** The freedom to move into new possibilities. That’s excellent. Great words.

**Steve:** One question I have for you is, this hasn’t been without challenge – physical, emotional, spiritual challenge with the move. What are some of the spiritual tools that you lean on for meeting this challenge?

**Marcia:** Centering Prayer; it’s always my baseline. If I don’t take the time for silence and for being alone with God and recognizing God’s presence inside and God’s action…. Even though I don’t understand what’s going on, I need to take that time. And when we’re really challenged for time, it’s hard to do that. Exactly at the time you need that the most is the time that you’re most likely to do without it or to brush it away. I made it a practice that I need to spend time just in silence with God every day. That was part of the reason I chose the condo that I chose, because it’s very quiet. Even though the things were a mess around me – there was chaos, there were piled books, there were piles of everything all over – I just closed my eyes for it, kind of like Jesus on the way to the mountaintop by himself to pray. I just closed my eyes to the mess and just spent some time with God. That just nourishes me and builds space inside of me like nothing else does. St. Francis de Sales, who was a spiritual director, said a statement that always rings true to me, and I know other people have said it as well. He said, “You should always spend at least a half hour a day praying, except when you’re really busy. Then you need to spend an hour.” I like that because again, it’s when you are least likely to have the time, that’s when you really need the time the most.

**Steve:**  I’ve got a final question for you, Marcia. In this move, has God shown up for you in any surprising ways?

**Marcia:** God has shown up all over the place [such as] in making this choice and being led to this place. In terms of surprising ways, I think the surprising way was that beautiful maple tree right outside my living room. I hadn’t noticed it when I saw the place, but that wasn’t where my attention really was. But when I really sat in a moment of thinking, “Did I make a mistake? Am I really in the right place?” I opened my eyes and saw this gorgeous, glorious tree with red leaves. The sun was shining on it, and it could not have been any more glorious. And I just said, “Oh, yeah, God. You’re here with me. Thank you for affirming it like that.” So, I guess that maple tree has been my surprise.