

The Empty Nest

The kids are gone, now what? Achieving the long-term goal of raising and launching a child is one of those milestones in life that can lead to surprising emotions. One day you might feel relieved to catch your breath after such an intense marathon and then the next day you miss the busyness—especially the ever-present relationships that went with it. Fortunately, the empty nest years can be a great time to take steps towards rediscovery in your life.

STEP ONE: Rediscover Your Mission

Psalm 90 gives empty nesters a sober reminder of the passage of time, but also a wise prayer for the Lord to “teach us to number our days aright” and to “establish the work of our hands.” A major segment of your life up to this point has been committed to serving and guiding your children. Now that your children are more self-sufficient, you can take what you learned in the family setting and translate that into broader service in the community.

In I Timothy 3:5 Paul asks the question, “If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?” Another way to see that passage is that those who have managed their families have learned a couple of things about how to care for God’s church—how to love, forgive, guide, lead, and encourage.

Such characteristics developed in the last season, as well as the additional time and resources that often come with an empty nest, can equip you for a whole new world of opportunities to fulfill your mission during this exciting season of life. (Galatians 6: 9 -10)

STEP TWO: Rediscover Your Marriage

Some marriages don’t last until the empty nest years either because of death or divorce. If your marriage has made it, you may feel like you have become disconnected over time. Once the kids leave home, you may need to rediscover the person to whom you said “I do” so long ago.

Proverbs 5:18-19 says, “May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth.” After this intense stretch of parenting, how can you find fresh ways to rejoice in the marriage of your youth and to “be ever captivated” by your spouse? You may just need to reintroduce yourself (“Hi, I’m that guy who asked you out a couple of decades ago,” or “I’m that girl you met on the missions trip”) and start rediscovering some of your earlier passions and dreams.

STEP THREE: Rediscover Your Children

Your relationship with your children should change as they step into adulthood. Instead of discipline and more involved forms of parenting, your efforts will focus on coaching your children into self-sufficiency and into pursuing career, marriage, and families of their own.

This season requires a lot of trust because “sideline coaching” is all you can offer rather than step-by-step direction. Now is the time when your influence is built upon strong relationship rather than direct control. But this season also gives you a vantage point to see the time and effort you’ve invested into your children in a different light – especially as they begin to take ownership of the values you’ve tried to instill (Psalm 78:3-7) and watch them discover God’s plan for their lives.

GOING FURTHER - Resources

Recommended Books:

Some books are available for checkout at the Faith@Home Center or purchase online.

Half Time (by Bob Buford) Reaching midlife doesn't have to be a crisis. It is actually an opportunity to begin the better half of life.

Second Half of Marriage (by David and Claudia Arp) addresses eight challenges of the empty-nest years.

Recommended Website:

The “Empty Nest” topic on **TroubledWith.com** website provides a wide range of articles, resources and referrals.