

The Empty Nest: Loss or New Lease on Life?

Janet Nygren

1. The challenge: The empty nest creeps up, vulnerably exposing unmet dreams and disappointments. If we don't navigate this well we can get lost and fizzle out instead of shining.

2. Empty-nesters are a more vulnerable group than we tend to think.

a. New challenges:

Relationships

Adult children
Special needs adults
New marriages/in-laws
Becoming grandparents
More time with spouse
Aging parents

Finances

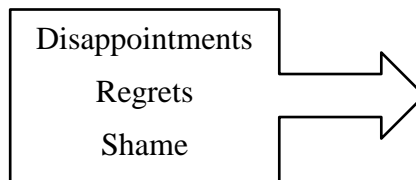
College debt
Other debt
Mid-career changes
Retirement
Caring for parents

Health

Menopause
Hair loss/graying
Memory loss
Hearing loss
General aches & pains
More serious concerns

b. Reaping the harvest of what we've been sowing:

Children
Spouse
Job
Self



Lonely
Overwhelmed
Weary
Unneeded

c. Pressures expose cracks in our foundation/heart/faith.

3. The risk: giving up and giving in.

“It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.” (C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*)

4. The turning point: Listening to the voice of our Creator and Redeemer instead of the Tempter and Accuser.

“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.” (2 Cor 4:16)

God woos us to himself, as Hosea pursued Gomer, as God pursued Israel:

“Behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her...In that day, declares the Lord, you will call me ‘My Husband.’” (Hosea 2:14, 16)

“You are my beloved...With you I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:11)

5. We can rewrite the empty-nest story into a transformation story with God’s help. Regardless of what our lives have been like, God can use those experiences—the suffering, the disappointments, the mistakes—to give us perspective and teach us wisdom, humility, and patience.

“He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion.” (Phil 1:6)

6. We need each other to see our “harvest” from God’s perspective instead of the world’s perspective:

- ❖ *We are blind.* We need one another to help us see ourselves more clearly, to help us know that we are not alone, and to realize that our stories are valuable.

Temptation: Rationalize that we are okay as we are.

- ❖ *We are fearful.* We need encouragement to be vulnerable, to share our stories, and to encourage others to do so.

Temptation: Hide and remain isolated and unknown.

- ❖ *We are weary.* We need to encourage one another to press on and see what God is up to, believing that he is up to something good.

Temptation: Keep doing things as we always have, or give up.

With God we can face new challenges with fresh eyes:

- ❖ Ministry to your adult children

- ❖ Ministry to your spouse

- ❖ Ministry to the church

- ❖ Ministry to the world

- ❖ New blessings

“Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path...Other seed fell on rocky ground...Other seed fell among thorns...And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.” (Mark 4:3–8)

“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.” (Phil 2:1–2)

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.” (Phil 2:12–16)

Recommended resources

Jethani, Skye. *With: Reimagining the Way You Relate to God*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011.

Miller, Paul E. *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2009.

Nelson, Heather Davis. *Un-ashamed: Healing Our Brokenness and Finding Freedom from Shame*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2016.

Rainey, Barbara, and Yates, Susan. *Barbara and Susan's Guide to the Empty Nest*. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2017.

Tripp, Paul David. *Lost in the Middle: MidLife and the Grace of God*. Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2004.

Contact Information

Janet Nygren is a counselor at CCEF and can be reached at jnygren@ccef.org.

For discussion

- Who are the empty-nesters that you are in touch with?
- What are the challenges they face? How well do you know their story?
- How do they view their circumstances?
- What sort of encouragement might help them to shine brighter?