

New Beginnings: Empty Nesters



■ by Kim Pronoitis, MA, LCPC

As parents we all know that there will be a time when our children leave the nest and we release them into the world. Whether our children are small or young adults, the idea of having no children at home can be impossible to imagine.

Unlike birds of a feather, empty nester parents sometimes feel lonely, disappointed, or even depressed. It is difficult, but letting our children go is something we eventually have to do to promote healthy emotional growth for them. It is our job to prepare our children for their next stage in life.

Whether our child is going off to college for the first time or getting married, the anticipation of change that an empty nest can bring to your life can be overwhelming. New empty nesters often ask, "Where do I start?"

As a therapist and fellow empty nester, I offer some thoughts on this new beginning.

Trust God's plan for your child

There comes a time when we have to rely on God and believe that the seeds we have planted in our children will take root. We ought to believe that we have done our very best at the time with the information we had.

Our children are gifts from God and it is natural to want our children to do well and be safe. As we let go, it may help to remember that God has a plan for our children (Jeremiah 29:11), just as he lovingly planned we would be their parent. We need to let them explore and trust God's plan.



Give yourself grace to adjust to the loss

For many parents, so much identity is wrapped up in our children. It's natural to feel sad and disappointed as we truly are experiencing a loss. We were parents first and for many of us our lives revolved around our children.

Many women at this time wonder who they are and what they are going to do with the rest of their lives. Because I have two grown children who have left the nest, I have been witness to this on more than one occasion. I can honestly say that when my oldest went off to college there was an empty spot in my heart. I took a liking to the computer and television in his room - it became a standing joke when he was home on college break.

It is not uncommon for dads to feel an emptiness as well. Although stereotypical for moms, societal norms are changing and a "Mr. Mom" can experience this as well.

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Article taken from the Sep | Oct 2019 issue of *PRESSING ON*, a Publication of Chicago Christian Counseling Center
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Embrace New Beginnings

Although we have closed one chapter it is healthy to move forward and start another.

- **Embrace the extra time.** You now have more free time. Even the house stays cleaner and more organized. Bring your time to God in prayer and see what he does with it. I also encourage parents at this stage to rekindle hobbies, explore interests and new ways of using or volunteering their talents.
- **Embrace the opportunity to grow.** Any growth period in life can be difficult. Sometimes we have to become vulnerable and that takes courage. We need to be open to new ideas whether it be starting a class in school, volunteering, or networking with those we know.
- **Embrace important relationships.** Whether you are single or married, it is a time when you can shift your focus and think about other people. For those who are married, sometimes we need to get to know our spouse again. Rekindle your marriage relationship. As so much of life often revolves around our children, we need to stay connected.
- **Embrace the peace and quiet.** Although there was a time for all the hubbub of activity, you may actually get a better night's rest. After years of flushing toilets, showers, refrigerator and garage doors opening and closing, and the third ear that listens for the last child to come home safely – it is time to embrace peace, quiet, and a good night's sleep!
- **Embrace your child's adulthood.** Yes, they come back to visit. One of the greatest joys is when they come back as adults. It's exciting to see them walk through the door. We can now appreciate them as they evolve into adults with their own lives, ideas, opinions, and passions. Look at your empty nest as a place of many accomplishments and memories to reminisce.



Cherish and embrace this new beginning. Focus on God, entrusting everything to him and he will give you perfect peace (Isaiah 26:3). This is a time of growth and a time to evolve as we watch our children make their way into the world. God is always working in our lives no matter what the season. ■

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