



“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24).

The Empty Nest

Central Truth: Parents must adjust to their children leaving home.

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Topic: Marriage; Children.

I have never understood why a husband and wife live together for twenty years or more and then separate when the children leave home. I did not understand it, that is, until my children left home.

My wife and I have three children, a son and two daughters. My son had married and lived only a five-minute drive away. The two daughters were still at home. And then the moves came.

My son moved to another city. The older daughter married and moved 450 miles away. The younger daughter left home to attend a university 300 miles away. And they all left within a ten-day period. Suddenly the house was so large, so quiet, and so empty that I understood why marriages sometimes break up when the children leave home. Unless the husband and wife have a relationship other than the children, there is little left to hold them together. The experience of “the empty nest” is a challenge indeed. Parents need to prepare for it.

It Is According to God's Plan (Genesis 2:23, 24)

God instituted the home and established the ordinance of marriage in human society. He saw that it was not good for man to be alone. Where could that first man find a companion? God brought all the animals before Adam, and he discerned their natures and named them. But not one matched his nature. So God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, took a rib from his side, and made a woman. When the man saw the woman for the first

time, he recognized that she matched his nature and met his need for companionship. *“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh”* (Genesis 2:24).

Marriage was for a purpose beyond companionship. God told the man and woman to *“be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it”* (Genesis 1:28). The birth of children was God's intention in marriage. But did He intend for there to be only two generations of the human race — Adam and Eve plus their children? No. He intended for each generation to marry, establish permanent homes, and beget and rear children. In order for that to happen, those children who grew up in a home had to leave that home when they married in order to establish their own home. As God designed marriage, He designed the “empty nest” to be a part of living together as a family. Leaving father and mother is a natural stage of life.

It Is by Their Own Choice (Genesis 24:58, 59)

Many centuries passed between Genesis 2 and Genesis 24. But the institution of marriage continued. The “empty nest” was experienced by countless parents as each generation left home to establish homes of their own. Each chose a partner in marriage and left parents in order to be with that partner. It was by their own choice.

Listen to the enthusiastic talk of young adults as they approach marriage. They speak of their new life's partner, their new job, their new apartment, and their new school. Their excitement is contagious. Almost everyone laughs and jokes and rejoices at a wedding. Few think about the “empty nest” which the parents will endure.

God designed marriage to involve the consent of the bride and groom. Abraham's servant was commissioned to find a bride for Isaac, his master's son. He asked God's help. But after the girl was identified, and the marriage proposal presented, she was given a choice. She was asked, *“Wilt thou go with this man?”* Her response was, *“I will go”* (Genesis 24:58).

A bad marriage often begins with one or both parties being forced into the contract. Social pressure can force a marriage. Unpleasant home conditions can hasten one into marriage. Today it is not unusual for an unplanned pregnancy to lead to a marriage which otherwise would never have been consummated. A couple will have a problem in staying together under such conditions.

God designed marriage to be a lifelong relationship: one man and one woman joined for life. We want to send each of our young adults into marriage with every “plus factor” possible in order for theirs to be a lasting

and enjoyable marriage.

It Is With the Family's Blessing (Genesis 24:59-61)

The Bible reports of the family response to Isaac's offer of marriage to their daughter, “*They sent away Rebekah. . . . They blessed Rebekah*” (Genesis 24:59, 60). That marriage was entered with the blessings of the family of the bride, as every marriage should be.

Rebekah's family did all they could to provide for her easy adjustment to her married life. They sent her nurse (probably a servant girl who ministered to her) along with her to meet her groom and establish her new home (Genesis 24:59). That is a good example for all parents to follow. There is a great adjustment when the strains of “Here Comes the Bride” fade away and are replaced by “Work for the Night is Coming!” It is demanding for a young woman to pass from being a girl in the household to being the mistress of her own home.

Rebekah's parents wanted the best for her. They sent her away with the greatest blessing they could express: “*Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them*” (Genesis 24:60). Her leaving did not take her from their hearts. So they affirmed, “*You are still our sister.*” But her leaving opened the door for a great ministry for her as “*the mother of thousands of millions.*”

Rebekah was going far away to meet Isaac, her intended husband. It was very possible that she would never return to her home again in her entire lifetime. There was a very final “good-bye” in her farewell to her family. But they sent her away with their blessing because they recognized that was best for her and in agreement with her inmost desires.

Parents may cry on the inside, but they must smile on the outside as their child leaves the family circle for marriage. It is as God intends it to be. God himself instituted marriage. He put it in our nature to desire a partner with whom we can share life's joys and sorrows, rear children, and find fulfillment. Blessed is the child whose parents send him away with their blessings.

It Is to Enter a New State of Life

Look at the parents who are left at home. The bride and groom step out to start a new life. Love is fresh. Every experience is new. The future is bright. Their excitement is great. But the parents are left with only a part of

what they had known. But that can be a new beginning for them, also.

Renew your relationship as husband and wife without the children.

That was how you began. You can enjoy one another in a way you had forgotten while the children were at home and were your concern. Think of the things you can do together now that the children are gone.

Expand your involvement in the Lord's service. You have more time than before. You have more money available than when you were providing for the children. You have talents you can invest in the work of God. Fill those times of loneliness and of missing the departed child with deeds of love and helpfulness to people in need. You can contribute more than ever to God's kingdom.

Plan to make life enjoyable. The two of you (or you alone if you are a single parent) can rejoice in the memories of rearing your family. You can rejoice in the good words you hear as the children's homes are established and their families grow. You can rejoice in knowing God's will has been done in your family through marriage, child rearing, and even in the "empty nest" now.

The "empty nest" is a time of adjustment. But you would not want your children at home and unmarried for a lifetime, would you? As difficult as the parting is, it is best for both parent and child. Use your years in the "empty nest" to enjoy your partner, serve your God, and rejoice in your grandchildren.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why do we refer to this stage as the "empty nest"?
2. How is the "empty nest" a part of God's plan for marriage?
3. What divine purpose is fulfilled in marriage?
4. Why should marriage not be forced upon a person?
5. How can a family "bless" its departing member today?
6. How can a family help its departing member adjust to married life?
7. How can husband and wife renew their relationship at the "empty nest" stage?