The Woman of Christ Faces Daily Living

The Empty Nest and the Role of Grandparents in the Home

Titus 2:4; Acts 16:1-3; Luke 15:11-24

Lesson #11

Women often confront this dilemma: Just as they begin to get a handle on things and efficiently do their jobs as mom (Titus, 2:4), they find Band-Aids, bedtime stories and cookies are no longer needed.

Different Children, Different Choices

Parenting is shaped by a unique blend of circumstances, personalities, and choices. As a result, children within the same family may develop very different dispositions and follow very different paths.

Two Biblical Examples

Timothy, described in Acts 16:1-3, and the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-24 both made choices that led them away from home. Their departures invite us to consider what their parents may have felt, remembered, or learned as they watched their sons step into new seasons of life.

Reflection for Parents

These examples remind us that a child's departure can bring mixed emotions: gratitude for growth, concern over choices, and a renewed need to trust God with the child's future.

The Empty Nest

We hear a lot about the empty nest syndrome, but many of the reports may not be accurate. While some moms feel unhappy about their adult children's departure from home, many are registering more cheerful feelings. Those in the latter group often believe they performed adequately as parents, and they are glad to see their offspring launch their own lives. Sadly, the mothers who think otherwise regret their parental ineffectiveness and fear for their children's maturity.

It's as if a door has been opened for our child, and as he or she exits the childhood phase of life, there's the rush into adulthood. There he goes with some of me, some traces of dad, some of Granny and some of Granddaddy. How prepared is this child for life? His flight from home is usually at a time of his life when his senses have not been fully exercised by use to discern both good and evil (Hebrews 5:14b). Spiritual milk is a nourishing diet which can bring young

Christians to a state of maturity and wisdom. This will better prepare them to exit the door of childhood and enter the next phase (1Peter 2:2 and 1 Corinthians 3:2).

How can we give a diet of spiritual milk to our children? To our grandchildren? It's a matter of words -- God's Words: keeping them; treasuring them; looking on them as the apple of the eye; binding them on their fingers; writing them on their hearts; and talking of them to the degree that His words become lodged in our children's hearts (Proverbs 7:1-3 and Deuteronomy 6:6-9). Encourage your family's children to read God's Word and to memorize verses and books of the Bible -- the younger, the better. Make lessons and discussions from daily occurrences and observations such as the behavior of school bullies or the germination of garden seeds, etc.

When the children have flown from the nest, many husbands and wives find that the return to "just you and me" is rather nice. They seem to pick up where they left off in their togetherness about 25 years earlier. The babies are no longer crying. The older children are not squabbling. The graduations have all been attended, and the children's weddings are all over.

For some spouses, though, the empty nest only reveals an unhappy marriage. There's nothing more to hide the fact. If the woman's children were more important to her than her husband, trouble lies ahead.

After her children had left, a woman said to a counselor, "I feel purposeless. When I first married, I found my identity as a spouse. When I had a child, I found my identity as a parent." If only the women's priorities had been in order, she would have stated, "When I was baptized, I found my identity as a Christian." It's only that certainty of self that we succeed in all other phases and aspects of our lives.

Take a look at the worthy woman of Proverbs 31. If only verses 15 and 21 and 27 were the focus of that chapter, we would see a woman whose life was wrapped up entirely in her children. However, additional verses, and especially verses 12 and 23, reveal a balanced woman, one who capably managed her time and focus and bestowed consideration on each member of her family -- children and husband.

While for many parents there is great joy in the return visits of their adult children, for others there is the stress of coping with a more permanent return of those who earlier had left the nest.

It must be stated that the disappointment of that return is not for the parents only. The young person may feel despondency over what appears to be failure. He or she will need time to reorganize for a fresh start. Mom and Dad may be required to delay plans they had made during their brief liberty from child rearing.

The Empty Nest Syndrome – a poem

One of these days you'll shout, "Why don't you kids grow up and act your age?"

And they will.

Or: “You guys get outside and find yourself something to do, and don't slam the door!”

And they won’t.

You will straighten up the boys’ bedroom, neat and tidy: bumper stickers discarded; spread, tucked in and smooth; toys displayed on the shelves; hangers in the closets; animals caged. And you'll say out loud, “Now, I want it to stay this way!”

And it will.

You'll prepare a perfect dinner with a salad that hasn't been picked to death and a cake with no finger traces in the icing. And you'll say, “Now, there's a meal for company!” and you'll eat it alone.

You'll say, “I want complete privacy on the phone -- no dancing around; no pantomimes; no demolition crews; silence! Do you hear?”

And you'll have it.

No more plastic tablecloths stained with spaghetti.

No more bedspreads to protect the sofa from damp bottoms.

No more gates to stumble over at the top of the basement steps.

No more clothes pins under the sofa.

No more play pens to arrange a room around.

No more anxious nights under a vaporizer tent.

No more sand on the sheets or Popeye movies in the bathrooms.

No more iron on patches; wet, knotted shoestrings; tight boots or rubber bands for ponytails.

Imagine lipstick with a point on it.

No babysitter for New Year's Eve?

Washing only once a week.

Seeing a steak that isn't ground.

Having your teeth cleaned without a baby on your lap.

No PTA meetings; no carpools; no blaring radios; no washing her hair at 11:00 pm; having your own roll of tape.

Think about it -- no more Christmas presents out of toothpicks and library paste; no more sloppy oatmeal kisses; no more tooth fairy; no giggles in the dark; no knees to heal; no responsibility. Only a voice crying, “Why don't you grow up?” And the silence echoing, “I did.”

The Role of Grandparents

“Children's children are the crown of old men” (Proverbs 17:6a). If Grandfather is viewed in today's families as the crowned king, no less important is his queen, Grandmother.

Lovingly dubbed Grammy, Granny, Nanny, Nana and many other endearing names, grandmothers often enjoy a unique give-and-take -- a very special resource of her children by just being there for her grandchildren. Grandmother's presence lends confidence to her family.

For those who use the Federal Census list to research ancestry, they frequently note that historically, grandmother was a member of younger households. She often moved from one young family to another as the decades were recorded, Mrs. Marion Robinson, mother of First Lady Michelle Obama, agreed to set aside her plans and move to the White House to ensure stability for her two granddaughters, while their parents fulfilled their duties as President and First Lady.

Many family researchers agree that grandparents are the historians who form the bridge to the past for younger families. Grandmothers’ stories enable the younger family to understand many of its own ideals, moral views, and individualities. Alma Derryberry Worthington chronicled her warm memories of childhood lived during the Great Depression in her book “Remembering With Granny.” Mrs. Worthington relates 58 chapters of wonderful recollections. The importance of her role as family historian is verified in a paragraph in the book's preface:

“Many times, over the years, I have told my children and grandchildren, the experiences of the hard times, the fun, and the lessons we learned from our poverty and from the love and Godly training our parents showed us. My children have urged me many times to write these stories down for them so these wonderful memories would not be lost. As time goes on, they are always delighted to hear of these happenings and would ask me to tell them over and over. When my oldest grandson Ted was small and was visiting us, he would always say, “Granny, let's sit on the porch, and you tell me about the good old days” (Joel 1:3; Deuteronomy 32:7; Joshua 4:6; and Joshua 22;28).

With the intervention of today's health awareness, more people are living longer lives and achieving the status of grandparents. Studies have found that many people enter grandparenthood in midlife at an average age of 52 for women and spend 40 years as grandparents. Many go on to become great-great-grandparents. The younger ages of modern grandparents may account for those who prefer other interests over too much involvement with their grandchildren. However, for grandparents over 65, polls find 75% of them visit with their grandchildren at least once a week.

Sometimes it is difficult for a woman to find her place as grandmother. She feels she may overstep her bounds. She agonizes over whether she should say what she thinks to the younger family or even what she should say. Usually, grandmother is wise to tread lightly in this area. Extenuating circumstances force her to speak out on occasion, though.

When troubles in the domestic lives of the younger generation cast grandmother in the parenting position once again, life can be a real challenge for the older woman. In 1990, 5% of children in the United States lived with grandparents -- over a million in households where neither of the grandchild's parents were present. The responsibility of rearing one's grandchildren is mixed. with rewards and costs. Grandmother, who may have already come to enjoy her freedom from child rearing, loses much of her privacy and her time for hobbies, friends and with her husband as he enters retirement years. It can be an overwhelming turn of events.

Some grandparents perceive their work as parent to their grandchild as an opportunity to improve on their earlier parenting skills. The situation would afford a Christian time to help the children develop positive values, a time to teach them about the Lord (2 Timothy 1:5 and 2 Timothy 3:15).

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