



Chapter One

Entering the Crossroads

Between and Between the Empty Nest

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart and
lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him, and
he will make your paths straight.*

Proverbs 3:5–6

Each woman thought the day would never arrive. Some dreaded it, others prayed for it. Yet every mother sees it coming, ominously lurking around the corner. The empty nest. Those who have already passed this signature mark in the childrearing process deem it another passage in life, in parenting. Others, single moms, especially single moms—those who've invested heart and soul into keeping their struggling family intact—frequently regard the thought of sending their kids off to worlds unknown as morally unconscionable. Yet like every other challenge single mothers have faced, they're determined to make the adjustment successfully, and if at all possible . . . trauma-free. Sure, there are bound to be some wrinkles in the formula. And not to forget that after years of solo parenting, these courageous survivors instinctively surpass the status quo in every possible arena of life. They've honed their coping and managerial skills to a science—nothing takes them unawares—especially when it comes to their kids.

So, as babies grow into toddlers, elementary age kids grow into teens, and high school graduates into young adults, single moms are readying themselves for the good-byes they see inching toward them. Wisely, most mothers begin making prudent plans for the

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upcoming “empty nest” years that won’t demand so much of their daily energy and time. Mothers entering this second stage of parenting initiate a chain of events, of patterns actually, that eases both parent and child into the future with confidence. Some women realize that they’ve been so consumed with their children’s activities; they’ve let the development of their own circle of social resources slide. Other moms may opt to

start back to school, take up a long-neglected hobby, or rev up their volunteering pace. Step by step, single mothers from all walks of life begin putting into place small, but nevertheless significant, choices to let go of their children.

Prayerfully and systematically, the proactive mom views the future as flush with opportunity, not as an incalculable venture to be dreaded or shirked. Rather than grasp at the ever evolving yet diminishing relationship between mom and child, these women embrace the changes as God-ordained. Journey now with some amazing single mothers who have learned to see the good in change, expect the miraculous from the mundane, and overcome the impossible by God’s good hand of grace.



Forty-eight-year-old Jennifer looked around the hastily vacated bedroom in dismay. What a mess! What in the world had Haley been thinking? Trying in vain to recall the last words her nineteen-year-old daughter called out as she darted through the door minutes earlier, Jennifer sighed . . . loud and long. Oh my. I can’t leave this

room in ruins for the next two months. Every time I walk past Haley's bedroom I'll be visualizing (and exaggerating) what lies beyond her closed door.

Standing akimbo, Jennifer gazed thoughtfully at the piles of unfolded clothing, the stacks of books, magazines, and assorted CDs, all apparently discarded, unwanted. Just look at this, Jennifer frowned as she reached down and pulled out a CD, a once favored collection of currently "in" pop artists. I remember the day we went shopping and Haley had to have this particular CD. When was that? A few months ago? Six? I guess it really doesn't matter now.

Jennifer stood back up and stared at the disarray glumly. What to do? Should I dutifully clean up this room and get it organized for my own peace of mind or leave it to its doom as evidence of one more lesson in life about the value of being responsible and organized? Hmmm. Stepping gingerly into the cluttered but empty—so empty—room, Jennifer decided life lessons could wait for another day. *She* couldn't stand the mess.

Okay, where to begin? I'll clear the floor first and then work the room clockwise, Jennifer decided. On hands and knees, she reached deep under Haley's bed and began exercising both her muscles and her patience. As she continued to grab and pull, Jennifer wondered just how much could be squished underneath such a small berth. What Jennifer found continued to both astound and amaze her. Not only did Haley trash beloved books, music, and quality clothing, she had stuffed countless other reminders of her childhood into the confines of that minuscule space. Jennifer dragged out dusty diaries, youth group mementos, frayed sports ribbons, dog-eared yearbooks, and even sticky remnants of who-knew-how-old Easter candy!

At last, Jennifer had retrieved every abandoned article and dust bunny from her daughter's bed. Looking around, she realized that organizing all this stuff was going to take a significant time commitment. What's more, it would also require an emotional investment. Clutching Haley's worn-to-shreds-by-love stuffed dinosaur, Jennifer gulped. Cleaning was all well and good, but was she ready

to take a stroll down memory lane in the process? And at such an emotionally volatile time? Tea, Jennifer decided. A cup of fragrant, tasty tea always does me good.

Basking in the late afternoon sunlight, Jennifer relaxed. Holding her favorite teacup in hand, she breathed in the delicate aroma of her tea of choice, citrus splendor. Spicy, yet smooth. As she sipped, she fell into a brief spell of melancholy. She knew this day would eventually arrive. Still, even with all her preparation, Jennifer—officially a newcomer to the ranks of empty nesters—wasn't all that sure she was prepared for the next step in her life's journey.

Sure, she'd been making all the appropriate plans for the day when Haley moved out of the house and left for an out-of-state college. Certainly, Jennifer had been diligent in facing this auspicious change. So why did her heart ache so? Why did it pain her to see all those mementos—all those memories of Haley's childhood—tossed

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glibly aside? I know the answer, Jennifer thought sadly. What mother wouldn't feel a vast expanse of nothingness when her child leaves home? It makes sense. I hurt when I gave birth; it hurts to let go. Such is the stuff of life!

Closing her eyes, Jennifer prayed. Lord, help me. Come swiftly to my aid as you have done so many times in the past. Always my faithful Lord, you know

my every thought, my every fear. Calm me now, in these troublesome days when life as I know it is changing forever. Give me your grace to see this change as a gift from your hand. Let me not shirk from the unknown, but rather face each day, every moment, with full assurance that you will walk me through to the other side. Enable me to step positively into this brand new future. I trust in your strength, your goodness, and your love. Amen.

With new resolve, Jennifer rinsed her cup, wiped the wet ring off the kitchen table, and determined to make some real progress yet that day in Haley's room. Making her way up the stairs, Jen-


nifer's spirits flagged a bit, but then she remembered how she had faced so many other "adjustments" as a single mom. One step at a time. One small choice at a time.

All right now, maybe if I get this paper problem under control first, the rest will be simpler. After stacking pile upon pile of miscellaneous paper, Jennifer started sorting. Fifteen minutes became sixty, then ninety. When the room lost its luster from the sun's final rays, Jennifer got up, stretched, and went to turn on Haley's bedside lamp. Perched half under, half next to, its stand, Jennifer noticed some travel brochures. Pulling the top one out, Jennifer smiled as she read its contents. Each one detailed a different adventure trip; one to a dude ranch, another white water rafting, the third a mountain climbing excursion. That daredevil girl of mine! Always planning for her next venture.

Putting the pamphlets back in place, a sudden thought occurred to Jennifer. Why not? The parallel is certainly there. Maybe, just maybe, I'll ask Haley if she wouldn't mind some company. After all, life's to be an adventure, right?



Ready, Set, Adjust!

 *Forge new relationships apart from your children.* Renee woke up one day and suddenly realized that virtually every social contact she had was somehow connected to her son's social circle. The parents of the boys her son played with became Renee's friends by default; nothing wrong with that. After all we often choose friends based on common interests or, in this case, mutual friends. But Renee wondered what was going to happen once her son grew up. After her son outgrew his need for a chauffeur, would Renee's current cache of female friends continue to befriend her? Or were their friendships tied to their sons' relationships? Good question. Renee decided then

and there to begin seeking out a few other women she was acquainted with and begin cultivating some social activity that was based on Renee as a person, independent of her offspring.

☀️ *Invest time and energy in developing skills, abilities, and talents.* Being a mom takes the majority (and sometimes all) of a woman's concentration and daily energy. Thus, most moms have little "extra" to spare once they've fulfilled their basic responsibilities. Though it might feel awkward at first, midlife single moms who are reaching that transitional place between their kids' blossoming independence and the empty nest wisely take some well-spent hours simply to "introspect." They remember what they were good at, what they loved doing pre-mommyhood. These thoughtful women also revisit earlier life goals and then put in place opportunities to enhance their lives with valued and valuable activity.


☀️ *Proactively step into life independent of the lives of your children.* Cathy sat in the parking lot of the ladies gym. She felt her palms moisten and wiped them on her thighs. I can't do this, Cathy thought . . . What's the matter with me? Answering her own silent query, Cathy recognized that it had been years since she had done anything significant apart from her kids' activities. Sure, she could handle whatever life threw her way when it came to parenting, but this was different. Suddenly, Cathy was attempting to step into a role where she was the focus of attention. Up to now, most of her life had centered on enabling her children to grow and succeed. Taking a deep breath, Cathy realized it was high time she experienced a bit of stretching for her own sake, and she wasn't thinking about how her muscles would ache come evening. I've got to do this . . . and she did do it but, Cathy conceded, the stretching came with some residual aches and pains.

☀️ *Find the will and the courage to step into unknown territory.* When Sally's ex-husband left her during the early years

of parenting, she was bereft in every possible way—financially, emotionally, spiritually. But Sally had a small group of friends who came alongside her, comforted her, listened to her complaints, and then cheered her on to better days. Some six years after her unwanted divorce, Sally graduated with a degree in business and now manages her own at-home health care enterprise. Sally often gives credit to those who believed in her ability to succeed when she didn't feel she had the strength even to get out of bed.

- ☀ *Ease emotionally into the empty nest by anticipating its arrival.* Taking a proactive approach to life is one of the primary ways to ensure smooth transitions and eventual success. The women who best acclimate to challenging situations or life-altering changes are those who are mentally and spiritually aware. These women are prepared, stand at the ready, and literally anticipate the ever-shifting phases of life. By adopting a faith-enthused, positive, can-do perspective, moms “can do” whatever it is that needs to be accomplished.
- ☀ *Stay prayerfully engaged while allowing your children room to grow up and leave.* When Ruth waved good-bye to her twin daughters, she cried buckets. Yet her weeping wasn't characterized by emotional devastation. Rather, thankfulness and a grateful spirit frequently marked Ruth's prayers. Ruth was fully confident that even though she wouldn't be able to speak words of encouragement to her girls daily, she could offer a greater gift. Ruth determined to invest her parental energy in interceding for her daughters from every vantage point. She realized that no one would ever pray for her girls as she would. So Ruth found quiet solace and sweet comfort in bringing every request, large and small, before Christ in prayer. She often got up from her knees wondering if she wasn't the one who was most blessed after such heavenly encounters.
- ☀ *Resolve to think and act positively toward all changes.* Jill was the mother of five children. All but one were grown and

had left home. Jill looked back and marveled at the speed at which the mothering years had passed by. While her home is quieter these days, her heart and mind continue to relive those moments when God's presence and provision made all the difference. Certainly, Jill and her children had gone without many of the perks other families take for granted. But Jill realized God's hand had provided for their every need. So why fret the future? Already seasoned by years of God's faithfulness, Jill took time to give thanks every day. And she, like other great women of faith, was not afraid of tomorrow.

 *Partner with other parents who have already walked the path.* Becky and Susan had been friends since elementary school. They had grown up together. Now, they were growing old(er) together as well. The only significant difference between them was that Becky was parenting a ten-year-old. Susan had married right after college while Becky had first pursued a career. While Susan's children were all grown and on their own, Becky was just entering the jumping off phase. Daily, sometimes hourly, Becky would make urgent 911 calls to Susan for small doses of emotional respite and perspective. Becky realized how precious Susan's counsel and comfort was . . . and how timely. She'd already walked this road. Who better to confer with?



Every Mother's Prayer

*Lord,
I stand at the crossroads, often unsure and uncertain of the next step. I frequently find myself wondering if I've done all I could do as a mom. Have I passed on my faith, my values, everything that is of eternal worth? Will my children still hear and abide by those timeless truths even when they've moved on? My heart, I admit, is often*

marked by fearful thoughts. Lord, will you stand with me now? Please, be my guardian, my friend, and my counselor. I have such need of your wisdom, instruction, and grace. Grace! Oh how I long for a renewed measure of your sweet grace to see me through this time of change. Let my mind and my heart be fixed upon you and your good word. When I feel tempted to draw back in fear or pity, nudge me forward. Enable me to continue serving day by day, hour by hour, even though my life may continually change. Help me recount your faithfulness from days past. Remind me of who you are. And never let me neglect the privilege of prayerful intercession—for myself and for my children. Link me to your heart, and let not despair or discouragement tear me from your presence. As always, I depend on your strength and your mercy to continue my journey. Thank you, Lord, for loving me, for forgiving me, for redeeming me. Amen.



Thought for the Day

“In the Bible I find the Creator who made me and therefore knows everything about me. I find a Savior who walked on earth in my shoes and understands everything about my experience. The Bible faces the deepest issues of the human experience head-on, with bright hope and functional wisdom.”

—*Lost in the Middle: Midlife and the Grace of God*, by Paul David Tripp