

Changing Roles and Responsibilities to Adult Children

This subject is possibly the most challenging that we have thought about so far as a group. Our children have the greatest power to “wring our hearts” with various degrees of concern and at times sorrow, yet at the same time to “swell our chests” with pride and joy. We love them so much that it hurts. From before they were born to however old they are now as adults, they are part of us and we continue to feel every “bump in the road” they face and long to smooth it out for them, but often we cannot, nor should not.

In her book “Empty Nest, What’s next?” Michele Howe writes, “People always told me the most difficult parenting years were from birth to eighteen years of age. They were wrong. Not to be discouraging to younger parents, but with every year that passes your child inches his way out of your control, and eventually out of your home. Who knew how much emotional distress this never ending transition could cause us parents?.....Since parenting is a role that is constantly growing and evolving in the same way that individual family members grow and evolve, there are specific challenges to parenting our adult children that are rarely addressed.”

There are challenges as we consider our changing roles and responsibilities to our adult children and the issues that emanate from that relationship, but remember there are no perfect parents and no perfect children. Perhaps the saddest thing is that at times we can feel that we face difficult issues alone, partly because we do not want to break confidentiality, or because we fear the rejection of other Christians, or just feel that we have failed. Although, as ever, we want to respect confidentiality, let us seek to be honest, to support each other and to pray for each other.

A good place for us to start is with a Biblical perspective. The scriptures speak of children as a gift and great blessing from the Lord:-

Psalm 127:3-5 “Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from Him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one’s youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.”

Psalm 128:1-4 “Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in His ways. You will eat the fruit of your labour; blessings and prosperity will be yours. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your sons will be like olive shoots round your table. Thus is the man blessed who fears the Lord.”

Take some time to praise God for the wonderful gift and blessing of the children He has given you.

Praise Him for each one as an individual, for all the memories, the joys and the sorrows over the years.

Think about their unique personality and what you value and enjoy about them.

Recognise and appreciate the strengths, gifts and talents God has given them.

Not all are high achievers in the world's estimation but they may bring other strengths that we value of being loving and caring, creative and imaginative, hardworking and committed, faithful and loyal. Praise God for these and other characteristics that God "Wove together" in them "when he made them in the secret place". (Psalm 139)

We can be sure that the parent/child relationship is immensely precious to God since it is at the very heart of the Trinity. The Godhead itself has a Father and a Son. The Father who sent His only Son to die in our place (Romans 8:32) knows all that there is to know about the love and joy, as well as the pain and loss that parenthood involves; and He understands.

The parent/child relationship is also given value since it is so often used in the scriptures as a metaphor of God's relationship as our Father to us, His children. For example "As a Father has compassion on His children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him." Ps 103 and in 1 John 3:1 "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"

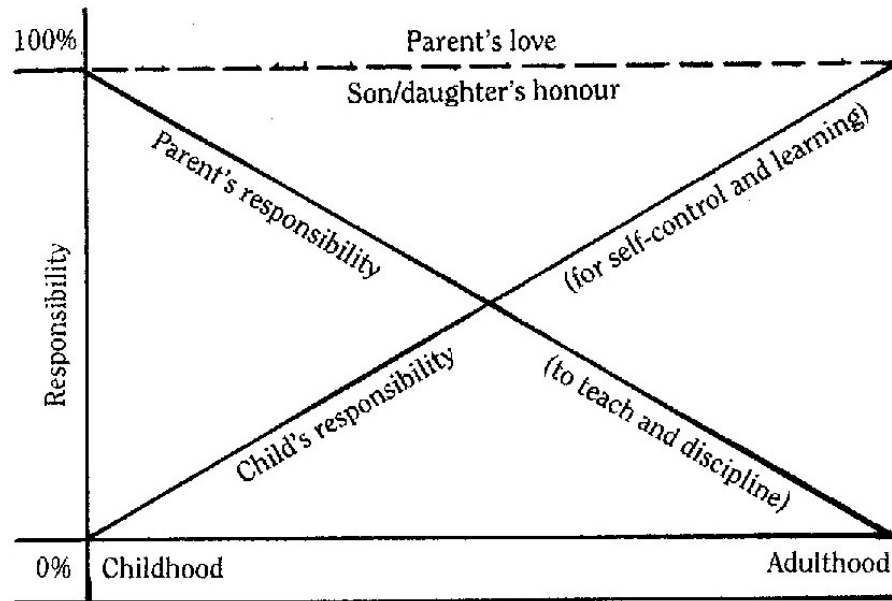
The Journey toward maturity

As parents, we long for our children to grow to maturity in every area of their lives, but this is a journey and often through uncharted waters. The scriptures give us some primary injunctions concerning the parent/child responsibilities but as is often the case, we have to do some serious thinking and praying about how to apply them in the 'messy' circumstances of everyday life.

Some responsibilities continue for life, though how they are applied will change over time. For example the fifth commandment "Honour your father and mother, so that you may live long in the land" Exodus 20:12 is a lifelong responsibility to show honour and respect for our parents. In contrast Ephesians 6:1 "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." Is a responsibility with limits as the child grows, matures and begins to assume responsibility for themselves.

Similarly, God has given parents the responsibility to love, teach and to discipline our children. Deuteronomy 6:6-7 says "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk upon the road, when you lie down and when you get up." Also Ephesians 6:4 "Fathers so not exasperate your children, instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." Although the responsibility to love our children unconditionally continues throughout life, the responsibility to teach and discipline does not. The changes in responsibility occur gradually over time, but at some life marker events e.g. leaving home, financial independence and marriage, the change may need to occur more suddenly.

The illustration below represents this move from childhood to adulthood showing those responsibilities that change and those that continue for life both for parents and for children.



In their book “How to really love your adult child” Campbell and Chapman recommend Michael Bloom’s research that sites five stages in the growth process to adult hood and maturity :-

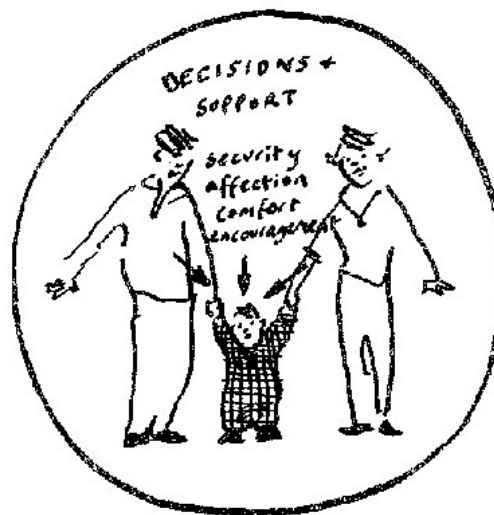
1. Children begin to rebel against parental authority. In early adolescents about age twelve, children vacillate between needing restraint and freedom. This stage ends when the parents appropriately adjust their ways of handling the children, to accommodate this normal phase.
2. Children enter normal adolescent rebellion. They challenge house rules, place high interest on peer relationships, and begin to question their parent’s values.
3. Children move on to college, the military, or a job. Often this means that they begin to live away from their parents. This is a time of separation with some sadness and grief.
4. Family members redefine themselves and their roles during this phase, as they see much less of each other. The parents find outlets for their energies and the children discover their own values.
5. Adult to adult relationships develop, in which each person is seen as a separate and valued individual.

Campbell and Chapman comment that “Most children progress fairly well until they reach stage 2 or 3. When adolescence hits their homes, many parents make few adjustments in their way of interacting, and continue with the same parent-young child relationship. The parents are unaware of what they are doing, but because the child hasn’t got into any particular difficulties before adolescence, the parents “get away” with their mistakes. Yet in most situations, when parents realise their mistakes, there is time and opportunity to make corrections. They can get their adult children’s development back on track.”

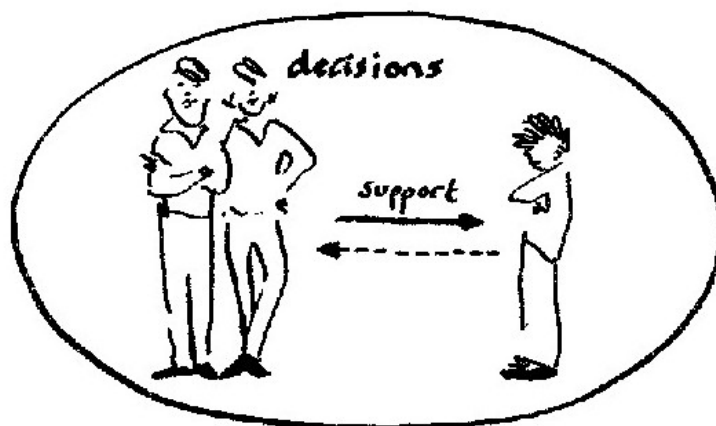
In “The Marriage Book” Nicky and Sila Lee describe the progress from dependence to independence with some useful cartoon illustrations (as seen below). They emphasise the importance of this transition with regard to establishing a lasting marriage.

“Our progress from complete dependence on parents as children through to eventual independence is of vital importance for marriage. We move through different stages as we change from being a child to being a teenager, then an adult, and finally a married person.”

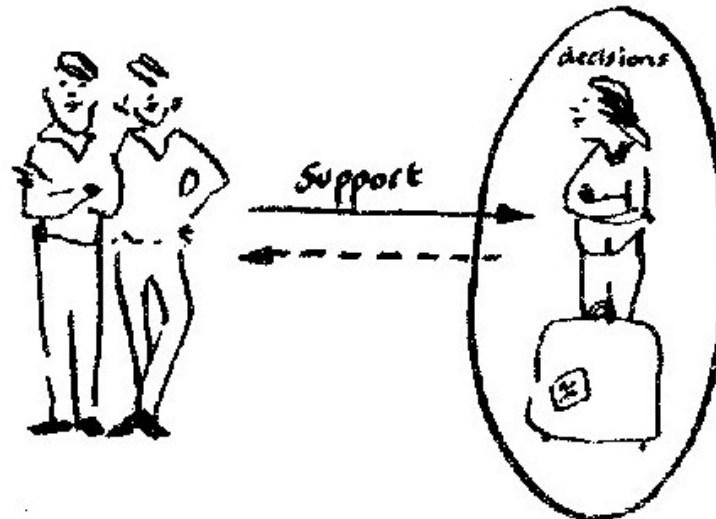
Early years – the parents provide all the child’s needs both physical and emotional. The parent’s unconditional love causes them to provide a safe environment for the child and to create clear boundaries (represented by the circle). Since the child lacks sound judgement at this stage the parents make all significant decisions



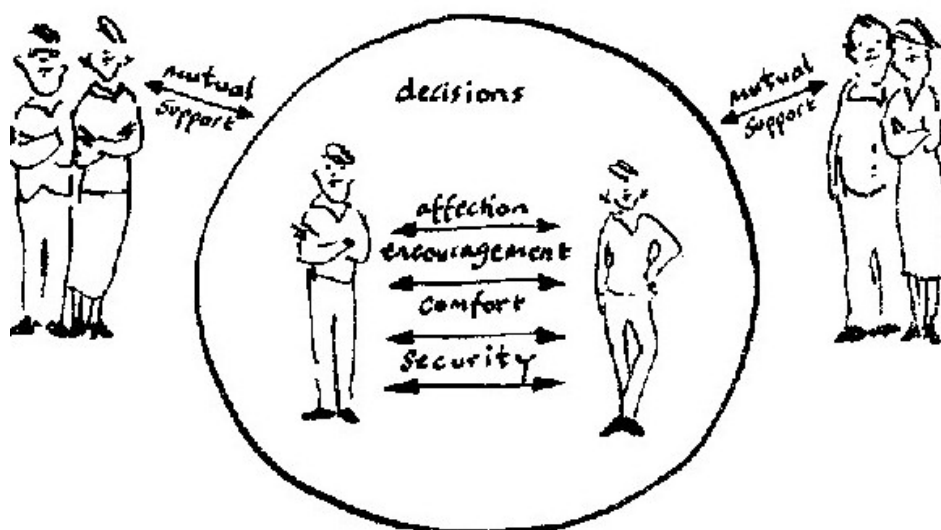
Teenagers – During these years parents need to give increasing independence, allowing the child to make decisions in as many areas as possible. The teenager still needs boundaries but there needs to be a gradual letting go as the essential transition from total parental control to eventual independence. The oval represents increasing freedom within set limits. The dotted line represents the emerging awareness of the teenager that they might be of help to the parents.



Coming of age/leaving home – Between the ages of 18 and 21 whether still living at home or having left home, there is more of an adult relationship to parents. The child is making more decisions about further education, future career, relationships, use of money etc. Most will still look to parents for advice and support but will also recognise parents need for appreciation, affection and encouragement.



Getting married – The circle around the married couple represents the need to establish their own home, make their own decisions and meet each other's needs. Their first loyalty must now be to each other and they must leave behind any emotional dependence upon the parents. This change does not mean cutting themselves off from their families and in fact, when on a proper footing, parents and siblings can be a huge support to the marriage.



The Lord Jesus spoke of this necessity of 'leaving and cleaving' in marriage in Matthew 19:5, when He reaffirmed the original injunction given in Genesis 2:24 " For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, and they will become one flesh." The footnote in the NIV for this verse says "Instead of remaining under the protective custody of his parents a man leaves them and, with his wife, establishes a new family unit." It is interesting to notice that God's original intention for marriage was for the married couple to form a new family unit, separate from both sets of parents, and yet the Semitic culture had instead brought the son's wife into the parental home, where the parents maintained control. This arrangement was probably practiced for economic or land ownership reasons, but as in today's western cultures, failure to 'leave' properly, both emotionally and psychologically as well as physically, causes confusion of roles and responsibilities and eventually leads to conflict.

Nicky and Sila Lee continue to explain the need for the couple to establish a new primary loyalty "The family home was the place of authority, provision and security. After marriage, there is a new centre, a new decision-making structure, a new home. The highest commitment and loyalty of the couple must now be to each other; the apron strings must be cut."

"In many marriages this need to change loyalties is never addressed. In some cases an unhealthy and unhelpful influence continues to exist from parent to child, causing resentment from their partner and placing strain on the marriage. In other families it is because the parents have failed to recognise their child's need to make their own decisions. Insecurity and fear on the parent's part may have led to excessive control. Other parents have sought to hold on to their child to meet their own need for affection and support."

Changes affecting the rate of maturity and growth to independence of young adults

Campbell and Chapman describe some of the momentous changes that have occurred over the past five decades that have completely altered the landscape of the world within which our young adults have grown up:-

- The freely available birth control pill
- Legalised abortions
- The so called 'sexual revolution'
- Proliferation of 'easy' divorce
- Mobilisation and diversification of culture
- Globalisation
- The digital revolution
- The diminishing importance of the 'traditional family'

"Nowhere have these changes been more poignantly felt than by parents of those amazing and puzzling young people we call Generation Y (or the Millennials or the Mosaics), as well as some of the younger Generation Xers." Campbell and Chapman

(They would describe GenXers as those now in their late thirties or forty and the Generation Y or Millennials as those born between 1980 and 1995 approximately.)

But they don't let parents get away without some responsibility for these changes, "Today 40% of our young people grew up as children of divorce. The GenXers, in particular, were labelled latchkey children, because they had keys to their homes after school, as their parents were away working. Many of these children were more often shuffled and managed than parented. The Millennial generation, as we will see, were the 'baby on board', pampered generation, but their coming of age and seeming delaying of adulthood has also baffled parents."

"Today's young people have a different idea about what constitutes 'the good life.' They want to travel and enjoy hobbies and sports. They want satisfying relationships and freedom to explore and do new things. They don't have much patience with the notion of working decades to gradually rise to the lifestyle their parents enjoy."

Indeed the accumulating of material possessions and the symbols of lifestyle status of their parent's generation has been exchanged for the desire for experiences and pleasure now.

Campbell and Cameron conclude "Many adult children display a dependence on their parents that is foreign to an older generation. Indeed, some researchers even suggest that "emerging adulthood" – the life stage about 18-30 – is a separate developmental stage, similar to adolescence, which was first identified early in the twentieth century. Certainly today's economy is one factor; however this phenomenon has been growing for two decades. Whatever the reason, many young adults seem to be struggling to grow up."

In his book "Emerging Adulthood" Jeffrey Arnett writes "To be a young American today is to experience both excitement and uncertainty, wide open possibility and confusion, new freedoms and new fears. The rise in the ages of entering marriage and parenthood, the lengthening of higher education and prolonged job instability during the twenties, reflects the development of a new period of life for young people in the United States and other industrialised societies....that should be recognised as a distinct new period of life that will be around for many generations to come."

A Question of Expectations

This is a new phase of life between dependent childhood and independent adulthood. But what does everybody expect? Parents have some expectations that are very different from those held by their adult children. What parents may view as failure and immaturity, their adult children may see as normal and necessary to achieve their goals. Also adult children may expect certain things from their parents that they are not able or willing to give them and so feel under pressure. Most parents had expectations of more time for themselves when their children were grown up, but instead can feel put upon by their young adult children. When left unexpressed these pressures can lead to confrontation.

Campbell and Chapman go on to explain how the dashed expectations of parents can result in confrontation "Perhaps your children have given you disappointment, frustration and concern from one of the following situations: doing poorly in college, wasting time and

money; finishing college but then wandering and/or moving back home for a while ‘to get their feet on the ground’; having a marriage end in divorce in a few years, perhaps moving back home with a child or two; spending far beyond their means; or making lifestyle and employment choices that turn out disastrously.”

Before you feel too depressed, they do go on to say that in spite of all the profound changes that have affected families, they do see some hope on the horizon. That there are many parents and children, who work through and enjoy their new relationships as their child becomes an adult. That many parents genuinely enjoy being with their adult children; several referred to their adult children as “good friends”. A 2010 report study notes that there is less of a generation gap between Millennials and their parents than in the past.

What is the goal for our children as they reach adulthood

That they become mature, independent adults, taking responsibility for their own decisions and behaviour? Although this is our aim, sometimes we inadvertently behave as parents in ways that perhaps delay or even prevent that from happening.

“As parents, we raise our children to become independent, fully functioning, contributing members of society, don’t we? Why then do so many parents short-circuit the maturation process by needlessly intervening when young adult children would benefit from all the wrestling and thinking through of making some of life’s tough decisions? The answer is in one word: Fear.” (Michele Howe)

Campbell and Chapman describe what they call three “parent traps”:-

1. **“Over protection** – Parents who insist, ‘let me do it for you’, fall into parent trap number one. They want to do for their children, what perhaps, was not done for them. However, they do so much that their children never learn to do for themselves. Their “kindness” fosters dependency which appears in several areas of life, the most obvious of which is financial. These are the “helicopter parents” we are hearing about in the media. Why do some fall into this trap? Overprotective parents usually accept one or two false beliefs. The first is that a child cannot make it without the parent’s constant involvement. The second is that a parent cannot bear the thought of a child – even as adult child – having any pain or problems out in the real world. Ironically, this is most prevalent in parents who have had to survive great hardships and have emerged as competent people. Instead of realising that their hardships are what made them strong and competent, they desire that their children have problem free lives with no character building trials.”
2. **“Under management** – Parents who do not give enough management to their children’s lives can be of various types. Some may seem distant and unapproachable, and not know how to care for their child’s emotional needs. Many under manage because they fear displeasing their children, even losing their love; some give little input because they dislike conflict. Others may be overly permissive; still others devote little time to their children’s lives because of busy or long work schedules, which often leave them tired when they arrive home. Those parents who seem distant usually grew up in homes where their own parents provided for

physical needs but failed to relate to them on an emotional level. Consequently, they have little idea how to develop such a relationship with their own children.”

3. **“Over management** – With this parenting style, the parents are deeply involved with their children, devoting much energy to help their offspring learn and grow. Since the children’s earliest years, the parents sought to give the children auditory and visual stimuli to develop their intellectual capacities. They gave lots of hugs and kisses and affirming words to meet the children’s emotional needs. They attended all the ball games, piano recitals, and dance performances. Now as their children move into adulthood, they intend to continue being good parents. The problem is that they fail to shift gears, and the young adults, who are seeking independence feel dominated. Thus they draw away from their parents, spending less time with them, and asking less and less advice. This hurts the parents, who feel that their children are abandoning them. The parents whose style is intense, hands on management need to draw back, pray more and probe less and give their children the freedom to make decisions on their own.”

(These three parent traps and the ways to deal with them are developed in chapter nine of Campbell and Chapman’s book “How to really love your adult child”)

Michele Howe shares a prayer on this subject for parents, which you might find helpful:-

“There is so much about letting go of my children that makes me feel afraid. I allow my imagination far too much space in my thinking, and I reflect back on my own mistakes in unhelpful ways that only increase my worries. Help me to learn from what I have done wrong in the past, and to use those experiences as fuel to pray more powerfully for my children as they face life and all its crossroads. Jesus you love my children more than I ever will, so by faith I give them and their choices to you. Please infuse your Holy Spirit guided thoughts into every decision they make, and bless them for each one they make in obedience to you. When they don’t obey you, Lord, then I relinquish them to you once again to steer them back to you in your way and in your time. Amen”

When things don’t go according to plan

“Nesters” – There was a time when adult children finished high school and shortly afterwards “flew the nest” usually to college, to travel or to enjoy their independence in some other way. But in recent decades there has been a growing trend for 18 – 24 year olds to remain living with their parents. Although this arrangement can work happily, for some parents who were looking forward to more time for themselves and anticipating more freedom to develop their own interests, it can face them with some challenges. The primary reasons for this phenomenon are of course economic. The high cost of college education may keep children at home attending a local university. The huge cost of rental accommodation is a deterrent even for those with paid employment. There are also pulls – when home provides

warmth, comfort, good home cooking and possibly laundry taken care of – what's not to like? For some there may be fear, insecurity or just not feeling ready yet to face the stresses and pressures alone, as an independent adult. There are extenuating circumstances in some families, when for some adult children it is right and proper for them to continue either totally or partially under the loving care of their family.

This extended time together can be a really positive time, especially if the quality of family life is strengthening and encouraging for the young adult and provides the parents with a longer time to transition the 'leaving' process. The downside is that parents find it hard to discover the attitudes and roles they should adopt to make it work and how to avoid being either too authoritarian or too permissive with these "nesters". Campbell and Cameron recommend making this experience as warm, upbeat, supportive and positive as possible in order that everyone has happy memories as they look back. They also have some practical guidelines:-

- Clarify and agree expectations.
- Maintain open communication e.g. family conferences where everyone can share their ideas, feelings, thoughts and opinions and will be listened to seriously.
- Balance freedom and responsibility. Although emerging adults need more freedom than high school children they also need to assume responsibilities within the family and home and for their own behaviour.
- Honour your moral values. Frequently the personal values of young adults differ from those of their parents. If your adult children plan to continue living at home, you have the right to ask them to respect the values of the parents, as least while they are in the home. In this way you are not forcing your values on them, but simply asking them to respect your beliefs as long as they live with you.
- Consider your own physical and mental health. This may vary with the parents tolerance levels, but it is not too much to ask to be informed if your adult child will be out late at night, when they might be expected home, or if they intend to be out all night, to avoid too many sleepless nights and unnecessary anxiety.
- Set time limits and goals. This will include areas like agreeing rent to be paid, setting a goal for when they will be seeking to move out of the home, or what efforts they are making to find a job, in order to give them some motivation. Setting goals and limits helps them to keep focussed on their own development and not to become complacent or depressed, even if events mean that they have to be jointly renegotiated at a later date.

“Boomerang Kids” – The boomerang effect is when you think your adult children are gone and then they come back home. Parent’s main concern in this situation is often not the return home, but their own reactions and uncertainties and the practical implications of the new, and perhaps unexpected arrangement. There are many and various reasons for returning adult children, some are practical and financial and some are emotional.

Campbell and Cameron describe two groups of returners – “planners” and “strugglers”. The “planners” expect to return home and to live there until they feel financially prepared to live on their own. “Planners” may have a reasonably well paid job but are unable to live independently, with all the high costs that incurs, whilst at the same time saving for a deposit for a mortgage or for that dream of travelling the world. So they return home to live, which allows them to both live and save.

Their rationale includes saving money, paying off college debts, or building up a “nest egg” for the future. The parent’s home is a sheltered and inexpensive environment. They tend to be savvy and use resources well, not putting too much burden on their families. The evidence indicates that “planners” do well in moving home and preparing themselves financially and socially for a secure future.

The “strugglers” simply go home out of necessity. They don’t want to struggle alone and need the security of home. Their plans may go no further than living at home for a while. Having lived independently of parents, perhaps gained a degree at college, they may then not be able to find a career job and discover that what they can earn with a temporary job isn’t enough to sustain them and so return home.

Difficulty finding a job in their field of study and the discouragement of the constant rejection of applications may lead to low self- esteem or even, in time, depression. Some find the outside world threatening, the competition too intense and the pressure too great. Most are perfectly normal adults, who just need longer in the “nest” to mature.

There may be those more extreme circumstances of an adult child, who needs to return to the support and encouragement of the family home due to unforeseen events such as illness, disability, divorce or bereavement; the later may mean that they bring a child or children with them.

The “strugglers” have met with failure or experiences they could not handle. They are hurting and need love and support. When an adult child is experiencing hardship, disappointment, and pain, the way their family and loved ones treat them will make a difference in the character they develop. If treated with respect, encouragement, love and support, they will eventually come out of the difficult days a more mature and capable person. But parents treating them with dismay, frustration or anger will increase their pain and lead to bitterness. So what can parents do to help:-

- Offer love, encouragement, support and perhaps financial help.
- Challenge the adult child to assume responsibility for themselves and to grow in independence.
- Establish a time limit for the nesting experience (with a degree of flexibility).

- Formulate a financial agreement that will take into account the financial goals and situations of all parties as well as the expectations of all. If financial contributions are impossible, then contributions to the household in other ways can be agreed.
- Respect the need for privacy. People's needs vary and this needs to be a matter for open communication to avoid friction.

Prodigals - This term is obviously derived from the parable of the prodigal son that Jesus taught in Luke chapter 15. The parable tells of a son, who takes his inheritance early, turns his back on home and family and the values they represent, whilst wasting his life and money on dissipation in a far country. Rob Parsons takes up this metaphor in his very moving and thought provoking book "Bringing Home the Prodigals". I would recommend this book for any parent for the insights that it gives, even if the subject does not seem relevant at the moment. The following is based on several quotes from the book.

He asks the question – "Who are the Prodigals" and answers it "It is true that the parable of the prodigal son is two thousand years old, but it is being re-enacted every day in homes all across our world as thousands of mothers and fathers wait up until the early hours of the morning for their children to come home. It is being relived in the homes, where in the children's bedrooms the drugs were first found, being played out again in the tears, the pain and the sheer frustration of the broken dreams and the crying out of, 'Where did we go wrong?'"

This may seem a bit extreme and perhaps outside of our experience but he also explains:- "Most families have a child who, in their younger years, looks more likely to become a prodigal. I sometimes wonder if it becomes a self- fulfilling prophecy in that we set them such impossible standards. We require them to jump through hoops they were never designed to negotiate and eventually they give up trying. They think to themselves, 'If my parents really think I'm so bad then I may as well prove them right.'"

He widens the responsibility for the making of prodigals beyond the family to the whole church culture:- "It is a great tragedy that in the modern church we so often judge each other by rules and regulations that we have devised ourselves and which have nothing to do with following Christ. And so often it is with this unwritten code that we create our prodigals."

He goes on to say: " I believe that many of us in the Christian community have some heart searching to do in this area. We have all at times, made it easier for our prodigals to leave; kept them out of mind when they are gone and, saddest of all, made it harder for them to come home." But he suggests that we can change by adopting the Father heart of God expressed in the parable with outrageous grace and mercy that will welcome the prodigals home.

Rob Parsons also reminds us that the prodigals are not always in the far country, but may be sitting in the pew every Sunday. The elder brother in the parable described himself to his father as having been 'slaving for him for years' and 'never having disobeyed his orders', yet his heart was cold and unforgiving toward his brother and resentful and bitter toward his father. Was he any closer to God than the returning prodigal?

Here are just a few pointers to help from the book:-

- Are we so strongly tempted to let our children know what we disapprove of in terms of their behaviour, appearance, relationships etc. that they are no longer convinced that we unconditionally love them and accept them?
- Because we want to be well thought of ourselves, we can react to our child going through a difficult time with 'what will people think of us'. We can help each other by being more honest, less judgemental and avoiding comparisons with others.
- Parental guilt is a huge issue often voiced with the words 'where did we go wrong' or 'if only we had...' or 'perhaps if we had not been...'. This guilt is a terrible burden to bear, since we cannot have that time again, and even if we did we would probably just make different mistakes. Rob Parsons says "As much as we love our children, as much as we want their good, as much as we would give all that we possess for their sakes, we cannot live their lives for them. Our children make choices. And sometimes those choices are bad ones." It is time to lay down the guilt. Ask their forgiveness if that is appropriate. But we need to let it go, give them to God the Father, since they are ultimately in His hand, not ours.
- We have to forgive our prodigals, even when they have deeply hurt us, when they have treated us badly and before there is any evidence that they may ever change. Forgiveness allows us not to reject them, to go on loving them and to keep alive the hope of their return. Forgiveness demonstrates the love and grace of God to them.
- We need to ask forgiveness when our words, attitudes or controlling behaviour has been part of the problem, but then by God's grace, we need to forgive ourselves.
- Where ever your prodigal is, whoever they are, God loves them more than you do, so never stop praying and never give up.

What's next for the "Empty Nesters"?

As the name implies, one of the major challenges of this time is facing the sense of "loss" that we may experience. We may feel keenly the loss of the young people in our home; the energy, fun and exuberance that they bring to our lives. As they mature and don't need us in the same way, there is the loss of what has been a defining role (especially for mothers) for some time. There can be a sense of loss of identity, purpose and direction, since we have given our children so much of our time, thinking, energy and emotion over the years.

Michele Howe describes this time "Truly the only lasting values in life are people. Our relationships with our families, friends, neighbours and colleagues are what bring the fullness to life – eternally. So when one season of life comes to a close (or, as in parenting takes on a new direction), we would do well to first accept the change, and then embrace and gently enter into it. Slowly, certainly. Always working towards this 'new normal' with the grace that God gives us.....God never wastes pain, especially pain of the heart. He uses it for His glory and our good."

We are probably all at different stages – some thinking 'Who am I now that my children are adults? How do I spend the time that I once invested in them? What are my deepest desires and dreams? How should I best put my gifts and talents to use? While others might

be exhausted with “nesters” or “boomerang” adult children at home, a full time job, as well as ministry responsibilities at church. Still others might have just got used to the ‘empty nest’, have redefined their new roles and direction just in time for grandchildren to come on the scene, filling their hearts and time with new responsibilities.

So here are a few suggestions to think about:-

- **Transition and change.** This is one of those seasons for redefinition of our roles and our goals in life. We need to spend time both as individuals and as a couple, thinking and praying about the direction God has for us, at this stage of our lives.
- **Reinvest in your marriage.** Time together as a family, along with the pressures of work may have taken time from the marriage relationship, and this is the time to put that right. Take time to talk and to listen well. Encourage each other to share their hopes and dreams, their disappointments and fears, as you get to rediscover the person you committed yourself to, all those years ago.
- **Reinvest in your spiritual life.** “It is true that as we grow older we have to face numerous daily changes, challenges and the consequences of many accumulated choices. This in itself is daunting enough. But without a strong faith base on which to build a foundation for making decisions, facing tough times, and dealing rightly with consequences, we would be in over our heads. Thus we need to continually invest in (and bolster up) our faith with our minds, hearts and acts of our will. We alone decide where to place our energies, and if we aren’t positioning ourselves to grow in intimacy with Christ daily, on our own, in the company of other Christians and serving in the local church, we set ourselves up for eventual failure (if not tragedy) when hard times hit. And they will” Michele Howe.
- **Serve others beyond your children.** Michele Howe recalls their pastor reminding them “If you’re still alive and breathing, then the Lord has something of importance for you to accomplish; otherwise He would have taken you to heaven.” She says “Adult children would be grateful beyond measure to know that their parents are doing well now that they have moved out and are busy with their own lives. Be that refreshing parent, who is a joy to be with, and who is flourishing, once your children have flown and gone.”
- **Leave a Spiritual Legacy.** “A legacy is an inheritance handed down from one generation to the next, something by which our descendants remember us. Legacies from the past affect a family’s future.” Campbell and Chapman. They go on to explain that those legacies go beyond money and property to the legacy of character, reputation and behaviour. They recognise that those legacies can be either positive, giving great advantages of self-esteem and wellbeing to our children and grandchildren, or negative in a way that plagues and handicaps their lives. They suggest three areas of legacy that greatly influence our children – moral, spiritual and emotional. “The moral legacy we leave our children is both by what we say but also how we live, as they closely observe our lives. All of us are in the process of leaving a spiritual legacy, whether we realise it or not. The spiritual legacy we leave our children depends on how closely our behaviour correlates with our expressed beliefs. The emotional legacy we leave depends largely on how we meet the

emotional needs of our children. If those needs are met, they receive love, wholeness and balance – a positive emotional legacy. But if they are not met, the children receive insecurity, low self-esteem and often fear – a negative emotional legacy.” The most important legacy we can leave is our personal character and integrity, along with happy memories of shared events and activities that will continue to have a long term influence on our children and grandchildren.

- **The Power of Prayer.** “This is one of the most powerful ways of influencing our adult children. This is a living legacy that can influence our children now and for years to come. The praying parent not only becomes a wiser person but is forever an influential parent.” Campbell and Cameron.

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Graph illustration: *Learning to Live Bible Studies*; The Navigators UK