



"EMPTY NEST" SYNDROME

*"I'm no longer needed on this earth;
my mission is done; my life is over"*
These are just a few sentiments an
'empty nester' might have.

For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven Eccl. 3:1

Most people understand "empty nest syndrome." It's when the kids leave the 'nest,' (home) and the parents are left alone. Realizing their work of raising the kids is done, they can sometimes get this forlorn, almost mourning sense about this chapter of life closing. Sometimes to the point that they feel like a dungeon door has slammed shut on the rest of their lives.

In addition to this feeling of loss and 'my whole reason for being is gone,' there is also what's left at home by the absence of the children...the parents. The independence and subsequent leaving of the grown up children can reveal some disturbing things about the relationship between the husband and wife. Were our whole lives and relationship wrapped up in those kids? Do I even know my spouse? What are we going to do for the next 20 years? Do we have anything in common with each other? All this can lead to a fork in the road emotionally between the couple who are, possibly for the first time since they got married, faced with only each other.

There can be a feeling of sadness and loneliness, almost like someone has died. An air of emptiness (where the 'empty' nest part comes in.), and an all around feeling of lostness...and 'what do I do with the rest of my life' kind of thing.

Well, I don't have it...empty nest syndrome that is. No, I'm not in denial, I am just not built that way. Though God has given me two boys to raise, I'll be the first to admit I've never been very maternal. God is so awesome though that I've recently seen how HE uses some of my very good female friends (incl. my sister in law) to fill in the gaps in my mothering...sometimes it does take a village, and I'm ok with that:)

THE HOLY SPIRIT, MY COUNSELOR:

I've been very baffled to watch this 'empty nest syndrome' in full swing in others, and ask myself, "what's wrong with me?" I've never been able to understand how people could put their whole lives,

and hopes and dreams into their kids, effectively putting them first. I've never understood it until now. And as the Holy Spirit is so faithful to do, especially with me in the past year and a half, He counseled me on this just the other day....

On my oldest son's wedding day I was sitting with my 'in laws to be' (including the bride) as they were getting ready for the big day. The Grandmother, who is very active in her grandchildren's lives, and who in fact was involved in raising some of them, was lamenting how in a few days the house would be empty, the busy-ness would be over, the house could finally be cleaned...then she got a little choked up as she realized she would be having an 'empty nest' all over again, this time with her grandchild, my future daughter in law. Immediately I had a revelation! I don't have 'empty nest syndrome,' I have 'empty ministry syndrome!' Now I understand.

EMPTY MINISTRY SYNDROME?

You see, since I got saved 20 some years ago, I had a calling to preach the Gospel, to serve the Lord with my whole heart, to be on the front lines of ministry. Two years into my new life with Jesus, God directed me to get married. Not so we could have a fairy tale life together, you know, have kids, a house, a fancy car, a dog, etc., but to do ministry together...because two are better than one, and God wanted to use us twice as much for His glory:) For our wedding gifts we asked for money to buy the equipment needed for music ministry. We have never desired houses, cars, land or money, honestly, we just wanted to serve the Lord full time with all our hearts.

My husband and I did 'ministry' together, and saw many people come to Christ in a short time, then I got pregnant. Not by surprise, but on purpose. I believe God called us to have a child. Still, we lived light so we could be mobile. The baby did not stop our desire to be ministers of the Gospel, though it was harder for sure. A couple of years later, we were again called to have a second child and still

we continued to live 'poor on purpose,' as 'missionaries to America.' We ALWAYS had what we needed, but ministry to the Lord still took first place in our family. Over the years we've done concerts, led worship, taught Bible Studies, etc. and have seen some fruit from our labors.

Twenty Two years later, our lives have taken such a turn in the 'blessing' direction that sometimes I wonder if I've backslidden :o Even though we never strove for 'things,' now it seems we have them. The kids have grown up, one is married and the other is in ministry, and here is the kicker for me, we just moved from Florida to Michigan...from where I was used in ministry for many years to where, at present, I am not so much. Here I am with a calling from God with, it seems, no place to fulfill it. You may be thinking I'm overreacting, but if you understand 'empty nest syndrome,' you can understand my 'empty ministry syndrome.'

If I understand anything it's that there is a season for everything under the sun. And while I know this is a season, it still doesn't make it any easier to accept the loss of usefulness I feel at times. **But GOD!** My wonderful Counselor is healing me from the inside so that He can use me more effectively on the outside. But wait, there's more! My husband and I are having fun UP here in the great, white north just getting to know one another in a totally new way :)

Ministry may not be what it was for me or through me, but I venture to say that it's only going to get better!! Honestly, I'm ok with that. Ministry hasn't ended for me any more than parenting ends for the empty nesters...it's just different that's all, and now maybe God will fill this 'empty nest' with something even bigger for the Glory of His Name!!!

Empty nest is NOT the end, it's just the first glance at a brand new beginning.

Peace In, Big D

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