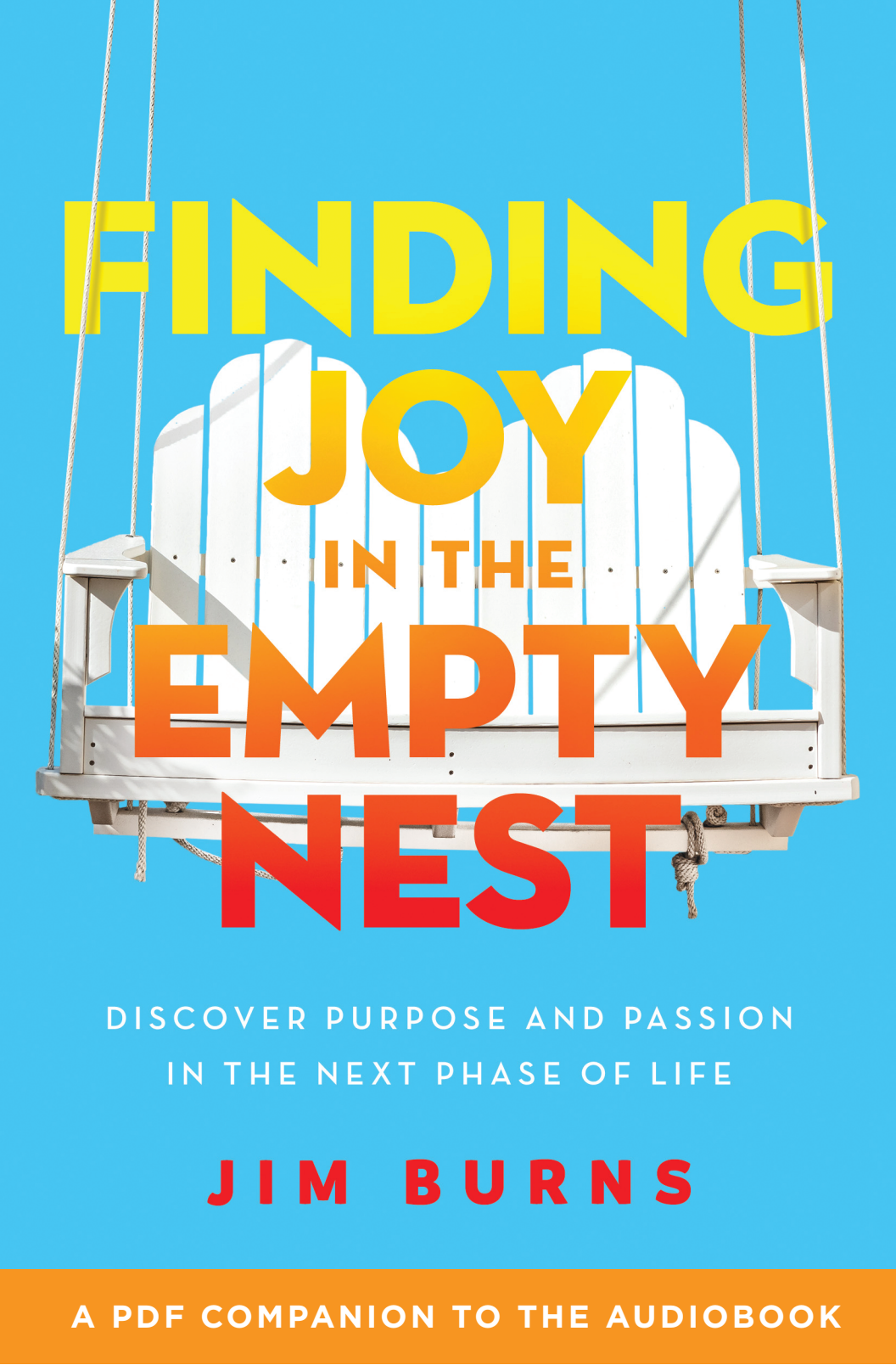




FINDING JOY IN THE EMPTY NEST

DISCOVER PURPOSE AND PASSION
IN THE NEXT PHASE OF LIFE

JIM BURNS

A PDF COMPANION TO THE AUDIOBOOK

ZONDERVAN BOOKS

Finding Joy in the Empty Nest

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The Empty-Nest Syndrome Quiz

On a scale of one to five, with five being the highest level of intensity, mark the intensity of your feelings.

I have experienced a sense of loss in the empty nest.

1 2 3 4 5

I have had trouble adjusting to the change in my parental role.

1 2 3 4 5

I have experienced a lack of purpose in life since my kids left.

1 2 3 4 5

I often feel deeply alone.

1 2 3 4 5

I have felt a loss of interest or energy in my love life.

1 2 3 4 5

I have felt depressed or anxious more often.

1 2 3 4 5

I have noticed a loss of self-identity since the children left.

1 2 3 4 5

I sometimes feel like the best years are behind me.

1 2 3 4 5

I have a lot of fear about the future.

1 2 3 4 5

I am too often preoccupied with my absent
children's safety and welfare.

1 2 3 4 5

Score

40-50 Full alert! But don't despair just yet. It's gonna be okay.

30-40 Intense feelings have brought you here. Read on.

20-30 Okay, average level of freaking out. Not too bad.

10-20 Good for you. Maybe you should be writing this book.

0-10 Hmm. That doesn't seem right. Are you sure?

Communication Questions for Deeper Discussion

1. How would you respond to this phrase: “How your spouse treats you is their issue. How you respond is yours”?
 2. It is important to give each other space in the empty nest. Do you agree or disagree?
 3. Kindness matters. Kindness is a critical element of a successful second half of marriage. How are you doing in this area?
 4. How can you reconnect with your spouse emotionally and physically?
 5. Are you a safe person for your spouse?
 6. Are there mentors, peers, pastors, or counselors who could help you draw closer to each other in this phase of your lives?
 7. What are some of your unmet expectations?
 8. In what ways do you take your spouse for granted?
 9. What roles do you and your spouse need to redefine in this new phase of life?
 10. How well are you handling conflict in your marriage?
 11. Do you have any unresolved anger or resentment?
 12. How well are you dealing with change?
-

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Chapter 1: Empty or Full? Challenge or Opportunity?

1. If you've taken the Empty-Nest Syndrome Quiz, how did you feel about the questions? Do you wish to change any of your answers?
2. What is the best part of your transition to the empty nest?
3. What is the most difficult part of your transition to the empty nest?
4. How does the quote at the start of the chapter relate to you personally? "I miss their mess. I miss their noise. I miss their rudeness and neediness. I miss their laughter. I miss my place in their lives. Who am I, and what do I do with the rest of my life?"
5. Consider the following four important steps toward a fresh start. Which do you need to work on?
 - a. Close the chapter.
 - b. Choose to change your attitude and perspective.
 - c. Set new personal goals.
 - d. Make new friends and enhance old friendships.

Chapter 2: Reinventing the Relationship with Your Adult Children

1. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “needs major improvement” and 5 being “excellent,” how would you rate your relationship with your adult children? Why did you choose that number?
2. Do you have difficulty expressing expectations to your adult children? Reconsider the five big questions. Which are going well for you, and which need improvement?
 - a. Have you relinquished control and given your adult children the passport to adulthood?
 - b. Are you enabling dependency?
 - c. Do you want it more than they want it?
 - d. Are you communicating with them on an adult-to-adult level?
 - e. Are you ready for the boomerang?
3. Do you believe you have adequately expressed your expectations to your adult children regarding issues that are important to you?
4. Money can have a high cost on your relationship. Do you believe you have done what is needed to uncomplicate it and create an environment that equips your adult children to be financially responsible, or do you need more work in this area?

Chapter 3: Reinventing Yourself for the Rest of Your Life

1. The empty nest is a rite of passage for you. What one course correction would help you embrace positive change in this time of your life?
2. Is there an area of self-care you could focus on, keeping in mind that small changes equal amazing new outcomes?
3. Peter Drucker said, “First things first, last things not at all.” What in your life is weighing you down and could use some decluttering? What would it take to declutter that part of your life? What’s holding you back?
4. Do you have a dream-on list? If not, spend a few moments creating a short one. What is on that list that you would really like to do or experience?
5. Consider the benefits of the empty nest listed in this chapter. Write down the benefits that are most meaningful to you. Are there any opportunities still waiting to be grabbed? Note those as well.

Chapter 4: Your Empty-Nest Marriage

1. As you reflect on your marriage, what are your hopes and dreams for your empty-nest years? Share them with your spouse.
2. What is holding you back from doing whatever is needed to refresh or reboot your relationship?

3. How clear and open is your communication? What can you do to enhance your friendship?
4. Since doing things together is “sexy,” consider what adventure you might like to have as a couple. What fits you both?
5. How is the health of your “marriage soul”?

Chapter 5: Rekindling Romance

If you're in a group, allow each other grace to avoid getting too personal on this topic. But be open to discussing Christian counseling services, especially those that specialize in sexual intimacy.

1. Are there any actions you could take to enhance the romance in your marriage? Share your ideas with your spouse.
2. Emotional intimacy precedes good physical intimacy. What does healthy emotional intimacy look like for you?
3. How important to you is having your spouse initiate a time of romance? Have you ever had a conversation about the difference in your libidos (sex drives) and how that relates to your physical intimacy?
4. How do nagging and negativity affect the mood of your physical intimacy? If this is damaging your physical intimacy and closeness, what can you do about it?

5. What hinders you from better sexual intimacy? Be brave and circle which of these eight sex and passion killers affect you the most, then talk with your spouse about what you might do about it.
- a. Exhaustion and stress
 - b. Lack of physical affection, flirting, and intimate conversation
 - c. Too much to do and too many things left undone
 - d. Emotional distance or intense conflict
 - e. Lack of safety, emotionally or physically
 - f. Feeling unappreciated
 - g. Negativity and constant criticism
 - h. “Plumbing” isn’t working correctly

Chapter 6: Midlife Meltdown or Purposeful Living?

1. When you mix midlife issues with the empty nest, life can get complicated. What five midlife issues are affecting you positively or negatively?
2. Many, though not all, who thrive in midlife have a “now what?” moment. Have you had a “now what?” moment? How have you handled it?
3. What in your life has gone unattended or uncultivated during this stage?
4. What would you say is your passion for life in the empty nest?

5. Do you have any regrets? This question was posed to people ninety-five years and older. Their top three answers were:

- Reflect more.
- Risk more.
- Do more things that would live on after I'm dead.

Which of these resonates with you most? How would you answer this question?

Chapter 7: Finishing Well

1. Most people don't think much about finishing well until they get to the empty-nest stage of life. What does finishing well mean to you? In your marriage (if married)? With your adult children? With your grandkids? In your faith? In your work?
2. Saint Augustine asked a great question: "What do I wish to be remembered for?" How would you answer?
3. What areas of your life are distracting you from putting more energy into finishing well?
4. According to Celtic tradition, a "thin place" is the thin boundary between heaven and earth. Do you have a thin place in your life where your soul is nourished? What does that look like for you?
5. It seems that people who thrive in the empty nest use their giftedness to serve and make a difference. How are

you doing that right now? What would it look like if you put more effort into serving and making a difference?

Chapter 8: Empty-Nest Friends

1. Do you have safe people and deep friendships in your life? What are you doing to enhance those relationships?
2. “A great life requires great friends.” What are the qualities you have found in great friendships?
3. Do you believe you are spending enough time fostering replenishing relationships? If not, what holds you back?
4. Do you have friends with whom you feel safe confessing your mistakes and have an accountability relationship? Has there been a time in your life when you confessed something to a friend and sensed healing taking place?
5. If you are involved in a small group, what is the best part of that group? If you are not in a small group, what is holding you back?

Chapter 9: Single Parent, Empty Nest

1. If you are a single parent living in the empty nest, what part of this chapter is most helpful? What would you like to have added to this chapter?
2. At least two major upheavals take place in a single parent’s life: divorce or the death of a spouse and when the adult child leaves home. How do both upheavals relate to each other?

3. How have finances affected your empty-nest experience?
4. As you move forward, it's important to remember that even though life is different, your children haven't totally left your life. What can you do to enhance your relationships with your adult children?
5. Now that the last child is gone, how have you reactivated your social life? What decisions have you made about dating and remarriage?

Chapter 10: How to Be the Grooviest Grandparent in Town

1. How do you feel about the phrase “grandparenting is a marvelous love affair between generations”?
2. Have you decided to invest in your legacy with your grandkids? How are you doing that?
3. What steps can you take to offer blessings (like those described in the chapter) to your grandchildren?
4. Have you had to grandparent during tough times? How has that felt? What have you learned through the experience?
5. Connection with your grandkids is critical. Depending on whether you are a long-distance grandparent or live nearby, your actions may be a bit different. What practical things are you doing to stay bonded with your grandkids?