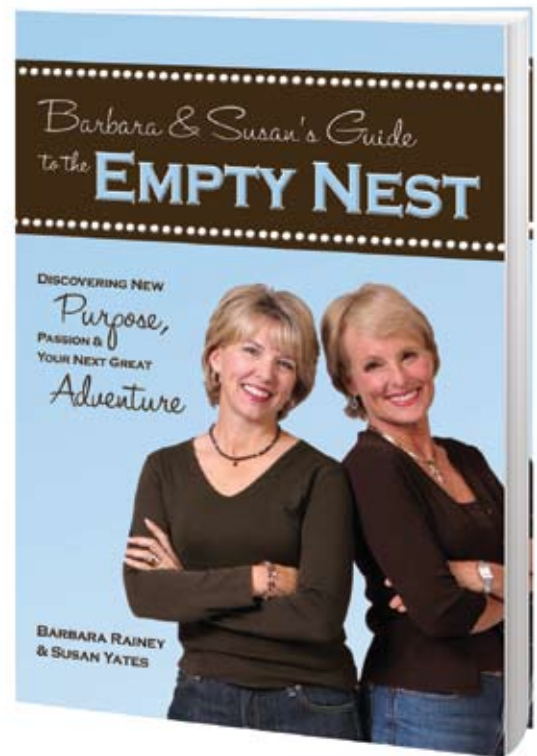


Barbara & Susan's Guide  
to the **EMPTY NEST**

BY BARBARA RAINEY AND SUSAN YATES

## Four-Session Study Guide

- Explore the empty nest in four simple sessions.
- Understand you're not alone.
- Discover your next great adventure together!



We're glad that you are interested in leading a group study on *Barbara & Susan's Guide to the Empty Nest*. One of our hopes is that by discussing this season we can build a new community of empty nesters that is willing to be honest about the challenges its members face—women who yearn to discover their next great adventure. Both of us have found it extremely helpful to have friends with whom we can share our fears and who will give us feedback as we dream about new ways to invest our time, recognize our unique gifts, and make a difference in the lives of others.

We'd like to learn from you, too, so please keep in touch with us through our community page ([FamilyLife.com/EmptyNest](http://FamilyLife.com/EmptyNest)) as your group progresses.

Barbara & Susan

## GETTING STARTED

If leading a group is a new experience for you, here are some suggestions to help you get started:

- Consider hosting one of the celebrations described in chapter 10. At the celebration, present the idea of a group study and invite the women to sign up. You may find it helpful to have already selected a date, time, and location for your group. Also, consider having books on hand to give to those who are interested.
- Enlist the help of a friend to facilitate the group with you. Sharing the responsibility lightens the load and enhances the group dynamic.

- Be realistic about the size of your group; eight to twelve is probably a good number to include, although a larger group can also work.
- You might invite women who are in various stages of the empty nest—those approaching it, those in their first two or three years of it, and those who have been empty nesters for several years.
- The book has twelve chapters. Each one of these four study sessions covers three chapters. Be sure that those who are planning to participate in your group get the book in time to read the first three chapters prior to the first meeting.
- Welcome diversity in your group. Some may be experienced believers who are familiar with the Bible and are intentional about living on the basis of scriptural principles, while others may not have a personal relationship with Christ. In fact, we hope many will use this book to reach out to neighbors and friends who are exploring matters of faith. The common challenges of this season can become a bridge to spiritual discussions.
- You may find that some in your group are not comfortable praying in front of others. As the leader, you could simply close your time together in prayer rather than following the points found under the “Pray Together” heading at the end of each session.
- Be sensitive to the needs of those in your group. Some members will be willing to share very openly while others may need time to build trust and to speak up. Be gentle, loving, and flexible. Most importantly, pray for your group members and try to keep in touch with them outside the group, if possible.
- As the group leader, you will set the pattern for openness, honesty, and trustworthiness.
- Remind your group of the importance of speaking respectfully of spouses, parents, and children when talking about them in your discussion times.
- Use the suggested questions to help your group talk openly about their response to the book, but don’t feel bound by these questions. You may come up with other questions and ideas that will be even more suitable for your group.
- Your group will gain much more in their discussion if everyone has taken the time to read the chapters in advance. Also, encourage group members to record their responses to the “Take the Next Step” sections that appear at the end of each chapter.
- Finally, remember that the purpose of your group is to provide a friend-helping-friend connection. Do all you can to provide a safe environment where women can be honest about their challenges, worries, hopes, and discoveries.

## Session 1: Chapters 1-3

As you begin, ask each member of your group to introduce herself to the others, giving her name, children's ages, and a brief description of how she is feeling about the empty nest.

### WARM UP

1. What led you to read a book about the empty nest?
2. What do you hope to gain through being a part of this discussion group?

### TALK IT OVER

3. In the book I (Barbara) tell the story of thinking that my mother was old—at the age of thirty-two!—because she couldn't remember her age when asked by a policeman. As a child, what things did you associate with old age (ch. 1)?
4. What seems old to you now in terms of behavior?
5. "Empty nest" refers both to a season of life and a transition. Why is change often difficult for us to handle (ch. 2)?
6. How has God used transitions in your life to draw you closer to Him or to mature you emotionally and spiritually?
7. What challenges do you anticipate as you move into the empty-nest season? What do you look forward to?
8. Of the many emotions experienced by empty nesters or soon-to-be empty nesters, loneliness seems to be universal (ch. 3). What help can we find for our loneliness through:
  - friends?
  - family?
  - God?

### TAKE IT WITH YOU

8. Loneliness often comes as a result of some significant change in our lives. As we attempt to adjust, we often feel alone in our struggle, as if no one else could understand or empathize with us. This is why we are encouraged to, above all things, *run to God*. Read the following verses and explain what they teach us about the wisdom of running to God when we are struggling, or share other Bible passages that you have found helpful during these times (ch. 3, "Adjusting to the grand adventure," pp. 34-39).

*[B]ecause He Himself has suffered when tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted.*

Hebrews 2:18 ESV

*The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.*

Proverbs 18:10 NIV

## PRAY TOGETHER

As you close your time together, ask God to

- make your group a safe, encouraging, and helpful place for all who come;
- help each of you process the challenges of transition;
- guard your hearts from loneliness and isolation.

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## Session 2: Chapters 4-6

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## WARM UP

1. Now that you have the opportunity to talk about it with friends, are you starting to think differently about the empty-nest season? What are you thinking or feeling now that you hadn't before? Are you feeling less alone?
2. We wrote about the importance of giving thanks. What are some people or things in your life that you are thankful for today?

## TALK IT OVER

3. When we discussed some of our disappointing circumstances and said that we had learned that we "cannot change the past, but we can control how we respond to it in the present" (ch. 4, "Live in the present," p. 56), how did that strike you? Have you entered the empty nest with some disappointments of your own? How are you learning to respond to your circumstances?
4. In light of what you've learned, what advice would you give to a friend who is having a hard time getting free from hurts from her past?

5. Do you agree with the observation: "Usually, this season is harder on women than men" (ch. 5, "The wild card," p. 73-79)? Explain your answer.
6. We challenged married couples to consider: "What is God calling us to do together that will make a positive difference in the lives of others?" (ch. 5, "Dream about a new mission together," p. 89). Can you think of a couple who exemplify this kind of life, giving their empty-nest years to serving others? Tell the group about them.
7. Describe what it means to be a "helicopter parent." Describe what it means to be a "hands-off parent." Which do you think you tend to be? What about your husband (ch. 6, "The challenge of relinquishing control," pp. 96-101)?

At the end of chapter 6, you were encouraged to write down two specific steps that you would take, along with your husband, to achieve more balance (ch. 6, "Take the next step," p. 115). If you can, please share your steps with the group.

6. Did it go well between you and your parents when you left home? What did you learn then that can be helpful to you now?
7. If you have adult children, how would you describe the nature of your relationship with them now? How is that relationship different from what it was when they still lived at home?

## TAKE IT WITH YOU

8. The Third Letter of John, verse 4 reads:

*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.* ESV

John was referring to his spiritual children—those whose spiritual development he had participated in. What would bring you the greatest joy regarding your physical children?

## PRAY TOGETHER

As you close your time together, pray

- for one another as you deal with disappointments that could be making this season of transition even more difficult;
- for one another's marriages, that they would grow even stronger in the empty-nest years;
- for your children in five areas: spiritual, emotional, physical, mental, and social (p. 115, #2 for encouraging specific ways to pray).

## Session 3: Chapters 7-9

### WARM UP

1. Did you have a favorite grandparent, aunt, or uncle? What was special to you about that relationship?
2. How would you like to be thought of by your nieces, nephews, and grandchildren? Describe the relationship you want with your sons-in-law or daughters-in-law.

### TALK IT OVER

3. Keeping relationships free of regrets is a good goal, even though it's not always possible. Choose one of your key family relationships (children, in-laws, parents) and explain what you can do to keep that relationship regret-free (ch. 7).
4. Does having an empty nest make it easier or more challenging for you to deepen (or repair) relationships with family members? Explain your answer (ch. 7).
5. We offered several suggestions in chapter 7 for strengthening family ties. What plans have you made, or are you considering, that could help connect your extended family in fresh ways?
6. Chapter 8 opened with a list of questions that many women may be asking themselves as they enter the empty-nest season:
  - Who have I become?
  - What is my purpose now that my kids are gone?
  - Does anyone need me?
  - How do I know what to do next?
  - What am I good at?
  - Where do I start?

Which of these questions are you personally dealing with at this moment? What other questions do you have?

7. What is your faith story? What are some questions that you are still asking (appendix 2, p. 235, has some helpful thoughts.)?
8. In chapter 9, we suggest taking a break as you enter the empty-nest season. What do you think about this? Identify some of the obstacles to doing this in your life.
9. What would you like to do to rest and be refreshed (ch. 9)?

## TAKE IT WITH YOU

10. In several places, the Bible encourages us to talk to one another about the goodness of God and how we have personally experienced His goodness. One such place is Psalm 34:3:

*Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together! ESV*

Psalm 78:4 calls one generation to tell the next generation about the things they have seen God do.

*We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and His might, and the wonders that He has done. ESV*

Briefly share with the group about a time that you personally experienced the goodness of God. (Consider sharing this story with your children and grandchildren. Even if they already know the story, repeating it will emphasize its importance in their minds.)

## PRAY TOGETHER

Close your time together, praying

- for God to strengthen the family ties of each person in the group and to repair any broken relationships
- for God to calm any anxiety that some may be feeling over what life will be like for them in the empty nest
- for each person in your group to find a way to rest and be refreshed

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## Session 4: Chapters 10-12

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## WARM UP

1. Think back on some of the celebrations you and your family have enjoyed (birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, weddings, retirement, etc.). Tell the group about one or two of your most memorable. What made those particular celebrations special to you?
2. On page 191 you were asked to make a list of the positive things you are discovering in the empty nest. Share your list with the group or compose a list together as a group. (Remember, we're regularly adding to our online community page, so be sure to send your group's list to us at [emptynest@familylife.com](mailto:emptynest@familylife.com).)

## TALK IT OVER

3. Why do you think it is important to celebrate achievements and transitions in our lives?
4. Do you think that it would benefit you to celebrate your transition into the empty nest? Why or why not?
5. What hopes do you have for your marriage in the empty nest?
6. At the end of chapter 10 (p. 191) you were asked how you and your friends can “spur one another to dream big about your next callings.” How did you answer that question?
7. As part of discovering new purpose, we encouraged you to take inventory of your life and to try some new things. What five things did we list that you should *know* when trying to learn your new purpose (ch. 11, pp. 200-210)?
8. Share with the group what you are learning about yourself, or already know to be true, in at least one of the five categories.
9. Has anyone made an effort to write a personal mission statement (ch. 12, “Take the next step,” p. 220)? Would you like to share it with the group?
10. Did you feel challenged by the idea of becoming a “world changer”? Share with the group how you feel about this possibility and any ideas you’ve had, even if those ideas feel beyond your reach right now.

## TAKE IT WITH YOU

*And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*  
Philippians 1:6 ESV

11. God is always at work in our lives, shaping us to His design and for His purposes. How should this truth affect our hopes, plans, and dreams for what’s ahead in the empty nest?

## PRAY TOGETHER

As you end your study of the empty nest together, pray that each person in your group will

- know the love and nearness of God;
- appreciate the help and pleasure of close friendships;
- experience joy and intimacy in marriage;
- discover her purpose for this new season in life.