

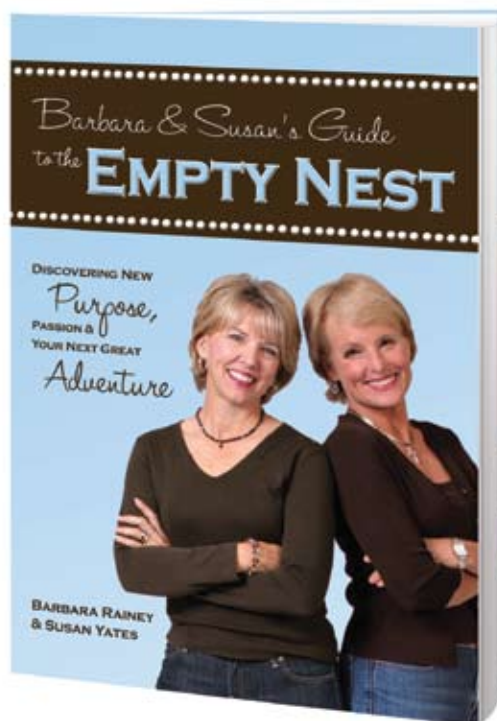
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Barbara & Susan's Guide
to the **EMPTY NEST**

BY BARBARA RAINEY AND SUSAN YATES

One-Session Reader's Guide

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Welcome! Thank you for joining us for a look into the “empty nest” season. We applaud you for *any* thought and preparation you’ve made. We found this time of life has plenty of challenges, and the help we found among friends in the same situation is priceless!

To help you find such like-minded friends, we’ve created this simple study guide to walk you through a discussion on *Barbara & Susan’s Guide to the Empty Nest*. Our questions will help your group think and talk about their experiences or what lies ahead. We think you’ll be amazed how many will say “I’m not the only one!”

If you’ve never led a small group or book club before, here are a few tips to get you started. We wish you the very best on your next great adventure!

Barbara & Susan

GETTING STARTED

- Choose the questions that you think will most benefit your group, as you may not have time to discuss them all.
- These questions are suggestions. Don’t be bound by them; feel free to add your own.
- Review the questions that appear at the end of each chapter for additional discussion ideas.

1. 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.
2. 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? What do you associate with old age now (ch. 1)?
3. "Empty nest" refers both to a season of life and the transition into that season. What is it about change and transition that seems to bring added difficulty to our lives, at least for a while? What are some of the challenges that are unique to the empty nest that might make this particular transition even harder to handle (ch. 2)?
4. Those new to the empty nest, or soon to enter it, often experience a deep sense of loneliness (ch. 3). Why is this? What help can we find for our loneliness through
 - friends?
 - family?
 - God?
5. We wrote that through disappointing circumstances we both learned: "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). What can help you process your disappointments in a healthy way?
6. Why is forgiveness so important if we want to move into the future without dragging along the hurts of our past? Are you facing the challenge of needing to forgive someone or of needing someone to forgive you? What steps should you take in order to properly deal with this circumstance or person (ch. 5, pp. 78-82; ch. 7, pp. 124-130)?
7. Do you agree with the following statement: "Usually, this (empty nest) season is harder on women than men" (ch. 5, "The wild card," p. 73)? Why do you agree or disagree?
8. What effects do you anticipate that the empty nest will have on your marriage? Are there things about this transition that you and your husband need to discuss? What steps will you take to grow closer in this new season (ch. 5)?
9. Can you think of someone who is making the best of her empty-nest years by working to make a positive difference in the lives of others? What can you learn from her that will help shape your approach to the empty nest?
10. What does it mean to be a "helicopter parent"? What does it mean to be a "hands-off parent"? Which do you think you tend to be? What about your husband? What steps can you each take to achieve more balance (ch. 6, "The challenge of relinquishing control," pp. 96-101)?

11. Does having an empty nest make it easier or more challenging for you to strengthen your relationships with family members? What plans are you making that could help connect your extended family to one another in new ways (ch. 7)?
12. We opened chapter 8 with a list of questions that many women may be asking 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 are in your thoughts?
13. How does the thought of taking a break before plunging into the activities of the empty nest strike you? What do you like about the idea? What are your hesitations about it? What concerns do you have about what others may think (ch. 9)?
14. List some of the positive things you are discovering about the empty nest (ch. 10, "Take the next step," p. 191).
15. Do you think that it would benefit you to celebrate your transition into the empty nest? Do you think it would encourage your friends if you celebrated their transition into the empty nest with them (ch. 10)?
16. How can you and your friends spur one another to dream big about your next calling (ch. 10, "Take the next step," p. 191)?
17. If you could go back in time and have the opportunity to ask advice from a *Take It or Leave It* club what would you ask (ch 12, p. 216-217)?
18. 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 discover your new purpose? What are you learning in each of these five categories? What do you plan to do to learn more about each one (ch. 11, "What's in your closet?" pp. 200-210)?
19. Share with the group what you would like to include in your personal mission statement. If you have begun drafting a mission statement, consider sharing it with the group (ch. 12, "Take the next step," p. 220).