

# T R A N S I T I O N S

August 2010

by Chris Ann Waters

## EMPTY NESTS

*All things were made by Him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.*  
John 1:3

*Don't blink!* This is the advice of one dear dad to his daughter when she gave birth to her first child. In blinks—this is how fast the years go by. One day there are diapers, the next the training wheels are off the bicycle, and next they are launching out into the world and leaving home. College, work, marriage, relocation, and new relationships are factors that make for departures. While these activities are expected to occur one day, the *one day* becomes personal and often comes too soon for the likes of parents who must now adjust to an empty nest.

Whether or not there are still other children and/or a spouse in the home, the absence of a child is a transition eventually made by all parents and siblings as well. Natural brooders, moms are accustomed to having their young ones around. Natural protectors, dads feel a steady pull to guard. When these actions are curtailed, mom or dad can feel displaced—even in their own home!

When the nest changes and has been emptied of life as one knew it, the echoes of yesterday can be both rewarding and haunting. Reminders of days overwhelmed with raising a child, an array of inimitable memories, and pangs due to silence all make for what can be an uncomfortable and emotional adjustment. This is a time of grief. Sorrow, loneliness, longing, guilt, regret, and even anger can show up. It is worth recognizing that even happy departures are tinged with sorrow and grief.

While there is often joy in seeing young ones branch out on their own, the reality of these actions spurs feelings of loss. To be needed and wanted are powerful human pulls. When a parent no longer feels that same role is as full as before, grief can settle in. Growing into a new identity and new expression of that role as mom, dad, sister or brother will be different. However, it in no way minimizes the influence family members continue have on those who are no longer living at home. In fact, bonds can grow stronger. Distance will even offer the one who departed new insights and perspective.

Empty nests also come about due to tragic and untimely deaths of young people. Such absences are grueling. These losses are penetrating. They can challenge marriages. Often hope dies with a life shortened by homicide, suicide and substance abuse. Unless someone has experienced tragic loss, it is impossible to know the depth of that grief. Those who grieve young people snatched from life too soon are grievers who need tremendous support, great love, and much time to heal.

Empty nests can be a lifetime undercurrent of emotion for people who long to have children but cannot. For some, the inability to have a family and participate in loving and raising a child can be an isolating experience. One may learn to cope but sadness can strike when news of someone else's child is announced, when someone else's child celebrates a birthday, and when someone else's child is deciding where to go to college. As stated earlier, to be needed and wanted are powerful human pulls.

The warm news of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is that hope ascended when He rose from the tomb. That hope is everything. Every ending in the life of a Christian has an inherent resurrection quality. Jesus' rise gave birth to hope that lives and outlasts every seen conclusion. Christ's rise is proof that all who die in Him shall live eternally. But the glorious Good News is as optimistic for the earthly life as it is for knowing one's eternal destination. You see, in Jesus Christ everything rises again. New buds of purpose spring up and the Lord transfers unique talents and personalities to new places and new faces. He magnifies the influence of one on another; a magnification not possible if a nest was still occupied as before.

The Scripture above tells us that all things—not some—all things were made by the Lord. This means there is purpose in all He creates that is seen and concealed. Losses in life are painful as they come in different forms. But if one rests in God's promise to be with us always, that promise will not only uphold His saints as goodbyes are spoken but will equally uphold the hellos and beginnings that await.

*Lord Jesus of Life, how much Your eyes have seen. You are over the years of our lives to grant grace and strength to allow for remarkable and individual life tales that are our own. Lord, comfort those who miss someone. Give tender assurance that they are needed, wanted, and loved. Assuage any doubts, regrets or longing with Your presence that exudes hope and loving kindness. In Thy Name, Amen.*