FOLLOW THEIR LEAD

Chapter 1 • Based on *Finding Joy in the Empty Nest* by Jim Burns

THE TRANSFORMATIVE ARC OF THIS SESSION
From **mourning the role you've lost** → to **embracing the new thing God is doing in your second half.**

Anchor Scriptures

"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?"
Isaiah 43:18–19 (NIV)

"Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."
Philippians 3:13–14 (NIV)

"They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green."
Psalm 92:14 (NIV)

How to Use This Guide

This Personal Study Guide is designed for the individual — whether you're walking through the empty-nest season on your own or as a participant in a small group. Each session includes Scripture for reflection, brief stories that illustrate the chapter's principles, and personal reflections for journaling. Work through it at your own pace. There are no wrong answers here — only honest ones.

For best results: Read the corresponding chapter of the book, then watch the Session 1 video. Open your Bible. Then work through this guide slowly, pausing to journal where the Spirit prompts you. Close with the prayer.

Start Here

Play the Session 1 video now, before you work through the questions below.

The house is quieter than it has been in twenty years, and the quiet is louder than you expected. For two decades your days were built around someone else's schedule; now the schedule is yours, and you're not sure what to do with it. That disorientation is normal — and it is not the end of your story. Before you begin, settle in and invite God into this time.

Self Check: The Empty Nest Syndrome Quiz

On a scale from 1 to 5, mark the intensity of each feeling — 5 means strongly, 1 means not much. Then add up your score.

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 am too often preoccupied with my absent children's safety and welfare.	1 2 3 4 5

Your Score

40–50	It's going to be okay, but you need to work on your reaction to the empty nest.
40–30	Intense feelings have brought you to this point. Keep working on it.
20–30	Okay, this is an average level of freaking out. Not too bad.
10–20	Wow, good for you! Maybe you should be writing a book on this subject.
0–10	Really? That doesn't seem right. Are you sure?

Scripture Foundation

Before we talk about what to do, we start with what is true. These three passages anchor everything in Session 1. Read each one slowly — out loud if you can.

> *"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?"*
> Isaiah 43:18–19 (NIV)
>
> God doesn't ask you to pretend the old season didn't matter. He asks you to stop living there — because He is already starting something new.

> *"Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."*
> Philippians 3:13–14 (NIV)
>
> Paul's secret isn't forgetting that the past happened. It's refusing to let it set the direction. The straining is forward.

> *"They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green."*
> Psalm 92:14 (NIV)
>
> The empty nest is not the end of your fruitfulness. Scripture says the later years can be the freshest, greenest ones yet.

Reflect

1. Which of these three verses speaks most directly to where you are right now? Why that one?
2. Jim says it's time to "reboot and reconnect." What would it look like to intentionally open your heart this week to the new thing God is doing?

Jim reminds us that the empty nest is both a challenge and an opportunity — and the opportunity usually arrives disguised as a quiet you don't know what to do with. The two stories below are about parents who let the quiet become a fresh start.

> A STORY TO REFLECT ON
> **The Long Way to the Library**
>
> Scripture: Isaiah 43:18–19
>
> For eighteen years, Connie's whole day bent around one turn: into the school lot at 3:05. When her youngest left for college in August, the turn didn't leave with her. For weeks she still caught herself driving the long way home, past the school, slowing by the empty pickup lane out of a habit her hands hadn't unlearned.
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> "What am I even doing?" she said out loud one afternoon, idling at a curb where no child was waiting. The quiet in the car was the same quiet that had moved into the house. She wasn't sad, exactly. She was aimless — a supervisor with no one left to supervise.
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> A flyer caught her eye on the library bulletin board the next week: a literacy program needed volunteers to read with kids who had fallen behind. She almost walked past it. That's not me, she thought. I'm just a mom. But she wrote down the number, and that Thursday she sat across from a seven-year-old named Theo who couldn't get past the first page of a chapter book.
>
> They started with one page. Then a chapter. Then Theo began saving up new words to show her. Six weeks in, Connie realized she hadn't driven past the school in days. She'd been driving to the library instead — a new route her hands were learning without being told.
>
> The old road was still there. She just wasn't living on it anymore.

BIG IDEA

God's promise isn't that you'll forget the years that mattered — it's that He is already making a way you can't yet see. The empty nest isn't only an ending He allowed; it's the wilderness where He starts a new thing. Your job is simply to perceive it when it springs up.

Reflect on the Story

- "Old route" — Connie kept driving hers out of habit. What old route are you still driving now that the season has changed?
- She almost ignored the flyer because "that's not me." What new thing have you dismissed because it didn't fit who you used to be?
- The new thing sprang up quietly, with no fanfare. Where might God already be starting something you haven't perceived yet?

A STORY TO REFLECT ON
The Workbench

Scripture: Philippians 3:13–14 · Psalm 92:14

For years Marcus told himself he'd build things "someday, when the kids are grown." Now the kids were grown, someday had arrived — and the workbench in the garage was buried under boxes that had nowhere else to go. He'd stand in the doorway of his son's old room and feel the strangest thing settle over him: I think my best years are behind me.

He said it out loud one night, half hoping his wife would argue. She didn't. The next morning he found the boxes moved off the bench and his grandfather's old hand plane set in the middle of it, where he couldn't miss it.
He started small — a crooked birdhouse, then a better one. A bookshelf for a young couple at church who couldn't afford one. He wasn't fast and he wasn't sure, but his hands remembered more than he expected, and the garage stopped feeling like a storage unit and started feeling like a shop.

Then a sixteen-year-old from the youth group — a kid whose dad wasn't around — asked if Marcus could teach him. Marcus said yes before he'd thought it through. Within a year, three or four boys were spending Saturday mornings in the garage learning to measure twice and cut once.

"Fresh and green," his wife said one Saturday, watching through the kitchen window, quoting the psalm she'd taped to the fridge. Marcus had spent months sure the goal was behind him. It turned out it was ahead of him the whole time.

BIG IDEA
Following their lead doesn't mean chasing your children — it means doing what they're doing: letting your life fill up with fresh experiences. Paul strains forward; the psalmist still bears fruit in old age. Your second half can be your most fruitful one yet.

Reflect on the Story

- Marcus believed his best years were behind him. When have you caught yourself believing that? What planted the thought?
- His wife didn't argue — she cleared the bench. Who could help clear space for your next thing? What would that look like?
- The fruit came when Marcus gave it away. Whose life could your experience pour into in this season?

Personal Reflection

Set aside fifteen quiet minutes this week. Find a pen and a place where you won't be interrupted. Sit with these questions and write whatever comes—unfiltered, unpolished.

- Finish this sentence: "The hardest part of the quiet house is…"
- Finish this sentence: "The new thing I sense God might be inviting me into is…"
- The empty nest is both change and loss. Write about one way you can see those two experiences connected in your own life.
- Choose one small way to reboot and reconnect this week — a call, a class, a walk, a project — and write down when you'll do it.

A Prayer

God of new things, You see the quiet I'm sitting in and the ache underneath it. You know how much of me was poured into the years that just ended, and how unsure I am of what comes next. Forgive me for believing my best years are behind me. Open my eyes to the new thing You are already doing, and make me fresh and green again. Help me follow where my children are leading — into a life that fills up with fresh purpose — and to press on toward all You still have for me. Amen.