HAND THEM THE PASSPORT

Chapter 2 • Based on *Finding Joy in the Empty Nest* by Jim Burns

THE ARC OF THIS SESSION
From **holding on to control of your adult child's life** → to **handing over the passport to adulthood and becoming a mentor.**

Anchor Scriptures

"That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh."
Genesis 2:24 (NIV)

"For each one should carry their own load."
Galatians 6:5 (NIV)

"A person's wisdom yields patience; it is to one's glory to overlook an offense."
Proverbs 19:11 (NIV)

How to Use This Guide

This guide is designed for couples walking through the Finding Joy in the Empty Nest book and video series together. Each session includes Scripture for reflection, brief stories that illustrate the chapter's principles, questions for discussion, and personal reflection for journaling.

For best results: Read the corresponding chapter, then watch the Session 2 video together. Open your Bibles. Work through the guide at your own pace, saving the discussion questions for conversation with each other, and close with the prayer together.

Introduction

Few transitions test a marriage quietly like this one. The two of you raised a child together — and now you have to release one together, often at different speeds and with different worries. One of you wants to help; the other calls it enabling. This session gives you shared language for the handoff. Before you dive in, settle in together and invite God into this time.

To begin:

- On a scale of 1 to 5, how ready do each of you feel to hand your child the "passport to adulthood"? Share your numbers. It's okay — and common — for them to be different.

WATCH — SESSION 2 VIDEO (7–12 min)

Play the Session 2 video now, before you work through the questions below.

Scripture Foundation

Before we talk about what to do, we start with what is true. These three passages anchor everything in Session 2. Read each one slowly — out loud if you can.

> *"That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh."*
> Genesis 2:24 (NIV)
>
> Leaving is not rebellion; it's the design. God built families so children would launch and start their own. Releasing them is obedience, not loss.

> *"For each one should carry their own load."*
> Galatians 6:5 (NIV)
>
> Love carries a lot — but not everything. Some loads are theirs to carry, and lifting every one off their shoulders keeps them from growing strong.

> *"A person's wisdom yields patience; it is to one's glory to overlook an offense."*
> Proverbs 19:11 (NIV)
>
> Maturity is realizing how many things don't need your comment. Overlooking an offense isn't weakness here — Scripture calls it glory.

Reflect

- Which of these three verses speaks most directly to where you are right now? Why that one?
- Jim says, "You're fired — your role as a parent must change." What would it look like to hand your adult child the "passport to adulthood" this week?

Reinventing the relationship with an adult child is, as Jim puts it, a "wobbly" process — learned by practice, not by getting it perfect. The two stories below are about parents who started practicing.

> A STORY TO REFLECT ON
> **The Phone Call She Didn't Make**
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> Scripture: Galatians 6:5
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> Diane had a system: when Caleb's life wobbled, she steadied it. She'd called his landlord once, covered an overdraft twice, scheduled the dentist appointment he kept putting off. It felt like love, and maybe some of it was.
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> One Tuesday he called, panicked — rent was short again, could she just this once cover it? Her hand was already on the checkbook when something stopped her. "I love you," she said, "and I know you'll figure this out." The silence on the line was awful. He hung up angry.
>
> For three days she sat with the discomfort of not fixing it — which, she realized, was harder than the fixing had ever been. She kept her hands in her pockets and let it be his.
>
> Then Caleb called back. He'd talked to the landlord himself, set up a payment plan, and picked up a weekend shift. "I didn't know I could do that," he said, almost surprised at himself.
>
> Diane had spent years carrying a load that taught her son only one thing: that he couldn't carry it. The day she set it down was the day he discovered he could.

BIG IDEA
Galatians 6:5 says each one should carry their own load. Love that lifts every weight off your adult child's shoulders isn't strengthening them — it's quietly telling them they're not strong enough. Sometimes the most loving thing you can do is keep your hands in your pockets.

Reflect on the Story

- Diane's hand was "already on the checkbook." What's your reflex when your adult child's life wobbles? Where does it come from?
- The hard part was sitting with the discomfort of not fixing it. What would it cost you to let one consequence run its course this month?
- Caleb said, "I didn't know I could do that." What might your adult child discover they're capable of if you stopped carrying their load?

A STORY TO REFLECT ON
What Ray Didn't Say

Scripture: Proverbs 19:11 · Genesis 2:24

Ray had an opinion about everything his daughter Bree did — the tattoo, the boyfriend she'd moved in with, the "useless" art degree. And he shared every opinion, because that's what a good dad does. Right?

Bree started calling less. Texts went unanswered for days. At Thanksgiving she was polite and far away, like a guest in her own family. Ray told himself he was just being honest.

His wife finally said the thing out loud: "You're winning every argument and losing your daughter."

So Ray tried something that felt like swallowing glass: he stopped commenting. When Bree mentioned the boyfriend, he asked a question instead of delivering a verdict. When she showed him a painting, he just looked at it for a while and said, "Tell me about this one." It was clumsy. He bit his tongue so often it nearly bled.

One Sunday Bree called — not because anything was wrong, just to talk — and stayed on the phone for an hour. Ray hadn't changed his mind about much. He'd simply decided his daughter mattered more than his commentary.

BIG IDEA
Proverbs 19:11 calls it glory to overlook an offense. Handing your child the passport to adulthood means trusting them to live their own life — and discovering that biting your tongue is often what keeps the door open. You can hold your values and your child at the same time; you just can't hold your child with a clenched fist.

Reflect on the Story

- Ray was "winning every argument and losing his daughter." Is there a relationship where you're winning and losing at the same time?
- He swapped verdicts for questions. What's one verdict you could turn into a question this week?
- Ray kept his values but loosened his grip. Where is the line for you between holding your values and holding your child?

Couples Discussion Questions

These questions are designed for the two of you to talk through honestly. Take your time. Listen more than you speak. Be gentle with where your spouse is.

1. "It's really not about you anymore — as they shift into adulthood, they won't want to see you as much as you want to see them." Has that been your experience? How does it make each of you feel?
2. Walk through the five big questions together — passport, enabling, control, adult-to-adult communication, and the boomerang. Where do you agree on how you're doing, and where do you see it differently?
3. How does handing your kids the "passport to adulthood" go hand in hand with helping instead of enabling? Where are each of you most tempted to enable?
4. When your adult child makes a choice that clashes with your values, what is the best thing you can do for them — and how can you support each other in doing it?
5. Have you faced the boomerang yet? If so, how did it go? If not, how prepared are you to adjust if a child moves back home?
6. Read **Galatians 6:5** together. What "load" are you each still carrying that actually belongs to your adult child — and what would it look like to hand it back, gently?

Personal Reflection

On your own this week, set aside fifteen quiet minutes with a pen and write whatever comes — unfiltered, unpolished

- Finish this sentence: "The hardest part of letting our child be an adult is..."
- Where am I still carrying a load that belongs to our adult child? What would it look like to hand it back?
- What is one piece of unsolicited advice I can choose not to give this week?
- One expectation I'd want us agreed on before a boomerang move-in is...

A Prayer

Father, You designed our children to leave and to launch, and we confess we sometimes hold on tighter than we should. Help us hand our children the passport to adulthood — to love without controlling, to support without enabling, to overlook what doesn't matter and trust You with what does. Teach us to carry our love without carrying loads that are theirs. When we're tempted toward unsolicited advice, give us grace to bite our tongues, and help us support each other as our family is reinvented. Amen.