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EQUIPPING “EMPTY NESTERS” FOR MINISTRIES AT  
MARYLAND CHINESE BAPTIST CHURCH,  
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

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by  
Lemuel Chen  
May, 2022

**APPROVAL SHEET**

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MARYLAND CHINESE BAPTIST CHURCH,  
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

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I dedicate this project to my wife Mengyu and our four children Tricia, Patrick, Spencer,  
and Ronald, and members of the Maryland Chinese Baptist Church.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE .....	vi
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Purpose Statement .....	1
Goals .....	1
Rationale for the Project .....	4
Definitions, Limitations, and Delimitations .....	6
Research Methodology .....	6
2. THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR EQUIPPING EMPTY NESTERS FOR CHRISTIAN SERVICE .....	9
Overview .....	9
1 John 2:15-17 .....	10
John 8:31-38 .....	14
Luke 12:15-23 .....	17
Mark 10:32-45 .....	21
Psalm 149:1-5 (NIV) .....	24
1 Corinthians 12:12-20 .....	28
2 Corinthians 4:16-18 .....	31
Genesis 12:1-5 .....	34

Chapter	Page
3. THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES RELATED TO EMPTY NESTERS FOR CHRISTIAN SERVICE .....	39
Overview .....	39
Establishing a Significant Purpose of Life.....	41
Establishing New Perspective on Time.....	45
Satisfying Relationship with God and Christians .....	49
Appropriate Response to Aging.....	52
Cultivating a Humble Spirit .....	55
True Meaning of Success.....	57
Rearranging Priority.....	59
4. DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT .....	64
Overview .....	64
The Project .....	64
The Project Results .....	66
The Sermon Evaluations .....	68
5. PROJECT EVALUATION AND PERSONAL REFLECTIONS .....	76
Summary of the Project.....	77
Evaluation of the Goals.....	77
Strengths.....	81
Weaknesses .....	83
What I Would Have Done Differently.....	84
Conclusion .....	85
Appendix	
1. EMPTY NESTERS FOR MINISTRIES SURVEY .....	87
2. SERMON EVALUATION RUBRIC.....	91
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	92

## PREFACE

This project is submitted with the sincerest appreciation for the brothers and sisters at Maryland Chinese Baptist Church. I have had the privilege and honor to serve as their pastor since February 2004. They gave me full support throughout this project. Church member Mr. Wentong Ma helped proofread this project. Church leaders Dr. Ling-sui Choi, Dr. Xiaolu Li, Dr. Richard Lei, and brother Mr. Wentong Ma offered their precious time to evaluate the sermons in this project and gave their timely encouragement. Rev. Paul Chaung and Rev. Lusa Su offered excellent value of critiques for the eight sermons. All four of my children, Tricia, Patrick, Spencer, and Ronald offered their help in one way or the another. Tricia and Patrick served as proofreaders as well. I appreciate my wife Mengyu who always encouraged me and took on all the house chores to allow me to concentrate on this project while serving as a full-time pastor of the church. I praise the Lord for inspiring both my immediate family and church spiritual family to be my support all the way through this project. Without their support, it would be impossible for me to get this project finished. My deep appreciation goes to my supervisor Dr. Robert Plummer who showed his wisdom, great loving patient, and encouragement throughout this project. May the Lord Jesus Christ be gloried, and His church be built up through this humble project.

Lemuel Chen

Rockville, Maryland  
December 2021

CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this project is to equip “empty nesters<sup>1</sup>” of Maryland Chinese Baptist Church, Rockville, Maryland for Christian service.

**Goals**

This project will be guided by three goals. The first goal is to gain knowledge of the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of “empty nesters” in the church and their understanding about their calling to Christian service. This goal will be measured by conducting a pre-sermon survey among all “empty nesters” in the church<sup>2</sup>. This survey includes questions to help gauge their understanding of their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs and their life purpose as Christians in their current “empty nester” situation. This goal will be considered successful if fifteen “empty nesters” in the church return the survey form and analysis of the survey yields a clearer picture of their current physical, emotional, and spiritual situation, including their understanding of Christian calling to service.

The second goal is to develop an eight-sermons series on equipping empty nesters for Christian service. These sermons will address issues of their Christian calling at their current life-stage as well as finding the fulfilment of physical, emotional, and spiritual needs in their daily relationship with the Lord, and serving the Lord in the

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<sup>1</sup> Empty nesters are those parents whose children have grown up and left home. This group of people may feel loneliness and a sense of losing purposes.

<sup>2</sup> See appendix 1.



church ministries. The second goal will be measured by the rubrics completed by two pastors, three church's leaders, and one member of the church, who will evaluate these sermons to be faithful to Scripture and sound theology and practical for listeners<sup>3</sup>. This goal will be considered successful when eight sermons are completed, and reviewers' scores indicate that each sermon is at a "satisfactory" or "exemplary" level.

The third goal is to deliver these eight-sermons series on equipping empty nesters for ministries. The third goal will be measured by conducting a post-sermon survey<sup>4</sup> among the previous fifteen empty nesters who had completed the pre-sermon survey to evaluate changes in their understanding of the relationship of their needs and their calling, and the ways they would like to respond to their calling for Christian service and fulfillment of their needs. The results of this second survey will be compared against the results of their pre-sermon survey to determine any change in their understanding of the responsibilities of empty nesters for Christian service. This goal will be considered successful if seventy-five percent of those who completed the pre-sermon surveys returned the post-sermon surveys and the analyzing between the pre- and the post-sermon surveys indicates a statistically significant change among the empty nesters in understanding of Christian service.

### **Context of the Ministry Project**

Maryland Chinese Baptist Church, located in the Greater Washington D.C. metropolitan area, consists mainly of first-generation Chinese immigrants from mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong who speak Mandarin, as well as their children who mainly speak English, although native Mandarin speakers constitute the primary ministry

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<sup>3</sup> See appendix 2.

<sup>4</sup> See appendix 1.

target of the church. The church is an outgrowth of many years of missionary work and formally gathered as its current congregation in 2013.

Empty nesters are the important part of the church. Although many of them are not very committed to attending every Sunday worship gathering and have minimal engagement in Christian service, empty nesters still come to the church often on an irregular basis. Empty nesters associate many good memories with this church and their stable life in the D.C. area contribute to why they continue to come out to church.

Many empty nesters in the church are affluent. They live in properties that are worth more than half a million dollars or more. Many of them occupy an advantageous position in a company or a government office. The careers and life status of the “empty nesters” are respected by the younger generation within the Chinese community. The empty nesters have been in the United States long enough to know well how to relate to any Mandarin Chinese speaking people no matter where they are from, either mainland China, or Taiwan, or Hong Kong, or south Asia. Because of their prestigious positions in the Chinese community, they are influential among first generation Chinese immigrant from all the Chinese cultural backgrounds. However, their lukewarm Christian faith is a stumbling block for a young Christian who look up to them.

Because of their position and social status, empty nesters could be an impactful Christian taskforce if the foundation and ministry meet their needs. Empty nesters are in the process of re-establishing their life focus at this stage of their life. Their children had been the center of their lives for many years. They invested almost all their time on their children for studying art, music, and sports when they were still young. When their children left for college or for work, empty nesters suddenly lost their life focus. This change of focus is disorienting. Although it is hard for empty nesters to say goodbye to their former life and to adopt something new as their life center, they must find something in which they can invest their current time and energy as empty nesters.

Without a meaningful life focus, many empty nesters generally do not use their time and financial resources wisely. Some empty nesters relish luxurious vacations while others take up expensive sports or hobbies which often stops them from coming to church on Sundays. Showing their vacation pictures during church lunch time can be observed often from empty nesters. People are impressed that empty nesters can take so many international vacation trips and cruises and live in luxurious hotels. One sister reluctantly told the pastor a few times that she came to the church alone because her husband went to play golf. All these activities of the empty nesters promote the pleasure of this world and are not spiritually healthy to their Christian life. These activities hinder the empty nesters' commitment for church service. This kind of lukewarm Christian life is not only harmful to empty nesters own spiritual life, but also a distraction for other church members from pursuing their spiritual growth. The negative influence of the empty nesters particularly can affect younger Christians in the church.

### **Rationale for the Project**

If Maryland Chinese Baptist Church would like to be a spiritually healthy church, equipping empty nesters for Christian service becomes a necessary and urgent task. Empty nesters are an important part of the church. Ministry to them should be one of the foremost priorities of the church because they are at a critical change in their life that could inspire spiritual growth. In addition, they are a target group because they have positive associations to the church and could potentially come more regularly. Their life problems could be resolved as they grow in their faith. The emptiness of their heart needs to be filled with the Word of God and love for God.

Second, most empty nesters are affluent people compared to other age groups. Their improper use of resources makes empty nesters lost in the pleasure of this lustful world. Their worldly lifestyle is harmful to their own spiritual lives. Empty nesters gradually become deadly stumbling blocks for many others in the church, especially

younger members since they are role models to the younger generation of church members. If empty nesters can be renewed and become good stewards of God, not only their lives will be deeply enriched, but they can be great blessings to this church and to God's kingdom. If empty nesters are spiritually whole, the church can move toward greater spiritual healthiness.

Third, empty nesters are still part of the church, although they are not committed to the church. Maryland Chinese Baptist Church consists mainly of first-generation immigrant families. Many of these immigrant families do not have secure and permanent jobs in a location for long time, especially young first-generation immigrants. As a result, they usually cannot serve as long term members of the church and be committed to growing the church. Although younger first-generation immigrants do need ministry and attention from the church, the goal of this project is to give special attention to the spiritual growth that empty nesters need as well. Empty nesters could serve to minister to these first-generation immigrants and other groups that do not come regularly once they are properly equipped and have a good foundation in their faith. The spirituality of the empty nesters has greater weight on the church because of their stability in the church. To revive this church, one of the reasonable steps should be to revive the empty nester group.

Fourth, the influence of the empty nesters without being transformed can be doubly harmful. Their lukewarm Christian faith is poison to the church. Weak Christians look to them as the example of their Christian life, because of the influential position of the empty nesters. If they do not repent from their lukewarm faith, they not only destroy their own faith, but also the faith of other weak brothers and sisters. But if they have strong faith and stand firm in the Lord, they will have long lasting positive influence in the church. Many weaker Christians will be built up because of their influence. The transformation of their faith will bring a transformation of the church. If the church has a

commitment to reach out the unbelieving Chinese first immigrant generation community, the equipped empty nesters could be a vital force to bring many to know the Lord through their influence.

### **Definitions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

In order to help reader for better understanding of this project, the definition of the frequently used technical terms is provided below.

*Empty nesters.* Parents whose children have reached adulthood and left home. Empty nesters have the tendency in suffering from a feeling of grief and loneliness. This feeling may result in depression and loss of live purpose.

*Christian service.* All kind of serving work that believers perform, based on believing that all Christian are given responsibilities, no matter how basic, in expanding the Kingdom of God.

The first limitation is that these sermons are preached to Mandarin Chinese speaking first generation immigrants in Maryland Chinese Baptist Church. The second limitation is that these sermons will be preached in Mandarin Chinese language and in successive eight weeks Sunday worship service.

The only delimitation is that these sermons will not be preached to the empty nesters group only. These sermons are meant to be preached in the church's Sunday worships. Members of all ages will be among the empty nesters in the congregation while these sermons are preached.

### **Research Methodology**

The research methodology for this project will use following instrumentation: pre-sermons surveys, an evaluation rubric, a post-sermon survey, and the analysis of the comparison between the pre- and post- sermon surveys. Three goals will determine the effectiveness of this project. The first goal is to gain knowledge of the physical,

emotional and spiritual needs of empty nesters in the church and their understanding of calling for Christian service. This project will start from visiting and interviewing some individual empty nesters. After obtaining information about their needs and struggles, a survey will be conducted among all empty nesters in the church. The survey will include questions concerning fulfillment of their needs according to secular philosophy and psychology or biblical advice. The Bible addresses issues of their struggles and needs. The meaning of life, wealth, health. Four weeks before sermon preparation, the survey form will be given to all empty nesters to complete. The completed survey will yield a clearer picture of empty nesters struggles and needs. The sermons will be prepared to address the victory over the struggles and fulfillment of their needs in relationship with the Lord and service to the Lord. This goal can be considered successful if seventy five percent or fifteen of the empty nesters in the church (about twenty people) return the survey form.

The second goal is to develop an eight-sermons series on equipping empty nesters for ministries. This goal will start from reading twenty books concerning the needs and fulfillment of empty nesters from both secular and spiritual perspectives, twenty books concerning general Christian calling from the Lord and its application for the empty nesters age group, and twenty books on the related Scripture commentaries and theological books. During reading all mentioned books, eight sections of Scripture will be chosen to develop the sermons. This goal will be considered successful when eight sermons are completed and meet the rubric previously set to gauge the usefulness in practice and faithfulness to the Scripture and sound theology.

The third goal is to deliver the sermon series on equipping empty nesters for Christian service. This goal will start with promotion for this sermon series on equipping empty nesters for ministries. After all church members are aware of the coming of this sermon series, the eight sermons will be preached in eight weeks. This goal will be

considered successful if seventy five percent of the empty nesters who completed the pre-sermon return their post-sermon survey and the analysis of the comparison between their pre- and post- sermon survey showing the changes of their understanding of their calling and the ways to respond their calling into Christian services.

CHAPTER 2  
THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR  
EQUIPPING EMPTY NESTERS FOR  
CHRISTIAN SERVICE

**Overview**

Searching for the satisfaction of life and life's purpose is natural for all human beings. Throughout our lives, we are surrounded by societal constructs that guide human desires. Common human desires include fame, monetary wealth, and knowledge. Human daily activities are driven by trying to pursue or prepare for material gain and human desires. This pursuit and desire never stop before life ends. Due to the deviation from the original design of its creator, human beings cannot and will not find their true and final satisfaction in their own ways and by their own means. Many people in this world have regrets on their deathbed and are not satisfied in their life. Empty nesters are facing critical changes in their lives at this specific time. Their old way of satisfaction of life in raising children has come to an end when their grownup children leave home. Empty nesters are also stepping into their first taste of aging at this stage of life. If empty nesters would not like to become like those who are filled with regret at their deathbed, they must contemplate the following questions. How will they become satisfied with their life as an empty nester? What is the purpose of life other than raising children? How will empty nesters use the resources which they have gained to fulfil their new settled purpose of life? How will empty nesters switch from focusing on child raising to focusing on new self-improvement and re-development for the new purpose of life? These are the questions that equipping the empty nesters for Christian services must answer from the perspective of biblical and theological foundation.



This chapter tries to point out that empty nesters must understand that in order to achieve true satisfaction they must live for God and aim for eternity with him. Living out the will of God in many aspects of life is the right way for the empty nesters to pursue the true satisfaction of life after their grownup children left if they had not done this earlier. Empty nesters can achieve this by referring to the Bible for guidance and living a humble life under God. By exploring the Bible, empty nesters can live out God's will. God begins to do his work to empower them when they are living in a world and society distorted by sin. Relying on the empowerment of the Holy spirit is the best means in the process of pursuing the fulfillment of life for the empty nesters.

### **1 John 2:15-17**

The Bible is a great resource for guidance in pursuing the meaning of life. From the eternal perspective, the meaning of life should be found in God's purposes for his creation and not in this world alone. Since their first child was born, many empty nesters had assumed that the meaning of their lives was in raising their children. When their grown-up children left home, empty nesters' previous meaning of life in raising children could not continue to guide and motivate their lives anymore. Empty nesters inevitably stepped into the process of redefining meaning of life. This is a good timing for the church to lead empty nesters to go to the Bible for guidance concerning the meaning of life.

Apostle John proclaimed in 1 John 2:15-17 that Jesus was the Word of Life. He was a trustworthy witness for his claim because he was among the people who "have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched" concerning the

Word of Life.<sup>1</sup> God chose Apostle John and inspired him to write these instructions concerning pursuing the true meaning of life.

Apostle John was a widely loved and respected leading pastor in Asia Minor in early church history. People knew him as “the one who Jesus loves” among the early Christians (John 19:26; 21:7, 20). However, the church under his shepherd was not immune from the attacks of heresies. Some members of the church adopted a heresy concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ. These heretics denied that Jesus came in the flesh (1 John 4:2). They boasted that they loved God, but their lives showed that loved the world and hated the brothers (1 John 2:15, 4:20). These heretics were leading other people away from the church. Because of this heresy, Christians in his church were under the danger of losing the true fellowship with the Lord and deviating from the life which was meant for them to live. Apostle Paul was inspired by God to write this letter to correct the false teaching and its related wrong behaviors and to exhort Christians to return to the loving fellowship with the Lord from the one with the world.

This passage was one of the exhortations in the letter. John warned Christians in his church not to love the world. When Apostle John noticed that his church members had turned away their love for God and devoted this special love toward the world under the influence of the heresy, he urged these church members to cease this spiritual destruction. Their love (*ἀγαπάω*) for God was divine origin. This love could only be devoted to one party, either the Father or the world. Apostle John’s teaching aligned with his master Jesus Christ, when he taught John and other disciples, “No one can serve two masters” (Matt 6:24).

When Apostle John warned Christians not to love the world, he used the Greek word, “κόσμος” for “world.” There are many meanings of “κόσμος” in John’s Gospel and

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<sup>1</sup> 1 John 1:1. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotation come from New International Version.

epistles. First, the word “κόσμος” could mean “the ordered universe” and “the earth”<sup>2</sup> that was created through Jesus Christ (John 1:9-10). The Bible indicates that God perceived the universe as good when he created it (Gen 1:4, 10, 18, 31). The universe proclaims the glory of God (Ps 19:1). We can be sure that when Apostle John warned Christians not to love the world, he did not mean not to love this physical world. Secondly, the word “κόσμος” could also mean “the inhabitants of the earth.”<sup>3</sup> One of the most memorable Bible verses is “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). The word “κόσμος” appeared in the Greek text of this bible verse is translated as the “world” also. This bible verse tells that God not only loves the “κόσμος” (the people in the world), but also gives his only begotten Son to save the “κόσμος” (the people in the world). It is impossible for Apostle John to teach Christians not to love what our God loves and Jesus sacrifices for. Therefore, the “κόσμος” in 1 John 2:15 does not mean “the inhabitants of the earth.” Thirdly, “κόσμος” could mean “the world of sin that stands in aggressive opposition to God (1 John 4:3-5; 5:19).”<sup>4</sup> This “world of sin” rebels against God and hates Jesus and his work (John 7:7, John 15:18). From this perspective, this “world of sin” should refer to the value system of this sinful world, which is under the influence of Satan (1 John 5:9, 12:31) and the judgment of God. Therefore, Apostle John exhorted his church members not to love the value system of this sinful world, while they lived as the witness of the Lord in this world. This teaching of Apostle John is in line with what Jesus taught. Although Christians do not belong to this sinful world and under the control of Satan (John 17:14, 16), they are called to be in this world as the light and salt for the

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<sup>2</sup> H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, Eds., *Epistles of Peter, John & Jude, Revelation*, The Pulpit Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson), 24.

<sup>3</sup> Spence and Exell, *Peter, John & Jude, Revelation*, 24.

<sup>4</sup> Gary M. Burge, *Letters of John*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 114.

witness of Jesus Christ, with the assurance that they are under God's protection (John 17:15, Matt 5:14).

There are three areas of sinful desires in this world of sin which Apostle John warned his church members about. The first one is "the desire of flesh." This referred to any sinful desires that turned people's hearts away from God the Father. Therefore, "the desire of the flesh" in this context should mean any desires of rebelling against God and turning away human hearts from God. The first temptation of Eve in the garden of Eden was one example of the destruction of "the desire of the flesh." When the serpent tempted Eve's "desire of the flesh" to eat the fruits of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, she fell into the temptation. Although she knew that the Lord God had told her that she should not eat the fruits of the tree, her "desire of flesh" rebelled against God. The fall of Eve due to the "desire of flesh" in this temptation should be an alarming warning to the members of Apostle John's church. When our Lord Jesus Christ faced the same kind of temptation, the result was different. After fasting forty days and night, the tempter seduced hungry Jesus to turn stones into bread. But Jesus did not give in to the desire of the flesh. The victory of our Lord Jesus in the temptation of "the desire of the flesh" should be an encouraging example for the readers of this letter. The sin of "the desire of flesh" could only be overcome through Our Lord Jesus.

The second area of sinful desires is "the desire of the eyes." It is common in the Bible to refer the eyes to sinful passion. When Eve looked at the fruits of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil after the serpent tempted her, her "the desire of the eyes" to satisfy her desire was aroused. She ate the fruit and violated the command of God. Her sins caused her and her husband to be driven out of the Garden. When King David's eyes fell on beautiful Bathsheba in bathing, "the desire of the eyes" for the woman overpowered him. David murdered her husband and took her to be one of his wives. He committed a great sin against God and man. "The desire of the eyes" is a strong sinful

passion that led people into rebellion against God. Apostle John strongly warned his church members not to fall into this sin.

The third area of sinful desires in this world is “the pride of life.” The pride in the 1 John 2:15-17 referred to exaggerated outward boasting and inward arrogant attitude. The subject of pride are the possessions and status of this life. Those who fall in the sin of “the pride of life” tend to impress others and pretend that they are independent of God. Apostle Paul listed pride among other vice characters in the Book of Romans Chapter One and the Book of Second Timothy Chapter Three. Proverbs 6:16-17 in the Old Testament says that “There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood.” Both the New and Old Testament consider pride as one of the top gross sins against God. Therefore, Apostle John warned his church members to stay away from the sin of “the pride of life.”

### **John 8:31–38**

The human mind is the battleground for good or evil. All human behaviors stem from the mind. If our mindsets are aimed for the achievement in this world, our life will be directed to the emptiness. If our mindsets aim to achieve eternity with God, our life will have true fulfilment. When empty nesters start a new page of life after grown-up children leave home, it is especially important for them to think thoroughly about what their achievement in the coming years are. Proverbs 4:23 reflects the wisdom of the Hebrew people, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.” The “heart” in this proverb is identical to what we say “mind” in modern language. Jesus’s ministry on earth focused on changing people’s mind and heart through his teaching. He taught those who followed him to hold his teaching and be free from the bondage of this world. This passage is the right teaching at right time for the empty nesters.

Jewish men were required to go up to Jerusalem three times a year to observe Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles and worship God at the temple (Deut 16:16). As a religious Jewish man, Jesus followed all these obligations. As the Son of the living God, the coming Messiah, Jesus did not want to just appear in these festivals. He had a mission to use all these opportunities through his teaching to change Jewish people's mind to receive the coming kingdom of God through receiving him as the Son of God. This was Jesus' last time leaving hometown Galilee for Jerusalem. He did not return to Galilee until his resurrection. His reason to be at Jerusalem this time was for the Feast of Tabernacles. The Feast of Tabernacles was served not only as the celebration of the grain harvest and praising God for his sovereign provision but also as the time to remember their nation's special period of desert wandering in their history. Water and light were two important motifs of the Feast of Tabernacles. Gary M. Burge noted, "Each day of the feast witnessed a water ceremony" and "a light ceremony that was popular in Jerusalem and orchestrated during Tabernacles."<sup>5</sup> Jesus had used both two motifs to proclaim that he was the coming Messiah and urge them to come to him for the living water and follow him because he was the light of life (John 7:37-39; 8:12).

Many of his followers claimed that they had believed, but their life did not demonstrate any transformation of their mind and heart. The teaching of Jesus in this passage was for these self-claiming Jewish followers. The conversation in this passage and the following revealed that they only had some interest in Jesus. Although they believed in certain parts of Jesus' teaching, they denied the true identity of Jesus. Without accepting Jesus as the Son of God, they could not obey all his teaching. They claimed that they were the descendants of Abraham and had the freedom to choose what to believe and what not to. But actually, they were the offspring of the devil, not the real

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<sup>5</sup> Gary M. Burge, *John*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 226, 255.

descendants of Abraham. They did not have the capacity to choose the freedom in Jesus the Christ due to the bondage of the devil.

When Jesus mentioned “his disciple,” he did not mean those who just follow him. Jesus said before that some of his followers came just for the food. These followers were not his disciples. Jesus gave a clear definition of his disciple in Luke 9:23, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.” his disciples should have committed to self-denial. The life of a disciple should not be the life of pursuing his own carnal and earthly interest. The disciples of Jesus should deny anything that pleased their own “lust of the flesh and lust of eyes” and aroused their desire for “the pride of life.” They should renounce their own agenda and pursue their Lord Jesus’s mission in their lives. “Taking up their cross” meant on the road to death. By “taking up their cross daily,” disciples of Jesus should be ready to die to the world. They should renounce the value and lifestyle of this world and replace them with the value of the Kingdom of God and the lifestyle pleasing his Lord, even though they might face the rejection of this world. All these requirements were not fulfilled once-for-all. These self-denying and cross-taking were the daily realities in mind and behavior. The disciples had to rely on the indwelling Holy Spirit to provide the power for victory. The lives of disciples of Jesus should have a clear purpose and direction. The disciples should always occupy themselves on how to carry out his mission and to live in this world according to his value and pleasing him.

The teaching of Jesus during these seven days of observing the Festival of Tabernacles was not meant for his disciples to discuss or study only. Jesus wanted them to obey the trustworthy truth with divine authority daily. Only those who obey Jesus' teaching were his disciples. Jesus proclaimed that his disciples would be set free if they received his teachings as divine truth and obeyed them, because he was “the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Freedom

had a special weight on these Jewish people. Their ancestors had been in slavery under many nations. They were slaves in Egypt. It was God who sent Moses to break them out of the slavery bondage. They were under the bondage of Assyria, Babylon, and Persia due to their idolatry. By God's mercy, he delivered them from all these nations. Due to their spiritual pride, they denied the history of slavery in their nation. They preferred to claim that they were free because they were God's chosen people. It was true that God set them free from bondages of nations several times in history because God saw them as chosen people. But it was also true that they were under bondage of many nations due to their sins of idolatry as the chosen people. The real freedom had come for them, the freedom from the bondage of sins and the control of the devil, if they would repent and receive Jesus as their Messiah, the Christ. Without repentance, their sins had covered their eyes. They could not see the blessedness of God's purpose in our lives. Jesus urged them to accept and obey his teaching so that they could be his disciples and receive the true freedom for which they had yearned. With the freedom offered by Jesus, they could live their life according to the will of God. They would be free indeed.

The principles of Jesus teaching were not only for the Jewish people at that time, but also for people from all nations in every generation. A born-again life with a transformed mind can have the joy of freedom from the bondage of this sinful world. Their minds have the capacity to know God's loving purpose for their lives. Their lives accomplish their true fulfilment.

### **Luke 12:15–23**

Our perspective on wealth and our management of wealth reveals who we are and what kind of relationship we have with God and others. When empty nesters come to know and cherish their new identity in Christ, they must transform the way they manage their wealth. The way that empty nesters manage their wealth provides insight on what their priorities are. Jesus Christ has clear teachings to guard our hearts and guide our



behaviors. Obeying Jesus' teachings is necessary for the empty nesters to fulfill the purpose of God in their life.

Wealth is not necessarily good or bad. But a wrong attitude toward wealth could lead a life into a dangerous situation. When Jesus was approached by a man asking him to take his side and to request a share of the inheritance from his brother, he saw that the real problem behind the disputes between the brothers was greed. Greed would cover the eyes of the greedy people and it was not possible for the brothers to find any fair solution for the dispute. Greedy people's scale of judgment always tilts toward their own side. The greedy spirit between these two brothers could not help in dividing the shares of inheritance fairly but divided their brotherhood relationship badly. Greed is the big problem of humankind concerning wealth. Jesus took this opportunity to address this issue to this man and the surrounding crowd including his disciples. Using this parable, Jesus wanted people to pay attention to the greedy attitude toward their wealth.

The rich man in the parable was a person full of blessings but with the wrong attitude. First, he was rich and owned properties of land and proper storage for his normal yearly harvest. Second, his land was fertile and could yield abundant crops. Third, there was a great harvest year. All these blessings should move his heart with thanksgiving gratitude toward God who blessed him. This man should respond with generous spirit by using parts of his blessings for those who were in need or unfortunate. Instead, he reasoned and planned for himself only. In the original Greek text, this rich man used seven times present active indicative verbs (*ποιήσω* will do, *συνάξω* will gather, *ποιήσω* will do, *καθελῶ* will put down, *οικοδομήσω* will build, *συνάξω* will gather, and *ἐρῶ* will say) to indicate that he had the right to do what he wanted for himself right now and four times “*μου*” (of me) to show that he was the absolute owner. Dr. Darrell Bock notes this, “There is no hint of an awareness of stewardship or responsibility to others as a result of

his fortune.”<sup>6</sup> He thought that he was completely in control of his wealth and wanted to use the wealth completely for his own indulgence. He did not care about anyone else instead of himself. He wrongly assumed that he obtained this wealth totally by himself and he was the real and forever owner of this wealth. This wrong attitude toward wealth would bring him a judgement from God.

God had commanded Israelite to leave some of their harvests in the field for someone who was in need or unfortunate, such as the foreigner, fatherless, and widow, because Israel people historically had experience of being needy as slaves in Egypt (Deut 24:19-22). As a descendant of Abraham, this rich man should have been taught that it was God who delivered their ancestors from their slavery in Egypt. He should realize that he could be who he was as a rich man because of God’s providence. He should revere God when he saw the great blessings. Out of gratitude to God, he should not concern himself only when he manages the wealth. His heart became callous because of greed. There was no place for God and other people in his heart concerning his wealth. Without compassion and a giving spirit, this rich man was not rich at all, but poor and miserable before God.

God rebuked this rich man as a fool in this parable. The word “fool” in the Old Testament term does not only mean without knowledge and wisdom but also arrogant toward God with self-indulgent life attitude. Psalms 14:1 says, “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, their deeds are vile.” The book of Proverbs warns many times that a fool would produce many evil behaviors and find ruin in his life (Prov 10:10, 18, 23; 15:5; 20:3; 29:9). A fool lives this life in a destructive way. There is no future for a fool.

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<sup>6</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 225.

The rich man really showed his foolishness. He was driven to store up his wealth for himself without any notice that his life could be taken away from him that very night. A serious question from Jesus laid ahead of this fool rich man, “who will get what you have prepared for yourself?” The Wise Teacher of Ecclesiastes had answered the question a long time ago. A rich man would have to leave all his wealth to someone foolish or wise. Someone would control over all his preparation (Eccl 2:18-19). He had to realize that his life was in the hand of God. He could not control or extend even a minute of his life. His fulfillment of life could not come out of “eat, drink and be merry.” An abundance of possessions had nothing to do with abundant life. It is God who can give life abundantly.

The important missing part of the rich man's life was God. He did not have a place for God in his life, but he had to face the reality that God had the final say in his life. Although he could assume that he had many years to come, his life could be ended by God in that same night. The tragedy of the rich man's life was that he ignored his eternal security and hope in God on purpose. He wrongly prioritized his temporary enjoyment and shallow pride in the material over his eternal status before God. James, one of Jesus’s disciples, denounced this arrogant attitude as an evil boasting (Jas 4:13-17). The abundant wealth he gathered would finally have nothing to do with him after the end of his life. He could not gain any benefit from the wealth after his death. Because he missed God in his life, he missed everything that truly mattered in life.

Through this parable, Jesus taught his disciples that greedily hoarding wealth for the self would end up in misery. The right attitude toward wealth was to realize that they were not the ultimate owner of wealth. It was God who entrusted the material in their hands. They should have gratitude toward God for his provision. They should prepare for life before the judgment of God, instead of preparing fleeting enjoyment of

“eat, drink and be merry” in this world. Using the material in the way of honoring and serving God is considered as being rich toward God.

### **Mark 10:32–45**

Having the right motivation is important for doing any Christian ministry. If the church wants to equip the empty nesters to Christian service, it is necessary for the church to help them build up a solid foundation on the characteristics of meekness and glory in the Kingdom of God on earth. The church should guide empty nesters into taking the responsibility willingly with self-denying spirit. The teaching of our Lord in this passage provides context on how to guide empty nesters and establish the correct foundation.

The third prediction of Jesus concerning his sufferings in the cross and his resurrection served a significant role in his discipleship training for the purpose of the coming ministry. When Jesus had determined to press on his final mission received from the heavenly Father, he set the course for Jerusalem, the final mission field. While aiming to the cross as his destination, he had the urge to take effort to prepare his disciples for the mission they would continue after his resurrection. The disciples were full of fear while Jesus led them on the way heading for Jerusalem. The context did not specifically spell out the reason for this fear. Matthew Henry suggested that the thought of “how very malicious the Sanhedrim which sat there was against their Master and them” was the reason for their trembling fear (Matthew Henry commentary). Whatever the reason might be, it was necessary for the trembling disciples to be encouraged before facing the challenges ahead of them. Jesus showed his grace toward these fearful disciples. He did not rebuke them for their cowardness. Instead, Jesus took them aside and pre-informed them what would happen to him in order that they could have the courage to face it. Jesus re-assured the disciples that he had full knowledge of the things ahead of him and had been well prepared to face them. The ensuing sufferings and death would serve the

purpose of bringing glory to him in the resurrection. This message was necessary and timely encouragement for the trembling disciples.

The disciples seemed to receive the message well because they recovered their courage and assured Jesus's Messiah identity. However, they all only received the message selectively. The request of the two brothers, James and John, and the response of the other ten disciples revealed that all of them only received the message of Jesus as the powerful and glorious Messiah but ignored the message of the humiliation and service side of Messiah. It was meritorious for the two brothers, sons of Zebedee, not only to believe in the kingdom of God that Jesus was going to bring, but also to have high evaluation of it. In fact, this was only part of the message Jesus brought to the disciples. All disciples of Jesus in all generation should believe and highly evaluate the kingdom of God. But the two brothers should be reproofed to request the positions of both the right-hand side and left-hand side of Jesus in the kingdom of God. This worldly desire deviated from the teaching of Jesus concerning the kingdom of God. The positions of right and left hands of a king in his kingdom were regarded as having the most honor and power in the worldly order and status. Jesus ushered in the kingdom of God through his humiliation crucifixion on the cross, not by the power of this world. The two brothers' desires for seeking power and honor in the kingdom of God revealed that they did not really understand the kingdom of God, although they showed their belief of it. The indignant feeling of the other ten disciples toward the two brothers showed that they shared the same improper ambitions. The eagerness for power and honor in the ten disciples' hearts were no less than the two brothers. All the disciples lacked understanding of the meaning of humility and service in the kingdom of God which Jesus was going to bring.

It was the grace of Jesus to listen to their presumptuous request. Instead of rebuking their request, Jesus patiently explained their ignorance about what they were asking for. Immersion in the water (baptism) was often used as metaphor for calamity in

the Old Testament (Ps 42:7; Isa 43:2). The word “cup” in the Old Testament could symbolized joy, prosperity (Ps 16:5, 223:5, 116:13), and calamity brought by the judgement and wrath of God (Ps 16:5, 75:8; Isa 51:17; Jer 25:15-28). But Jesus referred the “cup,” that he would drink, and “baptism,” that he would be baptized with, to the same calamity of death brought by God’s judgement and wrath on the sins of the human race, that Jesus would bear for in the cross. The meaning of the “cup” and “baptism” was fully displayed when he was put up on the cross. The left- and right-hand sides of Jesus on the cross were two criminals who were crucified with Jesus. The two brothers clearly had no knowledge about what they were asking for. The “cup” that the two brothers would drink referred to the sufferings from this hostile world toward the kingdom of God, that they had to put up with as the disciples of Jesus (Acts 12:2). The two brothers, James and John, neither had knowledge that they could not bear humiliating crucifixion for the sins of this world, that they thought they could drink and baptize with, nor prepared for the sufferings that they had to take as the disciple of Jesus, that they had to drink and be baptized with.

Jesus called all the disciples together and gave them the lesson of the fundamental principle of humble service in the kingdom of God, because none of them initially understood his earlier message. Jesus acknowledging the disciples’ feeling of being victim under the power and authority of Roman oppression. Jesus reminded the disciples that this kind of power and authority could only bring sufferings and conflicts. If they resented this kind of power and authority from Romans, they should not expect this kind of power and control to be among their brothers and sisters in the kingdom of God. The motivation for social status and power ranks in this world could not be brought into the kingdom of God. The preeminent virtue of service in the kingdom of God contradicts with the value of this world. A servant was regarded as a low class in this world, but he was ranked great in the kingdom of God. Jesus used himself as an example.

When he asked the disciple, “who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves?” he gave the answer himself, “I am among you who serves.” (Luke 22:27)

As the Son of Man, the coming Messiah, Jesus came to usher in the kingdom of God through becoming an obedient servant. He was exalted to the highest because of his service to the point of death on the cross. (Phil 2:7-9) The one who was the greatest, was the one who served till death on the cross. The word “ransom” was used in the Old Testament for the payment to free a slave (Lev 25:47-55) and the sacrifice replaced for the first-born. (Exod 13:13-16). Dr. David Garland commented that, “The concept of ransom, therefore, is connected to the idea of cost, substitution, and atonement.”<sup>7</sup> The service of Jesus giving his life on the cross freed all of humankind who were slaves in the tyranny of sin and the dominion of Satan. His death on the cross became the sacrifice for the sins of all who had faith in his redeeming work. Apostle Paul also taught that Jesus was one “who gave himself as a ransom for all people” (1 Tim 2:6). The economy of the kingdom of God was based on the humble service, not the power or rank, because the suffering Messiah is the King of the kingdom of God.

#### **Psalm 149:1–5 (NIV)**

When their youngest child left home, empty nesters start the second half of their life. How can the empty nesters make their second half of life joyful? The answer should be found in their intimate relationship with the Lord in worship and service. The teaching of this Psalm gives good guidance and encouragement for empty nesters as they start a new chapter of their lives.

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<sup>7</sup> David E. Garland, *Mark*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 413.

Psalm 149 is one of the five concluding Hallelujah hymns<sup>8</sup> (Ps 146-150).

Although most bible expositors including Matthew Henry and John Calvin said that the author of this psalm and its date were unknown<sup>9</sup>, many suggested that this psalm was written either after Israel's deliverance from Babylon, or after king David's settlement in Zion. Matthew Henry suggested looking further "to the kingdom of the Messiah, who in the chariot of the everlasting gospel, goes forth conquering and to conquer" (Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole bible). This psalm truly is a great encouragement for Christians who become God's faithful people through the Gospel today.

The joyful and thanksgiving spirit in this psalm demonstrates that the psalmist has an intimate relationship with God. God is the source of the worshiper's joy. The psalmist's praise comes from his conviction of God's worthiness due to his grace and salvation. Whatever the salvation might be, either returning to home country from Babylonish captivity, or conquering Zion for the establishment of David's kingdom, or forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ, all people in all generations who have intimate relationship with God will have the common desire to praise the Lord. Their spirits are refreshed through their worship. The Lord's faithful worshippers can sing a new song because they have new knowledge of God every day. They can see the new grace and new salvation of the Lord pouring upon them day by day, and they are anticipating more magnificent work of the Lord to be done for them in the future.

Worship is a great consolation for anyone who just transitioned from misery to hopefulness. All the defeat, sadness, and disappointment in their past will be washed away when they worship God. Worshipers are reinvigorated as new men. The same cheerful spirit could be seen in the prophet Isaiah, when he predicted the wonderful work

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<sup>8</sup> Willem A. VanGemeren, *Psalms*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 37.

<sup>9</sup> Donald Williams, *Psalms 73-150*, in *Mastering The Old Testament*, vol. 14, rev. ed (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1987), 535.



of the Servant of God. The prophet was inspired to call all the people in the world to sing a new song to the Lord (Isa 42:10). Worshipping the Lord will give those who have intimate relationships with God a special perspective of life. The worshippers can see not only what they can do with the strength of the Lord, but also what the Lord can do for them with grace. This new perspective of life will bring confidence and hope for the future. The nature of public worship brings the worshippers together. The assembly of worshippers looks for their common purpose, instead of individual interest. They appreciate their common characters and support each other to accomplish their common goals. The sense of belonging to each other is enhanced during their worship. The unity among the people of God is forged.

The intimate relationship with God comes out of their deep understanding who God is and what God means to him. The worshiper sees God as his maker. He can joyfully sing to the Lord that “you created my inmost being you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful; I know that full well” (Ps 129:13-14). The worshiper claims that no one can have such an intimate relation with himself other than his God the Creator. He can be as he is today due to the wonderful maker. He is a masterpiece of the Creator. Worshipping his creator brings immense joy to him (Ps 95:6). The worshiper also sees God as his king. As a descendant of Abraham, the psalmist can gratefully recall how God graciously chose their ancestors, made covenant with them, formed them as a nation, and promised to be their King. Despite their disobedience as a nation, merciful God still had protected them, provided them, delivered them as their King. Apostle Paul who was inspired by God, said this, “It is just as Isaiah said previously: “Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah”” (Rom 9:29). It is their duty and joy to sing and praise God their King.

Zion is the capital city of David's kingdom and the location of the temple of God. People of Zion refer to Israel as the chosen people of God. The phrase "people of Zion" reminds the worshipers that they have the covenant with God and should be faithful to their God. Since they are close to the temple of God that is in Zion, the worshipers should use this privilege well in worshiping God their King. They should be willing to be ruled by their mighty and merciful King. They should enjoy his rule. Their Messiah King will rule them with gentleness and love. Prophet Zechariah described the Messiah Kings as "righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zech 9:9). They rejoice and be glad in this King.

The psalmist encourages to worship the Lord with both vocal message and body language. Dancing and making music were considered very appropriate worship to the Lord in Israel history. After God led Israel past the red river, Moses' sister Miriam led the Israel women praising the Lord with timbrels and dancing (Exod 15:20). King David worshiped the Lord with dance when the ark of the Lord was brought into the City of David (2 Sam 6:14-15). Worshipers want to use these expressive actions of worshiping to please their Lord because they have seen the great favor of the Lord showed on them. Worshipers consider themselves as the people of the Lord. The Lord made them for himself in order that they may praise him (Isa 43:21). In the same way, Christians are the chosen people purchased by the blood of Jesus and renewed in the Holy Spirit for the purpose of declaring the praises of God (1 Pet 2:9). God delights in his people not only in their service and worship, but also in their current welfare and eternal salvation. As a matter of fact, there is nothing in the people that could delight the Lord. People's characters are polluted by sins. Their behaviors show their disobedience very often. But God chooses to delight in his people through Jesus Christ. It is the delight of the Lord to sanctify them, to conform them to the image of Jesus, and to glorify them (Rom 8:29-30). God's delight is the forever fountains of joy for the worshippers.

The Lord crowns the humble with victory. Matthew Poole sees “the humble” as the Lord’s “poor afflicted and oppressed people.” The Israelites were the poor and afflicted in this world. It was their God who conquered their enemies and established David kingdom in Zion for them. God delivered them from the Babylonian captivity and brought them to their homeland. Their God gave them victory repeatedly throughout history. In the same way, God will crown those who are humble in spirit with victories. God will give them victory over sin and death through the salvation of Jesus. God will give them victory over the temptation of the world, such as “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16), over the dominion of Satan. God will give them the victory to make disciples of all nations for Jesus Christ the King of kings and Lord of lords who holds all authority in heaven and on earth. The worshipers will have immense joy from the morning till the night, even in meditation on his bed, his heart will continue to be full of joy. His praise will continue even if he is alone at night.

### **1 Corinthians 12:12–20**

One of the symptoms of the empty nester is loneliness. It is natural for Christian empty nesters to come to the church seeking social conversations and participation in Christian fellowship. Church is the body of Christ. This spiritual body requires unity in the Spirit among all members. How can the empty nesters maintain harmony relationship with other believers? This passage guides how unity in the church can be established.

Because of multiple problems that appeared in the Corinthian Church during the early church era, apostle Paul was chosen and inspired by God to address the issues in the Corinthian Church. The intension of 1 Corinthians, written by apostle Paul, was not only for solving the problems in the Corinthian Church at that time, but also for teaching and edifying the universal Church in the years to come. Therefore, learning and practicing these principles of relationship among fellow believers will enhance and

extend the ministry boundary for any Christians who are seeking to serve the Lord in this age. This passage is a great resource for the empty nesters to access while they are looking to be used by the Lord in serving this generation.

Many appealing spiritual gifts sprung up among brothers and sisters in Corinthian Church while Apostle Paul wrote this letter. This phenomenon was supposed to be a great blessing and beneficial to the church. But, because of the lack of proper perspective and reasonable handling, these beneficial spiritual gifts brought the church into chaos instead of benefits from them. The teaching of this passage 1 Corinthians 12:12-20 was aimed to maintain unity while enjoying the benefit of diversity in the fellowship of believers. Apostle Paul was very skillful while using the similitude of human body and its parts to illustrate the relationship between the body of Christ and individual Christians and relationship among themselves. Because this similitude of body and its members was commonly known in area, like Corinth, influenced by the Greek philosophy. Apostle Paul's argument of inseparable relationship between body and members was very convincing to the Corinthian church.

“The body” in in this passage referred to the Church. The Church was the body of Christ as he clearly indicated in the following verses (v27). Apostle Paul might have well remembered that the risen Christ said to him during his conversion that his persecution of the Church was considered as persecution of him (Acts 9:3-6). The wholeness and harmony were stressed in this passage. Apostle Paul wanted Corinthian believers to know that their church was the body of Christ, which could not be divided and in chaos. The church should maintain its wholeness and be in harmony. Any actions that divided the church was hurting Christ.

“Many parts” in 1 Corinthians 12:12–20 refer to the individual believers with different gifts. The different gifts of each believer functioned differently in the church. These varieties of functions made believers distinct from each other. Therefore, they

could be identified as many different parts in the same body. Although the believers could be seen as distinct parts, they were inseparably united in the same body of Christ. All believers, the “many parts,” formed the body, the Church, and made the Church to function as a church.

The way all believers became one inseparable and harmonious body of Christ was through baptism in the Spirit. The indwelt Holy Spirit in each believer made them belong to the same body of Christ. Every believer in the Corinthian Church shared the same experience of baptism in the Spirit. This shared life-transforming experience in the Spirit united them together as the church. Through baptism in the Spirit, all believers were immersed into the death of Jesus Christ. The lives of all believers were seen by God through Jesus Christ as dead. Believers in Christ were able to consider the value system of this world, which was held dearly, including the identities of Jews and Gentiles and the class ranking of slave and the free, as dead and had no value in the new spiritual world through baptism of the Spirit. Therefore, all believers in the body of Christ, no matter how much difference they had, such as Jews and Gentiles, or the free and the slave, could live together and helped each other to achieve the purpose of God in their lives and the Church. All believers who were baptized by the Spirit received the Holy Spirit in their hearts and lives. The Holy Spirit worked in all believer’s hearts and lives for the same purpose of Christ, who was the sender of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, all believers should function harmoniously as one body of Christ, for the purpose of Christ.

If a human body had only a single part, it could not be considered a viable human body. Craig Blomberg commented that, “Without the diversity that comes from specialization of function, one no longer has an organism, merely on giant organ, unable to do anything.”<sup>10</sup> It would be a monster because it could not function and appear as a

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<sup>10</sup> Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 246.

human body. Same metaphor worked for the church of Christ. The church, the body of Christ, needed every believer, the members of the body, to play his or her own role within the purpose of the church. It was foolish for anyone or any group who considered himself or herself or the group as the only representative of the whole church.

Apostle Paul realized that some less gifted believers might feel afraid of being considered as second-class Christians and not belonging to the body of Christ. He rejected this thinking by using two body parts as examples to show the absurdness of this thought. A foot might have the feeling that it was considered as less important as a hand and the same inferior feeling an ear might have when it was compared to an eye. But neither their feelings nor other's judgement could stop them from belonging to the body. Just as a foot and an ear were inseparable parts of the human body, less gifted believers were necessary parts of the Church. If all attentions went to a few organs and the others were neglected, the whole body would perish. In the same way, if only few gifts of believers were used and other gifts were forsaken, the whole church would not function. A well functional church depended on the variety of gifts of its members. All believers should respect each other's gift because these gifts are all mutually needed. Any sense of superiority should be totally rejected in the Church.

### **2 Corinthians 4:16–18**

Although aging is a natural process, the preoccupation of aging is becoming increasingly a universal phenomenon. Affliction due to aging in this life is another area of concern. These problems can never be escaped in one way or another. No one can avoid aging and afflictions. However, empty nesters are at the age of first taste of the symptom of aging. When they were busy with the demanding chores of raising children, empty nesters might not pay attention with the symptoms of aging. When the nest became empty, they become more aware of the state of their body. The symptoms of aging became more phenomenal. Anxiety and depression normally are accompanied with

aging and afflictions. Empty nesters must be prepared to face them. Some of them may look for a healthy diet and physical exercises as the solution to aging and afflictions. Others may want to depend on the advantage of modern medical science. But none of these ways can help empty nesters avoid meeting the death someday in the future, just as people in all age. How can the church equip the empty nesters to have hope, strength, and joy when they start to develop concerns about aging and affliction in life? Apostle Paul gives his answer to these problems in this passage.

Apostle Paul sees a man both outwardly and inwardly. A man outwardly, in Paul's understanding, is the mortal body with the earthly life and belongs to this physical world only, while a man inwardly is the person with spiritual life and belongs to the spiritual world. This physical world is corrupted and going to an end. The spiritual world is perfect and eternal. A man currently exists in both physical and spiritual worlds. There is no remedy for a man outwardly going to perish just as the physical world does, because they are all created for this end. The physical world can be seen through our physical eyes, but the spiritual world cannot be seen with physical eyes, only with spiritual eyes. Christians who are redeemed by Jesus Christ have the spiritual eyes and can see the works of God and things in the spiritual world (Col 3:1-2). With physical eyes, an outward man can only focus on temporary things concerning our body, our flesh desires, and all other earthly things. The nature of an outward man tends to look for comfortable living, good health, riches, fame, and high positions in this world. All of these are temporary and passing away. As the years go by, the outward man becomes weak and feeble physically, losing his energy and ability without hope. Nothing in this temporary world can provide an outward man a rest place for long. The spiritual eyes of an inward man can see life's eternity and happiness. His expectation gives him a mighty support and comfort when he faces aging and affliction. He has hope in the spiritual world while maintaining life in this physical world.

The daily renewal of the inward man gives him the strength and hope while he faces the problems caused by afflictions and aging. The progressive decay of the outward man is accompanied by the daily renewal of the inward man. The source of the strength and hope of the inward man comes from God whom he trusts. The Holy Spirit works without ceasing in an inward man and supports him with constant increase of inward vigor (Eph 3:16). This renewal of the inward man cannot be seen with physical eyes. But it can be experienced through faith in Jesus. With this spiritual perspective, a man can live a quality life in any situation of life. His courage for living becomes stronger. His ability to deal with problems of aging and affliction increases. His view of truth of life becomes clearer. He can face death without fear because of the assurance of his salvation. He is a strong and capable man full of hope while living this temporary world.

An inward man will share the eternal glory of God that he seeks. We may see God's glory in his creation in the shining sun and moon day and night (Ps 19:1-2). But we yearn for the glory of God in the spiritual realm. Apostle Paul saw the glorious light of risen Jesus in his conversion. That experience turned his life upside down. The glory of God became his lifetime pursuit since then. How to face the troubles of aging and affliction in this temporary world? Apostle Paul puts these temporary troubles and eternal glory into a scale for comparison. He points out that the glory of God far outweighs all troubles in this world. Troubles of aging and affliction in this world become extremely light when we fix our eyes on the risen Christ and set our hearts on things in heaven.

However, the troubles of aging and affliction in our life are not pointless. God can use them to remind us that this world is temporary and decaying. We cannot trust this world with our life and rest our hope in it. There is no future in this physical world. We need to look toward heaven for our eternal home. Apostle clearly expresses it in the following passage. "For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands" (2 Cor 5:1).



Because of the trouble, we are forced to constantly rely on the Holy Spirit to work in our life to provide our inner strength. Therefore, we can be renewed day by day. Troubles have no merit or virtue in themselves. But through troubles, our lives may be purified by God who loves us (Isa 48:10). God miraculously uses troubles to achieve for us an eternal glory (Rom 8:28-30). Aging and affliction become light and much easy to bear when we see that an eternal glory is achieved through them.

The remedy that Apostle Paul gives for the aging and affliction in this world is clear. We must not fix our eyes on what we see. All that we can see through our physical eyes are temporary. No matter how pleasing the earthly things may be, they are passing away. Things in this physical world will leave us regretted and disappointed. There is no hope in this temporary world. But the unseen thing, that can be seen through spiritual eyes, is eternal glory. With this understanding, Apostle Paul can have great confidence to say that “we do not lose heart.” He has the ministry which imparts eternal life in this temporary world (2 Cor 4:1). The eternal glory of God is proclaimed through his ministry. Anyone who trusts in Christ will be transformed into the image of Christ “with ever-increasing glory” (2 Cor 3:16). Therefore, pursuing eternal glory should be the purpose of our life on earth. This pursuit will bring inner joy and peace. Life will have strength and hope even in the middle of aging and affliction.

### **Genesis 12:1–5**

The purpose of equipping the empty nesters for Christian ministry is that they can become a blessing to others through Christian service. The best blessing for the empty nesters is to become a blessing to others. In the process of listening and obeying to God’s calling, empty nesters will gradually know God’s heart and purpose for the calling. When the empty nesters follow God’s leading with obedience, they become the blessing of others. Abraham will serve a notable example for empty nesters.

Abraham is an important biblical figure in both the Old and New Testament. He is called not only the father of Israel, the chosen people of God, in the Old Testament (Isa 41:8), but also the father of faith for those who trust Jesus as their Savior in the New Testament (Rom 4:16). Old Testament records that “Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6). The New Testament claims that “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness....to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness” (Rom 4:3-5). It is a great lesson for Christian today to learn a lesson of faith from Abraham and to be challenged to respond to God’s calling as Abraham did.

There were great challenges for Abraham to respond to the calling from God. He had been living in his country for seventy-five years (seventy years in Ur and five years in Harran). He was used to the familiar surroundings and the way of life in his country. It was extremely hard to separate his family from the people in his country. Some of them were his friends from when he was young; some of them were the people he respected, those who kept the community safe and enjoyable; some of them were his partners in his work or business. He was very much attached to the life and culture of his country. He and his family were part of the country and the people. A sense of belonging to the people and inner security attached to the land had been built for seventy-five years. When a call from God was announced to him, he needed a great faith to respond.

Abraham’s faith was rooted in the characters of God. He knew his God as the God of glory. When Stephen, one of the seven deacons of the early church, preached to the high priest and other members of the Sanhedrin, he described God who appeared to Abraham as “the God of glory” (Acts 7:1-2). From all his understanding and life experience, Abraham saw no other gods in his father’s land who could match this “the God of glory.” He saw his God as an omniscient God who knew the life ahead and the future. God could lead and guard his life and the family into a life more satisfied.

Abraham saw his God as omnipotent God who had the power to protect and bless him and his family. Abraham understood that it was his privilege to worship this omniscient and omnipotent God, the God of glory. He chose to trust and obey his God. He willingly made the decision to leave behind all his sense of belonging and security and the people whom he closely attached to as the community. The “God of glory” was worthy of Abraham’s trust and worship.

Abraham’s obedience was tried in his sacrificial response. When God called Abraham to go to the land he would show him, God did not tell Abraham where the location and what kind of land it was. God did not say that the land would be given to Abraham either. How could Abraham leave the land he owned and the life he was used to live and go to a land he did not own or know the location? Abraham had to have a strong faith to believe that God should have great favor on him. God should have the great power to protect him and mercy and love to bless him. Although he did not know exactly what God would bring into his life, Abraham believed that God would bring fulfillment much greater and more worthy than what he would leave behind or forsake. God would work for the best of his interest. His sacrifices were nothing if they were compared with God’s great blessing. God was worthy for him to trust and obey.

The promise of God to Abraham required his faith to receive. Abraham left a country; God promised him a great nation born out of him. But Abraham had not even one child at that time. He was already at an old age and his wife was barren. Even though God clearly promised him at later time that he and his wife Sarah would have a son, Abraham still did not understand (Gen 17:15). His wife Sarah even laughed about it (Gen 18:12). But Abraham had the faith to take God’s promise without understanding. Dr. Sidney Greidanus stressed Abraham’s in his expository, “Even accepting these promises

required a great deal of faith. But we don't hear Abraham questioning God.”<sup>11</sup> God replaced what Abraham sacrificed for his faith with much more. God promised Abraham a great name, because he left his country and lost his name to be remembered. Abraham was on the way to a foreign land without knowing the location. It was obvious that no one would know him and that even his family's surviving had to be taken into consideration. How would he be known in the foreign land? Abraham had the faith to believe that God would provide him with resources to make him prosperous and known in the foreign land.

God promised Abraham that he would be a blessing and all peoples on earth would be blessed through him. Abraham lost his security when he left his country; God gave him security and confidence so that he could be secure enough even to be a blessing to the land he was going to. God's promises added on, “I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse” (Gen 12:3a). These additional promises imparted confidence to Abraham. The promise which was most difficult to understand was that “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen 12:3b). God repeated this promise to Abraham later with clearer wording, saying that “through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me” (Gen. 22:18).

Abraham did not have a full understanding how all the people in the world could be blessed through him. The nation born from Abraham later had not shown their understanding of this promise from generation to generation. Who would be “your offspring”? God revealed the mystery of this promise, when Apostle Paul inspired by God saying this, “The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ” (Gal 3:16). How could all nations on earth be blessed by him? The

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<sup>11</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ From Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 152.

same Apostle under inspiration of God clearly stated in Galatians 2:8-9. “Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.”” *The Bible Knowledge commentary* has this clear and simple comment, “The third promise takes on its greatest fulfillment in the fact that Jesus Christ became the means of blessing to the world.”<sup>12</sup> All nations will be blessed through their faith in Jesus the Son of God who came to the earth to become “the offspring” of Abraham and to die on the cross becoming the “ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). The Scripture says, “So Abram went” (Gen 12:4). He demonstrated his faith that he could trust God’s promise even if he could not understand it.

Abraham believed in God not only in his mind and heart, but also with immediate action. Abraham left his father’s land and followed God’s direction to a foreign land. He would rely on God’s direction continuously all the way to the destination. Abraham guarded and strengthened his faith all his life following God who called him. His faith is a notable example for all people who can be called children of Abraham because of the faith (Gal 3:7).

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<sup>12</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Genesis*, in *The Bible knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (SP Publications, 1985), 47.

CHAPTER 3  
THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES RELATED  
TO EMPTY NESTERS FOR CHRISTIAN SERVICE

**Overview**

Many empty nesters face a common situation: their children have grown to a certain age and move out of their parents' home to pursue lives of their own, usually in the context of college studies or for another post-high-school world. According to Pew Research Center, about 48 percent of young adults aged 18-29 do not live with their parents<sup>1</sup>. Some grown-up children may move to another state and their parents are not able to see them often. Others may live nearby but they want to live an independent life; they do not want their parents hovering behind them all the time. These children prefer their own way of living and enjoy their freedom. In both cases, empty nesters do not have their grown-up children living with them at home, making the home an empty nest. They can neither see their grown-up children often nor can they offer help as they used to. In fact, their children are reluctant to receive their help in the same way as when they were younger. Grown up children want to experiment and demonstrate their independence. All of this affects empty nesters psychologically and emotionally. Under the circumstances, some of them feel depressed, even to a degree of needing certain professional counseling and medication. Many of them feel that they have lost their sense of purpose in life. The feelings of rejection by their children and anxiety over the welfare of their children all potentially contribute to a breakdown. Grief and loneliness may accompany them in the

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Fry, Jeffrey S. Passel, and D'Vera Cohn, "A Majority of Young Adults in the U.S. Live with Their Parents for the First Time since the Great Depression," *Pew Research Center*, September 4, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/09/04/a-majority-of-young-adults-in-the-u-s-live-with-their-parents-for-the-first-time-since-the-great-depression/>.

form of long nights. Not many can find themselves exceptional, not even among celebrities. Madonna, the “Queen of Pop,” described her feeling when her daughter left for college as “an absolutely devastating experience.”<sup>2</sup>

All these symptoms of empty nesters apply to both Christians and non-Christians alike. The ways to cope with the symptoms and the resources are different between Christians and non-Christians. Christians normally would look for spiritual resources for help. Non-Christians naturally would search for worldly resources for comfort and healing. Although people display a different variety of symptoms and therefore diverse ways of healing, they all ultimately seek re-adjustments for their mind and life.

Christian empty nesters should cope with their symptoms by being encouraged to look for God as the only source for their new purpose of life and inner strength. The church to which they belong must be prepared to provide them with support and mechanism for them to change or mitigate symptoms, with the clear goal that in the process they can enter a new phase of their life, more exciting and meaningful, something they have never imagined, but more long lasting.

For those who do not feel any symptoms of empty nester, or even enjoy more time and space of an emptied nest, they likewise must change their focus of life and reinvest it on something else. The church can also provide guidance in line with Christian values and help them to make their life meaningful and a blessing in the eternal perspective. The ministry of the church not only can help empty nesters to walk out of the symptoms but can also equip them for Christian services.

To equip empty nesters for Christian service, the church should create a strategic plan to help empty nesters by first understanding all the challenges they

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<sup>2</sup> Melissa Shultz, *From Mom to Me Again* (Naperville: Sourcebooks Inc., 2006), 5.

experience and their yearning heart at this stage in life. First, the church needs to help empty nesters to establish a clear and significant purpose for life. Without a purpose in life, they will not have a drive for change and nor direction for change. Second, many Christian empty nesters have deviated from their commitment to God and have poorly maintained fellowship with other Christians in the church. Empty nesters need to renew their mind and come to a satisfying relationship with God and other Christians in the church. Third, empty nesters need help establishing a new perspective on time. They are in the critical time of late middle age. How empty nesters use their next half of life is a great concern and demand for answers. Fourth, aging is an inevitable issue demanding them to answer at this stage of life. The right attitude and response will release them from their anxieties. Fifth, after their lives have been renewed and refocused on God and His calling, they need to cultivate a humble spirit to be a blessing instrument of God for others. Sixth, many empty nesters are goal-getters and are considered successful. It is harmful for them to bring a worldly success mindset to the Christian service. They need to redefine the meaning of success when they are in the Christian service. Lastly, because of their many years of commitment in parenting, they have downplayed many hobbies, interests, and desires. After their children become independent, empty nesters may be tempted to fill out their extra time with the hobbies, interests and desires they had to forgo during their time as parents. With extra free time in hand, they need to re-arrange their priorities to serve better in the Christian service rather than worldly hobbies and interests.

### **Establishing a Significant Purpose of Life**

Losing the purpose of life is the main cause for some symptoms of the empty nesters. Many Christian couples unfortunately, in a gradual way, adopted a non-Christian's worldly view about parenting after they have had their first child. Just like non-Christians, these Christian couples also focused all their attention on their children in



daily life for many years. Parenting became their main purpose of life. They devoted most of their time and energy to children. After their children left home, their lifestyles changed drastically from what they used to be. Their role became entirely different from the one when their children were home. These Christian empty nesters suddenly lost their focus of life. Their time and energy have become a surfeit, having nothing to serve as their anchor. Either they could not find any pursuit that was worthy of their time and energy, or they were not willing to devote their time and energy to anything at all. They lost their purpose in life when they became empty nesters. To overcome the symptoms, to be excited and energetic about their life again, they should first come to a clearer view of the real purpose of life as a Christian.

The purpose of a Christian's life is "to glorify God and to enjoy him forever."<sup>3</sup> Both the Old Testament and New Testament have teachings on this subject. Psalmist says, "All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, Lord; they will bring glory to your name" (Ps 86:9). The purpose of God to create human beings who are in all nations is to worship him and bring glory to him. Therefore, the focus of our life in any stage of life should be to bring glory to God. First Corinthians 10:31 teaches, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." The purpose of our daily life is to honor God in all of what we do. Our children and their welfare cannot be our purpose of life. For those who do not know God or keep a distance from God, they have deviated from their divine purpose. Instead of having God being the center of their life, they replace God with themselves and their desires, making those the center of their life. In the case of empty nesters, they replaced God and made their children the center of their life. Such replacement could not bring them satisfaction, as this missed the purpose originally designed for life. They are doomed to feel

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<sup>3</sup> Westminster Divines, *The Westminster Shorter Catechism with Scripture Proofs*, 2, Kindle.

disappointment, because they cannot find fulfillment for their desires and interests in the ever-changing circumstances of life. In addition, they can easily feel devastated from factors outside of their control since children have become the center of their life. Some parents may easily feel devastated or sad from a child's performance. They must reorient their life often to fit in the circumstance all the time. They would feel the pain when they lose the previous purpose of life, whereas the new purpose is nowhere to be found. In addition, their desires and interests will keep changing or losing because the condition of their physical body is changing corresponding to the span of life. Their purpose of life based on meeting their desires and interests is bound to be lost repeatedly. With their children gone from home, their purpose of life focused on parenting was gone as well. Other symptoms, such as depression, anxiety, and resentment, will follow. Christian empty nesters who are deeply influenced by the non-Christian world value system and have taken parenting as their purpose of life for many years, will suffer the similar symptoms. It is the church's responsibility and opportunity to minister to these Christian empty nesters, bringing them back to a life that advocates serving God and glorifying him as the purpose of life.

There is nothing wrong with parenting. Its importance is both obvious and understandable. Parenting is worthy of hard work because the future wellbeing of children is at stake. Parenting is also a joyful life experiment even though it involves pains along the process. Parenting is full of rewards because parents witness the steady growth of their children, in their physical and mental abilities. However, parenting itself cannot be arisen to the level as the highest purpose of life for Christians. The Bible teaches that "children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him" (Ps 127:3). Children belong to the Lord. They are not part of their parents. The parents are rewarded to have the joy to raise them up. The parents are called to "bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Eph 6:4). The purpose of parenting must start from

God. If parenting is for God, the purpose of life for the parents should be focused on “to glorify God and to enjoy him.” The purpose of parenting is not for their enjoyment, not for their achievement, not for their possession, although it will bring them joy, achievement feeling, and feel of ownership. The purpose of parenting must be for the glory of God. After bringing them up according to the teaching of God, the parents must let their children go to follow God as their personal God and to live a life of glorifying God themselves. The goal of parenting is for children to be ready to leave. If Christian parents hold their purpose of life as “to glorify God and enjoy him forever,” they will praise God that their grown-up children are able to leave them and follow God themselves. They will be grateful that their mission as parents in this stage of their children’s life has been accomplished with the sovereign provision of God. They should not worry about their grown-up children after they leave home. They should trust that God will lead and guide their grown-up children in their life just as God has guided and provided all their needs. Once this Christian view has been established, the Christian empty nesters could shake off the anxiety over their children’s welfare, since they can entrust their children to God. Next, they should listen to God for the next mission in their life for the purpose of which is “to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” When God is the purpose and center of their life, it cannot be taken away from them. The purpose of their life never changes. What change are the way of their effort and platform of their life. Empty nesters should have enough faith that the next journey of their life. This coming new journey should be exciting and meaningful by the grace of God. If God can provide all their needs for the period of their life as the parents before their children leaving the home for their own life, he will continue his provision for the coming years ahead. With this faith their purpose of life will be clearer and firmer.

It is important for the Christian empty nesters, while coping with the symptoms, to re-establish their real and lasting purpose of life, which is “to glorify God

and to enjoy him forever.” Thereafter, they can enjoy God not only in the time of parenting, while children are still at home, but also when they are grown up and left home. They do not necessarily have to experience the symptoms of an empty nester. With a clear purpose in life, they should have a bright future ahead. Even if they do have symptoms, they should be able to get over them and be glad to embrace Christian service as God calls them into a specific area of service.

### **Establishing New Perspective on Time**

Significant extra free time in daily life is one of the causes for the empty nester symptoms. One of the first obvious things empty nesters will soon realize, with a sense of discomfort, is that they suddenly have plenty of time. Challenging and fulfilling round-the-clock job as parents has finished. There is no more rushing for the pick-ups or drop-offs for their next child’s activity. The situation of “not being on call” gradually produces the feeling of “not being wanted” and then “not valuable.” The grief and sadness can set in after feeling like one is not needed. Having plenty of free time may seem like a good thing for many people, but it becomes negative for empty nesters at this stage. How to use the extra free time that used to be occupied with their children’s needs becomes an urgent question for empty nesters. Instead of enjoying the extra free time for their own interests, many of them choose to be idle, doing nothing. This idling exacerbates the symptom of the empty nester. They need to establish new perspectives regarding the use of the extra free time they have currently.

A vast variety of suggestions from popular culture, through traditional media and the Internet, are available for the empty nesters. We can see them often in magazines, social media blogs, and some TV programs. Traveling, reconnecting with friends, and learning are the most popular ones. But few of them can really serve the purpose well for the empty nesters. In most cases, they lack strong drives behind the activities, nothing like getting busy with their children, which was a dynamo that kept them going. The

activities for their kids added great values to the kids and to their life; they were fulfilling. They were driven to work hard, willingly, and eagerly, and to squeeze all their possible time for these activities. Now, those suggested activities seem just for the sake of killing time. It is extremely hard to arouse empty nesters' interest and energy for want of clear values. To mobilize the empty nesters into any activities, a clear purpose of life with lasting value that is compatible to or even higher than parenting, should be established.

Most empty nesters are among the middle age group. They realize that they have passed more than a half of their lifetime, which makes them subconsciously yearn for significance and purpose in their life. Even for those Christian empty nesters without a clear purpose of life, they are as miserable as the non-Christians. They had already deviated from the life purpose of "to glorify God and to enjoy him forever" for many years. Although they might still attend Sunday worship service and some church activities during the weekdays in these parenting years, their hearts and minds were fully occupied with earthly goals of their parenting, just as the non-Christian empty nesters did. The purpose of life as glorifying and enjoying God sounded familiar for them but far away from reality in their life for many years. Now they have time and have sensed that time is so precious in midlife. They do not want to waste time on any trivialities anymore. They want their time to serve the significance and meaning of life.

The church has a chance here to guide these Christian empty nesters back to the true purpose of life, which is "to glorify God and to enjoy him forever." When they return to the Christian purpose of life and are willing to live with it, their perspective of time will change. They will start to allot the extra free time with the activities that are in line with their renewed Christian purpose of life.

To avoid unnecessary rejection in the beginning from Christian empty nesters while ministering to them, it is necessary to confirm with them that re-establishing the real purpose of life for them does not mean to diminish the value of parenting that they

had held dearly in their hearts for many years. These empty nesters can be assured that the Bible teaches that biblical parenting is honoring God. The Scriptures also instruct parents to love their children (Titus 2:4), to teach their children (Deut 6:7), and to train their children (Ps 78:5-7). There is nothing wrong with making significant effort in parenting itself. However, the problem occurred when children had taken the center stage of their life rather than God when they were raising their children. After their grown-up children leave home, it is the right time for them to refocus their purpose of life and return God to the center of their life. Devoting their extra free time after grown-up children left home to activities related to God and practicing their faith in God are the most valuable and honorable choice. Their devotion to God will serve as a great drive in their hearts for activities related to their faith.

Taking up a subject as learning was one of the top suggestions from many popular culture advisers to the empty nesters to solve the problem of their extra free time after children left home. This suggestion sounds good for the purpose of diversion for free time. But empty nesters have passed more than half of their lifetime. Their careers are established. There is not much knowledge they will feel urgent and necessary to learn. For Christian empty nesters, the Bible is the urgent and necessary subject that they should take on for learning. Years of toiling as parents devoting their time and energy to the growth of children may have dampened their sense of responsibility as a Christian, which certainly include time and energy invested in the never-ending process of taking up Bible as a subject of study. They might learn some parts of the Scriptures here and there in their busy life with children. But lighthearted reading, ceremonially dabbling in it, and picking bits and pieces for the occasion of church gathering differ entirely from a wholehearted perusal for the purpose of discovering something fresh and valuable, which the Bible is forever ready to offer. Seriously studying the Bible should attract Christian empty nesters in this time of their life. The church should provide opportunities for them to study the

Bible in a certain depth. The Christian empty nester will start to allot considerable time for Bible study with a willing and happy heart.

Reconnecting with friends is another popular advice for empty nesters to spend their extra free time in many publications. Christian empty nesters can take this advice in the church setting. They can do this through the fellowship with brothers and sisters in the church. They might have missed many meaningful times together with church members for many years because of their busy schedule in parenting. This fellowship would be a mutual blessing for Christian empty nesters and the other church members. The joy of brotherly love and care in the fellowship will fill their empty hearts despite their empty house. The time spent in the fellowship will alleviate the burden of their extra free time. Fellowship of Christians in the church is a wonderful way to minister the empty nesters and prepare them for future Christian service.

Traveling is another piece of advice written about in the media and other blogs which could be worthy of Christian empty nesters' attention. Although not many of them have the luxury of international traveling, some Christian empty nesters, by the grace of the Lord, may have been blessed with the funds for such travel. The church can encourage them to take trips to countries for a better grasp on the cultural and geographical background of the Bible, for instance, to such destinations as Israel and Turkey. These trips will not only bring them the pleasure of traveling, but also arouse their interests to study the Bible and get closer to God. The church can provide them sufficient biblical geographical knowledge, so that their international traveling will be much more worthy from the perspective of spiritual benefit. In addition, volunteering for mission trips could also be a way to serve God in a manner that not many are able to do because of their responsibilities and limited finance. Once the church has provided the proper training for the empty nester volunteers, they will soon learn not only how to share their words but also what the Bible says. These trips will also give them more

confidence to share their faith with their co-workers in the workplace. This training can reignite their passion for learning the Bible seriously.

### **Satisfying Relationship with God and Christians**

Many popular culture advisers rightly point out that meaningful relationships with others is one of the key means to rid the symptoms of the empty nester and live a cheerful post empty nest life. However, human relationships are very volatile because they can easily be affected by many unpredictable circumstances. The proposed relationships, such as with people in clubs and interest groups, like anything else, may only prove to be vagaries. They are not expected to last long and do not provide significant meaning. Christian empty nesters have the advantage to further develop and enhance a meaningful relationship with God since they can always turn to God. Although they may feel some distance from God at this point because they had been putting their major energy, time, and emotion on their children throughout their parenting years and have truly little time left for God, the love of God for them never changes. God is still there waiting for them to repent and come back closer to him, just as the father waiting for his prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). The God they believe never changes (Heb 13:8) although they had changed in their level of faith in God in these years. The God they believed before their first child was born is the same God after their last child left home. They should and are able to return to God to resume their close relationship with God. Isaiah 46:4 has great encouraging words for them, “Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you” (Isa 46:4). It is the time for them to ask God to rescue them and stand up with God’s sustaining power for them. Their relationship with God will satisfy them in this critical time.

Christian empty nesters can talk to God when they are concerned about their grief, loneliness and feeling of purposelessness. They can talk to God about their anxiety



for their children's welfare. During their prayer, they do not just have someone to talk to but also have a merciful and loving God who are willing to listen. God will comfort them with everlasting love and compassion. God will answer their prayer by removing their grief and loneliness. God will open their eyes to see their true purpose of life which can satisfy them now and forever. Through their prayer, they will be assured that their grown-up children are under the care of the loving God. God is the heavenly father of their grown-up children. The presence of God will drive out their loneliness. The comfort of God will soothe their grief. Their purpose of life will gradually turn to God. The feelings of a lack of purpose will disappear. Their anxiety for the welfare of grown children will stop because of the assurance of God's sovereign provision for them. Therefore, their relationship with God can release them from the grief and depression due to the empty nester symptom.

The relationship with God will not only comfort the empty nesters, but also guide them into meaningful life ahead of them. When God lifts their heads, they no longer see their own needs only, they start to see other people's needs. This is a suitable time for the church to recruit them into Christian service. The church can encourage them to start establishing relationships with other Christians who are still suffering from empty nester symptoms. These people need help to come back to God just as they did. Recovered Christian empty nesters can share their own experience and encourage those who need help to trust God and let God lead them out of the symptoms. Recovered Christian empty nesters can share and teach them the specific Word of God that used to be their own help. They can pray for those who need help and accompany them in this crisis. All these ministries can be a blessing for both parties because of their satisfying relationship with God.

Because of their close relationship with God, the recovered empty nesters can be a good instrument in the hand of God for many other Christian services. Evangelism

can be one of them. Christians who have walked out of the symptoms of empty nesters are good testimony among those non-Christian empty nesters. They can attract these non-Christians to give ear to them. They can establish relationships more easily with non-Christian empty nesters than others because they can relate to similar feelings of loss. Through their testimony, the non-Christian empty nesters may have interest in knowing God. The recovered Christian empty nesters can introduce Jesus Christ and his salvation to them. They can be an effective force for evangelism.

After re-establishing a close relationship with God, recovered Christian empty nesters can be a great blessing for young Christian couples. They have gone through the entire process of parenting and learned many lessons. Through sharing their experience, they can help the young Christian couples to be aware of the importance of balancing between fulfilling the call to be parents and maintaining a good relationship with God. Since they have extra free time as empty nesters, they can be good supporters when these young couples need help. The efforts of these helps will also fill their extra free time and bring them satisfaction.

Beside the relationship with God, the relationship with other Christians in the church is also necessary and good for Christian empty nesters. People in the Christian fellowship are known to have more loving and caring spirit than other social groups. They tend to give rather than to take. People in the church are more willing to put others needs before their own. The Christian empty nesters will feel warm and have a sense of belonging in the fellowship. They will enjoy this type of friendship which is based on Christian values and common born-again life. This fellowship will also give the empty nester opportunity to gain experience of loving each other. They will not feel alone and self-pity anymore. They can start to initiate loving and caring others. They can become active part of the big family of God. God can use this fellowship to take away their loneliness and encourage them to walk out the symptoms of empty nesters. Unlike the

relationship through social clubs which is volatile, the relationship with other Christian in the church has lasting meaning and significance. Christian relationship will give empty nesters opportunities to participate and learn Christian service. Therefore, empty nesters can become healthier and stronger physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

### **Appropriate Response to Aging**

Many empty nesters may suddenly feel that they are getting old. When children were home, they were busy fulfilling all the parenting roles. They felt energetic because of the daily busy schedule or were too busy to take notice of their slowly aging appearance. When their grown-up children left home, all past business stopped. They started to realize that they were not young anymore. According to StudyFinds Research, the average American starts feeling old at the age of 47 and starts to worry about age-related bodily changes around 50 years old<sup>4</sup>. Aging and the worry about aging become real. Although there are many ways to deal with aging and suffering suggested by popular culture, there is no better way than getting help from God who is the designer and creator of our life on earth and the granter of life eternity. Aging and suffering are the other areas that the church can approach to empty nesters for the ministry.

When an empty nester starts to notice that their body functions slow down and their wrinkles become deeper, their anxiety about aging will increase. Although human being cannot stop their body from declining in its functions in the course of aging, they still have a hope to “maintain the optimal quality of life as long as possible within the boundaries of the human span.”<sup>5</sup> How can we live a quality life when we are aging? Dr. Gene Cohen, a professor of gerontology at George Washington University, tries to

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<sup>4</sup> John Anderer, “Review of Are You Past Your Prime? Average Person Starts Feeling Old at the Age of 47,” StudyFinds, November 16, 2020, <https://www.studyfinds.org/average-person-feels-old-at-47/>.

<sup>5</sup> Gene D. Cohen, *The Creative Age, Awakening Human Potential in the Second Half of Life* (New York: Avon Books, 2000) 45.

answer the question by looking for a hope on the human brain function. He points out that “Brain cells called neurons, in the thinking part of the brain—nerve cells of higher intellectual function—do show changes with age; but they also continue to show adaptive capacity regardless of age....until we die, the vast majority of the neurons we were born with are still present and performing.”<sup>6</sup> He basically says that we have hope because aging does not profoundly deteriorate our brain when we are getting older. Majority part of our brain still performs well before we die of old age; our brain can still function well and enable us to think and communicate well. But what to think and what meanings to communicate are the main components of “the optimal quality life.” Lacking significant things to think and communicate, life can still be miserable in old age. In addition, what is it after the death? There is no answer from Dr. Gene Cohen and any scientist who believe science only. The anxiety of aging and death remains. If Christians have clear and strong faith in Jesus Christ, they are supposed to be free from worrying about aging because they are very certain of what they want to think and what meanings they want to communicate even in their old age. Christians want to pass on their Christian values to the generations to come. Worshiping and praising their Savior forever are their joyful desire and will bring endless creativity whenever their brain can still function. The hope in eternity will dispel the anxiety of aging.

The great advantage of Christians is that they have eternal life. The life of a Christian can be renewed every day even in the process of aging until the point of death. They are new every day, “if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here” (Cor 5:17)! Even at old age, the thinking and creativity in the Christian’s brain can still focus on the things with eternal value. The meanings that they communicate can still be faith, love, and hope.

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<sup>6</sup> Cohen, *The Creative Age*, 47.

Every Christian can experience the promise of God, “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day” (2 Cor 4:16). It is true that there is no difference between Christians and non-Christians concerning their outward body deterioration. The body of Christians and non-Christians will all diminish in function when they become old. However, the fundamental difference remains that Christians have the hope of an eternal life, and non-Christians do not. Without eternal life, no matter how well the human brain may function when anyone is approaching death of old age, his/her brain function will stop forever at the moment death sets in. Life will end on this earth. Nothing can be promised after death. There is no hope but disappointment in this earthly life for them. Anxiety concerning aging remains if non-Christians think seriously. But Christians are different. It is good news for them to know that the brain can function well until death. The best news for them is that there is no eternal death for them. Their physical body will die and decay one day on earth. But their spiritual life will live forever in the kingdom of God with a better spiritual body instead of a perishable earthly body. They have great hope for eternal life. Christian life has its significance in this earthly life and the significance will continue into the eternal life after death in this world. Because of the eternal life, the impact of aging in this earthly life for Christians is very minimum. The hope of eternal life is the substantial solution for the anxiety of aging.

Therefore, the ministry of the church for the empty nesters concerning aging should focus on bringing them back to Christian faith. For those who are Christians but have distanced themselves from the faith, the church should bring them back to the fellowship of brothers and sisters for them to renew their Christian faith. Through the fellowship, the church should encourage them to rededicate their lives to the Lord and establish clear and strong hope of eternal life in Jesus Christ. For those who are not Christians, the church should approach them with loving care and introduce them to the

hope of eternal life in Jesus Christ. When their searching hearts cannot find any reasonable solutions for aging and death, there is a good chance that they will turn to Christian faith. The ideal result for the ministry is that recovered Christian empty nesters can be equipped and sent out for the ministry to their peer empty nesters.

### **Cultivating a Humble Spirit**

All Christian services require a humble spirit. Jesus Christ set the example for any service in His name. Philippians 2:5-8 sets the tune, “In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!” Humility and obedience are the fundamental values in Christian services. When the church wants to motivate recovered Christian empty nesters to enter any area of Christian service, the church needs to set up certain ministries to help them cultivate a humble spirit before going to the ministry.

Pride is a great danger for the people of God<sup>7</sup>. Most of the empty nesters in our church are in the plateau of their career. Thanks to over 20 years working experience, many empty nesters are the senior workers in their profession or in a certain level of leadership in the company. They are the ones who most of the time give instructions for others to follow. Because of their status, these empty nesters are easier to fall into the temptation of the sin of pride. Humble spirit is necessary for people who are entering the Christian ministries. At the last supper, Jesus washed the disciples’ feet and taught them the great lesson of humble service (John 13:1-17). If empty nesters enter a Christian service without training concerning the importance of the humble spirit in the service,

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<sup>7</sup> Prov 6:16-19, 16:5, 18; 1 Pet 5:5.

there will be a great tendency for them to bring their superior attitude into the ministry. There could be no humble spirit in their service. This kind of service will not bring people to know Jesus the Lord but draw people to empty nesters themselves and for their own honor. Because of over twenty years of accumulation in wealth from their profession, most of them are well off in finance. It is natural for them to have a certain mindset of self-sufficiency because of their financial status. This self-sufficient spirit would hinder their reliance on the Lord when they are in the ministry. It is highly possible that they would bring the same self-sufficient attitude to the ministry. They inadvertently will conduct their ministry by their own strength and wisdom. They would not feel the urgency to depend on the Lord for guidance and strength. The result will be no Jesus Christ in their ministry. Ministry without Jesus is not a Christian ministry. It would just merely be a civil ministry.

Training these recovered empty nesters to build a humble spirit serving the Lord in the ministry is important and necessary. The Lord Jesus clearly taught his twelve disciples that, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Jesus Christ is not only the example of humility for us in doing the ministry, but also the Lord of the ministry and the purpose of our ministry. Christian service does not mean only doing the job, but humbly servicing the people in the name of Jesus Christ. The purpose of Christian service is to humbly serve the Lord by humbly serving the people. The humble spirit in the service is toward both the Lord and the people who we serve.

For the best interest of the recovered empty nesters and the ministry, the church should not put recovered empty nesters into the leadership position in the beginning of their ministry, no matter how suitable they seem to be, or how capable they are. It is true that because they have gone through the dark time of the symptoms, the recovered empty nesters are the right persons for making a significant impact on other

empty nesters. It is natural for people to ask them how they have walked out of the darkness. People are more willing to listen to their suggestions and follow their guidance than others in the ministry. They are a valuable resource and workforce for the ministry to the empty nesters. The church should consult with them often and put them into the front line in the ministry. Due to their career experience, they normally are mature in conducting tasks. They should be able to minister to their fellow empty nesters better than others. In addition, some of the recovered empty nesters are in leadership positions in the company. They naturally have the most traits of a leader. However, no matter how many advantages the recovered empty nesters have in the ministry, the church should not arrange them in the leadership positions before sufficient trainings in cultivating humble spirit in Christian service. Only after they are trained in the importance of humble spirit in Christian service and guided them a period of time serving humbly, can they be put in the leadership of the ministry.

Equipped with a humble spirit before the Lord and the people, the recovered Christian empty nesters will be a great force not only in empty nester ministry, but also in many other areas of church ministries. Because of their maturity, the flexibility of time, and financial capability, they could be the blessing to many ministries of the Church. The church should urge them to respond to God's calling and welcome them to all the possible ministry positions that God calls them to.

### **True Meaning of Success**

Many empty nesters are successful people according to the world value system. Most of them have a good family as their grown-up children are now independent and have moved out from their homes. They show their marriage relationship is harmonious and happy because the husband and wife had worked together so well for many years to carry out their children's busy schedules. Their grown-up children are full of ambition and in good college or independent enough to live on their



own. They live in a good neighborhood with a well-maintained house. Their careers are stable and enjoy a prominent position in their career. They have accumulated a significant amount of wealth from their careers over twenty years. They are beyond most people's American dream. If this is the success that can truly satisfy their lives, they may just enjoy their extra free time with the wealth they can spend. However, the human heart cannot be satisfied with material things only. The empty nesters' success is based on material wealth and the judgement in the eyes of other people. The material wealth can come and go. The trend of the judgement of other people will change as time goes by. The reality is that "All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, <sup>25</sup> but the word of the Lord endures forever. And this is the word that was preached to you" (1 Pet 1:24–25). Success based on material and values in this world cannot be a true success. Before the Christian empty nesters can wholeheartedly participate in Christian service, they need to redefine the true meaning of success in their lives.

The true meaning of success should be found from the perspective of eternal life, instead of material possessions and status in this world. The Bible records some successful people who followed God's visions and plans for them. Abraham was successful because he believed in God. He became the instrument of God to bless all the nations (Gen 12:3, 18:18). Joseph was successful because he trusted God for his guidance. God blessed him and raised him to the position of overseeing the whole land of Egypt (Gen 41:39-41). Joseph became the instrument of God to save the household of Jacob (Gen 50:20), the people of Israel later in history. Apostle Paul was successful because he obeyed God's calling. He became the instrument of Jesus Christ to be his witness to the world (Acts 9:15). There is a common theme among the biblical figures for what they were recognized for. They all trust and obey God and become God's instrument to bless others from the eternal perspective. Through the enlightenment of

God, Lloyd Reeb, a successful real estate developer and owner of seniors housing facilities, realized what true success means to him. He stated these words in his book *From Success to Significance*, “God looks at life from an eternal perspective, and he counsels those who have these resources to ‘do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life’ (1 Tim 6:18-19).”<sup>8</sup> God can use the same scripture to bring the empty nesters back to the true-life that God had planned for them. Their true successful life should also be to obey God and be his instrument to bless others for their eternal benefit.

Understanding clearly and accepting willingly the true life stated in 1 Timothy 6:19 will help the empty nesters to walk out of their comfort zone of the so-called “successful life” in the eyes of the world. They need to see the meaninglessness of life for self-pleasing, even though they may have the time and money to do so. Lloyd Reeb found out this truth when he and his family were in the middle of a six-week luxury vacation. He wrote, “We simply couldn’t take floating around for six weeks with no purpose other than our own pleasure.”<sup>9</sup> Self-pleasing life will not satisfy the heart yearning for purpose and meaning in life. Life without satisfaction in heart cannot be called successful. For those empty nesters who have walked out of the shadow of the symptoms, it is for their benefit to walk out further into a true fulfilling life to trust and obey God and to be his instrument to bless others.

### **Rearranging Priority**

Many empty nesters had their children as their priority before they left home. Husband and wife worked closely to maintain the priority. After their home became

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<sup>8</sup> Lloyd Reeb, *From Success to Significance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 36.

<sup>9</sup> Reeb, *From Success to Significance*, 34.

empty, they lost their familiar priority. Life without priority cannot last too long and people will always find something to consume most of their time with. Something will set in as priority sooner or later consciously or unconsciously. They do not necessarily agree with it as the priority, but it can dominate their time and energy. After navigating through the dark time of empty nester symptoms, they have regained their strength and are ready for a new chapter of their life. With more time on hand and energy within, empty nesters have a need to re-dedicate themselves to something.

Life without clear priority with purpose will lead to wasting time on many meaningless or unnecessary activities. It is common that empty nesters face various levels of physical health challenges because of age. The fear of declining health will bring them to overspend their time and energy on exercise and food<sup>10</sup>. Gradually, exercise and food will become their priority. Especially among Chinese empty nesters, studying the food and its preparation has become extremely popular and trendy. They get into too many details on choosing and preparing their daily food according to the seasons, weathers, time of the day, etc. They not only spend many hours on the preparation of the food they eat, but also waste long hours on sharing and discussion about their food and the effect of the food on them. Some may spend too many hours on physical exercise. They may even get hurt instead of benefit from the unnecessary long hours exercise. Setting food and exercise as priority will not serve them in searching for a purpose in life. Many Chinese empty nesters become addicted to watching drama series and tv shows endlessly<sup>11</sup>. Because of all the years of dedicated parenting, they missed many highly appraised drama series in the past years. The development of high technology makes it

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<sup>10</sup> According to the survey of this project, forty-four percent empty nesters who took the survey chose “agree” or “strongly agree” to the statement, “My current highest goal is to be healthy.” See P. 78 of this project.

<sup>11</sup> Quite a few people often expressed their regrets about spending too many hours watching current drama series in the conversation at the Sunday church lunch table after service.

possible to watch nearly all the past drama series and movies with very little monthly fees of subscription. Some of them are attracted to the historical Asian drama series to the point of neglecting making dinners for the family. Then, watching endless drama series gradually became their priority. Extravagant entertainment as a priority in daily life will make them lose their purpose in life. All these wasting excessive time phenomena are related to not having a meaningful priority in their life after their nest becomes empty. This is the time for the church to help them make their next stage of life meaningful by rearranging priority.

The church may notice that Christian empty nesters may start to attend church service more often and join the fellowship meetings occasionally. But there is no evidence of devotion to God for going to these church activities. The church cannot expect that their church involvements will become their priority, because their purpose of attending these church activities is the same as attending other non-church activities, namely, to please themselves and to make their day easier and more interesting. This attitude for church involvement will not do much good for their spiritual benefit, unless their hearts are changed by the power of the Holy Spirit through these activities.

The church ministry to them at this stage should help them establish their priority on their relationship with God, instead of their involvement in the church activities. Stephen R. Covey, author of the New York Times bestseller, introduces Time Management Matrix in the book "*First things first*" which he co-authored with two others<sup>12</sup>. The purpose of the chart in the book is to help people to focus on things that are important and urgent, rather than falling into urgency addiction. This chart can be adopted to help empty nesters to think through the important and urgent things in their life at this stage of their life. First, the church should help them to realize that their

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<sup>12</sup> Stephen R. Covey, A. Roger Merrill, Rebecca R. Merrill, *First Things First* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994) 37.

relationship with God is important. Their eternal destination depends on God's grace. Anyone and anything in their lives can change but the love of God for them never changes. They cannot rely on anyone or anything that is volatile for their true satisfaction in life. Only God and his everlasting love toward them can be this life and eternal satisfaction. God is the cause and source of their happiness and fulfilment in this life. No other things can be more important than the relationship with God. Second, the church should let them see the urgency to have a close relationship with God. No one can guarantee his/her life in this world for any moment longer. The Bible teaches that, "you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (Jas 4:14). We do not know what may happen tomorrow. It will be terrible to leave this world without God. It is urgent to have a close relationship with God rather than keep postponing it. From the perspectives of importance and urgency, their relationship with God should be their priority. They should know that they were wrong when they made their children the priority for many years. Now, it is the time for them to set the priority right. Let the relationship with God be the priority of their life from now on.

After establishing their priority on the relationship with God, they will be able to avoid wasting excessive time on those trivial things and live a balanced and meaningful life. They will spend reasonable time on food and exercise, maintaining their body well for serving and honoring God (1 Cor 6:19), instead of indulging in self-pleasing. Their meaningful and exciting post empty nest life will have a good start.

There are a variety of methods that were covered that the church can use to minister to this group of people. Helping empty nesters to establish a clear and significant purpose of life is the first import, for Christians and non-Christian alike. The clear and significant purpose of life gives them the drive to walk out of the empty nester symptom and start a new chapter of life. For Christian empty nesters, a regained and satisfying

relationship with God and other Christians allows their purpose of life “to glorify God and enjoy him forever” become practicable. This ministry prepares their hearts and minds to participate in the Christian service. Furthermore, the provided ministry that helps empty nesters build a new perspective on time and right attitude to respond aging releases their time and energy for the Christian service. The ministry that helps them cultivate a humble spirit in Christian service is critical, because a humble spirit is the key for Christian service. The ministry to help them redefine the meaning of success protects them from bringing worldly values to Christian service. The ministry to help them rearrange their priorities make them get focused on their life and their Christian service. In conclusion, these different ministries serve well in equipping the empty nesters for Christian service. After these applied ministries, there is an enormous potential to turn these empty nesters into a dynamic force in Christian service.

## CHAPTER 4

### DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

#### **Overview**

This chapter will attempt to describe the project of Equipping empty nesters for ministries at Maryland Chinese Baptist Church from October 3, 2021, until November 21, 2021. The purpose of project was to raise the awareness of the specific needs of the empty nesters in the church and the opportunity of meeting their needs through equipping them with a biblical perspective of the purpose of life and the calling of God for Christians. Through the equipping ministry to them, the church could turn them from the object of the ministry of the church into the vital force of the church ministries. First, a general description of the project will be presented. Second, the project results will be given and explained. Third, the brief descriptions of the eight sermons and the evaluations for the eight sermons from the six evaluators and their names will be provided.

#### **The Project**

In order to raise the awareness of the unique and specific needs of the empty nesters in the church and the necessary ministry to them, brief description about the empty nesters and the statistics of the empty nesters in the church was presented through questions and answers during the announcement time in the previous Sunday service before the first sermon of the eight-sermon series was preached. An announcement about the eight-sermon series project in the church starting next Sunday October 3, 2021, was made. Then, the description of the pre-sermons survey was given. Due to the pandemic, services are conducted in the virtual meeting room facilitated by Zoom Video

Communications. Currently, all church communications are through electronic means. The church has set up three digital communication channels, a church email group, a WeChat group, and a Line group. WeChat and Line are Chinese social media applications that allow groups to message one another and support sending video, voice, text, and files. WeChat and Line are the most actively used communication channels for the church. All the church members have at least one of the three electronic communication means. All the empty nesters in the service were invited to receive the survey from any one of these channels and instructed to return the survey any time before next Sunday, October 3, 2021, through the channel that they received the survey. The empty nesters in the church who did not attend this Sunday service were also contacted to participate in the pre-sermon survey. A stated goal was to have at least fifteen empty nesters in the church to return the pre-sermon survey before next Sunday. The pre-sermons surveys were collected through all three electronic channels before the Sunday service on the morning of October 3, 2021.

After the last sermon of the eight-sermon series project was preached on November 21, 2021, the exact same survey was re-distributed and made it available in all three church electronic communication channels. Only the empty nesters who had filled out the pre-sermon survey and listened all eight sermons, whether in the virtual worship service or listened to them in WeChat or Line social media apps, were invited to fill out these post-sermons survey. They were encouraged to fill out the post-sermons survey and send it back through one of the electronic channels by the next Sunday, November 28, 2021. A stated goal was to have at least eighty percent of those who filled out the pre-sermons survey participated in the post-sermons survey and returned it by next Sunday. The post-sermons surveys were collected through all three electronic channels before the Sunday service on the morning of November 28, 2021.



## **The Project Results**

Sixteen pre-sermon surveys from the empty nesters were received through all three electronic channels in the morning before Sunday Service by the deadline of October 3, 2021. This number successfully met the goal of fifteen pre-sermon surveys stated in the project. Following the eight sermons from October 3-November 21, 2021, twelve post-sermon surveys from the empty nesters were received through all three electronic channels in the morning before Sunday service by the deadline of November 28, 2021. This number also met the goal of seventy-five percent of those who completed the pre-sermon surveys returned the post-sermon surveys.

By comparing the twelve completed post-surveys to their pre-sermon counterparts, some area of changes can be observed. First, the meaning of life found in God's purpose is getting more aware. For example, on the question concerning the purpose of life as serving God (question #30), empty nester #014 moved from "strongly disagree" to "agree somewhat." It shows that this empty nester is convinced in some way that serving God needs to be considered as the purpose of life. On the question about the importance of serving God (question #4,) empty nester #070 moves from "strongly disagree" to "agree somewhat." The answer indicates some conviction about serving God in the second half of life is more important than raising children in the first half of life.

Second, on the question concerning the life fulfillment (question #28,) empty nester #180 moves from "disagree" to "agree somewhat." The answer indicates that this person is convinced in some degree that life fulfillment can be found in God's purpose.

Third, the answer of empty nester #070 to the question #23 concerning the perspective on wealth moves from "Strong agree" to "disagree." His/her answer to the question #24 about the same area of concern moves from "disagree" to "agree." These two answers indicates that this person is moving closer to understand that God's material blessing should be used for blessing others.

Fourth, empty nester #150 indicates his/her attitude changed concerning the importance of humble spirit in Christian serving, when his/her answer to the question #20 concerning the higher importance of humble spirit than the importance of getting work done moves from “disagree” to “agree.” The answer of empty nester #100 to the question #13 concerning respect required from others changes from “Strong agree” to “disagree.” His/her answer indicates that he/she is becoming humbler.

Fifth, a few people’s opinions in the need of intimate relationship with God among the empty nesters are changed in this project. Empty nester #120 improves his/her relationship with God indicated in his/her changed answer to the question #17 concerning intimacy relationship with God from “agree some” to “strong agree.” The answer of empty nester #014 to the question #16 changing from “disagree” to “agree somewhat” indicates that his/her desire to have intimacy relationship are getting stronger.

Sixth, the fellowship with brothers and sisters is getting stronger. Empty nester #300 answer to the question #2 concerning happiness in helping brothers and sisters in the church changes from “disagree” to “agree.” His/her answer to the question #1 concerning the loneliness changes from “strong agree” to “disagree somewhat.” The result of comparing these two changes in the questions indicates that the fellowship with brothers and sisters takes away some of his/her loneliness as an empty nester.

Seventh, empty nester #410 shows his/her attitude toward aging and suffering changes better in this project. His/her answer to the question #7 concerning getting hurt in a Christian service from “strong disagree to agree somewhat.” The answer of empty nester #048 to the question #19 concerning attitude toward sickness changes from “disagree” to “agree.” His/her answer indicates that his/her attitude toward suffering is becoming more spiritual.

Eighth, the answer of empty nester #014 to the question #25 concerning dedication to serving God changes from “strong disagree” to “agree some.” His/her

answer indicates that he/she becomes more willing in serving God. When answering question #23 which says that God's calling is only for full time ministers, empty nester #150 changes his/her answer from "strong agree" to "strong disagree." The meaningful change in the answer indicates that his/her wrong understanding concerning God's calling to every Christian is corrected in this project.

Although the number of the responses is small because of the small size of the church, the completed surveys indicates that this project is changing the mindset of empty nesters in the church concerning about their benefit the involvement of Christian service in the church. Their relationships with God and follow Christians are improved. The willingness of the empty nesters to participate in Christian service is becoming stronger. However, these responses can only tell that their minds or their opinions are changed. The surveys did not say anything about when and how they will participate in Christian service.

### **The Sermon Evaluations**

There were eight messages on equipping the empty nesters for Christian Service. These messages were preached as sermons every Sunday from October 3, 2021, to October 21, 2021. The first message taken from 1 John 2:15-17 was titled "Pursuing True Happiness." The statement of the purpose for the message was that: "true happiness for the empty nesters can only be obtained by their sincerely doing the will of God." First, this message reminds the empty nesters that the temptation of indulgence in the material and sensational world value system are real and strong. The message served to remind Christians to be diligent and aware that the value of this world has penetrated many Christian minds and lifestyles. The temporary worldly desire is gaining more attention than the love for God. The sensational lures entice people's hearts. These temptations are fleeting and cannot bring true satisfaction in life, because these temptations contradict loving God. Secondly, this message urges the empty nesters to

escape the bondage of worldly value system. The lust of the flesh has its power in life. Those who live a lust driving life cannot inherit the kingdom of God. The lust of the eyes will lead a life into serious sins. The king of Israel David was a clear warning example. Pride brings destruction into life. The pride of life will make people self-centered and disobey God. It is necessary to break the bondage of worldly value for bringing true happiness into life. Thirdly, this message encourages the empty nesters to take action in pursuing true happiness. Obeying God's will in daily life is the key in pursuing happiness because he holds the future. Building up the godly characters will enjoy the true happiness. Looking for the hope of the Kingdom of God will bring perseverance in pursuing the true happiness. In conclusion, persistently overcoming the temptation of worldly lust through following God's will with love will bring true happiness.

The second message from John 8:31-38 was titled "Enjoy the true freedom." The statement of the purpose for the message was that: "true freedom for the empty nesters only can be enjoyed by knowing the true meaning of freedom defined by God and persistently obeying and serving him through serving others." First, the empty nesters need to realize that they have lost the true freedom because they did not full heartily follow God. They must walk out their current wavering faith. The baptism they had gone through did not give them license to live a life just pleasing themselves. They need to forsake the lie of Satan about the freedom without God. Secondly, the empty nesters need to seek the meaning of true freedom with sincere heart. Through obeying the teaching of the Jesus, they can find the meaning of true freedom. By willingly serving the Lord, empty nesters will understand the true meaning of freedom. Empty nesters need to invite the word of God to transform their mind in order to understand the meaning of true freedom. Thirdly, empty nesters need to live a life of true freedom with confidence in the Lord. Breaking the bondage of the sins in their life through the power of Holy Spirit will make the empty nesters live a life of true freedom possible. Live a life as the characters of

the children of God will demonstrate the empty nesters' true freedom in God. Serving the Lord with joyful heart will satisfy their spirit of true freedom in the Lord. In conclusion, when the empty nesters realize their lack true freedom and willing seek to know the true freedom in the Lord, they can enjoy their transformed life with true freedom.

The third message taken from Luke 12:13-23 was titled "Pursuing the richness of spiritual life." The statement of the purpose for the message was that: "if the empty nesters want to have a richness in the Lord, they need to forsake any covet spirit toward this world and unthankful spirit to God knowing that the eternal life is more than anything in this world." First, a covetous spirit toward the material in this world will hurts the empty nesters' spiritual life. If their hearts covet material goods, the empty nesters will hardly have desires to pursue spiritual matters, just as the person in the biblical text who are so close to Jesus asking only for his material interest, not for anything spiritual. There will be no godly direction in their lives when they deal with other people if the empty nesters' hearts harboring covets for material. If the empty nesters covet material, it will be hard for them to have a harmony relationship with others, just like no harmony relationship between the brothers in the biblical text. To be spiritual for the empty nesters means to forsake covets for material. Secondly, if the empty nesters want to have a healthy spiritual life, they should not let any unthankful spirit settle in their hearts. An unthankful spirit for material rich will lead any person into a self-center mentality. The empty nesters cannot be exceptions. The empty nesters are in danger of pride before man and God if they are influenced by thanklessness for all their material blessings. The empty nesters may fall into the temptation of arrogant if they ignore the blessings of their health and capability. To have a healthy spiritual life for the empty nesters means to have a thankful heart counting everything in life as the blessing of the Lord. Thirdly, if the empty nesters ignore their condition of their spiritual life, they are in danger of being poor and useless in the eyes of the Lord. For those empty nesters

who do not know the Lord yet, they may lose their opportunity to receive the eternal life in the Lord if they continue in harboring covet and unthankful spirit. For those empty nesters who know the Lord, they must understand that the material in this world can not satisfy their spiritual needs. For all the empty nesters, they must realize that both life in this earth and in eternity held by the Lord. Ignoring spiritual life has its profound consequences. In conclusion, the empty nesters need to take the warning and start to pursue the life with richness in the Lord.

The fourth message taken from Mark 10:32-45 was titled “Right motivation is important.” The statement of the purpose for this message was that: “the right motivation for the empty nesters for the Christian ministries should base on knowing both characteristics of meekness and glory in the Kingdom of God and taking the responsibility willingly with self-denying spirit.” First, the empty nesters should be motivated by the glory and honor nature of the Kingdom of God when they walk into service in the Christian ministries. The empty nesters can diligently serve the Lord in the Christian ministry because they are motivated by the majesty nature of their Lord. The empty nesters can enjoy the intimacy relationship with the Lord in their Christian service because they are motivated by the example of the meekness nature of the Lord. The empty nesters can eagerly serve the Lord in Christian ministry because they desire the glory nature of the Kingdom of God. The empty nesters should not be motivated by anything less than the Glory and honor nature of the Lord and his Kingdom. Secondly, the empty nesters should understand the nature of the service in the Kingdom of God on earth when they are motivated to serve the Lord. The empty nesters should understand that service in the Kingdom of God on earth requires willingly sacrifice. They should be willing to go through many hardships for the sake of the Lord. The empty nesters should understand that the value of their service in the Lord is not judged by honor or humble position in the service, but by the loyalty and kindness of their hearts when they are in the

service. The empty nesters should understand that God only will judge and reward their service. Thirdly, the empty nesters should be motivated to take responsibility in the service by the sacrifice of the Lord on the cross. The empty nesters should serve sacrificially when they are motivated by the calling of the Lord. The empty nesters should serve spiritually when they are motivated by the holiness of the Lord. The empty nesters should serve willingly and humbly when they are motivated by the meekness of the Lord. In conclusion, the right motivation for the empty nesters to serve the Lord should be the glory of the Kingdom of God. Their right response by such motivation should be serve the Lord with meekness and self-denial spirit.

The fifth message from Psalm 149:1-5 was titled “Make the second half of your life joyful.” The statement of the purpose for this message was that: “empty nesters can have a joyful second half life through an intimate relationship with the Lord in worship and service.” First, the empty nesters’ joy should come from praising God. The empty nesters can enjoy worshiping God as children of God with the desire to please him. Empty nesters can present their renewed life as a new song of worship to the Lord alongside other brothers and sisters in Christ. Empty nesters and other believers can stand together with joy as they worship Christ. Secondly, empty nesters’ joy comes from an intimate relationship with the Lord. Empty nesters’ intimate relationship with the Lord stimulates their amazement of knowing God as the creator. Their intimate relationship with the Lord comes from their desire to have the Lord lead their second half of their life. Empty nesters’ intimate relationship with the Lord comes from the thankful heart for the protection of God. Thirdly, empty nesters’ joy comes from the blessings of the Lord in their life. Empty nesters enjoy the blessings of God’s favor. Empty nesters enjoy the renewed life after their salvation. Empty nesters enjoy the blessing of the glorious hope for eternity. In conclusion, an intimate relationship with the Lord will bring joy into the

second half life of empty nesters. Their joy of praising God and thankful heart for God's blessings are immeasurable.

The sixth message taken from 1 Corinthians 12:12-20 was titled "Preserve spiritual unity." The statement of the purpose for this message was that: "empty nesters will gain great benefit from their effort in maintaining the unity in the Spirit among believers in the church." First, the empty nesters should respect the uniqueness of each believer in the church. They need to cherish the diversity of the backgrounds of brothers and sisters in the church. Just as they bring a unique background and experience into the church, empty nesters need to admire different gifts among brothers and sisters in the church. They need to understand the spiritual and inseparable relationship among believers. Second, empty nesters should make earnest effort to maintain the spiritual unity among brothers and sisters in the church. Empty nesters need to realize that brothers and sisters in the church spiritually need each other. Empty nesters need to specially care for the vulnerable brothers and sisters in the church. Empty nesters need to encourage that all brothers and sisters in the church share happiness or sad experiences together. In conclusion, preserving spiritual unity among brothers and sisters in the church can greatly benefit empty nesters' spiritual life.

The seventh message from 2 Corinthians 4:14-18 was titled "Appropriate Response to Aging and Suffering." The statement of the purpose for this message was that: "empty nesters can be lifted up spiritually through fulfilling service related to the glorious hope in eternity." First, empty nesters will learn that the resurrection hope with the Lord can overcome their concerns for aging and sufferings. Empty nesters will be reminded that life on this earth is not final. The resurrection of Jesus Christ will give empty nesters assurance to their hope for eternal life. Empty nesters can enjoy their renewed life due to the hope for eternal life. Secondly, the fulfillment in the Christian service will overshadow empty nesters' anxiety of aging and suffering. The involvement



in the Christian service will bring joy to the empty nesters. Empty nesters' demonstration of love and care in the Christian service will bring glory to God. Aging and suffering will be seem less important as empty nesters devote their heart to Christian service. Thirdly, empty nesters' hope of eternal glory will overcome their aging and suffering. Empty nesters will realize that aging and suffering is inevitable. The devotion of Christian service even in the midst of aging and suffering will bring the renewal of the inner life of empty nesters and the hope for the eternal glory. In conclusion, the hope of eternal glory and the sincere devotion to Christian service can help empty nesters to overcome the anxiety of aging and suffering.

The eighth message from Genesis 12:1-5 was titled "Become a blessing." The statement of the purpose for this message was that: "empty nesters in Maryland Chinese Baptist Church can become a great blessing in this great Washington D.C. metropolitan area with diversity in nations and races, if they clearly understand God's call and passionately respond to the call." First, empty nesters should attentively listen to God's calling. They should believe in God who still speaks to their hearts through the scripture with the revelation of the Holy Spirit. They should believe that the Word of God has authority in their lives and require obedience as Abraham did. They should believe that God has a call in their lives with purpose. Secondly, empty nesters should know God's heart and purpose for the calling. God wants to bless them with resources and opportunity. God wants them to bless others with resources and opportunities. God wants to empower them with influence in many nationals and ethnic groups. Thirdly, empty nesters should follow God's lead with obedience. They should trust that God is with them and will protect them. They should obey God actively without counting the cost. They should partner with other brothers and sisters in the spiritual journey in response to God's calling. In conclusion, the calling for the empty nesters to be a blessing is clear. They need to respond with obedience and clear action.

Two pastors, three church leaders, and one member in the church reviewed and offered critiques of the eight messages. Each reviewer was given rubrics to evaluate the biblical and theological accuracy and practical relevance of each sermon. The rubrics included eight different categories to evaluate: the accuracy of the message to the biblical text and the context of the scripture; the sufficient dealing with the biblical text; the solidness in theology of each sermon; the clearness and affirmation of the purpose of each sermon; the clearness and sufficiency of supporting points for the purpose of each sermon; the relevance of each sermon to the topic of equipping empty nesters for Christian services; the clearness of the statement regarding practical applications; relevance and effectiveness to the topic of equipping empty nesters to the Christian services overall in all sermons.

Using the rubrics, the two pastors and three church leaders and one member in the church all graded each of the eight sermons as “satisfactory” or “exemplary” level. The original goal for the sermon rubrics was set as “satisfactory” or “exemplary” level to accomplish the goal of spiritual growth in the listeners. The third goal was met.

The six evaluators include two pastors and three church leaders and one church member. The two pastors are Paul Chuang who serves as the chairman of the greater Washington D.C. metropolitan Chinese pastors fellowship and Lusa Su who are the pastor Emeritus of the church. Three church leaders are Lingsui Choi who works in U.S. Patent and Trademark Office as a Supervisory Patent Examiner, Richard Lei who serves as a staff dental officer at Walter Reed Military Center, and Xiaolu Li who serves in Bureau of Global Public Affairs of U.S. Department of State as a language editor and writer. The church member is Wenton Ma who works as a Multimedia Production Specialist at U.S. Agency for Global Media.

## CHAPTER 5

### PROJECT EVALUATION AND PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

This chapter will evaluate the project and reflect on its implementation. Maryland Chinese Baptist Church is strategically located in Washington D.C. metropolitan area. This is one of the most popular places for Chinese community in the States. The ratio of Chinese churches<sup>1</sup> vs the Chinese population<sup>2</sup> is still very low in this area. Maryland is also the seventh most diverse state in the United States so you can find diverse national and ethnic groups in this state. The restaurants in the area itself reflect on the diversity and you can try various ethnic cuisine in the area. Taking the Chinese population and the diversity in national and ethnical groups into consideration, Washington D.C. metropolitan area is an idea place to grow a Chinese church and to do a cross cultural mission work. The work of Equipping Christian is very important to the church growth and its mission work. Empty nesters are the very special age group in this Chinese church. Although they have some unique needs to be met, they have exciting potential to be a vital ministry force in the church. This project tries to identify their needs in this specific stage of life and to provide biblical edification to help them to get needs met with better and spiritual applicable resources so that they can be transformed into a vital force for Christian service.

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<sup>1</sup> There are 31 churches registered with The Great Washington D.C. Metropolitan Chinese Pastors Fellowship, a trans-denominational Chinese pastors' fellowship. The author has been the secretary of the Fellowship for over 5 years.

<sup>2</sup> Pew Research Center, "Review of Top 10 U.S. Metropolitan Areas by Chinese Population, 2015," July 6, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/chart/top-u-s-metro-areas-chinese-population/>.

## **Summary of the Project**

The aim of this project was to identify the empty nesters' needs and the correspondence with their spiritual situation. Thirty questions were specially designed to reveal their needs and spiritual situation. A survey with these thirty questions was given to the empty nesters prior to the preaching of eight sermons based on the aim of equipping the empty nesters to Christian service. Each sermon of this eight-sermon series addressed one identified need and tried to address the need with the word of God. In the conclusion of each sermon, empty nesters were encouraged to apply the sermon through the platform of the church. After preaching the series of eight sermons, a survey with same thirty questions was given to the empty nesters. By comparing the result of the pre- and post- sermon surveys, this project tried to analyze the changes among the empty nesters.

The eight sermons were evaluated by a group of six prominent and Christian men. The group consisted of two pastors, three church leaders and one church member. The evaluator group used a rubric of eight categories to evaluate the biblical accuracy, theological solidity, and practical relevance of each of the eight sermons. The inputs from the evaluation group reaffirmed that the eight sermons were all accurate to the biblical text and relevant to the topic. Eight areas of empty nesters' needs were identified, and biblical teachings were provided with encouragement.

## **Evaluation of the Goals**

All three goals listed in the project were met. The first goal was to gain knowledge of the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of "empty nesters" in the church and their understanding about their calling to Christian service through a pre-sermon survey that was given to them on September 26, 2021. This goal would be considered as successful if fifteen pre-sermon surveys were collected by October 3, 2021. The goal was met by receiving sixteen pre-sermon surveys by the due day.

The pre-sermon surveys indicated that over half of the empty nesters in the church had some symptoms of empty nester. Twelve out of sixteen (75 percent) empty nesters chose “agree (50 percent)” or “strongly agree (25 percent),” to the statement, “I feel lonely often since my youngest child left home” (question 1). Ten out of sixteen (62 percent) empty nesters chose “agree (50 percent)” or “strongly agree (12 percent),” to the statement, “I cannot settle on what subject to spend my extra free time” (question 3).

The surveys demonstrated that the empty nesters in the church were spiritually receptive to teaching and guidance. Ten out of sixteen (62 percent) empty nesters chose “agree (56 percent)” or “strongly agree (6 percent)” to the statement, “Satisfied spiritual life is important to me” (question 15). Eight out of sixteen (50 percent) empty nesters chose “agree” to the statement, “It is necessary for me to have an intimacy relationship with the Lord” (question 17). All the empty nesters chose “strongly disagree” with the statement “I only occasionally went to the church during raising my children” (question 12) and the statement “Going to the church serves the same purpose as attending a party” (question 22). These responses showed that empty nesters were incredibly open to learning and growing spiritually and recognized the importance of involving and growing with God in their lives. These survey responses seemed to correlate with the fact that many of the responses were from church members that have been baptized and already professing their faith.

However, the survey also showed that the material world attraction was getting into the life of a good portion of the empty nesters as well. Seven out of sixteen empty nesters (44 percent) chose “agree (37 percent)” or “strong agree (7 percent)” to the statement, “My current highest goal is to be healthy” (question 7). Four out of sixteen (25 percent) empty nesters chose “agree” to the statement, “All my friends are those who share the same hobbies of mine” (question 8). Ten out of sixteen (62.5 percent) empty nesters chose “agree” to the statement, “I will travel as much as I can afford it, because

aging will prevent it soon” (question 11). Although being healthy and aging were not necessarily sins, it was still a high enough priority that could potentially conflict and tempt empty nesters away from God.

The pre-sermon survey showed that majority of the empty nesters did not have the sense of “calling from the Lord” to the Christian service. Fourteen out of sixteen (88 percent) empty nesters chose “agree (75 percent)” or “strongly agree (13 percent)” to the statement, “God’s calling is only for those full-time ministers and missionaries” (question 21). All the empty nesters chose “strongly disagree (75 percent)” or “disagree (25 percent)” to the statement, “My purpose of life is to serve God by serving others to trust Jesus” (question 30). All the empty nesters chose “agree (63 percent)” or “strongly agree (37 percent)” to the statement, “My possessions are God’s blessing to me to enjoy and be grateful” (question 23). All the empty nesters chose “strongly disagree (31 percent)” or “disagree (69 percent)” to the statement, “My possessions are God’s trust to me to evaluate my faithfulness to him as a steward” (question 24). It seemed that many empty nesters did not see that they could be a bigger part of the church and serve in their own ways. This could be also because of the background of many of the empty nesters. Many of them are first generation immigrants who made significant efforts to stay in the United States and acquire material wealth to support their children.

The second goal of the project was to develop an eight-sermons series on equipping empty nesters for Christian service. Eight sermons addressed the issues of empty nesters’ calling as well as finding the fulfillment of life in their relationship with the Lord and in their Christian service for the Lord. These sermons were sent to be reviewed by the sermon evaluation group before they were preached. Two pastors, three church leaders and one church member reviewed and evaluated the sermons with eight rubrics concerning biblical faithfulness, clarity, and relevance. All the sermons received a “sufficient” or “exemplary” from all the evaluators. The second goal was met. The

encouragement and comments from the evaluators were significant help for the final delivery of the sermons.

The third goal was to deliver the eight sermons on equipping empty nesters for Christian service to the congregation of Maryland Chinese Baptist Church from October 3, to November 21, 2021. The post-sermon survey with the same thirty questions was given to those empty nesters who had completed the pre-sermon survey on the day when the last sermon was preached. Twelve surveys (75 percent of those sixteen who completed the pre-sermon survey) were received by the following Sunday, November 28, 2021. The number of collected post-sermon surveys met the third goal of receiving 75 percent of the surveys from those who had completed the pre-sermon survey. The result of comparison between the pre- and post-sermon surveys showed the significant changes among the empty nesters concerning the fulfilment of their needs and their calling for Christian service. The third goal was met.

First, the analysis of the pre- and post-sermon surveys indicated that empty nesters' understanding of God's calling for Christians became clearer after eight sermons. The pre-sermon survey showed that 87.5 percent empty nesters thought that "God's calling is only for those full-time ministers and missionaries" (Question 21). The post-sermon survey revealed that all the twelve empty nesters changed from "agree" or "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree (62.5 percent)" or "disagree (37.5 percent)" to the same question 21.

Secondly, the comparison between pre- and post-sermon surveys showed that empty nesters' perspective concerning material possessions was changed. The pre-sermon survey showed that all empty nesters disagreed (31.25 percent strongly disagree and 68.75 percent disagree) with the statement, "My possessions are God's trust to me to evaluate my faithfulness to him as a steward" (question 24). The post-sermon survey revealed that 50 percent empty nesters changed from "strongly disagree" or "disagree" to

“agree” and 25 percent of them changed from “strongly disagree” or “disagree” to “agree somewhat” to the same question.

Thirdly, the survey analysis showed that empty nesters became more eager to know the Word of God. All the empty nesters in the pre-sermon survey did not have the desire to use “significant extra free time” to study Bible (66 percent strongly disagree and 33 percent disagree to the question 9). The post-sermon survey revealed that 33 percent empty nesters changed from “strongly disagree” or “disagree” to “agree” and 16 percent empty nesters changed from “strongly disagree” or “disagree” to “agree somewhat.”

Fourthly, the comparison of the pre- and post-sermon surveys showed that empty nesters’ willingness to respond God’s call increased. All empty nesters answered, “strongly disagree (87 percent)” or “disagree (13 percent)” to the statement, “It is time for me to commit my life to God and for his service” (question 25) in the pre-sermon survey. Twenty five percent of the empty nesters changed their answer from “strongly disagree” or “disagree” to “agree” and thirty three percent of them changed their answers from “strongly disagree” or “disagree” to “agree somewhat” to the same question 25 in the post-sermon survey.

In conclusion, the data from the pre- and post-sermon surveys seem to show that empty nesters were able to shift their opinions and perspectives on their role in the Church after the sermons. As our church continues to congregate and guide one another, we can also lift each other up. As a church, we can provide more opportunities to empty nesters so that they can grow in Christ and help others come to know Jesus.

### **Strengths**

There were several strengths of the project. The first was that the concept of empty nesters’ ministry was introduced to the congregation of the church. As a small church, the relationship plays a significant role in adherence among church members. Because of the closer relationship, some unrealistic expectation could appear among



members. Families with small children could expect the empty nesters to take more responsibilities in the church ministries. They naturally thought that empty nesters did not have the burden of raising children, therefore they had more time to the work. The senior group of people could also expect the empty nesters to take more responsibilities in the church because they were relatively younger and energetic comparing to themselves. This project helped the congregation of the church to realize and understand that the needs of the empty nesters were as real as theirs. It was unrealistic to expect the empty nesters for the church service before their needs were met and their lives were changed by the Lord through specific ministry of the Word of God to them.

Secondly, the new prospect concerning Christian service was emphasized to the empty nesters. They started to realize that participating in Christian service could be a healing process toward the symptoms of empty nester. Serving in Christian ministry was beneficial and blessing in their life as a Christian. This biblical teaching would benefit not only the empty nesters but also all age groups in the church.

Thirdly, through this project, the concept that the church was a service platform was promoted in the whole church. Both groups of people in this platform including those who gave service and those who received the service were all blessed. We edified and built up each other in this church platform. The whole church including the empty nesters were encouraged to participate in the church ministries.

Fourthly, the challenge of having six evaluators was beneficial. These evaluators included two pastors, three church leaders and one member. For 28 years in the Christian ministry, I never invited the people whom I ministered to evaluate my sermons. Although I did often send my sermons to our church pastor emeritus to review out of respect and information, this was the first time to invite church leaders and a member to evaluate my sermons. This new experience came out incredibly positive. All the church leaders and member were receptive to the invitation. With all the great

encouragements, they also carefully detailed the areas of applications and illustrations that could be strengthened. The feedback was very important in allowing me to improve my expository preaching.

### **Weaknesses**

There were several weaknesses in the project. First, we could not have in-person gathering in every Sunday morning worship service, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We were a church without our own facilities. We had to rent a public school as the place of worship. Although many churches who had their own church facilities had started in-person Sunday worship service, we could not re-open our in-person worship service because the public school kept showing some positive cases periodically throughout the pandemic. Our church leaders decided to not rent the public school until the pandemic is basically over. We had to use a meeting software named Zoom to facilitate each morning worship service. Although we could see and heard each other in the virtual room, we did not have the dynamic of in-person meeting. Quite a few members chose not to turn their cameras on during the worship service. This also reduced the impact of receiving the challenge of the word of God.

Secondly, there was no meaningful follow-up ministry after the eight sermons were preached. The result showed that many empty nesters' minds were transformed and would like to walk out of the symptom of empty-nest and to be involved in Christian services. But there was a limit to what could be done during the pandemic. Most people avoided meeting each other, especially in Chinese community. Without in-person contact, it was extremely hard to recruit co-workers to set-up a new ministry and to invite people to participate in the ministry.

Thirdly, there were not any basic trainings for the empty nesters for their future possible ministries, even though they were encouraged many times to do so in the eight sermons. Many empty nesters never had any Christian ministry experience. The

pandemic might prevent this project from initiating any ministries for the empty nesters to get involved, but some trainings for them to get ready for future ministries could be provided through virtual meetings.

### **What I Would Have Done Differently**

There were several areas that could have been implemented differently to make the project more effective in equipping the empty nesters in the church for the Christian service. First, I would not choose the pandemic time or any public health challenging period to do the project if I had the choice. After starting the virtual meeting, I quickly realized the missing of the dynamic of meeting with each other in-person. The level of engagement was drastically reduced. Usually during in-person or live sermons, I was able to make eye contact with listeners and also view their facial expressions as indirect feedback to my sermons. Since many listeners were now at home or on their devices and turned off their cameras, this kind of feedback was missed. The dynamic of in-person meeting could never be replaced by virtual one. This was the lesson I never forgot.

Secondly, I would promote to form a fellowship group for empty nesters after preaching the eighth sermon. Empty nesters could share their experiences and encourage each other in the fellowship and in a safe space. A relationship among the empty nesters could be established in the fellowship so that they could feel less alone in their life journey. The support from the fellowship would be available to every empty nester. They could share their information and recourses concerning the empty nesters' interests. They could share the ministries opportunities to the empty nesters in the community outside of church and the possibility of involvement in them. Through the fellowship, they might develop some interest groups which also could invite non-church goer empty nesters in the community to participate. This could be the seed of an outreach ministry of the church.

Thirdly, during the eight sermons period, I would form an empty nesters Sunday school class. This would further build the relationship between fellow empty nesters. They could discuss each sermon related to them after they listened the sermons. They could recall the challenges for them in the sermon and discuss about their proper response to the message. Other fellow empty nesters could take turns facilitating the discussion so that they could begin to feel more involved in ministry.

Fourthly, I would start basic training classes for the empty nesters concerning Christian services. Although there was not Christian service currently in the church that they could involve as a beginner of such service during the pandemic, some basic training could provide to them such as safe and reliability issues in Christian services.

### **Conclusion**

Empty nesters are a very strategic group of people in Maryland Chinese Baptist church. They have immense potential to become a vital ministry force in the church, because of their advantage in their life experience and resources. They are the group of people connecting between the younger child-raising families and retired senior families. Equipping them ready for Christian service are both their benefit and the need of the church. In fact, Chinese language speaking churches in the United States have more opportunities to reach out for new immigrants in the near future. According to the Pew Research Center, the Chinese population in America has been growing each year (Chinese | Data on Asian Americans | Pew Research Center). As the Chinese population in America grows, there is also a growing need to reach out and minister to this population as well. Empty nesters have the potential and are capable of doing this ministry work. They are fit for the task because they can speak both English and Chinese since most of their children grew up in America. As a result, they can connect with both the second generation and first-generation Chinese immigrants.

Maryland Chinese Baptist Church is strategically located in Great Washington D.C. metropolitan with large first-generation Chinese immigrants' population. Empty nesters in the church can be a vital force in the outreach ministry to this large Chinese society. When the empty nesters are well equipped in evangelism, they can serve as short term missionary back to their hometown in China, because they have the time and are financially capable to visit their hometown often. This project serves well for the current need of the church and for the future. May our God be honored; his church be built up and gospel be proclaimed because of the equipping the empty nesters ministry.

## APPENDIX 1

### EMPTY NESTERS FOR MINISTRIES SURVEY

#### **Agreement to Participate (part one)**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify your current level of understanding of the needs of an empty nester and the calls for Christian ministries. This research is being conducted by Lemuel Chen for purposes of the project research required for the Doctor of Ministry (DMin) degree at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In this research, you will use the same identification number with three digits which you create for yourself to answer same questions both prior to and following the eight sermons preached by Lemuel Chen. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

**Your ID number: \_\_\_\_\_ (same in both pre and pro eight sermons)**

#### **I. PERSONAL BACKGROUND** (Please place a check beside each answer)

1. How long have you been an empty nester?

\_\_\_\_\_ will be one in less a year

\_\_\_\_\_ half year

\_\_\_\_\_ one years

\_\_\_\_\_ over two years

2. How many children do you have?

\_\_\_\_\_ one child

\_\_\_\_\_ two children

\_\_\_\_\_ three and more children

3. Are you a single parent?

\_\_\_ Yes

\_\_\_ No

4. How long have you been a Christian?

\_\_\_ Not a Christian yet

\_\_\_ Less than 1-5 years

\_\_\_ 6-10 years

\_\_\_ Over 10 years

**II. PERSONAL OPINION** (Please indicate your opinion using the following scale)

SD = strongly disagree

D = disagree

DS = disagree somewhat

AS = agree somewhat

A = agree

SA = strongly agree

1. I feel lonely often since my youngest child left home for college.

SD D DS AS A SA

2. I feel happy when I spend time helping a brother/sister in the church.

SD D DS AS A SA

3. I cannot settle on what subject to spend my extra free time since my last/only grown-up children left home.

SD D DS AS A SA

4. Serving God in second half of life is more important than raising children in the first half of life.

SD D DS AS A SA

5. I will not feel happy if I cannot see my children often.

SD D DS AS A SA

6. My current highest goal is to be healthy.

SD D DS AS A SA

7. I feel very fulfilling after serving in the church even though my back is still sore.

SD D DS AS A SA

8. All my friends are those who share the same hobbies of mine.

SD D DS AS A SA

9. I will use significant extra free time after grown-up children left home to study Bible.

SD D DS AS A SA

10. My perspective of the purpose of life can be changed through Bible study.

SD D DS AS A SA

11. I will travel as much as I can afford it, because aging will prevent it soon.

SD D DS AS A SA

12. I occasionally went to the church during raising my children.

SD D DS AS A SA

13. People should respect me when they get help from me.

SD D DS AS A SA

14. My material possessions can bring me long lasting happiness.

SD D DS AS A SA

15. Satisfied spiritual life is important to me.

SD D DS AS A SA

16. The desire to have intimate relationship with God moves me to start a regular devotion time.

SD D DS AS A SA

17. It is necessary for me to have an intimacy relationship with the Lord.

SD D DS AS A SA



18. I will feel satisfied when I serve the Lord by serving others.

SD D DS AS A SA

19. The sickness I went through after my child left home draws me closer to God.

SD D DS AS A SA

20. Having a humble spirit is important than getting the work done in Christian service.

SD D DS AS A SA

21. God's calling is only for those full-time ministers and missionaries.

SD D DS AS A SA

22. Going to the church serve the same purpose as attending a party.

SD D DS AS A SA

23. My possessions are God's blessing to me to enjoy and be grateful.

SD D DS AS A SA

24. My possessions are God's trust to me to evaluate my faithfulness to Him as a steward.

SD D DS AS A SA

25. It is time for me to commit my life to God and for his service.

SD D DS AS A SA

26. I am happy when people respect me because of my successful career.

SD D DS AS A SA

27. I will not feel lonely anymore because I have plenty of meaningful services to do in the church.

SD D DS AS A SA

28. I must use my time wisely to fulfill my purpose of life.

SD D DS AS A SA

29. I am eager to serve others in the name of the Lord because Holy Spirit inspires me.

SD D DS AS A SA

30. My purpose of life is to serve God by serving others to trust Jesus.

SD D DS AS A SA

APPENDIX 2

SERMON EVALUATION RUBRIC

Sermon Evaluation					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria					
<b>Biblical Faithfulness</b>	1	2	3	4	Comments
The sermon is accurate to the biblical text and the context of Scripture.					
The sermon sufficiently deals with the biblical text.					
The sermon is theologically solid.					
<b>Clarity</b>					
The purpose of the sermon is clearly stated and affirmed.					
The points of the sermon clearly support the purpose.					
<b>Relevance</b>					
The sermon is clearly relevant to the topic of equipping empty nesters for Christian services.					
The sermon clearly states practical applications.					
Overall, the sermon is relevant and effective.					

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## ABSTRACT

### EQUIPPING “EMPTY NESTERS” FOR MINISTRIES AT MARYLAND CHINESE BAPTIST CHURCH, ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022  
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This project seeks to equip “empty nesters” in Maryland Chinese Baptist Church, Rockville, Maryland for Christian service by leading them to understand the relationship between their needs and God’s calling and encouraging them to respond to God’s calling. Chapter one introduces the need for equipping “empty nesters” in Maryland Chinese Baptist Church. Chapter two provides a biblical and theological basis for equipping “empty nesters” in eight specific areas of life to be satisfied by their response to God’s calling. Chapter three discusses the theoretical and practical issues concerning equipping “empty nesters” in finding their satisfaction of life in the designing of God for his people. Chapter four gives details and a description of the project. Chapter five evaluates the results of the project with personal reflections on the area of strength and weakness.

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