

# PARENT CONVERSATIONS

No matter what age your children are, your role as a parent has changed over time. The first time we leave them with someone else as newborns can feel monumental. Then there's that first day of school. First time they stay home alone. First time they drive away on their own after they get their license. The firsts go on and on. Each one pushes them a little further into independence. How do all those changes affect a parent's role? Here are three perspectives.

—Nicole Balza

## HOW DOES A PARENT'S ROLE CHANGE OVER TIME?

LAST SUMMER, my daughter was almost killed. A semi driver, going about 60 mph, plowed into six cars stopped at a red light, my daughter's car taking the brunt of it.

It's a long story. Suffice it to say that thanks to talented doctors and a series of small supernatural events we Christians rightly call miracles, she survived. She can't remember a thing, fortunately, so the only ones with PTSD are the rest of us who could do nothing but cry and pray, stare dumbly at doctors, and think about funeral hymns while she slept.

I'm only telling you this because it brought home a strange parenting phenomenon. My daughter became a toddler again. She came home, but she could hardly walk, and she needed every kind of care, day and night, for many weeks. My midday thoughts were mostly grateful: "Thank you, Jesus, for letting us do this for her." My midnight thoughts were not so great: "O dear Lord. This is why you send us babies when we're young."

When you've launched your adult children, you don't expect to get them back—until you do. Maybe it's a job loss or crushing student debt that drives them home. Maybe it's cancer, depression, chemical dependency. Maybe the people or institutions

they trusted broke their hearts. Abuse. Infidelity. Divorce.

When the chaos of this sin-infected world comes crashing into their homes, they sometimes need to come back to yours. You thought you'd just figured out how to let go, to set boundaries, to be the family consultant instead of CEO, and then they ask you to be in charge of a few things again. It can be hard—but beautiful too.

So, to all of you who are parenting adult children for a little while, will you pray with me?

*Fill us up, Jesus. We're tired, angry, anxious. Push out all that darkness. Make our hearts warm and our faces happy. Make our arms strong and our words wise. And— even more important—hold our children close. Heal the brokenness. Straighten the crooked. Shine in the darkness. Love them, Lord—through us and in spite of us. Love them as only you can and help them launch again. Amen.*



Laurie Gauger-Hested and her husband, Michael, have a blended family of three adult children and attend St. Mark, Mankato, Minnesota. Laurie's daughter has made amazing progress after her accident and is a fully launched adult again.

## HAVE PARENTING QUESTIONS?

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**IT HAS BEEN** said, “Once a parent, always a parent.” This is true.

As soon as a baby enters into the world, the wild ride begins. That’s because parenting is a role in which God chooses who is along for the ride. Each family member is blessed with a unique set of gifts and challenges that adds to the experience.

In Malachi God tells us what is pleasing to him: to raise “godly offspring” (2:15). As Christian parents, our purpose is to reflect the full spectrum of God to our children. Honestly, this was exhausting at times, especially during the early years. But nightly bedtime prayers put things back into perspective. Oh, the tremendous blessings.

My husband and I moved from being Nurturers to Limit Setters (for safety). Add on Encouragers, Coaches, Referees, Problem Solvers, Counselors, and Financiers. We developed new skill sets as the needs came up. Spiritually, we grew exponentially. We consulted the Word more, we prayed more, we practiced more forgiveness. Growth took place in our marriage as we pulled together to raise the kids with a unified front.

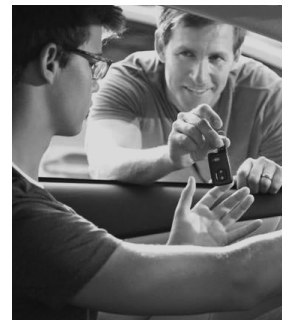
It wasn’t always easy, but when we fell down, we got up and just kept going.

A big challenge came when our last two (twins) of five went off to college. They were each two thousand miles away. Staying in touch was harder. Seeing them required planning and funding. The intense time of sharing their lives was over. We had not anticipated the emptiest syndrome to be a synonym for a sort of grieving process as our parenting role had diminished for all our children. But then spouses were brought into the family, and more children came along. The Lord’s plans for the family are very good!

Now that we are grandparents, the reward is seeing our own children strive to parent our grandchildren. We pray anew that the torch of faith is being passed to the next generation!



*Marilyn Sievert and her husband, James, are members at Good Shepherd, West Bend, Wisconsin.*



**AMONG MY** grandfather roles, the top priority is leaving a legacy. A legacy of faith in Jesus.

A half century from now I want my grandchildren to describe to their grandchildren how Papa Aderman’s faith in Jesus continues to inspire them. I desire that the treasure I have found in God’s commitment to me is reflected in their lives and through them is reflected in the lives of the next generations of Adermans.

I pray that my family embraces—and improves upon—my dedication to God’s Word and prayer. I desire that they remember that I not only studied God’s Word and talked about it, but I also lived out my appreciation for his love. I even want them to recall that I regularly and obviously failed to live as God’s child and regularly and obviously rejoiced in my constant forgiveness.

I want my children and grandchildren to think back on how I celebrated their faith-words and faith-works, so they celebrate every time their children express their faith. I want my grand-

kids to explain to their children why I placed their baptism photos—not their birth photos—on my living room wall. I want them to tell their freshly confirmed children and grandchildren how grateful and proud I was the day they pledged lifelong faithfulness to Jesus.

I pray the legacy I leave will prompt my daughters, their spouses, and my ten grandkids to share their faith boldly in their families and well beyond.

Leaving this legacy is not a newly discovered parenting role. It’s always been my priority. Now that eternity is a much shorter distance away, it’s an even greater priority.



*James Aderman and his wife, Sharon, raised three daughters and are now enjoying their ten grandchildren.*

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