

The Family Life Cycle

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The Single, Unattached, Young Adult

I came to faith in Jesus Christ in this stage. Talk about differentiating! At 18 turning 19 years old, I had an encounter with Jesus and became a born-again believer. Having made such a life changing decision in this time in my life accelerated this task of differentiating from my family of origin and developing a new relationship with my mother (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2015). My immediate family at the time consisted of my mother, my sister and me. We are from the country of Haiti. I give my mother a lot of credit in how well she navigated this stage of development because watching her eldest daughter transition into a young adult was no easy task. Coming from her cultural background and carrying her own personal concerns about my safety as a young lady in NYC, she could have stifled me, refuse to relinquish her control, and tried to keep me under lock and key. However, shortly after graduating from high school and starting college, she informed me that I didn't need to ask her permission to go out anymore. Her only request was that I let her know where I would be so she wouldn't worry about me – and so she had a last known location to share with the police if anything were to happen. Lucky for her since I was a new Christian, she didn't have to worry too much about me being at the wrong place at the wrong time. I spent most of my young adulthood in church, volunteering in ministry, at prayer meetings and at young adult retreats. In addition to my new faith in Christ, being gainfully employed helped us through the transition into young adulthood. Having your own money gives you a certain level of independence and autonomy. It's challenging to prove you're becoming a mature, reliable adult who can care for themselves when you must ask your parent for cab money to go out with your girlfriends! During this time, I discovered my career in stenography, a field that I'm still working in today, and I met / made some friends with young other young adult Christians who I still call friends today. I became a single mom at the age of

24 and modified the “unattached” portion of this stage of development. I also met and married my husband after my son turned 5 in this stage, beginning our journey as a blended family.

The New Couple

My husband and I got married in April of 2013. We started our journey as a blended family because I had a child from a previous relationship. This stage was challenging to navigate for many reasons. One, my husband was 7 years younger than I, so he was still figuring out his career goals while I had been working in my field for over 8 years. I was making significantly more than he was, which was challenging to his ideas of traditional gender roles. Another challenge was the fact that my husband grew up as an only child while I grew up with a sister and many cousins who were like siblings to me. As a result, my husband had to learn how to share his space, his things and his time and transition from an “I” mindset to a “we” mindset. Yet another challenge we faced was having to work through our idealized perceptions of each other (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2015). The man I thought I married and the woman he thought he married were nowhere to be found once we said I do. Dating someone and living with someone are two very different things. We had different perspectives on everything from how often to clean, how often to be intimate, how involved we should be to volunteering in ministry, who should cook, etc. This stage involved many role modifications and required us to adjust our expectations (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2015).

Families With Very Young Children

Starting a family with my husband was quite a culture shock for him. While we already had a child, my son was not an infant when we got married. Not only did he have to learn how to adjust to life with an infant, but he also had to adjust to living with a hormonal pregnant lady –

two things he had never, ever experienced before. Adding another child to our blended family was exciting, so we did it again, and again, and again. Now, we have a total of 6 children. The youngest members of our family are 2 years old and 5 months old, respectively. The biggest challenge for me was watching my husband parent his children. I am an unfathered daughter and only saw women caring, nurturing and raising children. My husband is a very-time oriented individual. He learned rather quickly that when you have small children, time can easily run away from you. We used to have difficulty just getting to church on time because (1) I'm chronically late and (2) having small children makes getting anywhere on time almost impossible. Another challenge that comes in this stage is the change that comes in the marital relationship as newborns, babies and toddlers need so much of your time and attention. "Parenting requires around-the-clock responsibility for childcare and safety," (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2015). Often, that time is taken away from each other. My husband and I had to be intentional to make time for each other as a couple and not allow the needs of our children to trump the needs of our marriage relationship.

Families With School-Age Children

After the birth of our 6th child, the dynamics of our family changed in that my husband is now the primary bread winner for the family and I function as the stay-at-home mom. Currently, three out of six of our children are school age. Up until very recently, they were all in public school. Now only one is in public school (our 15-year-old) and the other two are homeschooled. The youngest 3 are not old enough for public school or homeschool. Before homeschooling, COVID was a huge part of our children's first experiences with school. Our first daughter went through kindergarten virtually and first grade with masks and social distancing mandates. Her sister, who is one grade behind her, started Kindergarten and first grade with just the masks and

social distancing in place. They fared well, considering the restrictions; however, we felt the call to be our children's first teacher and provide a classical, Christian education. In addition to homeschooling our school-aged children, they are also involved in ballet and youth choir. These activities, as well as the needs of our other children, can cause us to lose touch with each other (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2015). In addition, we sometimes struggle to balance responsibilities between work, home, and ministry. We try to combat this with date nights. We don't always have family or friends who can and are willing to watch all our children. But when we do, we unashamedly shuttle the kids to their destination and take a much needed few hours away. This season has taught me that we're much better together. I have adopted an "US" versus "THEM" mentality because at times the stress of raising children can cause us to forget that we are on the same team.

Families With Adolescent Children

We have one child who is in the Adolescence stage. And it is a challenge. My younger children have asked why their eldest brother is so grumpy! Remembering that this stage "can be a time of turmoil as children adjust to changing bodies and emotions," (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2015) is helpful, but incomplete. The other part of it is that our eldest son lives with us parttime and with his biological dad parttime. I sense that for my adolescent son, who is 15, this one fact leaves him feeling like an alien in both homes.

Families With Children Who Are Launching or Leaving the Nest

Though my son is only in the 10th grade, I'm mentally preparing for the two and half years left before he transitions, like I did, out of high school into college / young adult life. I pray for the grace my mother had with me. I want to trust him and to be able to say, you don't need

my permission to go anywhere – just let me know where you’re going to be in case I need to inform someone of your last known whereabouts! My husband is counting down the days to high school graduation for two specific reasons: (1) we will no longer have to deal with our son’s father, who can be a challenging person to co-parent with. And (2) he can finally realize his dream to move to Georgia, which is not possible right now because of our Child Custody and Visitation Agreement for our son. In addition, I have concerns about my son’s ability to take care of himself, make smart / wise choices, and how to handle money. Though we haven’t technically entered this stage yet, we are attempting to teach him life skills now that will be helpful to his transition into adulthood, i.e., how to budget, how to do laundry, how to go grocery shopping, how to use a planner or calendar, etc.

Families in Retirement and Later Life

Since my mother had me at age 18, she hasn’t entered retirement age yet. She’s still in her late 50s. Though she is not yet ready to retire, my sister and I have had discussions regarding who our mother will live with, who will most likely be power of attorney for her and health proxy. We want to make sure our mother doesn’t end up in a nursing home. Culturally, it is expected that the eldest child takes care of their parents in their old age / declining health. Putting a loved one in a nursing home or assisted living facility, especially if they are incapacitated in some way, is the worst way to repay them for raising and caring for you. My maternal grandmother had 7 children and not one of them could care for her because of her complicated health needs. She was reluctantly put in a nursing home but was visited regularly by her children and grandchildren. This was to ensure her needs were being met and to advocate for her as well as reduce the opportunity for abuse by the staff. She did not want to be there. She constantly made requests to go home. After 2 plus years in that nursing home, she died from diabetes

complications, which left her an amputee and blind. My mother and aunts never forgave themselves for how their mother died: alone, blind, and in pain. And they made it clear to our generation that they'd rather die than to be put away and forgotten.

References

Capuzzi, D., & Stauffer, M. D. (2015). *Foundations of couples, marriage, and Family Counseling*. Wiley.