

# Single Parents Come in Three Stages

## Stage Two: The Transitioning Stage



*Moving from crisis to reality.*

by Linda Ranson Jacobs

Gradually you realize you have experienced a trauma, but the world around you has continued to move forward. There is nothing you can do stop life from moving ahead. You feel the fog lifting—this fog that has encapsulated you and your world for the past many months or years. You come to the realization it's time for you to move on also.

It's at this point you may leave behind some of your newfound single parent friends. This is because many single parents don't make it to the transitioning stage. Or they don't arrive at this stage before experiencing another marriage and then a second divorce. When in the survivor and crisis stage, many people think another person in their life will be all they need. Immediately they begin to look for another person to marry. If you marry before you've healed and before your children have healed, you more than likely will face either a life of continual heartache or another divorce.

Gradually in the transitioning stage you will realize the old relationships that you had as a married person may not be working for you any longer. You begin to form new friendships and develop different relationships with family members, old friends and church friends.

### **Seeing Positive Changes**

During this time you may begin to see positive changes that have been brought into

your life. You are no longer needy. You will know this because when you walk up the sidewalk to your neighbors' apartment or house, you will not see them run the other way or suddenly close their blinds. You look around and you realize that your neediness has driven away friends and acquaintances.

You will still have times when you relapse and feel needy, but those times will get fewer and further apart. You are continuing to heal, and your pain is not as intense as it once was. You may still feel anger and sadness at times about your situation, but slowly you depend on the Lord to bring you through. If you don't know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, it's at this transitioning stage that you begin to reach out and search for a deeper understanding of who and what God is all about. You are beginning to be aware that the world that is out there includes the Lord and His family, the church. You begin to take joy in reading the scriptures, and you find you have a hunger to know the Lord on a more intimate level.

### **A Single Parent in the Bible**

The dictionary tells us that transition is a process where you undergo a change and pass from one stage, state, form or activity to another. One person in the Bible who experienced such a transition is one of the first single parents in the Bible. (Did you realize there were single parents in the Bible?) This single parent was Hagar. You

can read about Hagar in the 16th chapter of Genesis.

Hagar was an Egyptian maidservant. Her mistress wanted a child so much that her mistress instructed her husband to go and sleep with Hagar so Hagar would get pregnant. The mistress's plan was to have a family through her servant. And you thought your life was a little out of balance?

Now there was a little problem with this plan. When Hagar became pregnant, she began to dislike her boss. Can you just imagine the soap opera that went on back in the Old Testament days—The Days of Their Lives!

Mistress: “So Hagar, what are your plans for today? I, um, thought you might go and sleep with my husband. You could get pregnant with his child, and then we could all be one big happy family. So how about it?”

Hagar: “Ah, gee, I was kind of thinking of hauling some water up from the river, washing some clothes, maybe doing a little sweeping of this dirt floor. I'd really prefer not to go sleep with your husband. I mean after all, someday I might want a life of my own.”

Mistress: “What? You disobey me, your Mistress? You go sleep with my husband so I can have a family! I am ordering you to do this. Now get going!”

And so the story goes. Hagar gets pregnant, but when she begins to despise her mistress, the mistress takes notice (Genesis 16:4–5). The mistress goes to her husband to complain about Hagar's attitude, and he tells her to do whatever she wants with this woman. She mistreats Hagar, and Hagar flees to the desert (v. 6).

What must have been going through Hagar's mind? Here she is essentially an unwed pregnant woman with no means of support. She finds herself wandering the desert completely alone. We continue to read in the 16th chapter of Genesis that an angel of the Lord speaks to Hagar and encourages her to return and submit to her mistress. Hagar returns, has her baby, and for a while life returns to normal.

But that's not the end of the story. We read in the 21st chapter of Genesis about the mistress getting pregnant with her husband's child. When this baby is born is when life gets bad for Hagar and her son. Eventually Hagar and her child, Ishmael, were sent away.

### **She Wandered in the Desert**

Hagar had to wander the desert with her child. Talk about a crisis! This woman got lost in the desert, and then her supplies ran out. Not knowing what else to do, she sat the boy under some bushes because she couldn't bear to watch him die (Genesis 21:15–16). Hagar must have felt destitute. More than likely she couldn't see any future for her life or the life of her child. But that is when the Lord intervened. The Lord promised to make the child into a great nation (v. 18). God opened her eyes, and there was a well of water. Can you begin to imagine what went through Hagar's mind? We are not told all the particulars about Hagar's life after this point, but I think this was the beginning of her realization that life goes on. This was her transitioning stage. She went from hopelessness to a life of the Lord's calling.

You may be like Hagar and feel completely hopeless when the Lord reveals to you His plan. Or it may come to you in gradual phases. One day you may wake up and find joy in having your children around you. Or you may be the person who comes slowly to

this understanding. You become conscious that your children need you and you need them. You take comfort in them, and you begin to understand your children are hurting. You want to make the hurt go away. You acknowledge that your children have needs.

### **Going It Alone**

At this juncture many need seminars on how to parent alone. You may need classes on behavior and guidance or classes on how to handle finances. You will learn new skills. But it's different now than when you were in a crisis mode. Now you have new insights and are excited to tackle these opportunities. You experience glimpses of a bright world that is ahead. It's now that you also begin to understand that you don't have to have a mate or be married. Whereas before, many of you thought you had to have a marriage partner to be happy and to be able to survive. Now you know that the Lord will provide a partner when and if that is His plan for your life. You will be okay with a mate or without a mate, but you realize for now you have to concentrate on developing a healthy single parent family.

You decide it is time to take control of your home and set boundaries, develop rituals and follow a schedule. I became a better parent to my children than I had been when I was married to their father. During this stage I began to encourage my children to spend more time with their other grandparents.

I also realized that I couldn't do this parenting thing all by myself, so I began to ask for help. I called on a couple of church families to help me parent my children. My son's best friend's parents became a substitute two-parent family. They went to our church, and at least one Sunday out of the month I knew my son would go home with them after church. He

spent holidays with this family. He watched a Christian two-parent family interact.

As I began to emerge from the fog, I realized our house was a mess. I took my kids aside and explained that from then on, they were going to be responsible for doing their own laundry and other jobs around the house. I took them to the washer and dryer and showed them how to use them. Then I asked them if they had any questions. I set consequences. For example, if they didn't do their laundry, then they would have to wear dirty clothes. And a couple of times they either wore dirty clothes or clothes that were still damp because they forgot to put them in the dryer.

I put them both on a TV, electronic games and computer time budget. I gave them so many hours a week they could sit in front of an electronic or battery-operated gadget. This included when I wasn't home. Did they sneak in extra hours when I wasn't home? They probably did, but when I was home, they stuck by the rules. If they didn't, then their time was taken away along with me confiscating the item they enjoyed. They weren't allowed a TV, computer or other type items in their rooms. When I sent them to their rooms, it was not intended to be a happy adventure.

### **Bringing in Help**

When my teenage daughter began to ask questions about dating, I called all of her friend's parents and asked them about their dating rules. She complained that she was really embarrassed that I was doing this. I explained that I wanted to be fair to her and that if I did this by myself, I might make our rules stricter than her friend's. I didn't tell her this, but my thinking also went along the lines of, "Then when you ask me if you can do something and I tell you 'no' and you tell me

everyone else is getting to do it, I will look at my list and say, ‘No, the Smiths aren’t allowing that nor are the Jones or the Sanders.’” That actually happened a couple of times, too. Next, I sat her down, and we formed our own dating rules. We wrote everything down with what the consequences would be if the rules were broken. There was no confusion on what was allowed.

Our first big rule was that she couldn’t go on a car date until she was 15 and a half, and then it had to be a group date with other kids her age. When she was just over 15, she came to me and asked if she could go to a dance with an older young man. My response was “Of course not.” A few weeks later she came to me and told me that the weekend she wanted to go on this date was her father’s weekend and he told her she could go on the date. Oh my, I faced a crossroad. Then she added with a typical teen smirk, “And there’s nothing you can do about it because you can’t control what goes on when I’m with my dad!”

After I regained my consciousness and got over my anger, which took at least a week, I calmly said, “You are right. There is nothing I can do about what happens between you and your dad. However, you need to know that I feel like you are directly disobeying my wishes. I will not support you in this. That means I won’t spend any money on you for this event. That means no dress, shoes, haircut or anything else. I love you, but I won’t share in this event with you.”

Was it hard to say those things? You bet. But I felt I had to stick by what I said. As time got closer, one of her teachers at church gave her a formal to wear. Our neighbor and church friend got it cleaned for her. Her new stepmother bought her a lovely jacket and purse with shoes to match. On the weekend of the Big Dance, her best friend came over, and they gathered up all of her stuff and waited

for her dad to pick her up. Her friend was spending the night at her dad’s with her so she could help my daughter get ready to go to the dance the next night. You know it takes all day long to get ready for something this big! Off they went, giggling and excited.

I spent the entire weekend alone wondering if I had made the right decision. As I prayed about it, I began to feel a peace. I decided that it was the right decision for my daughter and me at this time. The weekend came and went without incident. She came home on Sunday and didn’t say a word about the date. Read this next part very carefully, and take time to digest what I’m about to tell you. It’s important you understand why you need to set boundaries and be a strong single parent.

Years later, when my daughter had her first baby, she and I were talking late one night. She said to me, “Mom, do you want to know the most miserable night of my entire life? You remember that time when you told me I couldn’t go on a car date until I was 15 and a half, and I disobeyed you and went anyway?” (Oh, so now it was “disobeyed”? Why didn’t she tell me that years ago—like at the time it happened?) I told her I remembered, but I thought, *How could I forget?* She went on to say, “I was so excited about going to that dance, but I knew I was disappointing you and that you didn’t approve of what I was doing. Mom, I couldn’t enjoy that dance because I knew you were at home alone and that you loved me and really cared about me. I knew I had robbed you of enjoying my going out on my first big date. I was so miserable the whole night. I didn’t have a good time nor did my date.” So that is why the Lord allowed me to have peace that weekend so many years before. See, He knew the future. He knew how this experience was contributing to shaping our relationship.

## Getting Stronger

With each situation I got stronger and became a better parent. As I got stronger, I began to set goals for my kids and me. For example, one of my goals was for my kids not to have a curfew when they entered their senior year of high school. I wanted them to be able to think and budget their own time and schedules. They both had to work outside the home during high school. They had to learn to budget their schedule in order to get their homework done, the housework and be at their jobs. And there were conditions that went along with no curfew. My thinking was they could move out and be on their own after high school, and I wanted them mature and ready if that is what they chose to do. When the children entered their senior years, I was able to release them from their curfews.

New skills and talents began to emerge in me. I discovered that I really liked to write. I also discovered that I enjoyed public speaking and that the Lord had given me a talent to do this. I discovered empathy growing within me. I found myself not wanting others to go through what I had experienced. I began to see with clarity the direction of my life.

I was moving into another stage in my single parent journey — Stage Three: The Emerging Stage.

For more on Stage Three: The Emerging Stage, go to [www.dc4k.org/parentzone](http://www.dc4k.org/parentzone). Click on “ParentZone Library.” Click on “Single Parents Come in Three Stages, Stage 3.”

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