

Searching For The End Of The Umbilical Cord

Introduction

I made a big mistake. It may be you are making the same one. I came into fatherhood thinking that when the doctor cut the umbilical cord Christine and I could move on to the next subject. I thought the birthing room was the beginning and end of the event. I quickly realized how wrong I was. Our baby's delivery room was not the end of the cord cutting; it was only the beginning. It was not the end of our baby being separated from Mommy's lifeline. No, it had barely begun, and I discovered I too had an umbilical cord attached to my son. Mine was made out of concepts and opinions, out of fatherly responsibilities and irrelevant grown-up viewpoints that might have nothing to do with our baby's need.

Physically, it was simple. One snip of the scissors and the job was done. One snip and our little one was on his own. He was separated from Mommy, and she was separated from him. It was like magic. One day it was me, my wife and her large tummy. The next thing I knew, there were three people in the room. Her baby was now our son. He was perfect, he was complete, and we were ecstatic to welcome him into our home.

What I didn't realize in all of the excitement was that his separation from Mommy physically was only the beginning of a long and wonderful journey. He, she and I had much to learn about what it meant to have the umbilical cord cut. Physically, she let him go in a moment, but there was so much to learn about letting him go in a multitude of other ways.

On so many levels, in so many ways, not only she, but she and I together would have much to learn and do to set him free to be his own complete person, even while learning and helping him feel he is a crucial part of a lasting family. Snipping the cord at birth seemed like a nearly mindless task. To cut the cord in many other ways to produce a wonderful man would take everything in our hearts and many years to do it well. Any other view seemed neither reasonable nor healthy.

I. The cord-cutting process

The life-long umbilical cord-cutting exercise is important, necessary, and positive. The cord will be cut, it is only a matter of how. It will be cut, it is only a matter of when and by whom. If parents learn to parent well, they can initiate the gradual separation of parents from child in a healthy and positive way. If they do not do this well, the little one whom they loved so much may do it all at once later on for them by withdrawing, rebellion, defiance or even physical flight from the family.

Cutting the cord begins from the baby's first day of life. It is a process of moving from his absolute dependency on his mother to a status of complete independence from both of his parents. It is also a process of moving from absolute protection of the baby by his mother/parents to a status of complete release of protective control.

The challenge of this process is that mother/parents feel threatened and fearful they will lose their little one forever. As a result, the tendency is to cling to him improperly and far too long. As a result, they may cause to happen the very thing their clinging wants to prevent. On the contrary, cutting the cord and giving the little one his own life progressively, builds trust and relationship and an intermingling that will likely give him great desire to always come back and always go on together in the family, even after he is mature and on his own. Cutting the cord properly is the best way to keep him forever, not because of your controlling of him, but out of

his respectful and loving desire. When the relationship is grown in such a cultivated, healthy way, he will want to be in your life/lives as much as you wish for him to be in yours. Even if there are rough patches along the way that seem hopeless, just live, believe, cut the cord, and eventually truth and principle will win the day.

Done well, it is a joyful and rewarding journey, although not without great challenges and probable failures along the way. Done poorly, it can make parenting a heart-breaking experience that brings disappointment, unbelief, disillusionment and possibly even regret.

It is a process where the baby grows into adulthood loved and protected without being over-protected, cultivated but not controlled beyond an age and maturity level appropriateness. It is a process where the mother/parents exercise themselves to lay aside their fear and protective instincts just enough so their little one can mature steadily.

Cutting the cord, releasing it gradually like a time-released vitamin, is not a matter of losing control, but of progressive, steady cultivation of him into growth according to his readiness. On the side of the parents, it is a matter of overcoming tendencies to over-protect, of shielding from new experiences due to fear of the unknown. On the side of the baby/child/young man or woman it is a matter of encouraging maturity and appropriate independence and individuality.

He is an individual. He is not you and you are not him. It is a challenging, wonderful and crucial exercise to help him develop his individuality without being individualistic. Well loved and cared for, he will mature to his maximum in a family-conscious manner. If he is not cared for in this cord-cutting way, he will still be an individual, but he will tend to be individualistic. To be a maturing individual is to be an active part of a whole. It is to be an accepted, needed and happy part of the family. To be individualistic is to be isolated from the whole in an effort to validate one's self-importance since it hasn't been realized in the needed and desired family way.

It is a matter of moving the child into new experiences, new frontiers, moving him/her to the edge of the nest. It is restraint from pushing. It is also restraint from holding back. It is release of the umbilical cord so it does not tie down either mother/parents or child. The umbilical cord always gives life. When that amount of life, of experience, of respect and growth and readiness is there, the cord must be severed at that place once more for the little one to be freed. The cord must be cut in order for him to take in the reassuring, strengthening, nutritional colostrum of loving supply.

If the little one were a bird, it would be like opening the hand to let him fly progressively as and when he is ready, yet the hand remains open for him to return again to enjoy your company and to rest. It is cultivating his liberty while overcoming your parental passionate drive of parental, self-centered self-preservation. As the proverb goes, if he flies away when the hand is open and he comes back on his own, he is yours; if he doesn't, he never was. Fear will drive him away and you will in the end lose him. Love and mutual respect will keep him coming back forever, not because he is weak, intimidated, overly dependent or guilt-ridden, but because he wants to. Not only does he want to, but he will strengthen your own passion for an extended family and sons-in-laws and daughters-in-law and grandchildren forever.

The umbilical cord at birth is physical and it must be cut cleanly and immediately. The umbilical cord of parental attention must be cut tenderly, gradually and ultimately entirely. This process is at least into adulthood, and in some senses goes on forever. When your baby is fifty

years old, you should treat him as the son you love, but as a fifty year old son you love, not as a the little boy of the past you failed to cultivate or whose childhood faults you always remember.

II. Stages of umbilical cord cutting

Cutting the umbilical cord has numerous stages. Each stage is elastic and has room for much cultivation of separation, independence, inter-dependence, individuality, family consciousness, and general growth into manhood/womanhood for the child, and general reconciliation and excitement for the mother/parents at the maturity taking place even while increasing mutual respect, mutual care and bedrock communication.

Here I insert a disclaimer. You may exercise yourself on all of the following points and find you have grown a child you don't understand and who does not respond to you as a teenager, or as a young adult or later as a family man. The following suggestions are not an "I told you so formula". They are critical guidelines, but every family, every person, every environment is different. It is crucial that the mother/parents cultivate a personal walk with the Lord and with each other in the Lord, both and all faithfully walking with the Lord enjoyably in the church life.

Also, in this text, I refer to the offspring usually as "he", meaning it could be a "she" or a "they". I use mother or mother/parents since especially the mother cares for the baby, but never with a passing thought that the father is less than crucial individually and in togetherness raising the little one unto maturity.

Christine and I were so blessed with four children, two boys and then two girls. When our oldest was five our youngest was in diapers. I often said that my only regret is that we didn't have twenty-four children (obviously, I didn't do the hard work of bearing the children). Even through the teen years it was a most adventuresome and incredible experience watching and helping each one develop wonderfully, responsibly and with a great love for each other and for being together as often as possible.

As events move on, we are delirious with excitement at soon welcoming grandchildren #8 and #9 into our extending family. Lest you misunderstand and over-estimate us, we have had plenty of challenges, failures and disappointments, but the following principles, with the Lord as our faithful Keeper, have been our faithful experience.

After each point, I will give a relevant example of our home life along the way thus far, but it still leaves so much unsaid.

A. Physical cutting of the cord

1. In the birthing room, snip-snip, and you are separated.
2. When Nathan was born in 1969, fathers could not be in the delivery room. I had the privilege of driving fast to a hospital with little warning. Upon arrival I was told where to go, and it was not into the delivery room where I could encourage my wife or feel part of something important that was apparently going to happen fairly soon.

In our situation at that time, there had been no birthing classes or intimate education of any kind, and there was no parenting instruction in advance. After hours alone in the waiting room I heard my name called, and suddenly a baby appeared all wrapped up in a blanket. I was told by the nurse that this was my baby boy, that I could see my wife later and take her and my baby home in a few days. Snip-snip, and I was a daddy. How did that happen so fast? I guess that is all there is to it, right? It didn't take long to find out there was more to do...

B. Consecrating your baby to the Lord

1. Deliberately and with fully yielded hearts, present your little one to the Lord for His purpose with no strings attached, now, and forever. Renew your consecration often, whether feeling up or down about things.

2. Remember Noah. Noah saved no one else, but he lived such a life with his wife before God that he saved his entire family. What if he had neglected learning how to raise a family? Who would have helped him build the life-saving ark, and whom would he have saved?

Remember Hannah. Remember the manner by which she loved, she conceived, she received, she raised Samuel with open arms, open heart and open hands to and for the Lord's use in the temple of God. She lived an apparent testimony of umbilical cord-cutting as a lifestyle of pure motherly love, a love that gratified her, served the Lord, and produced a man that was fully yielded to God for the kingdom of God in Israel.

3. What safety it brought Christine and me to give ourselves to each other afresh and to present to our Lord Jesus our little Nathan. The fear of yielding him to His maker and our Father was a lie from the devil. We knew our baby was never truly safe anyway unless he was given to the Lord. How faithful the Lord has been, not only with Nathan, but also with Steven, Robin and Amy, and now with their families and each of their children.

C. Babyhood

1. Acknowledge immediately that while you possess the baby, he is not your possession. He is separate from you and your task is to love him and train him to become a complete person. It is to demonstrate by your family lifestyle that he is crucial, respected and needed as a member of the family, and that your family is for the church.

2. Exercise yourselves to not over-protect him from others' interest. Leave your baby in the nursery during a church meeting as soon as reasonably possible. Except for feeding purposes, try not to leave the meeting "to see if he is alright". Be at peace, fear will begin to shrivel if you stand in faith. Let that umbilical cord cutting begin.

I was always so proud of my Christine. Although the maternal instinct is so powerful, she seemed to realize that our marriage should not revolve around our baby. He was for us, for our family, just as we were for each other so we could be a family. In turn, our family was for the church, so we were not self-centered in our family. It taught us as a family to look out, to look beyond our private challenges. In so doing we found the promises and the purpose of God were real. We found they are alive and were practical when we set our face and our lives in such a direction.

By making as many meetings as possible, the umbilical cord was automatically cut. So quickly our baby was absorbed by a life of hospitality, of reaching to others and responding to those who reached to us. It gave opportunity to share child care with other young families. It made it so simple (not necessarily always easy) to be involved in each others' lives, in needs and in gospel burdens for each others' families and in the burden of the church year after year.

Because we were in such a mode of living, the cord was always being cut, and our baby (and all of our children later) got the benefit of a marvelous Christ-centered, church-practicing lifestyle that strengthened our ability to meet all of our practical needs in work and in extended family. It helped us to bring focused, inclusive meaning and purpose to our lives even as we enjoyed our little one immensely and he grew normally stage by stage.

3. Cut the “feeling” possessive cord by letting someone or some family you trust take care of your baby while parents go out for an evening alone. Don’t call to see how he is. If you trusted enough to leave him with them, exercise yourselves to restfully leave him in their care. You have instructed them to page or call you on the cell phone if they need you. When you return, don’t “vow to never do that again because it hurt you too much”. It is not just about you, it is about cutting the cord for the sake of baby’s development, the earlier the better.

4. Teach him to eat a little of everything if at all possible while he is still in the high chair, unless there is a medical reason not to. You can train his taste buds to do this. What at first will be difficult will become a way of thinking, a way of enjoying a meal without fussing or whining. He will adapt to the amazing idea that food is good, that it is for eating and enjoying. It is not primarily for inspecting, criticizing and rejecting. If you don’t impose this effort on yourself and cut the cord of excess sympathy, he will in a few months begin to cut a way of disappointment into your home life.

If you cut the natural life cord that analyzes his every action and reaction, you will learn to be a mother/parents, and give him what he needs, not just what he screams for. Babies, as precious as they are, are not born full of faith, exercised in grace and love. They are born with the unconscious conviction they are the center of the entire world. The more you give into this fallen orientation, the more you, he, and the family will suffer. If you don’t learn to cut the cord properly, it may be that in time those around you will suffer as well.

Properly addressed as time goes on, this kind of envisioned thinking will become part of his positive character. If baby learns to eat broccoli and carrots, whether he wants to or not, it will make a difference. In about twenty years, his wife will be thankful you cut your cord of self-pity and trained him carefully and positively. Guess what, his wife may ask you why your son likes broccoli so much!

If you don’t cut the cord that causes you to be unduly sympathetic with his pickiness or distaste, you will soon find yourself interviewing him about what he would like to eat, and you will reap the pain that comes with it. Ask yourselves this question: “Did baby move in with us, or did we move in with him?” You are the mother/parents. (Whether working on food or sleeping schedules, if you truly realize he moved in with you, rather than you moving in with him, neither one will be an exaggerated problem, unless there is a medical reason.)

Study, pray, cook. If you don’t know what proper nutrition is, learn it, practice it yourselves, and bring your family into that kind of thinking by living that way. Set the pace and bring him into your proper and enjoyable eating. If you don’t, later years will use this lack of cord-cutting opportunity against you. When it is too late, you will be afflicted by the “what did I/we do wrong to deserve this disrespect and rebellion after all we have done for him” pity-party-syndrome.

D. Toddler stage

1. Cut the cord in increasing measure. Give him opportunity to be with other toddlers in church-related settings, trustworthy friends or neighborhood little ones, etc. He is still your baby, but don’t “baby him” inappropriately. Baby him as at a toddler stage, not like he is forever a one-day-old possession.

2. Stretch yourself to let him stay overnight with a trusted family or grandparents. If you are in fear, you will impart that fear and doubt into him without every saying the words around

him. Fearful or not, receive the encouragement and strength of others around you to develop this kind of thinking and living.

3. Begin to develop responsibility in your toddler. If someone speaks to him, help him learn to respond by waving or looking or smiling to the affectionate, older friend. If he throws something on the floor, help him pick it up and put it where it goes. Do it with him, not for him. Don't let it go. Don't wait for a more convenient moment "when you have time" or when the moment is less embarrassing. He will respond to loving firmness well. If you negotiate with him you will lose the case for a long time, probably forever. Don't fear his tears and don't accept a tantrum, not even once. Still, the situation is not about you. It is not about your frustration, embarrassment or anger. It is about bringing him into personhood respectably. If he needs firmness, help him because you love and care, not because you have lost self-control.

Your baby, your toddler, will not drift into obedience and respect. Don't be afraid you will wound his psyche. He deeply needs, he wants and he expects you to be his mother/parents, not his buddy. Yes, be friendly, love deeply and raise your family out of love but with a vision for tomorrow. The focus is not winning his friendship but of winning his heart for very many delightful years to come.

There is no conflict among love and firmness and training and discipline. If your view and your attitude are right with the Lord and right with your little one, things will end well long-term, even if it means you need to cut off your natural sympathy today. This is a wonderful cord-cutting exercise, an investment in his future character that is crucial. Die to yourself in the moment, and he will live to thank you for a very long time.

He is a separate person, don't live for him. If you are living his life for him at age two, when will you stop? The longer you live his toddler-life for him, the more you stunt his ability to respond to his age-appropriate environment responsibly, and to others. If he does not learn to live as a happy, responsive, obedient toddler, it may be a fantasy that he will suddenly reflect those qualities and that character in the next age stage.

4. By the way, it is never too early to include your little one in what you are doing. Give him something to do. He wants to be involved and he wants to "help". Make a decision once for all to never say "you are too young to do that", or "I'm too busy right now". Equally important, cut the cord on your own need to accomplish a lot of things "that matter" instead of taking time to teach him. If he shows interest and you show disinterest or "have other things to do", one day when you are interested he will not be, because you have taught him by neglect that what he is doesn't count, and that he is not really important after all. You would probably never say that, but that is what he will hear you say when he reads your attitude and distancing actions.

One of my favorite early photos of our little Amy Lyn is at age two making her bed. She was so excited she could help. She grew effortlessly into that as part of her daily life. By the time it might seem like a chore, it was part of her character and part of her thinking which affected many other things in her room, house, home, school, work and life in general.

E. Pre-school age

1. Help him learn to live in his environment. If mother/parents do something, give him opportunity to do the same in an age and readiness-appropriate manner. For example, if each person at the dining table takes at least one thing to the kitchen sink counter after eating, he will learn it is not only a privilege but an effortless responsibility. By the time it might seem a chore, it is part of his life, part of his character and part of his way of thinking. This cord-cutting

exercise will not only train the little one, it will also teach parents how to live responsibly with care and mutual respect for each other in the entire family context. Such an atmosphere will make it easier for other families to visit and be comfortable in your home or invite you to theirs, knowing your little one(s) is well-trained and will not be a problem in the home.

2. Help him learn to interact with others in his environment. If someone (not talking here about strangers, but friends) speaks to him, work with him to respond cheerfully and feeling rewarded. Don't let him ignore others who pay attention to him. Do work with him to speak back, whether it be with a wave before the little one can talk well, or a simple return greeting or handshake. It is a proper time to teach him manners in this process, such as "sir", "thank you", "no, thank you", etc.

Your fear that you will embarrass him if you work with him in front of others may be more about fear you will be the one(s) embarrassed, not him. Cut the cord, now, today, the first time, this time and each time. It won't take long, and it won't need help often. Do it now quickly, or hurt often, long and perhaps shamefully. It all depends on what you do with your umbilical cord. It will be a great loss if the little one does not learn this respectful behavior. By not teaching him to do it, you have taught him he has no responsibility to others unless he feels like it. Cutting the cord is at least as important for you as it is for him. If you don't grow into this kind of age-appropriate communication as an enjoyable, but expected, response you will likely find yourself in despair in teen years wondering what happened to your child whom you love so desperately.

3. Take the time to help him learn to do things. By age three and four, Nathan and Steven had their own hammers. With a pile of nails they learned to drive nails into a board where it was "their accomplishment". And no, it wasn't dangerous and they didn't hurt their fingers badly. It was so easy to admire what they were doing and teach them ever-improving techniques. Due to our respect of their age-appropriate developing abilities, it was so easy for them to respect and desire more of our family environment. They hit the board with a hammer, not the dog or couch or windows. Yes it took my/our time when it was not convenient, but priorities always win, and his/their little lives were the top of my/our priority list.

Robin and Amy were ages three and five, but wanted to hold my Sawzall while I cut out a countertop in the kitchen. Their intense concentration in our many photos clearly indicates they were aware how important they were to the task, to the moment, and to me/us as the family. It was their delight to be "helpful" and it was my cord-cutting pleasure to help them be helpful.

This is like growing a crop. You don't really plant a tree, you plant a seed. You don't really make a young man or a young woman because you talk about certain things when they are teenagers. You can talk to them easily then because you planted the seed earlier. You grow a man, you grow a woman best when they are seedlings. A tree or a vine is so easy to water, to train, to prune and bring into fruitfulness when they are planted where they belong as a seed. Too long waited will bring too early disappointment.

F. Elementary school age

1. Cut off your over-protective sympathy. Help him learn well and enjoyably the disciplines of good character, responsibility and forethought. Don't study for him. Help him learn to possess and "own" his own lessons, his classes, his fun times. Help him feel they are his importance in life at the moment so he understands your care, your affirmations, your appropriate discipline, if and as necessary. Continue entrusting him with secrets and the right to

have his own secrets. Allow him privacy and he will respect yours. Knock on his bedroom door, and he will knock on yours. It doesn't just happen, but it will happen if you tenderly train him. This is the further development of a way of thinking.

He needs you to cut the cord to allow him to live in this way and you in turn need it for the sake of mutual respect. The growing result is an ever-maturing atmosphere of mutuality, of mutual appreciation, of thinking like loving and loved individuals in coordination with each other, caring for each other, not living in fear or with dread of the next crisis.

2. Teach him to think for himself with you, with you, not instead of you or you instead of him. He should be learning teamwork, importance of himself in the family, in his school and in the church. It is right to be protective, concerned, watchful and careful for him. It is not right to exercise those parental necessities out of fear. Cut the cord, pray for him and live in a way you can parent him for his sake as well as yours. Even as he is learning to like being with others, your cultivated atmosphere will keep his orientation positive and proud of his family. His friends may wish they had such a family and provide opportunity for helping them and ministering things of the gospel to them and their families. It will be easy to lead him into the love of God when he sees how his mother/parents/family live.

3. These years are so crucial. They are not the time to only begin building interest, respect, character and developing abilities. It is time to continue building on the foundation you already began to lay on the first day baby came home from the hospital. If you have not started before, however, start now. Be honest with the Lord, with each other, with your little one. Be realistic and the results will come as surely as two parts of oxygen plus hydrogen yields water by which to live.

During the time our children were at this age, we had several single men living with us. We included them in our family life in every way. Each member of our family, including them, had housekeeping responsibilities on a scheduled basis. One evening, one of the boys did something that clearly needed discipline. The discipline I rendered was not allowing our son to help Star and Matthew do the dishes that night. He was absolutely heart-broken that he didn't get to help, and the problem never occurred again.

Because of cultivated interest and developing skills, when Nathan and Steven were ages nine and eight respectively, I bought Nathan an electric saber saw and Steven an electric drill. By so doing, they learned to share as they needed each other's tool. They learned how to care for the tools properly. Because their desire was full, it was easy to teach them what they could and could not do, and when. I bought them each a little tool box which they cared for and protected. And little sisters, of course needed to be like their big brothers, so they were learning the same things and each had their own tool boxes.

You may say, "Richard, this was easy for you because you are a builder, and Christine grew up on the farm." You may be surprised to know I graduated in Psychology and did student teaching in Drama as well as woodshop at a mental institution. I didn't really like tools and have very little natural skill with my hands in the trades. I was a school teacher who liked books and people, not a carpenter who understood practical things.

That is why I have confidence nearly everyone can learn to help their children in practical training at an early age and thereafter. You may be also surprised that while the girls also learned how to jackhammer concrete, how to build things and how to garden along with their feminine developmental interests, the boys also learned drama, ballet and sewed with great imagination and skill during this stage.

How was this workable? Were we wealthy and had lots of free time? Not even close. We lived by a thread of income, and our schedule was consuming, but our family and church life commitment spontaneously provided a wonderful and enjoyable atmosphere full of opportunities.

G. Middle school and high school age

1. As physical changes begin to take place in his/her body, anticipate the needs with a secure home, open communication and mutual respect that has been developed through the years since his/her birth. If you got a later start in this process, be honest with the Lord, with each other as parents and with your child. Build trust by being trustworthy, consistent, meaning what you say and saying what you mean. Humble yourself, and admit mistakes. If you don't, how will your children learn they should? Cut the cord that either ignores or over-controls.

2. Behavior may begin to change as independence and individuality seem to blossom. A foundation well laid along the ways makes this a time to enjoy and further mature as a family, not a time of fear, of panic and "can't wait 'til it's over" atmosphere. Above all, commit to each other that communication will always be maintained no matter what comes along. You are still a parent, not firstly a friend. Be friendly, but firstly be a parent. React according to need and for the sake of truth and accuracy for his sake, not because you are disappointed or angry.

3. Long before now you should have developed an atmosphere of pleasant regular family meetings and eating together at regular times. Never use meal times to solve personal or disciplinary problems. Make meal time always a positive event, a time to discuss, to share, to laugh, to plan together pleasant things. No matter what difficulties may need solving afterwards, an established pattern of enjoying being together while eating will be a bedrock reference point in family ties and family growth.

Continue exercising yourself to cut the cord of fear, of control, of manipulating decisions for your benefit instead of what is best for him and/or the family as a whole. Seek excellence, not self-preservation. Remember your consecration of your baby to the Lord without any strings attached.

4. We continued at this stage to cut the cord for the sake of our sons and daughters. By this time our house was full of hospitality, fellowship, enjoyment and hard work. Each child knew he was so important and necessary to each other and to the family. We all learned to do everything and cut off our own desires and schedules to support one another.

Whether it was having a family funeral in the back yard for Nathan's pet mouse; admiring brother Merle supervising Steven making a coffee table for Mother's Day when he was about twelve; or mother/parents/and both sons and daughters heading up to the barn in the dark at 5:30 a.m. to give Robin's pig a shot before her school bus came; or welcoming Amy's many little girl friends for a wholesome slumber party, we were growing together as a family even as each child was becoming a beautiful individual, properly independent in the way of coordination and fellowship.

H. High school and college age

1. Your baby is now a boy in an ever-developing man's body. He needs a secure place to stand, and that place is foundational if you have learned how to properly cut the cord all through the years. Uncertainties continue and perhaps expand, but fear and regrets should not be anywhere near the top of the list.

2. This is a time when mother/parents may be tempted to increase efforts to “live through their baby”. It is tempting for many to make up in and through their child for the failures of their own childhood and adulthood. It is also tempting to over-influence planning choices of colleges, trades, professional goals, etc. Remember, your baby, your child, your young man is a complete person and always has been. Yes, he still needs you very much. He needs you and you need him. He needs you to realize he is a separate person so he can be a complete part of the family he loves. He does not need you to live for him on his behalf. He is open for discussion if he can trust you. He is not open for discussion if he has learned you will insinuate him into an uncomfortable place where you have imposed your will upon his life. Cut the cord, and it will be a blessed opportunity to continue building your lives together.

Your task is, and has been, to nurture, to guide in word and by example, to build trust and respect. Your task is not to produce an adult-appearing child in your image who resents you and wants to escape as soon as possible. Such withdrawal may appear in the form of rebellion, stubbornness, secrecy, strange behavior and assorted deviancies. Actually, it may be an over-simplified desperation version of cutting the umbilical cord in his way, in his belated timing, mangling himself and your relationships in the process...because you may not have done it properly, gradually and progressively.

Again, your child and your family may have disappointing results for other reasons. This text is not all-inclusive. It is meant to encourage, to enlighten and to guide. It is not meant to make you feel guilty or in despair or to be self-condemned. If these thoughts are helpful, take them. If not, lay them aside except where they are constructive and helpful to your situation. And, never, ever give up on your child or yourself/yourselves and your family unity, cultivation and blossoming. God never gives up on one whom He is seeking, and neither should you.

Pray, believe, walk in faith. Continue to work on your loving, firm communications with honest intentions and exemplary lifestyle. It is not your task to produce a perfect son, so don't think of his perfecting as though you were producing a polished piece of exotic furniture for a showroom. Although it is important you have your son account for everything you see, wisdom will teach you that you don't have to “see” everything. Love is bigger than tit-for-tat problems. Enjoy each other, laugh, plan things together in which your son and mother/parents are all honored, respected and accounted for in importance to the family's well-being many years from now.

3. By building on the foundation of which I write, our boys were journeymen in several trades by the time they were fifteen and sixteen. At this age they started their own cabinet installation company and were sub-contractors for Tennessee Building Products in subdivisions of new construction. For several years already, both they and the girls had earned enough money at this stage to begin buying most of their clothes, fun things, transportation and saving money for their marriages and college. If something happened to me, they could have supported themselves and the family on a professional level, even as they continued preparing themselves for later years.

Robin and Amy had developed many abilities as well and were prepared for college training in the medical field, and each was capable of supporting themselves and a family if necessary by the time they were twenty-one or earlier. Thankfully, they all were believers in our Lord Jesus and the church life gave us all perspective, empowerment and purpose.

During the time the girls were fourteen and sixteen, and the boys were eighteen and twenty, it was necessary for me to commute to California to work for well over three years. My

wife stood against her fears and emotion and encouraged me to go for the sake of the family. She was cutting the umbilical cord in a significant way. As a man, and as a dad I also lived a life of cord-cutting. Even more, the four children understood why I needed to go. They also cut the cord of their own needs out of necessity and willingly sent me off with much emotion and affection. I was able to visit on about eight weekends each year, sometimes a little more frequently or longer.

Instead of destroying the family, in spite of monstrous complications in every direction and from every side, we made it through and we made it through stronger than ever. The Lord is never so much in affirmation as when the impossible becomes your place of faith, safety and certainty. Christine and each of the children each came to visit me at least once a year even though it seemed financially impossible.

During my absence for several years, our home in Nashville had no furnace in the freezing winters and we had only one tiny kerosene heater in our huge house one winter. My niece moved in with us while attending Trevecca from out of state during this time. She and Steven (who was at Nashville Tech in college), Robin and Amy (who were in high school) would take off their shoes and get in bed with Christine for awhile in the evening and do their homework, because the water bed someone had given us was the only warm place in the house. Christine's cord-cutting mentality turned every crisis into a blessing.

Meanwhile, Nathan had gotten a Tennessee Real Estate license when he was seventeen, and came out to California to help me on my job. While he was there he got his California General Contractor's license at twenty-one, and was my subcontractor in ceramic tile and finish carpentry on a subdivision I developed and built for a customer.

I thought my dear wife had run out of tears years before, but one night she was crying on the telephone when I called home. I asked her why she was crying. She said, "I'm not crying because I'm upset. I'm crying because I'm so happy. We have four teenagers. So many families have children who want to leave home as soon as possible. They are all so mature and capable, but none of them want to leave us. They just like to be here."

I. Adulthood

1. If there have been difficulties in separation due to college distance, job decisions, marriage possibilities or crises, grandchildren complications, etc., remember, keep cutting the cord. The best way to love forever is to not give in to controlling anew, again or more. The way to love and be needed and loved mutually forever is the way of respect and understanding; real respect and understanding that allows for real differences and real disappointments that leave you in good standing with your son/daughter and his/her decisions and future and his/her chosen life.

Stand firm in the Lord privately, and love genuinely, courteously and with integrity. If he senses his choices or mistakes have aroused your opinions and the chance to say something to "help" him (again), he will sense your umbilical cord is still reaching out to control him though he has desperately tried to cut it off. If he senses your total acceptance of him as a person regardless of his attitude or situation, love will have a way to bless, to cover, to recover and multiply its affect sooner rather than later.

2. Continue your cord cutting even when your son(s)/daughter(s) have their own families, occupations and pre-occupations. If perchance they are near you geographically, don't try to make up for lost time by being a nuisance or controlling them. Remember, he is a complete

person and always has been and his family is his family, not yours. His family is not designed to be an extension of your imposing umbilical cord. If you have lived like you believe that, he will be delighted to see you often and bring his spouse and children into the world you grew for him, a world where umbilical cord-cutting is the norm, a blessing and a forecast for the normalcy of a wonderful extended family life. Love will reign instead of fear, mutual appreciation will advance instead of distance, and fulfillment will manifest itself beyond your wildest dreams.

3. In fifty-one weeks, we had four weddings and by their choice each of our four children and their families chose to live within thirty minutes of our house. We talk with each other at least weekly and meet together often. It seems there is always full mutual support and rarely a problem among us needing resolved. Their homes reflect the tone and demeanor and practice of the principles of which I have written. Their children are a delight to watch as they cherish each other, instruct each other, and are developing manual and academic skills along the way.

Each and all are lovers of the Lord and the Lord has been faithful in so many impossible situations which have been, and some situations which may be difficult for a long time. Our collective testimony is that God is, that God is loving and dependable, and we are His for His purpose. Cord-cutting is a small price to pay to experience His blessings along the way, and hopefully until He comes for us, or until the next generation continues.

Lest I give a wrong impression, my/our family has been through many experiences, any one of which might have destroyed our family or a shallow faith. It has not been the absence of difficulties, but the exercise of cord-cutting, God-ordained blessings that have taken us through so many situations bigger than me/us, and strengthened our ties with one another, with God and with the church increasingly through the years. We cannot but worship Him for His faithfulness in spite of too many human failures. Nevertheless, it seems He is given to honor the principles and the exercise of searching for the end of the umbilical cord as I have fellowshiped with you here.

I hope what I have written will be an encouragement to you. I hope you will not find yourself comparing yourself to us or to others. Each mother/parents/family is different. The principles apply to us all, but we all need to seek Him in our own situation, in His way for His purpose. We seek not uniformity but unity, and the principle of cutting the umbilical cord forever will assist us all in producing children and a collective community where this enjoyment is possible, applicable and visible.

II. Summary of principles in Searching For The End Of The Umbilical Cord

1. Considering your baby as a separate person from the beginning
2. Practicing letting him go by wisely entrusting others with him
3. Practicing letting him go by wisely entrusting him with others
4. Establishing respect by giving him privacy in increasing measure, while teaching him to treat you and others the same way
5. Establishing respect by making him part of the whole in responsibilities and decisions
6. Developing communication with frankness, free exchange of thoughts, and growing into the ability to make viable decisions

7. Speaking honestly, yet without imposing upon his will
8. Giving freedom to fail or to shame the family, yet without cutting off loving availability
9. Cultivating an atmosphere where expression, confession and correction are without shame, and where the little one(s) comfortably mimic their mother's/parents' example of this practice
10. Directing in spiritual training and educational excellence, without forcing your view
11. Realizing from day one that your baby moved in with you, not the other way around, so live and train accordingly with Christ-centered lives and church-centered living
12. Letting the cutting of the cord separate you from your selfish possession in order to cultivate your little one into maturity so he/she will multiply that to others around him/her and replicate this practice and atmosphere in the next generation

by Richard A. Nelson/ May/ 2005