

Can You Let Them Go? When Kids Want to Serve God Away From Home

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Trevor Johnson, missionary to Papua New Guinea, is adjusting to the tribal missionary lifestyle. In recent days he and his family have gone through dengue fever, malaria, scabies and other parasites, plus “jungle gut.” In his recent letter he said things were looking much better now, though his son has an ear infection from swimming in the creek and both kids have impetigo—relatively minor agitations. Trevor didn’t die with dengue fever, though he came close. He reports that “any romance in missions disappears after a few weeks with parasites and stomach problems.”



If you were this man’s parents, or these kid’s grandparents, would you have something to say about the reasonableness of his vocation? Can’t he serve God in a suburban church in the US, within driving distance to the family home? Aren’t there enough unconverted people here?

Here is my advice. You had better be okay with *anything* God wants to do with your child.

Regardless of the fact that you raised your child and that you care about your child’s family more than anybody else possibly could, your son or daughter is still the servant of another. If you are a Christian parent, no doubt you taught them this truth yourself. This means that you have zero rights over his or her life. The word “Master” doesn’t allow for anyone else to dictate to your child what his or her life plans should be.

In my view, as a parent of children who have a bent toward wholehearted service for God wherever He leads, I view the parent’s “cost” for sending a child away as no insignificant thing. I expect some pain. Even so, my wife and I have decided that God has total rights over our children and that standing in His way is a serious problem. In fact, we’re even promoting the idea of going overseas if God wants it.

I am not excluding wise counsel from parents to their children, but do you really want to be a hindrance to your child’s future service for God? Do you actually want it said of you that you drug your feet, contended and cajoled, complained and resisted in opposition to what your child felt was God’s will? I don’t want to face God with that. Rather, I want to be my child’s biggest supporter, most faithful pray-er, and most willing servant.

Here are three comforting facts from the Bible that may help you in the transition.

Nobody could possibly love your child more than God

You love your son or daughter, but your love is next to nothing compared to God’s love for your child.

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35, 38-39)

You should memorize this passage and think of it often, especially in the night when your thoughts sometimes take a different turn. Ruminates on the fact that God cares more for your child than you do. Believe it.

Nobody knows more about your child each moment of the day than God

The whole of Psalm 139 teaches this truth. “You are intimately acquainted with all [my child’s] ways” (v. 3)

God’s omniscience covers every detail. There is no place God cannot see. The psalmist claims that darkness cannot hide your child from God’s view. “Even the darkness is not dark to You, and the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You” (v. 12).

Nobody has the power to do something about his love and his knowledge more than God

God’s love and knowledge don’t do much if He doesn’t have the power to act. Yet He is omnipotent, or “all powerful.” You are not powerful at all, actually. Think of it. If your child lived close by, could you really do anything to keep him or her from dying in a car accident, or from stepping on a rusty nail?

The angel told Mary, “For nothing will be impossible for God” (Luke 1:37).

God has given us the method of prayer to share with Him our desires for our children. But even when we are unfaithful in our prayers, we have that amazing promise to remember: “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). This powerful God is “for” your believing child, working out the difficult circumstances of life for a good result—both your child’s good and God’s ultimate good. It really cannot get any better than this.

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