



Where is the 'Good' in Goodbye?

Learning how to let go

By Cecelia Aslan

As though it were yesterday, I can still remember riding home from the hospital with our oldest daughter. A few blocks from the hospital my husband and I felt simultaneously overwhelmed – so much so that he pulled off the road for a bit until we could catch our breath. ‘She doesn’t come with any instructions!’ was our realization. Now, 28 years later, that same child is parenting her own daughter. Yes, we’ve learned much about parenting, but maybe just as importantly, we’ve learned a bit about letting go.

At this time of year, as students head off to university, the issue of parent-child separation becomes

reality for many. We want to be ‘super parents,’ and most parents I know put a lot of time and energy into parenting. So when it was time for our first goodbye (and for us, it was the distance from Central Asia to Central Ohio), my heart literally seized up: NO!

Now, 11 years later, we’ve sent four children across the ocean to start life on their own. I thought it would get easier

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(left) Cecelia riding through an orange orchard with a local friend she taught to ride.

(right) The Aslan family which has “left the nest” along with two sons-in-law.



over time, but each goodbye is much harder than the last. Now it feels like we are the ones leaving their homes each time we return to Central Asia. Each goodbye hurts more than the last. It's been challenging to learn to love our kids from afar and trust them into the Lord's hands. I feel particularly grateful to live in this era of technology that allows us to stay in touch in new ways.

Sending your children off to university, or to a job in another city, or overseas, is an act of faith. We never know what will result, or if we will like the results. We wonder, "Did we build an adequate foundation? Did we give our child the skills to cope with what life will throw at them? Will my child withstand temptation or doubt?"

Not all cultures see the value of 'cutting the apron strings' with children. Where we live, I've met many parents, who, when their child gets accepted to a university in another city, will uproot their lives and move with them, so that mom can continue to cook, clean and iron for their child and enable the student to commit full time to their studies. When children remain unmarried, they will continue to live with their parents until the parents die. In a home I visit several times a week, three unmarried children in their fifties remained living with their elderly mother until she passed away a few months ago. Now, at this late date, they have to learn how to live without her guidance.

In the USA, I appreciate our emphasis on teaching children responsibility at a young age (my kids started doing their own laundry when they were tall enough to reach the buttons on the machine!) and helping them become independent, functioning adults. Yet it seems that some unhealthy parenting patterns have emerged here as well. Some parents don't relegate their roles and thus remain overactive, 'hovering' in their children's lives or never leaving the cockpit. (See sidebar links to articles on 'helicopter' and 'cockpit parenting'.)

As parents who follow Christ, the model we have is Father God. Had he been selfish, a 'hovering parent' if you will, he might have kept his son in heaven with him, hoarding all that

A definition and some links

Super-parenting definition: Being all things to your children so that all of them can succeed in all the ways you didn't.

That is a tongue-in-cheek answer, but most parents I know really want to be good parents and go to a variety of extremes to enable their children to grow to be successful, well-balanced adults. They read books, take classes, and consult experts. For some, 'super-parenting' means car-pooling to a never-ending list of events, lessons and sports; for others, it means dedication to the best options available in education; for some, it means choosing home education; for others, it means using organic or earth-friendly products; for some, it means protecting a child from the harshness of the world until they are older. For a few, it means attempting this whole list! Conscientious parents today are more well-informed than parents of any other generation and are generally taking a more hands-on approach than ever before – thus, the term 'super parent.'

www.huffingtonpost.com/christine-hassler/cockpit-parents_b_836914.html

www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helicopter_parent



love for himself. However, we know that ‘He loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son.’ He was willing to relinquish his only son for the greater good, for a greater goal. Well, you might say, ‘He was God. With him, all things are possible.’

Parenting is a gift and a privilege. At our children’s dedication service, we acknowledge them as gifts from God and promise to do our best to raise them well and to release them to the will of God. It’s an easy promise to make when the expected ‘release’ is 18 years down the road.

Here are a few thoughts. First, God has entrusted us, as parents, to raise our children with wisdom and balance. Second, understand that your task of letting go has already started no matter the age of your child. We do our children no favor by always doing everything for them. In fact, it’s an efficient way to cripple them. Give your children age-appropriate tasks and let them know that you have high expectations of them. This varies for different children, but no one knows them better than you. Thirdly, have trial runs. When we took our oldest daughter off to a four-day mini-camp at age seven, she dragged her feet to the extent that we later teased her that her heels plowed ‘furrows’ into the camp’s driveway. Yet when I stopped in two days later to check on her, she was enjoying herself so much that she simply ran past with a group of friends and waved, ‘Hi mom.’ My heart broke that day, even as it soared. A week with grandparents or a short-term overseas trip builds healthy trust and confidence for future, longer-term separations.

Finally, when your child goes away for the first time, resist the urge to visit him or her two weeks later or even a month later. The first time I went away to university, it was far enough away that I couldn’t afford to go home until Christmas. I think that can be a good thing. Give your children time to adjust and find their own routine, to learn to fly on their own wings, even to be homesick. They CAN learn to do their own laundry!

It pains us when our children seem eager to leave – anxious for independence. At those times, we need to resist clinging or forcing promises from them. At those times, cling to Jesus and let him soothe your parent’s heart. I love it that, before his death, Jesus assigned one of his good friends, John, to care for his own mother.

I think that is a picture of how sometimes our familial relationships will be replaced by other relationships. During the teen years, and sometimes before, our children will begin to depend more on friends, a girlfriend or boyfriend, co-workers or a mentor, all of whom take on the role of advisor in your child’s life. And ultimately, don’t we want our children to learn to rely more and more on Jesus, allowing him to guide and carry them?

Just this morning, the truth of the ‘need to release’ was brought home to me. Over the past 18 months, I’ve been teaching some of my local female friends how to ride a bike, something that was not encouraged when they were young. During the initial lessons, I hold onto the bike tightly and repeatedly reassure them that I won’t let them go. I teach them the fundamentals of using a bicycle and explain how important it is to do what I say, for their own safety. The time comes, though, when I continue to run alongside the bike, but secretly let them go, seeing how they can manage without my support. This can be difficult because it increases the likelihood of a fall or crash. It would be easier on me to continue to hang on, but that would not release them to ride themselves. Eventually, I admit to my friends that I am not holding them any longer! Generally, they have a moment of panic, before realizing that ‘I AM RIDING A BIKE!’ It’s party time! In the excitement of the moment, we do a little jig of happiness together.

That might be a good parenting step – taking time to celebrate the accomplishment and actualize the creation of a masterpiece. Together, do the ‘WE DID IT’ jig. As Dr. Seuss tells us, “Don’t cry because it’s over, smile because it happened.”

Parenting is an astounding responsibility, one we don’t usually feel prepared for. But ‘un-parenting’ is no less major a task. Let’s do both well as we seek to build our families into people who will expand God’s Kingdom here on earth. **BB**

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(Right) The girl on the left is the reluctant camper!

