

when God says “go,” and parents say “no.”

My parents were full of conflicting emotions when my wife and I first thought God was calling us to a term in South America.

They called themselves Christians, as 90 percent of the people in England do, but they weren't churchgoers. Nevertheless, they were somewhat proud that I was going to a distant part of the world and that I would be representing something good. They were proud that their child was doing something different from the general run of things, so they had something to talk about with their neighbors that their friends didn't have to talk about.

But at the same time they were often quite embarrassed because they didn't know quite how to articulate what I was doing. If I had been going overseas to work with a bank, they could have talked about that with their friends. But since I was going to be a missionary--what were they to say? They didn't have the vocabulary to talk about it.

Besides that, we just had our first child, and they were now grandparents. They felt that they were being deprived because they would not be able to see their children or their grandchildren. It left a void for them.

After I returned from Chile in 1970, I helped train recruits for our mission, the South American Missionary Society. Once a year, we held a conference for the parents of missionaries. A large proportion of our missionaries' parents came; many of them were non-Christian.

Often at the conferences, late into the evening, we would see the parents gathered around the tables talking to one another, showing off their children's photographs. They talked about the reasons they resented the fact that their children were overseas. But when they were able to talk to other parents of missionaries, some of these resentments dissipated.

One cause of resentments is that they think their children are throwing away a promising career. While many say, as my parents did, "I'm really thrilled that my son is not doing what everyone else is doing," at the same time they're thinking, "Why can't he do what everybody else is doing? Why does he throw away his life like this?"

Another problem is the insecurity of it all. Many parents, especially those who haven't traveled much,

picture their children in the midst of a jungle somewhere with wild animals roaring at them, snakes hissing at their feet, and spiders climbing up their pant legs.

Parents also worry about what will happen if they need their children. As they get older and frail, they want to know whether their children will be able to fly home in an emergency.

What to do When Parents Say No

- Reflect on the way you've represented your great ideas before. You've sounded certain about so many other things that you are no longer very interested in. They've seen you dating three or four different people and every one of them, you thought, was God's one for you. How are your parents to know this plan to go overseas is not just another of your many enthusiasms?

- Ask them to pray with you for several months about your plans. If your parents are Christians, say to them, "Can we both seek the guidance of God during the next six months? If it's right for me, I trust that God will show that to you. If that's not so, then one of us is wrong. And it may be me." This kind of humility is important.

- Ask them why they feel as they do. And listen carefully! They may be right! As your parents, they know you better than you know yourself. Let them know you really want to know why they are so strongly opposed. Then question yourself quite carefully. A high proportion of missionaries should never have gone overseas. I know people who really didn't have what it took to be out there. If I had only spoken to their parents first, I would have known that.

- Introduce them to someone senior in the mission agency. When my parents met some people who are overseeing me, they found out they were good and competent people, and they were not odd. I got out of the way for part of that time so my parents could talk to the mission representatives alone. Then they could say things they knew about me that the mission needed to know.

- Let them know you haven't just dismissed their objections. I said to my dad, "You're right, Dad. I realize that if I follow what I believe to be the Lord's call to the mission field, that means I won't have the kind of career I would if I stayed here. Neither will I earn the kind of money that I could. I've really strug-

gled with that. But I've come to the conclusion that there are bigger values and issues."

- Bear in mind the ridicule your parents may face from friends. Sometimes the criticisms they express most stridently are not what they feel, but are reflections of the unkind things other people have said to them that they couldn't answer. Confronting you may be their way of looking for answers.
- Express your gratitude for their past provisions for you. I said, "Dad, I couldn't be doing this were it not for the excellent education you've given me. If I need all this education to make progress in this society, I need even more to be effective in another culture."
- Help them to realize many missionaries are dealing with more urgent and fundamental questions than what we meet here. For instance, the missionaries in my mission are saving whole populations from starvation, helping develop agriculture, teaching farm management and developing literacy programs. A number of parents visited our work and were very impressed with what we were doing. One father, a cattle breeder, looked over our stock and gave the most unusual gift any mission may have ever gotten—bull semen!
- Seek counsel from an older Christian who knows your family. The point may come when you must go in the face of parental opposition. But first, find an older Christian who will tell you whether you're an impetuous young person. If so, perhaps you should wait for a little while. A year may seem like the end of the world to you, but it may be better for you to go later.
- If you do leave in the face of parental opposition, it's good to know you have left behind somebody who cares for you and your parents. A lot can happen while you're away. I've seen antagonistic parents won over, and I've seen the chasm become so wide that it can never be bridged. Having this mutual friend helps prevent the chasm from getting any wider.
- Let them know you'll take care of them as they grow older. It's good to have a family chat with siblings about who will take care of your parents as they grow older. It's our Christian responsibility to see that our parents have adequate provision and care.

- Realize the costs they pay when you go overseas. Parents face more of the costs of missionary service than their children. You've got the adventure; you get to go to new places. But your parents are left behind, with your photograph over the fireplace. The Lord may assess their contribution as greater than yours.

It's also important to show your appreciation for their sacrifice; once you leave, go out of your way to keep up the communication. My wife, Renee, and I still call her parents in England once a month.

We tried to give our parents such a clear description of our daily activities that they could sit in their armchair on a winter's evening and picture exactly what we were doing. We often slipped copies of our slides (without the cardboard frame) into our letters. We sent my parents one of a Mapuche woman holding our 4-year-old, just like a granny. Wouldn't you know, that's the photo they put over the mantelpiece