

The Stretch of Parenting

This afternoon, my wife and I helped our youngest child load his car with many of his earthly belongings. We checked and double-checked to make sure he wasn't forgetting anything important. We checked the oil in the car and made sure it was ready for the journey. We hugged his neck and prayed with him, asking God's blessings on this trip and in the coming semester. Then we sat down on the front porch and watched as he started his car, waved, pulled out of the driveway, and drove down the road until his car disappeared from view.

No, I didn't cry. But a part of me wanted to.

I couldn't help but think back to our oldest child's first day at kindergarten. At the expected time early in the morning on the first day of school, the big yellow school bus rounded the corner near our house and slowly came to a stop. The door opened, and our little girl climbed into the bus and ascended the steps. She turned and waved, and the door closed behind her. We watched together as the big yellow bus slowly pulled away, took the first left, and disappeared around the corner.

No, I didn't cry that day either. Well, maybe somewhere deep within. I remember looking at the face of my wife that morning as the bus rounded the corner and disappeared. We looked at each other, but we could not speak. Words were inadequate for the moment. So, we just looked at each other, shrugged our shoulders, and sighed.

This is part of parenting that I do not remember anyone warning me about. The part where you raise them up, and then you let them go. The part where as you watch your children grow, you realize that you are growing too -- or perhaps instead of growing, you are being involuntarily stretched! While part of you is overjoyed that your child is moving on to bigger and better opportunities, another part of you wants to go with them -- but you can't. A part of you wants to hold them tight... to keep them small... to go back to the way things used to be. But you can't. That's not what parenting is about.

I have to at times remind myself that as parents, we raise them up to stand on their own. We prepare them for times when we will no longer be around to hold them up. We teach them to think for themselves. We see to it that they are educated so they will be able to survive in this world. As parents, this is our task!

But then...

After we do our part, we see them take those steps of independence. We see them flap their wings and actually fly away. The bus drives off. The car disappears around the corner. We have no words. We shrug, and we sigh, and we move on. We know it is just part of their growth process.

And as parents, we know we are being stretched once again.

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