

OF AFRICA AND SONS

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My 18-year-old son leaves today for Africa. He'll be helping at a children's camp in Rwanda, site of the infamous genocide of the 1990s and true-life inspiration for the movie, *Hotel Rwanda*.

Brett's official itinerary includes stops in London, Ethiopia and South Africa. The unofficial version is far more complex, involving new friends, unplanned adventures, expanded independence and fresh discovery of the will of God for his unique life.

Commissioning children for their epic life-adventures is emotionally draining for a parent. Though it's what we strive toward, when the day arrives, well, it's difficult. It's not that I cried -- something was just irritating my eyes for about three days and they watered up without warning. Someone must have been slicing onions nearby.

I've learned a few valuable lessons about helping a young adult push off from the home-dock and set sail into the uncharted waters of the future.

First, preparation for departure should begin long before an 18th birthday. In fact, it should be the underlying purpose behind child-raising. Parental success can be measured in the clarity by which we impress upon a child that God has a plan for his/her life and the child's primary goal is to discover and step into that plan. Young people will stride with confidence into the future when they believe the beautiful words uttered by the prophet Isaiah: “I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not harm you; to give you hope and a future.”

As the day draws near to venture beyond home waters, remind them that there is always a harbour that they can return to. Though future visits may be sporadic, such assurances serve as roots for a young person, shoring them up when faced with inevitable storms. Belonging is beautiful.

Send them forth with a compass. God's Word has proven to be a trustworthy guide for millions who have ventured forth before them. It is truly, as King David said, “A lamp to my feet and a light for my path.” Accordingly, present them with a Bible in an easily readable modern translation.

Tidy up last-minute details. Is there anything you need to ask forgiveness for? Remember that small offences can grow exponentially, especially when watered by distance. Boldly ask if there is anything they need to discuss before departure.

Commission them. Now before you smack a bottle of bubbly over their forehead let me clarify that I'm speaking of *prayer*. Even parents who may not feel spiritually adept are wise to muster courage and pray. It is an opportunity to send a young adult forth with words of affirmation ringing in his/her ears. I suggest writing out your thoughts and reading them. It ensures a clear message is spoken and can also be sent along as a reminder of parental love when future days are cloudy. List what you appreciate and why you are proud of them. It is especially important to emphasize your love.

And finally, when the preparation is complete and the day of departure arrives, go ahead and cry -- tears simply accentuate the sincerity of the heart. While staring through blurry eyes, watching them disappear, be aware that parenting does not cease just because a child becomes an adult. The role is only adjusted; it's never quite fulfilled.