

3 Keys to Answering God's Call

This week my wife, two sons and I arrived in Norway and officially embarked on an adventure only the Lord could have started. We spent the last couple of months literally giving away, selling or packing up everything we own and saying goodbye to family and friends.

The reason? We're obeying the Lord's call to follow Him wherever He goes and to do whatever He wants us to. That's a call every follower of Jesus has, but right now our assignment looks a little different than most as we arrive in the Land of the Midnight Sun, where 82 percent of the population considers themselves Christian yet fewer than 1 percent are actively involved in a church.

Almost two years ago my wife, Amber, and I sensed God calling us to be missionaries to the nations. I grew up as a missionary kid in Hong Kong, where my parents served for more than 30 years, and from an early age Amber knew she'd be a missionary overseas someday. So this isn't exactly a "foreign" concept for us. Looking back at our lives, we marvel at how God has equipped us—from skills to practical resources to ministry vision—for this call.

Still, nothing prepares you more for a journey like this than actually leaving behind everything and going. And as we've counted the cost and prepared as much as we could, here are a few things we've already learned about the missionary journey before we ever set foot on Norwegian soil.

1. Faith is everything, yet certainty isn't.

We know that without faith it's impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). And faith, by its biblical definition, is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not

seen" (v. 1). So blind faith—the kind that involves trusting God while you walk a path you can't see—arrests God's attention and captivates His heart.

That's a good thing, because right now my family is facing more that's unseen and uncertain than tangible and secure. I recently left a job at Charisma Media that had influence (both among the masses and with kingdom matters), challenged me to grow every day, and brought security. That's a sweet gig by any measure, and it certainly doesn't seem logical to quit a job when you're at your prime. I don't know exactly how we'll pay for everything in the coming days. I don't fully know what kind of work I'll be doing or how everything will work out. In fact, we're getting used to not having an answer for lots of questions tossed our way: *What denomination or missions organization are you going with? What will you be doing? Where will you be? How long will you stay? How will you support yourself?*

Thankfully we can answer some of these questions. Though this next year is an exploratory one in which we'll intentionally "scout out the land," we know we'll be working at a Bible school in Hemsedal through November and then head far north to Tromsø for several months to help a church develop its family ministry and train young leaders. But past that, we don't know. There are open doors in other nations, and we're sure more will open for us in Norway in the coming days.

Yet this uncertainty isn't just fine, it's a good thing. Our pastors, Ron and Sandy Johnson—who've walked with us since the beginning of this journey and, as former missionaries in England, know firsthand what it's like—have continually reminded us that it wouldn't be faith if we had everything planned out and knew every detail about what lay ahead. Faith is all about what you can't see. If we want to walk in the kind of faith that pleases God, we'll adapt to depending on the true Light to guide our steps—even if we can't see where our foot is landing next.

2. The bulk of going is in the leaving.

Years ago while I was in college, the Lord spoke to me in a near-audible voice: "Go and I will lead you," He said. I was facing a future with many possible career paths and needed to make a decision, yet this phrase was so simple yet profound it became a touchstone point in my life. God didn't clear the heavens and tell me to go to this job or that one; He didn't say to head to China or Norway or Fiji. As He did with Abraham and has done with countless others, He simply said "Go." The rest would be a matter of faith.

Often we fail to move even an inch while waiting for God to tell us how many miles we should travel in His Name—even when He's already commanded us to go. *But where, God?* is our immediate response. Yet more often than not, the *whereof* our going is secondary to us actually obeying and going anywhere. God has already promised to lead us; He just wants us to go. Why? Because leaving is often the greatest obstacle we'll face in our journey—and the greatest faith-builder. As we overcome that initial obstacle, we begin to develop the faith necessary to take us through the rest of the journey—which is what pleases God in the first place (remember point No. 1?).

Since taking the initial steps to leave everything behind for the gospel, Amber and I have experienced God's overwhelming presence everywhere we turn. He's supernaturally guided and provided for us. He's filled our family with love, joy, peace, grace ... the list goes on and on. We sense it like never before. But whether we're walking under a shower of seemingly unending blessings or through a lonely, dry, uncertain path, the command is the same: *Go*. And whether that "go" is Norway or next door, it's up to each of us whether we'll obey.

3. You need friends, not just supporters.

I originally thought we'd be going to Norway as marketplace missionaries—meaning I planned to use my media skills as a

freelancer in the secular arena to help financially support our missionary work. I'll admit: As the editor of *Charisma*, I had read too many update letters from Christian ministries beating the same drum to their partners. *Send us your money*. Every bit of communication landed on the same request for money. It became obvious that these were not partners, they were donors footing the bill. Having admittedly grown cynical of this approach, I cringed at the word *partner* and didn't want to ask people for money.

But then God cornered me. In one weekend several friends—all of whom knew nothing about God calling us to the mission field—approached Amber and me out of the blue and said they would love to support us if we ever became full-time missionaries. Again and again, He made it obvious to us that partnership is really all about relationship.

"There will be times when the last thing you need from those who support you is money, but their friendship will be invaluable," He said to me. "You'll need someone you can call at 2 a.m. for counsel, someone who will pray for your family at the drop of a hat, someone who will be there for you when you need them."

Obviously, missionaries need money to accomplish their mission. But at the heart of what we do are people—both those we're ministering to and those who are helping us minister. Amber and I know that our task will not and cannot be completed without having true friends truly supporting us rather than just sending a monthly support check. Because just as much as there are those assigned and anointed to go, there are those assigned and anointed to send. We're all part of the same Great Commission calling; we just serve different functions in that as partners with God.

Despite our calling to the mission field, our heart for missions and our personal missionary backgrounds, Amber and I have so much to learn as we begin this adventure. Thankfully,

we serve a God who is not only patient to teach us what we should know but also provide us with everything we need as He leads us.

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