

Family Road Trip: Stroke of Genius or Insanity?

For many years, I went through the parenting motions, mainly concerned with my own world and only casually noticing my family's. In my mind, this was the formula to follow: Do the right stuff consistently, and our three kids—Jessica, Bethany and Caleb—would eventually “get it” and become the wonderful Christian offspring I'd always imagined and hoped they would be. It sounds ridiculous, but that's what I really believed.

Only through a family crisis did I begin to see that God wanted so much more for us. As I prayed, asking God to help me grow in authenticity and find the right way to spend time with my kids and make up for the lack of spiritual reality in our home, I sensed that God's specific strategy to help us reconnect included taking a road trip out west.

I wasn't thrilled with His plan. A family road trip? For all of us, at one time? This idea, while at first super cool and attractive to my explorer's heart, became less exciting after a few moments of sane contemplation.

Five people in one vehicle for at least a week, or maybe longer. Two teenage girls and one seventh-grade son all together with my wife, Paige, and me in a box on wheels, a steel cage not much bigger than a king-size bed. My previous driving experiences with the five of us being in one consolidated space for any length of time were not good. So far, most trips had ended up with one or more of the kids getting seriously ticked off and causing a huge uproar. Sometimes they even dragged my wife or me into the fray.

And our previous adventures had been simple, three-and-a-half-hour trips to Memphis to visit my wife's family. What would an extended, multi-state, 7,000-mile road trip do to our family

and my sanity? It seemed like a pretty bad idea to me. "Really, God?" I found myself asking. "Your best solution for our very messed-up and often irritable family is to cram us all into an SUV for two weeks and let us duke it out?"

When I broached the idea of a family road trip with Paige, I expected her to be skeptical. To my wife's credit, she didn't dismiss my idea as ridiculous, although she must have been tempted. Instead, she prayed about it for several weeks. When she finally brought it up with me later, she was willing to go.

When Paige and I agreed to go forward with our plan, I knew that either God was up to something supernatural or I was insane. Either He was in this crazy idea and divinely preparing us to personally discover what we so desperately lacked, or it was an audacious and expensive diversion I had created in my head to satisfy my own need to take action.

I was mostly sure it was God. I believed deep down that it was His idea more than mine, that He had intentionally created a divine road map for our recovery, and that He had specific things to reveal to each one of us—things we would only be able to experience on our upcoming journey to the wilderness wilds of Canada and back.

Paige and I began praying for God to reveal Himself to our kids on the trip. We prayed specifically that He would teach Jessica to trust Him wholly, that He would heal Bethany completely from her struggles of the previous year, and that He would help Caleb in his transition from boy to young man. We had hopes that He would work mightily in each child's life, but we left the details to Him.

God would have to be in this, and I was fully relying on Him to make it all work out. At first I wondered if I was supposed to share some deep and profound spiritual truth or life-changing principle on the drive out, or if we needed to read

through a new Christian book as a family. But slowly I became aware that God didn't want me to do much at all on this trip. He just needed me to yield to His leading, and He confirmed He would give me the words to share along the way at just the right times.

✖ I felt a sense of warning as well—a caution not to attempt to control my conversations with my kids, but to allow them to bring things up to me whenever they wanted. I also felt God suggesting that when my kids did come to me, I should be careful not to overteach a point but simply seek to spend time with them in the moment and let God work in their hearts.

God worked in amazing ways during our road trip, and I came home convinced that He will continue to speak to us if we only take the time to stop and listen.

God is speaking to you, too. It may just be that the other voices in your head are so loud that you rarely hear Him. Yet if you can't hear Him for yourself, you will never be able to teach your kids or lead your families with anything but our own wisdom and strength ... and that is beyond exhausting. It's impossible.

Jesus said, "What is impossible with man is possible with God" (Luke 18:27, ESV).

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