

Here I Am Lord, Send Me. But Wait... I Have Some Questions.

"I'm interested in going into vocational Christian work, but my parents don't want me to."

When the Bible clearly teaches that we are to both honor and obey our parents, it's hard to justify going against their wishes. Both the fifth commandment (Exodus 20:12) and Ephesians 6:1-3, as well as other passages, admonish children to revere and obey their fathers and mothers.

Your parents' opinions are important. Your mother and father love you and are probably as concerned with your future as you are. So, how do you weigh your parents' wishes when you're evaluating many factors in trying to discern God's leading for your future? Are their wishes the predominant criteria or merely one voice in the crowd? Neither. Your parents' wishes should be considered as a very significant piece of information, but not the determinative factor.

There was a period of time in your life when you were totally under your parents' authority. However, the Scriptures indicate that with the onset of adulthood, your accountability shifts from your parents to your own independent responsibility to God. We are always to be committed to honoring our parents, but there comes a time when we are personally accountable before God.

The Bible indicates that God considers a person an adult at the age of 20. For example, God required men 20 years old and upward to fight in the Israelite army (Numbers 1), and He expected them to pay the temple tax at the age of 20 (Exodus 38:21-26).

When Israel was ready to enter the promised land, God considered each person above 20 years accountable for his own decision to cross the Jordan or remain behind. Were this not the case, those over 20 who responded to their parents' wishes to stay would have been spared God's judgement. They were not. God held them accountable, and all those of majority age (20 years) died and did not see the land of Canaan (Numbers 32:11).

The New Testament also addresses the issue of the age of adulthood or the time of breaking with parental authority. As in Genesis 2:24, Jesus (Matthew 19:5, Mark 10:7) clearly states that a married couple should depart from their family homes (which were the places of government and parental authority) and begin their own home. Jewish men usually married by their 19th year and were held responsible before the Lord.

Jesus challenged young men (probably near the age of 20) to leave their parents and follow Him. The Bible records in mark

1:20 that, ". . . they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him" (see also Matthew 4:22). Though they had probably discussed Jesus' ministry as a family, there is no biblical record that they even consulted their parents about their vocational choice when the directive came from the Lord.

We see that the sweep of Scripture points to the necessity to honor our parents, and it recognizes that at the majority age of 20, a person must assume responsibility for his own life decisions.

It is both biblically and psychologically sound that you should develop greater autonomy throughout your college years, while still maintaining an attitude of honor and respect for your parents, supplemented by regular communication and seeking of counsel. If you are 21 years old, and your parents are still pulling the strings in your life, it is very unhealthy for both of you.

When an individual is on the threshold of adulthood (about 20 years), that person alone is responsible for the decisions he makes. The final say must belong to the individual, and this may unfortunately be contrary to parental wishes. What Jesus communicates (Luke 12:51, Luke 9:59-62, Mark 3:31-35) is that the call of God is much more important than the call of the family. We must always respect and honor our parents, but our responsibility to obey subsides when we become independent adults.

"My parents are worried that I will be wasting my major."

It is difficult to imagine a major that would not have application in some facet of the worldwide work of the Kingdom. Many organizations have positions that someone with your particular academic degree can fill.

The academic part of your education, while very important, is only one part of your higher education. While in college you also learned how to deal with pressure, how to produce, how to function under different grading styles, how to learn and, most importantly, how to get along with other people. These benefits of your education will be with you long after the specifics of your major become obsolete. These broader abilities can be significantly used in any ministry context.

Incidentally, very few individuals actually end up working directly in the field in which they majored. Just ask most people you know who have been out of school more than 10 years.

Your major field of work is not to be confused with your spiritual gifts. For example, if your chosen major is economics, and God has given you administrative abilities, His first concern is what you do with your gift of administration rather than how you use your degree. Pursuing a particular major doesn't include the responsibility to practice it; receiving a spiritual gift does.

Notice that the Lord never hesitated to call people away from their majors or life work to serve Him full time. For example, Moses, who was raised in Pharaoh's court, listened to God's call and left a prestigious leadership position. Peter "majored" in oceanography, Matthew in tax accounting and Luke in medicine. Jesus never apologized for calling them away from their "majors."

Maybe your parents are really saying, "We don't want you to waste the buying power of your education." That's understandable. But, the way that you waste something is by spending it on something of lesser value. Buying land in Florida with your life's savings, only to find that it is six feet under a lake, is wasting your money.

The most valuable commodity in all the universe is the human soul. "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:36). Certainly it is not wasteful to invest something that you have for something of higher value. In a ministry you're investing your education in the changing of people's lives for all eternity. You're purchasing the commodity of highest value. That's no waste. That's a phenomenal investment.

"What can I do to help my parents understand what I want to do?"

First of all, sit down and ask them what their questions are. "I know you have some concerns about my future decisions, and I'd like to understand them" will go a long way in opening up communication. By taking the time to listen, you're not only

showing consideration and respect, but you'll also be better able to address their specific questions.

Explain what you want to do and why (your parents need to see your heart and the depth of your conviction). Calmly communicate your goals and desires, and give them adequate information on the organization that you will be with. Most Christian organizations have adequate to excellent programs for insurance, health care and retirement. Good organizations will be pleased to send information regarding their salary and benefit package. Many objections come from misinformation or a total lack of information. Talk to your parents in the context of how much you appreciate them and all that they have done for you.

If you sense pressure to fulfill their expectations more than your convictions, then consider saying, "I want you to know how much I've appreciated all you've sacrificed for my education. Now that I'm making my career choices do you have some expectations in return for your investment or am I free to make my own choices?" Getting their expectations out on the table will help both you and them evaluate their validity. Remember: your parents want what they perceive to be the best for you.

"What are some other steps I can take?"

Be filled with the Holy Spirit, and pray for your parents. Determine specifically what questions or objections your parents have.

Take the initiative to get answers and helpful information for your parents.

Introduce your parents to other people involved with the organization in which you are interested.

Begin to take personal responsibility for the decisions you have to make.

Be firm and assured in your call to vocational Christian work. Parents easily can sense apprehension, which can raise further doubts in their minds. Remember that disapproval probably does not mean that your parents will disown you. For most parents their children will always remain exactly that -- their children. Letting go is often very difficult.

In response to commonly asked questions, Roger Randall has written a series of articles about full-time vocational ministry. Roger, who has served on the staff of Campus Crusade for Christ for 25 years, has counseled thousands of university students and young professionals regarding their career decisions.

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