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My Kids Made Me Do It: My Journey into Global Missions

Dale Zevenbergen

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Abstract

" I... saw a thread throughout the entirety of scripture of God's heart for the nations and for God's glory to be made known in the lives of all people."

Posting about obeying God's call to spread the gospel from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/my-kids-made-me-do-it-my-journey-into-global-missions/>

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Comments

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My Kids Made Me Do It: My Journey Into Global Missions

Dale Zevenbergen

June 15, 2022

*This article is the final part of our ongoing series: **Living with Intentionality**. Our lives are a series of decisions of how best to love others, care for our creation, seek good, prevent harm, and glorify God. We will highlight these articles where fellow believers make very intentional choices that can expand our imagination for the Christian life.*

As we make our way through life, we grow and change and our priorities shift. This certainly has been the case for me, as “living with intentionality” 18 years ago would have meant something very different to me than it does today. I accepted Jesus as a kid and have followed him for as long as I can remember, but prior to 2004, I would have to admit I had an American Dream version of Christianity. I think my heart was in a decent place, as I had good spiritual disciplines and I was serving others well in my work and in my family, but my priorities and passions have shifted dramatically since then.

As I look back, if I’m completely transparent, I have to admit that God used my kids to transform my heart and priorities. Although humbling for me to admit, it rings true.

After navigating infertility, grieving three miscarriages and the loss of a son at six days old, my wife Tammy and I were thankful that God had given us two precious daughters. We had reached a place of contentment and gratitude even though we had wanted more children. In 2004, God began to stir in our hearts that we needed to add to our family through adoption. A year later, we were deep in the international adoption process, and by March of 2006 we were in China bringing our beautiful girl home. Two years later (May 2008), we were back in the same city bringing our son home. Our adoption stories profoundly affected my understanding of God’s love for me and for all of His children. I experienced the deepening of a passion to celebrate and support other families navigating adoption and foster care, and this experience opened my understanding of Scripture passages like James 1:27 and Isaiah 1:17 as I further grasped God’s love for His world. God was transforming my heart and priorities, and he worked through my children. Beautiful.

Ten years later, God began to stir a passion for global missions in my children, and I, once again, found God at work in my life through them. I always appreciated and supported missionary efforts of my local church, but I didn’t feel very connected. One Sunday dinner shared with my

daughters and their college friends, I prayed and, as I often did, added a habitual and common generic phrase “be with us, keep us healthy and safe.” After I closed, my oldest asked, “So, dad, are we supposed to be safe or are we supposed to be obedient?” A bit taken aback, I smiled and said, “Well honey, you can go be obedient; I’m gonna pray that you’re safe”. That was a defining interaction where I began to understand that running after Jesus doesn’t mean a comfortable and easy life, achieving the American Dream.

Pushed by my daughters and their desire to live out their love for Jesus in a different country, I dove into books, resources, and events about long-term, full-time global mission work. I was learning about having a global perspective on missions, and an eternal perspective on life¹. Most importantly, I started reading more intentionally in the most important book, God’s Word. I had been taught (rightfully, I think) to read the Bible as a metanarrative—the story of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation. And while that narrative is certainly there, I also saw a thread throughout the entirety of scripture of God’s heart for the nations and for God’s glory to be made known in the lives of all people.

I began to read Matthew 28—The Great Commission—like I never have before. I always treated it like many Christians do: as an option or a suggestion. As it turns out, it was a command, and I know I was ignoring it. We exist to glorify God and enjoy Him forever,² and He invites us to join Him in making His name known to every people group in the world. What an honor and what a task.

This eternal perspective has changed how I see and feel about our oldest and her family being on the other side of the world in Indonesia, and my granddaughters being so far away, and how we support our second daughter as she goes through training to head to the Unreached as well. Whenever I pity myself about the discomfort and inconvenience of living so far apart, I remind myself of Revelation 7:9-12.³

While I don’t get to see my kids and granddaughters nearly as much as I’d like, and my life is a lot different than the American-Dream-Christianity I was living 20 years ago, I remember the Spirit’s work, planting seeds and nurturing those seeds by my kids, and growing my heart for all people groups to know about Jesus’ love. I’m so thankful God has been working on my heart, even if He needed to use my kids to make me do it.

1. If you’re interested in further reading and more involvement in global missions, I recommend *Radical* and *Something Has to Change* by David Platt, *The Hole in our Gospel* by Richard Stearns, and *Don’t Waste Your Life* by John Piper, attending conferences (like *Engage Global*, *The Cross Conference*, *Secret Church*, and *The Journey Course*), watching the documentary *The Insanity of God*, or downloading

the *Joshua Project App*, a resource reminder to pray daily for unreached people groups

2. Westminster Confession, Question and Answer #1

3. After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. **10** And they cried out in a loud voice:

- “Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb.”

11 All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, **12** saying:

- “Amen!
Praise and glory
and wisdom and thanks and honor
and power and strength
be to our God for ever and ever.
Amen!”