

Letter to Parents and Care Givers

Sky Siu

Dear Mums and Dads, Aunties and Uncles,

When you are young, they tell you that when you get older, you get wiser. Then you grow up and find out that in wisdom lies the fact that the more you know about life, the more you realise you don't know. At this point, while many of the older generation will express this sentiment to you as well, what many don't tell you is that the wisdom of finding out about yourself, not just life in general, requires a process. This process is not dependent just on time and experiences lived or accumulated, but one that requires intentional self reflection, consideration of our past experiences, confrontation of all that is brings - the fear, the pain, the joys and the celebrations and support.

The first time I learned how important self-reflection is as part of embracing one's own identity as an MK, was when I was in my 3rd year of university. Ruth Van Reken had come to share with us about her first memory of being in boarding school at the age of 5. I watched her share with great emotion, her journey of painful and conflicted thoughts and feelings of abandonment that she had been carrying from childhood, written down in her book "Letters never sent". In that hour, I saw how much this woman had lived as a person, but it amazed me how these letters she had written when she was young became a platform for her years later, as an adult to help her process what she had experienced. Although it was not an easy journey, her efforts to confront it all made her a stronger individual with a voice and passion that God has continued to use to advocate for MK needs in a changing mission landscape.

We all need something to help us process and opportunities to work through our struggles, and I write this letter to you, because I think you might be a key part of it.

On behalf of MKs like myself, thank you so much for your love and care for your children and those under your care. Your prayers, your thoughts, the time you spend thinking and planning for our lives, you have no idea how much your efforts have made a difference and will continue to do so for the rest of our lives. We know that God loves us, but it also because you have taught and showed us what His love means. When we didn't know how to speak to God, you have taught us how, when we had no words, you spoke on our behalf and when we forgot, you gently reminded us that He does.

But, our relationship with you, especially as Asians, is a complicated one. We have an innate sense to respect, to obey and to honour you, even though we are educated in a culture that encourages us to be independent of family and speak out even if it contradicts you. This conflict is not easy and we will never show you or tell you this; in fact, we may not think much about this at all, because that conflict that we live in is the norm. This internal conflict however, will not go away and with time, it will be apparent to us. It can cause us confusion, guilt, shame and anger not just towards you, but ourselves and all of this, will be buried because we feel the responsibility to not burden you, and interrupt your ministry for God. It could eventually even cause a rift between us and still then we may not speak, not because we don't want to, but because maybe we speak different languages, and we may not know the right words so we fear misunderstanding or hurting you.

Being on the mission field is an adventure and a blessing to us, but oftentimes, we are placed in difficult environments, some of us at a young age, or older may suffer abuse, discrimination, loneliness, life threatening circumstances. Every change, every transition causes trauma. When we are young, all of this affects our brain development which may have longer term effects if not cared for, but somehow most of us will remain strong, and like an elastic band being stretched, we will find a way to stretch ourselves until one day we can be stretched no more. We don't want to be the reason why you couldn't continue serving God.

Most people will look at us and feel that we are mature. We learn fast as children, and as we are growing up in such cross cultural environments, we adapt very well, but at the end of the day we are still children. We need to have some semblance of stability within our own family unit with opportunity for us to just be children. Otherwise, the expectation for us to always be mature will linger over us and take away our child-like innocence, and we will start to bear your adult burdens, but with less experience to handle them like you do.

The good news is some of us have come out of this lived experience and like Ruth Van Reken, we can share our stories. Our stories can tell you that your ability to understand the conflict of cultures we experience will comfort us. Your being watchful over us as part of the family ministry and showing us how to debrief changes and challenging circumstances together with us will teach us how not to stress and strain. Spending quality time with you as we journey through life will help us build strong and trusting relationships with you that will be a good foundation for when we start processing the any difficult memories we may have in the future.

Go unto all nations (Oct-Dec 2018)

We will need time to process and reflect. For some of us, it may take years into adulthood as trauma can run deep. For each of us, different life circumstances will nudge us to confront and start the process of self reflection. Regardless of when this starts to happen, it is a confusing and painful time and sometimes, it surprises ourselves more than it will surprise you. While some of us may need longer term professional care, please know that you play a significant role in our journey. We hope that you will be an empathetic listener and gently encourage us to speak. When we are ready to talk, please allow us to express what we need to. Sometimes what we say may not make sense, and we may feel sensitive when saying things out loud, so as much as you can, please don't be defensive. We are not blaming you, we already blame ourselves enough, but instead, your unconditional love and patience will give us reassurance and create a safe space for us to process our thoughts. Some of us may walk away from our faith, but please don't give up the hope of our salvation and our relationship with God, because we need you to be our support system to champion for us when we are unable to do so.

Above all, know that there are no perfect ways to go about this, but with open hearts and intentional conversations, we trust that God will show us both a way to come back from the dark places and rejoice in Him.

Thank you for listening.

The author has spent the last 12 years building intentional life long friendships with different generations of young MKs from teenage years to adulthood in efforts to build support networks and give those who have not yet found their voice, a platform to speak.