

Sending Your Kids to School Fear-Free

By John Sorrell
August 11, 2022

The stress that accompanies the beginning of a new school year has been a constant for generations. For some, seeing the cozy and relaxed summer come to an end is depressing and stressful as you think about establishing new routines and rhythms. For others, there is profound anxiety around gathering all of the necessary supplies or making sure that their child is confident in their new back-to-school wardrobes. Then there is the simple burden each student faces as they wonder and worry if they'll be in class with their friends or if they will get along with their new teacher.

These same concerns have been around for decades and will likely never diminish. However, for parents, new fears have arisen over the past few years as it relates to sending their children back to school. For some, the excitement over seeing their children grow and move up the educational ladder has been displaced by fears over the continued presence of COVID-19 and the devastating school shootings that have plagued our country in recent years.

So, what's the easy answer for parents to send their children back to school without fear? There isn't one. There is no magic pill to calm the mind and heart of a parent as they hand their child off and send them into an environment that is out of their control and away from their oversight. However, we can find comfort and security in God's Word and through the story of His people as we prepare to begin a new school year.

Just as you stand at the doorstep of this new school year brimming with the fear of the unknown, the Israelites found themselves in a similar spot as they looked a fear-filled future directly in the face. Moses had been their familiar and faithful leader during their forty-year journey through the wilderness, as they fled bondage in Egypt for the freedom of the Promised Land. However, in Deuteronomy 31, Moses' life was drawing to a close, and Joshua, the untested and unfamiliar leader, was taking the reins as the leader of God's people.

As Moses handed the torch of leadership to Joshua, and as they prepared to enter the Promised Land, he encouraged the people of Israel and worked to calm their fears and anxieties over their unknown future. Meeting them at their point of need, Moses said, "Be strong. Take courage. Don't be intimidated. Don't give them a second thought because God, your God, is striding ahead of you. He's right there with you. He won't let you down; he won't leave you." (Deuteronomy 31:6 The Message)

What can we learn from these words given thousands of years ago to a people halfway across the world? Although we are disconnected in time and space, I think these words speak directly to what we, as parents, face in sending our kids back to school in the coming weeks.

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First, as parents, our job is to be strength and courage for our kids in moments where they have none. Author Anne Lamott said, "Courage is fear that has said its prayers." Our children should not have to carry the weight of our fear along with their own. Behind the scenes, it is ok for us to acknowledge our fears to God and our spouse - or a group of supportive friends. However, as Christ-followers, we need to lay those fears at the feet of Jesus and not the feet of our children. We need to clear the path in front of our kids of fears, worries, and our anxieties. This requires us to spend time with God to find courage in and through Him. Specifically, ask Him to replace our fears and worries with strength and courage. Believe that Moses' words are for you today as much as they were for the Israelites standing on the banks of the Jordan River thousands of years ago.

When we are young, courage comes to us most often through the presence of another. As we age and get the experiences of life on our side, courage can be a bit easier to come by. However, your kids will most likely look to you to be their strength and courage in moments like the beginning of a new school year, when the future is unknown and uncertain. Joshua and Moses were not able to lead the children of Israel with strength and courage because of who they were or because of what they saw in front of them. They were able to lead this way because of who they knew God to be. The story of the Bible teaches that our greatest enemy in life is sin and our greatest fear is death. It also tells us that neither sin nor death has a hold on us - not because of courage or strength that comes from within us, but because of the courage and strength that came through the presence of another, Jesus.

Look at what Moses said to the Israelites - "Your God is striding ahead of you... He won't let you down; he won't leave you." By using the pronoun "your," Moses is reminding them that their God was a personal God. Remind your children of this truth as you prepare for this new year. God knows them, loves them, and is with them. He's not distant and impersonal, He's present and relational; He's by their side.

Remind yourself of this truth today as well. As you wrestle against fear while staring the new school year in the face, picture a God who strides, as Moses put it. A person only strides when they are confident and at ease. Moses was painting a picture for the fearful Israelites of a God that was at ease with their situation. He strode, calmly and confidently. He does the same today in the midst of your fear. He both knows and holds the future - your future and your child's future. Allow God to stride ahead of you and follow where He leads. Today and throughout this year, rest in the God that strides.



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