

Two for the Road

Inspired by Mark 6:7-13

Bob summoned the family and began the steps to send his two oldest children away to college. He began with a prayer in the center of their living room. This room has really seen some living over the past 18 years. The faded blue walls tell the family story in a neatly ordered timeline of family photos. Bob and Anne stood near the fireplace with their five children gathered in a circle, all with bowed heads ready for their father to lead the blessing. This was nothing new. Each morning, with very few exceptions, they gathered together for morning prayer. From the time they left their mother's hip, the children learned this morning ritual. They all understood that their family was home base, and that they were to carry the family values with them as they were sent out each day whether heading to work, school, or play.

Today was extra special! The twins, Bart and Beth, were going to college to begin life away from the safety and comfort of the fold. Their father began with a blessing, "Lord, we praise You and thank You for the many blessings You have poured out over this family. Namely, we are most thankful for these seven precious lives gather together now. You supply our every need and You continue to keep us connected with each other and You. We ask special blessings on Beth and Bart as they prepare to move into their dorms and begin a new phase of life. Bless them with good friends who also love You, and make them strong in the face of the temptations which will inevitably come."

Beth opened one eye to see how Bart was reacting to that last piece. She was met with Bart staring back and flashing a mischievous grin and eye roll. Both quickly regained composure before a giggle escaped. They knew it would be challenging to leave the tight-knit structure of their parents' rule and watchful care. Now they would be making their own decisions and judgments.

Bob's prayer continued, "May they set a good example for their younger siblings, Aaron, Cathy, and Jill. Almighty Father, we ask You for continued good health and blessings over our family." Bob squeezed Anne's hand to continue the petitions around the circle. "Lord, I thank You for this beautiful day," she began. "Please grant safe travels to all the students leaving home and moving in today. May they all remember to call home regularly." Bob gave a little chuckle. He knew that was big on his wife's heart. She would have to release the habit of the twins keeping her fully engaged in their daily activities. This transition would be difficult for everyone, but most especially for Mama Anne's heart.

Anne squeezed Aaron's hand to indicate his turn to pray. He kept it short and sweet. "God bless my brother and sister with good grades and good choices." Aaron squeezed Cathy's hand who added, "Yes, bless them Lord, and thank You for blessing me with Beth's room — a room of my own, finally!" She gave an extra hard squeeze to her little sister's hand. The two youngest girls were five years apart, and had always had to share a bedroom. This had begun to really cramp Cathy's style now that she was 13. This move felt like just as much freedom to her as to the twins. 8-year-old Jill swallowed hard, and expressed her honest, most heart-felt prayer. "Jesus, help me not be scared to sleep all alone in my room!" Cathy gave Jill's hand another softer, loving squeeze of support. She hadn't even thought about it from her little sister's perspective.

They all ended with an Our Father and a Hail Mary, praying in perfect unison from all the years of praying together as family. With the final "Amen!" the children all began to scatter. "Hold your horses!" Bob called after them. "We still have important business to take care of!" All five turned back and settled into their seats anticipating this portion would not be brief. Bart and Beth were halfway up the stairs hoping their dad would skip "The Talk About College" but all the while knowing he wouldn't let them leave without his words of wisdom and warnings!

"We have authority over our choices," their father began. "But God has authority over our lives. How we live should always reflect that truth." He instructed them to not take too much stuff for the journey. "Beth, you need not pack ALL your clothes, rather select the ones that most reflect YOUR style. You still be you in college. Don't try to be a reflection of others or what you think they want you to be.

"Bart, you do not need to take ALL of your video games with you. Be careful not to stay closed up in your dorm room. Go, try new things, and meet new people. And both of you remember, whenever you enter a room or a meeting, stay there and be engaged until you leave. Whatever group does not welcome you or respect your opinions, leave there and shake the dust off your feet. There is no need to give testimony against them. Just move on and find a better space where you are well received. College offers plenty of opportunities!"

So Bart and Beth went off and began their new journey. The two drove out west to the city, and they met many new friends enjoying life and growing throughout their years of higher learning.

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