

# A healthy dose of neglect

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**By Lenny Cacchio**

LEE'S SUMMIT, Mo.—Many years ago some writer—it might have been Norman Vincent Peale—said, "Every child needs a good, healthy dose of neglect." I can hear the horrors from parents of small children even as I write this. How could anyone say such a thing?

And yet this thought needs to be explored a bit. Clearly no wise parent will allow a two-year old to play unsupervised in Daddy's tool shed or to explore his environment with a nail file in a room full of electrical outlets.

But, having said that, as children mature they need to be cut loose from Mom's and Dad's all-seeing eyes, allowing them to make mistakes or, better yet, develop problem-solving skills with their playmates. If Mom and Dad are there to ride to the rescue every time a little difficulty arises, the child will remain a child even into adulthood. Dependency will be a habit and adulthood delayed.

Maybe that's what Jesus meant when he told his disciples, "It is expedient for you that I go away" (John 16:7), and, "He that believes in me, the works that I do he shall do also, and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto the Father" (John 14:12). Maybe we can paraphrase it as: "It's best I leave. I'll send the Holy Spirit, but you'll have to learn how to step out of your comfort zones."

Jesus was going to give them a good, healthy dose of neglect, but not without the help they would need. Even though He would not leave them comfortless, he was going to turn them loose. If He had hovered around, they likely would not have stepped out as they had because they would have had the apron strings of their own imagination holding them back.

It's the same with our children. We can't tag along to their job interviews, although I understand that's happening these days. We'll cripple them if we try to shelter them from every trial and difficulty in life.

There is a wonderful little parable about a butterfly emerging from its cocoon. A child watched the process with fascination, but also concern. The new butterfly was struggling mightily to escape, and in kindness the boy decided to carefully cut the cocoon to ease the butterfly's burden. Shortly after, the butterfly died, unable to fly. The story goes on to explain that a butterfly needs the struggle of escape from the cocoon to force fluid into the wings so it can fly.

It is through the struggle that they can fly.