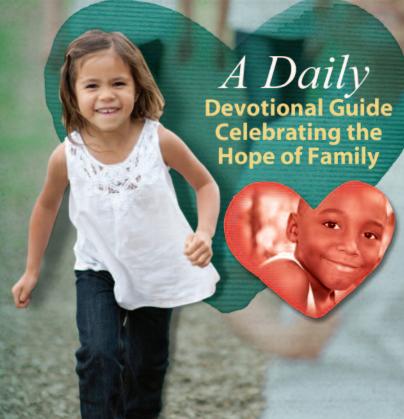
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PureAction
Churches Living Out James 1:27
www.PureActionChurches.com

fatba, tale.

a 30 day devotional guide celebrating the Hope of Family

This devotional guide is divided into six sections, which address a variety of issues related to God's heart for the orphan and our call to respond. Each section covers five days and explores the passion of each author.

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when Buckner began its first international ministry to children, there were hundreds of thousands of orphan children in Russia, not to mention the millions in the rest of the world, all living without the benefit of a nurturing home. I want to tell the story of two of them. The story of these young girls, ages 5 and 7, does not begin as a story of hope. It begins as a story of fear.

- Fear of violence that often found its way into the small structure called home.
- Fear of hunger that came many days when the small amount of available funds would not stretch to feed the family.
- Fear of cold nights, when, forced out into the extreme weather, they huddled in a garbage dump to find warmth.
- Fear of abandonment that became reality when, neglected and alone, the young girls were left to care for themselves.

It is a story where hope seems not to exist. These young girls, like so many children around the world, were doomed in a system that offered tremendous fear, but so little hope; a system where a sense of belonging seemed elusive to children desperately needing the love, security, and stability of a nurturing family, of a real home. continued next page >>

The daily feelings of fear became the primary emotion with which the girls related to the world.

But God had a plan for these girls to be adopted into a family that would show them His unconditional love. In the autumn of 1997, God provided the young sisters a forever family.

As the days that followed turned into years, God has showed His amazing faithfulness and love to this family. He brought hope to these sisters, and in so doing, He has renewed hope in many lives they have touched.

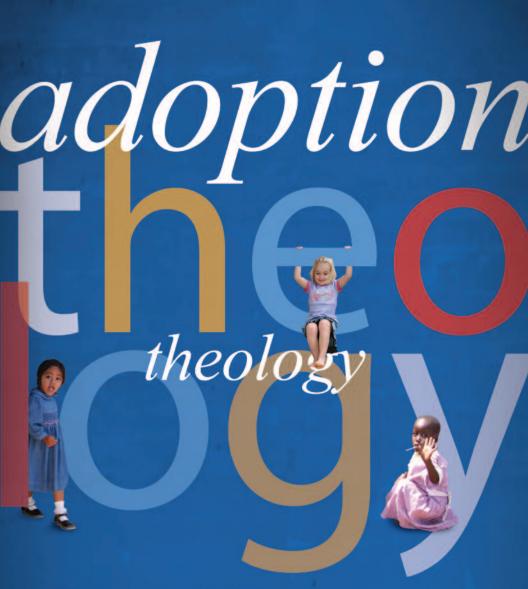
Recently, a family project called for various family members to select scriptures that were particularly meaningful. These sisters, now beautiful young ladies, chose as their scripture Hebrews 13: 5-6.

God has said,
Never will I leave you.
Never will I forsake you.
Therefore, we can say with confidence,
The Lord is my helper,
I will not be afraid.

I believe that God expects us to respond to the orphan crisis in our world today. He has called us as individuals, as Christians, and as His church. This devotional guide is intended to be a help for you as you study and pray through God's call to action. As you consider God's calling on your life to care for "the least of these", may you be blessed as you draw near the Father who can erase fear and bring hope with His unconditional love.



Lee Bush is the founder and owner of Red Dot Construction and the Chair of the Board of Trustees for Buckner International. He and his wife, Susan, have four children through biology and adoption, and seven grandchildren.



Romans 8:15

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

theology

When you think of the concept of adoption, what comes to mind? Stop for a minute and reflect on that question. Do you become fearful, agitated, inspired?

Many of us walk through a world where society is only recently opening up to the idea of adoption. God, however, had adoption on his heart from the very beginning. Adoption is a picture of the gospel. When you and I were alone, ashamed, hurt, and without hope God intervened and made us his children. Heirs to the throne. One of the family. Where we were once outsiders, now we belong. Over the next five days, consider the concept of adoption as it relates to theology.

To find out more about adoption, visit us on the web at www.PureActionChurches.com





"Theology of Adoption: A Redemptive Act"

Scripture: Galatians 4:4-6 (ESV)



Albert L. Reyes is sixth President of Buckner International. He is married to Belinda A. Reyes and they have three sons: Joshua, David, and Thomas, The Reves family lives in Dallas, Texas.

The concept of adoption, used exclusively in the New Testament, helps us understand God's redemptive act on our behalf. In his letter to the church in Galatia, the Apostle Paul used the concept of adoption to explain justification and regeneration of the soul before God. God sent his only son, born of a virgin, to redeem us when we were not part of God's family and gives us full rights as sons and daughters by placing his spirit in our hearts through our conversion.

Adoption is a choice. It is a choice on God's part to redeem us from our sins, from our eternal separation from God, and from the dominion of darkness to bring us into the Kingdom family of the son he loves

"The Apostle Paul says our adoption is motivated by God's love (Ephesians 1:4-5); us with a full inheritance as children of



(Colossians 1:13). God gives us full rights as sons and daughters (John 1:12) when we receive him and believe in him. Adoption, from a theological perspective, includes forgiveness, reconciliation, liberty, God's fatherly care, discipline as an expression of God's love, and his goodwill.

In Graeco-Roman society, adoption was commonly practiced by the upper-class with free-citizens, a process through which the child became a virtual slave with conferred rights and a list of duties. Yet, the Apostle Paul takes the first century practice of adoption and adds a

twist that redefines adoption from a biblical point of view. Paul says our adoption is motivated by God's love (Ephesians 1:4-5); makes us heirs (Galatians 3:29); and provides us with a full inheritance as children of the Kingdom (Ephesians 1:14-15).

God's redemptive act of adopting us came at a high price of sacrifice, the sacrifice of his only son (John 3:16). Adoption at Buckner is no different. Adoptive parents, whether they adopt domestically or internationally, do so by conviction, choice, and at times, great sacrifice. Buckner and Dillon families freely open their homes, their lives, and their hearts to the boys or girls that they adopt to share with them all the rights and privileges as a member of their family and household. These families are made by choice and conviction to redeem all that God intends for the life of their child.

Adoption is more about the future than it is about the past. It is about our hope, our potential, and our new life in Christ. As such, adoptive parents see the great potential in the life of their child for the future and for the Kingdom. Adoptive parents work, pray, and labor for their child's "Esther moment" for the Kingdom. I cannot think of a better picture of God's love for you and me than the redemptive act of adoption.

PRAYER GUIDE: Pray for greater understanding of the Scripture's teaching on the concept of adoption as a picture of the gospel.

Day 2

Second-Guessing Adoption

Scripture: John 14:18-24; and Romans 8:12-17



Joseph "Skip" Ryan is the founding pastor of Park Cities Presbyterian Church, and presently Chancellor and Professor of Practical Theology at Redeemer Seminary in Dallas, Texas. He has served as the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America and graduated from Harvard University and Westminster Theological Seminary.

Adopted children almost always go through a time when they second-guess the love of their adoptive parents. They question whether they really belong to their family. After some emotional times and



perhaps some behaviors that express their fears, adopted children almost always come to know that they really do belong.

How does a child or adolescent come to deeply trust in their parents' love so that they can stop second-guessing their adoption? I would suggest that their confidence is the result of the intense and intimate character of parental love, which wins the kids over.

Adoption in the New Testament is God's way of describing how he brings us into his family because of what our elder Brother, Jesus, did

"Adoption can't be second guessed... not for long."

for us. His death was the rightful penalty for our sins. We sometimes question the love which prompted the Father to "unadopt" his true son on the cross so he could adopt us. We ask whether this love is real, whether we really belong to God.

At these times, we must know and experience the intense and intimate love of God the Father which is even greater than ours for our own children.

First, we learn of the intensity of the Son's purpose to bring us into his Father's family. Jesus says in John 14:18, "I will not leave you as orphans" or better, "orphaned." There is emphatic earnestness to the voice of Christ: I will not... The word "orphaned" is sometimes translated "desolate." "I will not leave you desolate." Adrift, abandoned, utterly alone. God will not leave us as desolate orphans. And then Jesus says this of himself and his Father: "We will come to him and make our home with him." (John 14:23) If it is God's intention to adopt us and make his home with us, who or what can "separate us from the love of God?" The answer, of course, is clear: no one or nothing. Our doubts, our fears, even our own failures and sins cannot undo the intense love of God.

Second, we become convinced of God's intimate love by the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are

continued next page >>

children of God." (Romans 8:16) The Spirit brings Jesus to me in such a profound way that I can and should say, I am in Christ and Christ is in me. He speaks to me in the interior language of love, which doesn't always have words, just as our intimate "speech" to our babies is more sound than vocabulary: "Boo Boo... Goo, Goo," said with our noses touching the child's. Intimacy is not always expressed in words.

There is no second guessing the love a parent has for an adopted child. It is intense, and it is intimate. This love is derived from the much more intense and intimate love of the Father for us, his adopted children. Our Father emphatically says, "I will not leave you orphaned," so we can say, "We are the children of God." Adoption can't be second-guessed... not for long.

PRAYER GUIDE: Pray for fresh revelation for the Body of Christ concerning God's heart and plans for orphans.

Day 3

God's "Big House"

Scripture: Romans 8:16-17



Katie Sanders is a Senior at Baylor University, writing her honors thesis on the role of faith in parents' decision to adopt. She also completed a summer internship at Buckner during 2011.

Though it may seemingly just be a fun song for kids and adults alike, Audio Adrenaline's song, "Big House," paints a great picture of adoption theology. The lyrics say "I don't know if you got some shelter, say a place to hide... I don't know if you got a family, Say a mom or dad, I don't know if you feel love at all, but I bet you wish you had, Come and go with me, To my father's house... it's a big big house with lots and lots of room."

Jesus came to the earth so that we, as imperfect humans, could join His family. Romans 8:16 says that "We are God's children." Though we may sometimes feel as if we are too imperfect, too broken to have such a perfect Father, God says that we are His. God didn't say that he would only take the perfect children to join his family, but that he would take all



those who would accept Him and declare Him as Lord to His "Big House." Right after verse 16, where Paul declares that "we are God's Children," he says that we are His heirs. During the time when Paul wrote, heirs would receive everything that their father had, which often included continuing the work that their father had began. This is true of our inheritance. Part of our inheritance is heaven, but the other part is carrying on Jesus' work here on earth. This means that our purpose should be missional living. When Jesus was on earth He had compassion towards all people, He gave all that He had to the helpless, the "least of these."

Just as Audio Adrenaline's song states, it doesn't matter if "You got a family," Jesus calls for you to "Come and go with me." And as Christians, we can best model our own adoption by saying the same thing to a child that does not have a place to hide or a mom or dad. In the last stanza of "Big House," it says that "All I know is you need love, and I've got a family." By giving love and family to a fatherless child, you are allowing them a chance to join your bigger Christian family and have a room at the "Big House."

PRAYER GUIDE: Pray for God to open your heart and mind to the wonder of our own adoption in Christ.



My Eyes are the Wrong Color...

Scripture: Romans 8:14-17



David Ummel is the Administrator for BCFS in East Texas. He and his wife Shannon are the parents of Lauren (14) and Luke (8). They do their best to go to Disney World every year.

"My eyes are the wrong color." I sat staring into the beautiful blue eyes of my 4 year old daughter as she explained to me that mom's eyes were brown, dad's green and hers blue. Even the dog had brown eyes – none matched hers. We never hid from her the fact that she was adopted; it was part of her story from the beginning. At the time, it was difficult for her to completely understand how all the pieces fit together to form our family.

Many Christians have never given much thought to their spiritual adoption. We like the idea of being a part of God's family, but I fear a level of misunderstanding about what this picture really means for us today. For our society, adoption is mostly for the benefit of the child. Today, children become eligible for adoption due to crisis in the lives of their birth families. In the first century, this was not the case.





If we go back to the time of the writing of Romans, Paul is addressing a largely non-Jewish crowd. Rome is the legal-center of the known world, so when Paul used adoption terminology they would have had an understanding of his intent. When Roman couples did not have an heir, they would adopt a slave (normally a son) for very specific reasons. The first was so that they could have an heir, the second was so that someone would be there to bury them and grieve for them, and the third was to have someone to carry on the family business.

So, when Paul writes that we have received "adoption to sonship," (Romans 8:15b NIV) the culture and context of the book of Romans would infer that there are obligations that go along with this.

For the Christian, we have been spiritually adopted – becoming co-heirs with Christ. We have left the family of death and destruction in order that we might carry on the name and the business of the father. In other words, we were not saved for our own benefit – although we have and will benefit more from this than any other decision we will ever make in our lives – but for the benefit of the Father. We are to carry on His name and work throughout our life. This is the theology of adoption.

In case you're wondering just what work we need to be carrying on, I might suggest the following two parables of Jesus as a great starting point. The first is the parable of the Prodigal Son – the restoration of relationships; both earthly and heavenly. The second is the Good Samaritan – meeting the needs of those who are hurting.

My daughter, now fourteen, has come to grips with her different eye color. She understands how God used the vehicle of adoption to build our family and how family goes way beyond physical similarities. Through our experiences, our entire family has learned of the grace and love of our Heavenly Father who desperately seeks a relationship with us. An adoptive relationship.

PRAYER GUIDE: Pray for God to build your identity as his beloved and in turn view orphans and the world through the lens of His love.

Generosity Prevails

Scripture: Psalm 82:3-4



Gary Haugen, a graduate of Harvard University and the University of Chicago Law School, leads International Justice Mission's (IJM) global casework and groundbreaking structural transformation of public justice systems worldwide. Before founding IJM, he worked in the Civil Rights Division of the U.S.

Department of Justice and served as Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations' genocide investigation in Rwanda. Gary currently resides in the Washington, D.C. area with his family.

In the early days of International Justice Mission, I had the privilege of being the one who opened the mail and read through notes from people I had never met before but whose generosity was enabling us to stand up, speak up, and show up for the oppressed. I will never



"God calls us to be generous with our love, with our time, and with our resources.

Our fallen world is desperate for generosity."

forget the note of one young man who said he had been saving tuition money to start college, but had been moved to wait another year and asked us to use the money to rescue girls from sex trafficking – noting, without explanation, that he had a little sister who was adopted from Southeast Asia. It was beautiful to see his love for his sister and his determination to put that love into action for vulnerable children he would never meet, and to reflect on the potential violence his sister was spared by adoption into a loving family.



God calls us to be generous with our love, with our time, and with our resources. Our fallen world is desperate for generosity. In the dark places that my IJM colleagues go to rescue the oppressed, human generosity is up against a fierce and demanding foe: human cruelty and greed. And the battle is dramatic and urgent. Psalm 82 is no exaggeration – the destitute are suffering at the hand of the wicked. In fact, there are more slaves today than were taken out of Africa in four centuries of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.

However, what I have seen in the last 14 years of seeking justice is that generosity does prevail over darkness. Every week, I get reports from around the world of girls being rescued from brothels and entire families set free from forced labor slavery. These stories are modern day miracles and yet they happen through regular people who have simply chosen to be generous with their lives. This is true of you as well. As parents who have chosen to adopt, your generosity of love and care will change the lives of these children forever. You have rescued them from a world that preys on the vulnerable, and this gives great joy to our heavenly father.

Generosity is rooted in the life that is stronger, in the life that is larger – and who at their core does not yearn for an interior that is stronger and for an existence that is larger? Indeed, deep and joyful generosity comes from God – for God Himself is fundamentally a giver – the giver of life, the giver of all good things, the giver of forgiveness and redemption and love.

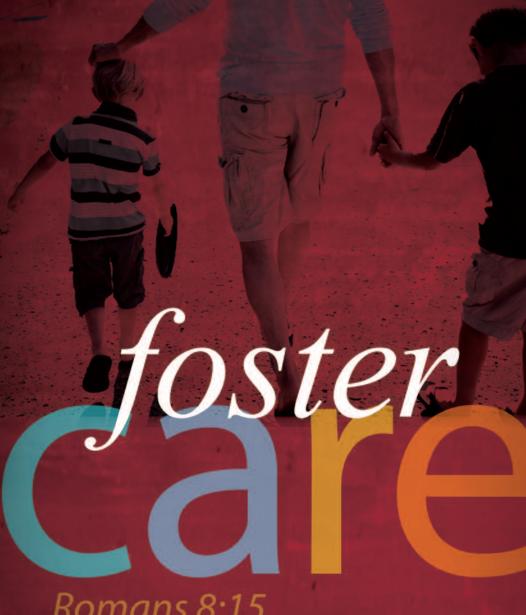
One of the reasons God has poured his generous love into our lives is for us to experience the heavenly joy of being generous. As we begin our day, what might it look like to be generous with our families, our co-workers, our neighbours, our friends, and the vulnerable in our communities and in our world? Join me today in pursuing generosity with abandon!

PRAYER GUIDE: Pray for the Lord to prepare our hearts and minds as His adopted children to join in His mission for orphans.

www.ijm.org

children come to Me, and to the man, the children come to Me, such is the man, the children come to Me, and to the man, the children come to Me, and to the man, the children come to Me, and to the man, the children come to Me, and to the man, the children come to Me, and to the man, the children come to Me, and to the man, the children come to Me, and to the man, the children come to Me, and to the man, the children come to Me, and to the man, the children come to Me, and to the man, the children come to Me, and to the man, the children come to Me, and to the man, the children come to Me, and the children come to the

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Romans 8:15

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.



Many in our country have a multitude of misconceptions when it comes to Foster Care. Troubled children. Delinquents. What did he or she do to be put into foster care?

Nothing.

Children enter foster care because the adults in their lives couldn't do their job. For a multitude of reasons, these children have been let down by the very people they should be able to depend on the most. Abusive treatment. Neglect. Violence and trauma. These children are the victims of what is quite often generational patterns of chaotic parenting. It is always best for a child to live with his or her biological family. When that family isn't safe, however, where does he or she go?

They go to foster families. These children depend on families who will accept a child as their own, even for just a short while.

Through the following devotionals, you will be challenged to reconsider society's unflattering description of foster care. Read these through the biblical worldview of caring for the foreigner, the Samaritan, the visitor who needs temporary care.

To find out more about foster care, visit us on the web at www.BeaFamily.org



Isaiah's Call

Scripture: Isaiah 1:17



Samela Macon is the Director of Foster Care & Adoption for BCFS in the Southeast Texas region and has been involved in this industry since 1997. She and her husband Joe are the parents of two sons, Weston (18) and Kyler (11).

There's a child I know. Her name is Rebecca. I met her when she was brought to the home of one of our wonderful Buckner Foster Families here in Texas. She was removed from the care of her biological parents at 13 months of age due to extreme neglect and physical abuse. Rebecca was in a full leg cast. Her left arm was broken. She could not sit up or crawl, much less walk, and God had brought her to us – a team of foster care parents and professionals – to help her recover and begin to walk toward God's redemptive plan for her life.



"There is
urgency in the
words of the
prophet.
According to
Isaiah, we don't
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We're
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seek justice."

It is my firm belief that God challenges us to care for the vulnerable and the forgotten. *There is urgency in the words of the prophet Isaiah.* As Christians we must reach out to the oppressed, the hopeless and the abused; and share the love and mercy of Christ. It's not something we want to think about, is it? In our world, however, children are abandoned, beaten, exploited, raped, and neglected. In our world, there is little hope.

According to Isaiah, though, we don't have the option of turning away. We're commanded to seek justice. We have to ask God to make our hearts burn with determination to make a difference! We must answer Isaiah's call - God's call- to encourage the oppressed and defend the cause of the fatherless.

But how? It's overwhelming. With 143,000,000 orphans in the world (and growing,) how do you know where to start? Their needs are critical. Is there, however, a practical solution?

Yes! We can begin by asking God to reveal the specific desires of HIS heart for children who are hurting. We can be change agents in this world, moving from fear to courage; from silence to advocacy. We can educate ourselves and others about the reality of child abuse and neglect in our community. We can reach out to children in need by becoming a mentor or foster parent or an adoptive parent. We can support families who are fostering or who have adopted. We can be a voice for children by reporting cases of suspected abuse and neglect.

We don't have to solve the world's problems. We just have to act. Right now. For one child. For one family.

What is your responsibility?

Each of us can be a light in this world without hope. God's children are waiting for his people to answer Isaiah's call.

PRAYER GUIDE: Pray for the children in foster care to know that they are remembered and loved by God.



Sail Out of Your Safe Harbor!

Scripture: James 1:27



Kara Curfman, adopted from Buckner, and her husband Locke are parents of 5 children, 2 of those adopted from foster care. They are current foster parents with Buckner.

This scripture is quoted often with regard to orphan care, but have you noticed the very last part of it? What does this mean? Many would argue that to avoid "corruption," we must isolate ourselves from the world and "live in our Christian cul de sac." That sounds like a safe plan, but it does nothing for the lost.

Mark Twain once said, "Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do, than by the ones you did do. Sail away from the safe harbor!" The "open sea" of this world is often an ugly place, yet the harbor *seems* calm and safe. But it has been said that a boat at anchor will decay faster than one moving in open water. At some point you must make a choice.

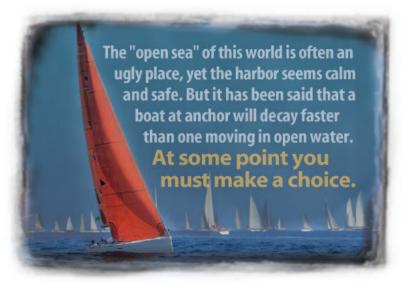
As a family, God has asked us to sail out of our safe harbor while still refusing to let the world corrupt us. This wasn't our plan. Our precious Father had a bigger mission field in mind than just fostering a few children. He wanted us to be a light in a dark world not just to the parents of children in CPS custody, but the entire group of people we would come in contact with including those inquiring about our transracial family. This meant purposefully reaching out and loving people by encouraging them and going above and beyond the normal contact.

Before becoming a foster parent, I often went about my business daily and never really reached out to others or thought about those outside of my circle. Through fostering, God exposed this selfishness. Ouch! How often are we so busy attempting to raise godly children that we stay too close to our own plans and don't see the bigger picture? Apart from Jesus Christ, this world is without hope for families who know little to nothing of God's transforming power. They will repeat this cycle with their children and grandchildren. What if they never see anything else because we fail to obey? Why are we depriving them of this hope by

man,, 3,4 God. When I

hiding in our own "safe" world? Whose responsibility is it to reach them? We are called to be a light! We must infiltrate this fallen world, not insulate and isolate ourselves.

As a family, our eyes are now open, but we had to take "I" out of every equation. "I can't give them back"....to which He replies, "Your children



are only on loan," biological, adopted, or foster. Sometimes you have to let them go. "I can't possibly meet my foster child's parents"...to which He replies, "I want you to show them unconditional love and acceptance. I want you to show them ME." "I am too busy taking care of my family to reach out," through fostering....to which He replies, "I sent my son to die for you and for you alone I would have done it." The challenge is to sail away from the harbor. A boat never reaches its potential without sailing and neither will you.

PRAYER GUIDE: Pray for the Lord to raise up families who will have the wisdom, love and compassion to be a family for children in need.



A Recycled Healing

Scripture: Hebrews 4:15



Shirley Davis has been a foster mom through Buckner Children and Family Services since 1997. Over the years, she has fostered 17 children.

When I was a child, I was intrigued by the sitcom "The Facts of Life." I never imagined someday I would become Mrs. Garrett.

At age 24, I began working at Buckner Children's Village in Beaumont. Two months before I turned 26, I became a foster parent. At first I resisted, but I strongly felt God leading me in this direction.

My story wasn't the same as that of the children I fostered, but I knew what it felt like to be separated from my parents. During my early childhood I lived with my aunt and uncle and visited my parents. The core feelings of abandonment and rejection in my youth consumed me at times. Although my parents had valid reasons, it never undercut the anguish I felt deep within.

Hebrews 4:15 says, "For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched by the feelings of our infirmities, tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin." This reason alone gave me an unrestrained compassion for the kids who called me "Mom."



Being compelled to love and nurture kids was born out of a deep pain I saw behind their eyes—those same eyes that I once had. Many of their fears were all too familiar for me. Jesus saw that same pain, which motivated Him to go to the cross and redeem us.

What I've found to be most effective in serving these kids is love and relationship. This is the key that breaks down walls and calms fears. It is the same with God. He knows and can relate to our problems, and His

solution to every one of them is love and relationship with Him.

It's been 14 years now, and no matter how many kids have come through, I still see that same anxiety and fear during initial placement. But, oh, the miracle of seeing the transformation that takes place! There is a joy in seeing them free, safe and more confident than ever.

Another miracle is when I see them whole and passing that love on to others. The ability to pay it forward proves that sowing and reaping works. This, to me, is "recycled healing."

PRAYER GUIDE: Pray for strength and encouragement for those who are currently foster parents. Pray for the Lord to provide for their family's physical, spiritual and emotional needs.

Day 9

I Believe They Should Fly

Scripture: Colossians 1:9-12



Debbie Sceroler is the Director of Foster Care & Adoption for BCFS in East Texas. She and her husband Randy are the parents of two sons. They enjoy spending time with their 8 grandchildren as much as possible.

I recently have overcome my fears about flying and now I really enjoy the flying

experience. Now when I fly I try to choose a window seat right over the wing, near the turbines so I can hear the roar of the engines and watch the wings shake and bend as we take off and land. The thing about a jet is, it was designed to fly. It

continued next page >>



was shaped in a specific way, and it was equipped with engines that are capable of producing an incredible amount of thrust because of the special type of fuel used. Once it gets in the air, it seems like it could stay there forever with very little effort.

Foster children come into care weighted down, also with lots of "baggage" such as: I was molested, so now I don't trust others. Or I have learned to use my body to get what I want. I was physically abused, and now I believe I am to blame for whatever I get, so I move from abusive relationship to abusive relationship. My emotional needs weren't met, so now I drain the life out of others, desperately trying to fill up my own soul.

It is easy to believe that a child carrying this kind of weight, will not be able to "get off the ground". But the truth of the matter is, they, like all humans, were made to fly, born to succeed. But they need committed families to provide the fuel that empowers them to fly. Encouragement, Expectations, Opportunity, Unconditional Love, Security and Hope. Without these elements they are grounded. With it, they might just fly forever.



When we help children fly we help them to see the beauty of the flight. They see the big picture in life, and the things of this world seem quite smaller than they are on the ground. Their fears, rejection, loneliness and pain do not seem quite as large and unbearable when we help them to get off the ground and fly high as they were designed by God to do.

Do you know how I have overcome my fear of flying? I quit worrying so much about the "what if's" and started concentrating on the beauty of the flight. Are you willing to quit worrying about the "what if's" of foster care, and are you willing to help these children see the beauty of the flight? Are you willing to be the fuel for someone's hopes and dreams? Are you willing to mentor or tutor to help a child succeed? To help a child dream, then help them achieve that dream? Are you willing to give a child wings so they can fly high?

PRAYER GUIDE: Pray that the Lord would protect foster children and bring about emotional healing through love and family. Pray that they attain the full potential that God has ordained for their life.

NO 1ES			



Try It. One More Time.

Scripture: Luke 5:1-7



Shannan and Kelly Goss, from Midland, came to Buckner Children and Family Services in August 2009. Since their licensure they have fostered four children and adopted two of them.

In the early days of our marriage, my husband and I began talking about adoption and our desire to have both biological and adopted children. The first of three of life's greatest blessings came to us in the form of our 5-year-old biological son. The moment my doctor laid him on my chest I loved him, utterly, profoundly and fiercely. I was undone. Instantly, he was mine. There was nothing I would not do for him.

The second of three of our life's greatest blessings came to us October 1, 2009. A tiny, beautiful, chocolate-skinned baby boy crossed the doors of our home. I was undone. Our love for him was immediate, profound and fierce. He was mine and there was nothing I would not do for him.



We could not go through that again. Three failed adoptions. And gut wrenching prayers asking God not to break us again."

That first night we laid him in his crib and he being a 'foster child' wasn't in the equation. He was our son.

When the quiet of night settled in I finally slipped into bed. Crippling anxiety and fear settled heavily on my mind and heart.

Total panic, I was shaking and breathing irregularly. My stomach was burning. Thoughts were flooding my mind about the last years of our adoption journey and what God had called us to walk through. We experienced three failed adoptions; one in which we literally handed triplet babies back to the birth mom after three weeks.

man, when I

How could we go through that again?

The next morning I opened my e-mail with the panic, fear, shaking and burning stomach still fresh. A beyond-timely devotional examining Luke 5:1-7 was in my inbox.

The disciples had been fishing all night, and caught nothing. Jesus told them to put their nets down again. "'Master,' Simon replied, 'We worked hard all last night and didn't catch a thing. But if you say so, I'll let the nets down again.' And this time their nets were so full of fish they began to tear!" Jesus told the disciples, "I know you've been fishing a long time. I'm telling you to try it again."

And to me, He quietly said, "I know what's happened. I know where I have taken you. I know what your heart is like. Try it again."

I don't know what it is for you—that 'thing' where the answer has been 'no' more times than you can count. Whatever it is, try it one more time.

When God presents you another opportunity, and you're terrified, and Satan reminds you of every single time God didn't work as you prayed he would, of every single time He walked you through a door and then closed it... Try it one more time.

Satan delights in you questioning God's faithfulness and his plan. He wants to erode your trust in the only One who is worthy of it. John 10:10 says he comes to steal, kill and destroy.

Christ's aim is life. Full, abundant life. So, try it one more time. When God opens one more door, try it. There will be a time that it works.

I know, because today that beautiful baby boy's last name is the same as ours.

PRAYER GUIDE: Pray for God to guide foster children into families of stability, security and love; and pray that He would draw their biological families to Himself and do a work of healing and restoration.



Romans 8:15

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

Orphans often live in a governmental system of substitute care for children who belong to no one.

They live in orphanages, residential facilities, or in foster homes meant to be temporary. But our world has allowed a temporary system to become permanent for too many children.

The faith community often approaches the concept of crisis pregnancy with a proud pro-life stance. This same community must continue to be there after the pregnancy, when the baby is born and needs a family, whether through biology or adoption.

Over the next few days, learn and pray about the concept of adoption. How is God speaking to you about this subject?

For more information, consult www.beafamily.org, or www.dillonadopt.com





Should the Right Thing Be the Easy Thing?

Scripture: Isaiah 51:7



Cheri Walrod and her husband Paul are parents to six children. Their youngest three children were adopted through Dillon International in 2003, 2006 and 2008. Cherri works to help other adoptive families find the financing

options they need to realize their dream of adoption through her website Resources4adoption.com.

Recently I've been learning that just because something is hard, it does not mean it is wrong and just because something is easy, it does not mean it is right. Like many Christians I determined the will of God through circumstances alone. God has been consistently showing me in His Word, however, that there are more scenarios where the easy thing was not the right thing, but the right thing was the hardest thing ever!



God's Word is full of examples of people doing the right thing no matter the cost; or how it appeared to those around them. My favorite is that of Joseph and Mary. Joseph could have walked away. But instead, he and Mary chose to do the hardest thing for them in their culture. They chose to stay in their hometown, in their small community of family, friends and neighbors, to raise a child that appeared to be "born out of wedlock". Certainly not everyone in the community was accepting and supportive of their choice. I wonder how many times Mary and Joseph had to listen to comments or endure looks? It would have been so much easier to move to a place where no one knew them or their past. I would have been tempted to follow this path.

During our first adoption journey, I was initially surprised, shocked and disappointed that not everyone shared our enthusiasm for adoption. It was difficult to understand why others were not excited and supportive of our decision, especially those within our own family. Even church acquaintances and people who we thought were friends surprised us with their reaction. Many of them looked at us like we were crazy; some even said so out loud. This was so hurtful and shocking.

If you ever experience something similar, please take heart! There may be people who will not congratulate you for making what seems to them like a very unwise or illogical decision. Always keep in mind the words from Isaiah 51:7 (NIV) "Hear me, you who know what is right, you people who have taken my instruction to heart: Do not fear the reproach of mere mortals or be terrified by their insults."

When you care for the fatherless—whether it is for a day, a week or for a lifetime—it is simply the RIGHT THING to do no matter how hard it is. May He give you the strength the do the right thing, the hard thing and the best thing ever!

PRAYER GUIDE: Pray that the Lord would give strength and courage to those called to adopt. May they endure the journey, though it may not be easy and friends and family won't always understand.



The Benefits of Adoption

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:15



Elizabeth Thomas, along with her husband, Stoney, are parents of 4 children: a son and a daughter, ages 7 and 3, are biological, a daughter, age 14, was received at age 7, from Texas foster care, and a son,

age 11, was adopted internationally through Buckner, August of 2011.

"For your benefit. Grace reaching more and more people. Cause thanksgiving to overflow." Paul is speaking about belief and outward expression of that faith in context of the resurrection of Jesus and the believer's future resurrection which ushers us into the presence of Christ. My experience is that the Word is not limited to one context, so today, let us apply this verse to life in general as well as to the adoption journey.

God has bestowed numerous privileges upon us, too many benefits to be contained in thousands of volumes of thousands of books. His favor rests on us to accomplish the work of adoption and parenting. He builds the house, your family and mine, in perfect wisdom and love.

Speaking of building the house, I thought our family might be complete after Joy was born in 2008. And so it happened through a phone call to a friend, Tiffany, whose two Russian-born children are adopted through Buckner. She said seven boys of fifteen children were without families, and my heart sank! I cried out through the Holy Spirit, "Please pray that Stoney would be open to one!" My husband, Stoney, was wide open and so we spent two weeks seeking the Lord about this decision. What followed was eleven months of paperwork, waiting, travel, meeting our new son, paperwork, waiting and more travel.

The difficult times have grown us into His likeness by teaching us patience and perseverance, plus we have seen more of His majesty as God opened doors and paved ways that could only be from Him. Forever friends have been formed with other adoptive familes, missionaries, Buckner staff, and translators met abroad and at home. These relationships are a great support and sweet fellowship. Another benefit is the homecoming and celebration of our new son, Nikita, and our relationship with him. His siblings adore their new brother, and he is

bonding well with them. He is a role model of courage and helpfulness. He is taking on household chores. He is happy, funny, and affectionate. We added a fourth child but the load seems lighter. After all Jesus said, "It is better to give than to receive."

"His grace may reach more and more people." It is amazing how many people this one adoption has touched. A check out girl at Old Navy teared when I told her the purchase was for our son in Russia. Strangers at the baseball park listened to our story and offered their prayers as we waited for travel. A Muslim man from Kuwait in flight to St. Petersburg commended me, a Christian, for this deed. Doctors, nurses, and medical administrators in the U.S. and Russia were faced with His grace as they completed exams or paperwork.

Adoption causes "thanksgiving to overflow." From the orphanage staff in St. Petersburg to the Buckner staff in Texas, from a Russian city and court officials to U.S. immigration officers, from Nikita to his mother and father, from the angels to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, there is an overflow of thanksgiving.

If you are considering adoption will you step out in faith and taste the benefits? If you have adopted, will you speak in faith of the benefits? If you accept the call in James 1:27, to care for the orphans, God has promised His grace will reach more and more people, thanksgiving will overflow and He will be glorified!

PRAYER GUIDE: Pray that God would awaken the hearts and minds of families called to adopt and help them to see adopted and biological children as gifts from God.



Jesus' Foreign Ministry

Scripture: John 4:13-14



United States Senator Jim Inhofe, Oklahoma, and his wife Kay, with their twenty kids and grandkids. Their granddaughter, Zegita Marie, was adopted from Ethiopia in 2001 by their daughter Molly and her husband Jimmy. Senator Inhofe and Kay travel regularly to

Ethiopia, where they fellowship with friends who still operate the orphanage from which they adopted Zegita.

In this passage, Jesus is ministering to the Samaritan woman at the well. The encounter is perhaps the Gospel's best example of Jesus' foreign ministry. Because of mounting political pressure by the Pharisees in Judea, Jesus felt compelled to leave Judea and travel to Galilee.

Although the story takes place only thirty miles north of Jerusalem, in between the City of David and Nazareth, Jesus' hometown, racial and religious tension separated the Jews and Samaritans. The Bible notes that Jesus "had to" go through Samaria. The route through Samaria, though the shortest and quickest, was not the favored route of the Jewish people in that time. But whether because of the need for haste or because of divine knowledge, Jesus chose that route.

In addition to the ethnic tension that existed between Jesus and the woman, there was another, perhaps more insurmountable, divide between them—gender. In those days, religious teachers rarely spoke with women in public, especially a Samaritan woman whom, we are led to believe by the story, was an outcast to her own people. Every social custom and tradition of that day should have kept Jesus and the woman apart. But instead, Jesus used it as an opportunity to advance his testimony to an entirely new group of people. Because of this, many of the Samaritans came to believe in Jesus as their Savior.

I have learned through my own experience that there is no greater ambassador between nations than intercountry adoption. Not only does it open our hearts to the children of a foreign country, it opens our hearts and minds to the country and its people. As in the story of the Samaritan Woman at the Well, many obstacles exist in intercountry adoption. Though the problem is not social norms that existed in Jesus' time but bureaucratic processes, they are obstacles all the same. Yet if we follow Jesus' example and refuse to be deterred by them, we too can be ambassadors for Jesus Christ in our own right.

PRAYER GUIDE: Pray this: Abba Father, You love all orphans. Guide families to adopt the child that you have chosen for them, whether from the United States or another country. Prepare them to parent with wisdom, love and patience. Teach them to always rely on you.

Day 14

"It's a Wonderful Plan"

Scripture: Jeremiah 29:11



Dave Riggle serves on the staff of Second Baptist Houston. He and his wife, Tonya, have one son, Ben.

One of my favorite family Christmas traditions is to watch "It's a Wonderful Life." Every time I watch the movie, I'm touched by the story of George Bailey. After a series of disappointments in his life, George reaches the point of extreme despair and questions whether his life had any meaning or purpose. Under the care of the angel Clarence, George has the opportunity to see what his home town of Bedford Falls would have been like if he had not been born.

Without his imprint, lives would have been lost and people he cared for would have ended up lonely. He received the gift of seeing how much the life he considered insignificant really mattered. In the closing scene of the town, people he had served and loved well came to his rescue. This warms my heart and reminds me God has a specific purpose for all our lives.



In Jeremiah 29:11, we read:

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

God's plan is to prosper his children. The Hebrew word for prosper is actually a word we may be familiar with: the word "Shalom". It has a



very full meaning. It means peace, well-being, wholeness, soundness, fullness, and flourishing.

As you consider adoption, be confident that there are real life boys

and girls who have great plans for their future. Plans where they can experience true peace. Plans full of wholeness and healing. They just need to grow up in a home full of God's love and grace where His purpose for them can be nurtured and encouraged. A place they can flourish.

Remember the same plans God has for these precious children, he has for you as prospective parents. As you embark on the adventure of parenting, He will bring peace to you amidst the joyful chaos. He will bring wisdom in life's uncertainties. He will bring more meaning and purpose to your life than you could ever imagine.

God offers us a wonderful life filled with His wonderful plans!

PRAYER GUIDE: Pray that the Lord would guide the transition of adopted children into their new families. May they feel completely loved and accepted, and may He heal the hurts and comfort the losses that adopted children may have experienced.

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God Already Knew His Name

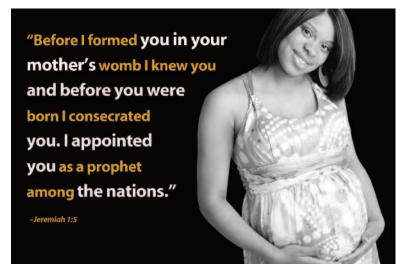
Scripture: Jeremiah 1:5



Stan and Lauren Britton are the parents of Noah and Colin James. Stan is on staff at NEXT Worldwide. They live outside of Dallas, Texas and are active members of Community Life Church.

We always knew that adoption would be a part of our family's story. My wife and I committed before we were married that we would adopt at some point. When we got the call from a friend about a young woman who wanted to place her baby for adoption, we were ecstatic. We sensed from the first conversation with the birthmother that the little boy growing inside of her was going to be our son. We began talking about names - Asher, Jacob, Matthew, Elijah – meaningful names from the pages of Scripture.

When we met her for the first time, she had picked his name. It was very important to her that we keep it as his given name. It wasn't a name we had picked and we wrestled deeply with it. Do we honor her wishes and keep his name? Do we change it after the adoption finalized? Should we forget the name we wanted?





Even as we visited with our caseworker, we asked her what she thought. "Do you believe that God knows his name?" she asked. "Absolutely!" we blurted out. She went on to challenge us to believe that God had known about this little boy far longer than we and we should trust that God already knew his name. It was a powerful moment!

After that visit, we recognized that the Scriptures are clear about God's knowledge of us, especially His plans for us. One particular passage that stood out was Jeremiah 1:5, "Before I formed you in your mother's womb I knew you and before you were born I consecrated you. I appointed you as a prophet among the nations." Jeremiah means, "God will raise up." It is strong and meaningful in the Biblical story. God used him to proclaim his truth to the nations for a generation. His name fit God's calling for his life.

We committed to keep the name that she had chosen. It has opened a door of trust and commitment between his birthparents and us.

Since our son was born, we have continued to develop a very healthy, open relationship with his birthparents. When we chose to honor her wishes about his name, it opened the door for the relationship we have today.

So, what's his name? She chose the name Colin James; Colin, after his birthfather and James after a special friend from her childhood. As we recognized God's sovereignty and His plans for our children, we noticed a noble trend. Our boys each have a Biblical name and a family name. We didn't set out with that in mind, but after struggling so deeply with what to name Colin, his name has become a great reward to us. It is a sign of confirmation of God's plan for our family and for each of our children.

PRAYER GUIDE: Pray that the Lord would give wisdom and compassion to adoptive parents as they seek the appropriate relationship with birth families.

NOTES			



Romans 8:15

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

Have you known someone who has gone through the adoption process? It's highly likely that they struggled with the wait. When called to respond to such an overwhelming need, why is there such a parade of delays, disappointment, and bureaucratic red tape?

Let's flip that for a moment. With so many Christians in the world, why are so many orphans and vulnerable children still waiting for someone to act?

Waiting is tough! God is purposeful, though, in his timing. As you read the following devotionals, pray through the challenge of waiting for the world to change and catch up to the plan God has in mind.

For more information, consult <u>www.BeaFamily.org</u> or <u>www.DillonAdopt.com</u>.





"Why?"

Scripture: Lamentations 3:22-26



Karl & Lori Heinrich have three sons, Matt (19), Garin (5) and Charlie (3). Karl is an officer in the U.S. Air Force. Lori serves as Worship & Music Director at Shiloh United Methodist Church in Shiloh, Illinois.

Why? It's a question our youngest son asks as often as he takes a breath and in response to most any statement. It is adorable and frustrating all at once, as there isn't always an easy answer.

As we waited for the Lord to fulfill His plan for us to expand our family through adoption, we, too, found ourselves regularly asking "Why?" Even as we trusted and believed that God had called us to adopt, we didn't understand the purpose of the many twists and turns we experienced along the way.

From the beginning of our marriage, we knew that we would someday adopt but were waiting on God to show us how that would happen. In April 2007, we learned of a brother and sister in Russia who were waiting for a family. We knew God was calling us to pursue them, and we set out to do so. At the time, Russia was requiring all international agencies to become reaccredited. God said, "Wait," and we did,

We still don't fully know why things happened the way they did, but this we do know: God is faithful. If we listen to Him and follow, He will not lead us astray, even if He allows us to take a meandering, difficult path to get there.

God When

believing that He had a plan. We were absolutely crushed in 2009 to learn that circumstances beyond anyone's control made their adoption impossible.

We considered giving up on adoption. We pleaded for God to intervene. We begged Him for answers. Still, in our lowest moments, we knew He was still calling, and He was calling us to Russia. That summer, we hosted a precious sibling group with the Angels from Abroad program. In spite of our love for them, we knew that these particular kids needed what we could not provide: a home with no younger siblings. And again, God said, "Wait," and we did, believing that He had a plan.

For a third time, we were matched, then again, heartbreak. More waiting... or so we thought.

For a fourth time we were matched. We had our documents in order and needed only to say, "Yes." One look at that sweet face, and there was no turning back! We traveled a few weeks later for our first visit, and it was far better than we could have dreamed. On our court day, more than three years after we began the process, we wept as the judge declared us his parents.

We still don't fully know why things happened the way they did, but this we do know: God is faithful. If we listen to Him and follow, He will not lead us astray, even if He allows us to take a meandering, difficult path to get there. Sometimes, it's just about timing. Sometimes God wants to teach us about Himself, to allow us to learn to rely on Him, or to make us more like Him. He knows our hearts and our needs far better than we do ourselves. Whatever the path, He will always lead us to what is best for us because He loves His children. And it will always be worth the wait!

PRAYER GUIDE: Pray that waiting families would have patience and trust in God's perfect will and timing in the midst of waiting.



What I Was Waiting For

Scripture: Psalm 27:10

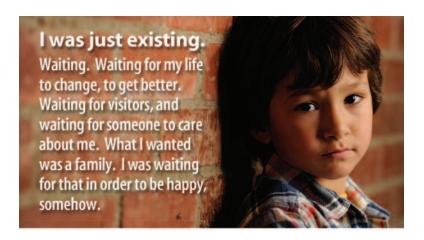


Simon Kincaid is a twenty-one year old alumnus of the foster care system. He is currently working and is anticipating starting college classes soon.

I grew up in residential facilities beginning at age ten. It was just me and 16 other kids and adults paid to be there. The other kids had visitors and family who would come see them, but I didn't have anybody. I just didn't believe that there was anything good in the world, because none of it was happening to me. Growing up like that is not easy at all. Sometimes I thought I couldn't cry anymore at the grief of being all alone in a strange place. I felt like the only way I could survive was to hold onto my anger and hate. I believed that by expressing love and wearing it on my skin was showing weakness and vulnerability.

I was just existing. Waiting. Waiting for my life to change, to get better. Waiting for visitors, and waiting for someone to care about me. What I wanted was a family. I was waiting for that in order to be happy, somehow. I wished for these things before I knew Christ, and during that time he was already listening to me. Out of the deepest part of my heart, he heard me – I guess that's what prayer is. I wanted God to prove to me that he was real. In my mind, I made a leap of faith and knew he would bring me out of my darkness and give me the things I wanted.

As an older teenager, I moved into a foster family. This family believed in Christ. This family fought for me and stood with me even when I pushed against them, particularly regarding God. They invited me to church, but I didn't want to go. But for some reason though, I felt rich in spirit. As messed up as I was, I felt heard. It was during my stay with this family that God found me, and I became a Christian. I chose to run to Christ, instead of continuing to run away from him.



At age 18, I left the CPS system. I had no one that I could really depend on. My foster family couldn't keep me because I was a legal adult and the rules at that time wouldn't let foster families house adults in the same home as younger kids. So I was gone.

After struggling for a couple of years I was at my lowest, but my faith never left me. I visited a church, and a couple I didn't even know prayed for me to accept the things I thought I would never have.

Two months later, I was matched with a mentor, a Christian man who welcomed me. It was a formal relationship, but it has never felt that way. I got to know his family, and they got to know me. We fit. I'm still surprised to have this kind of relationship with a family. It was what I was waiting for, and now it fits like a glove.

It has hit me like rushing water in a river, the love God has for me. He followed through and proved to me that he is real. He found me, he listened to me, and he put me into a family who cared for me when I needed them. And now, another. If there are families who care so much for me, then God must love me so much more.

PRAYER GUIDE: Pray that the Lord would guide children to the families He has chosen for them, according to His wisdom. Pray that the Lord would bring children home quickly (Psalm 68:6).



A Child Waits...

Scripture: Matthew 25:35-36, 40



Debbie Wynne is the Director for Buckner Adoption and Maternity Services, Inc. and Dillon International -Texas Office.

As I write this, I am looking at photos on my desk of just some of the many children who are waiting for a forever family. I look into the eyes of these children and each one has a story behind them: a life of loss, heartbreak and yet a hope and a dream for a future with a loving and stable forever family.

These are the children who you ask what they want at the age 7, 10, 12, expecting to hear they want a Barbie doll, a G-I Joe, or video games, but instead, the first thing they ask for is "a family."

Children shouldn't have to be desperate for the love of a family. It should be just a given for every child, but it is not for these. I have worked in the adoption and foster care programs at Buckner for over 18 years and my heart still breaks for each child and their story of loss.

I feel we are here to be a voice for these forgotten children, to respond to their plea for a family and provide them a future with a loving adoptive family, one child at a time.

It is truly a daunting undertaking when you consider over 120,000 waiting adoptable children in the U.S. and over 143 million orphans worldwide.

It is my prayer that churches and individuals will build and support Adoption, Foster Care and Orphan Ministries to pro-actively advocate for the "least of these." It will take the community and each individual to be the voice for these waiting children.

I also have photos on my desk of wonderful adoptive families embracing and loving their adopted children. We need more photos like these showing a tangible response to the overwhelming need. PRAYER GUIDE: Let our focus of prayer this week be for the waiting children as so clearly stated in the Lord's teaching in Matthew 25:35-36, 40, to encourage us to find specific ways to be a voice and advocate to help forever change lives, one child at a time.





God: 1, Jason: 0

Scripture: Romans 8:18-25



Jason Paredes and his wife Virginia have four kids, one of who was adopted from China in 2008. He is the Teaching Pastor at Fielder Road Baptist Church in Arlington, Texas.

I am not a patient man. I know it is not godly, but it's true. To be honest, I'm good with being impatient. The problem is that God isn't. A few years ago, He decided to demonstrate His lack-of-OK-ness with my impatience. Let me tell you my story.

On a trip to China I met a beautiful young boy who lived in an orphanage with other special needs children. Somehow this boy, Max, knew I was to be his father. Though he was only one year old at the time, he marked his territory by peeing all over me. He claimed me as his own!

"God, here is this child that needs adoption. Here we are ready to receive him. Why are you making us wait?"

God when

I got back to the US and shared my pictures of the orphans with my wife. Her love for Max was immediate. We were in! Adoption here we come... so we thought. But thus began the wait. We were told special needs adoptions would be fast. Ours wasn't. We were told that we could get pre-matched with Max. We couldn't. Days crept into months, months into over a year, and the process was completely stalled. Remember impatient Jason? He showed up.

"God, here is this child that needs adoption. Here we are ready to receive him. Why are you making us wait?" It amazes me how Scripture illuminates life. God's answer arrived bubble-wrapped in Romans 8:18-25, especially verses 23-25. It says that all creation eagerly awaits redemption, especially we who have the Spirit. "We also groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies" (Romans 8:23 HCSB).

God's instruction here is clear. The waiting does us good. It causes us to hope, and hope does not disappoint. If it were immediate, why would we have to hope? If the adoption were done, how would we learn to long deeply and jealously for our adoption? The wait breeds hope. Listen to what Paul says in Romans 5:3-5. "We also rejoice in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. This hope does not disappoint, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

God doesn't make us wait just for the sake of affliction. It is His mechanism to produce hope. And life without hope is no life at all. Now, with this in mind, read the last two verses of this passage. "Now in this hope we were saved, yet hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patience." Touché. God one, Jason zero.

That lesson is how an impatient man became an eager wait-er. How about you? Are you ready to welcome the wait?

PRAYER GUIDE: Pray for endurance, that families will wait on God's timing to accomplish His perfect plan.



"I Will Wait"

Scripture: Psalm 145:13



Marci Eubanks teaches 4th grade near Dallas, Texas and is the proud mom of three children, through both biology and adoption. She and her husband, Greg, recently partnered with others to launch the Family Foster & Adoption Ministry in their church.

As I grew up, I always thought of adoption as a positive thing, but I never thought of actually doing it. That all changed when my husband and I had been married for about 3 years. I read an article about Russian adoption in the *Buckner Today* magazine. I was very moved by the article and began feeling that God might be leading me in this direction. However, I thought my husband would not be interested, simply because we really had never spoken much about adoption before.

About that same time, as an employee of Buckner, he attended a devotional at work where a coworker shared about Russian adoption. He, too, was moved by the story he heard and began to feel God calling him in this direction, too. We were both quite surprised when we finally confided in each other about the way God had been speaking to us. So, we began a journey that would last almost two years. It would be a roller coaster ride with highs and some really low lows. We would hear about children and get excited only to learn that these children would not be matched with us. We went to support groups and rejoiced with others who had been matched with a child. Then we would go home and cry together.

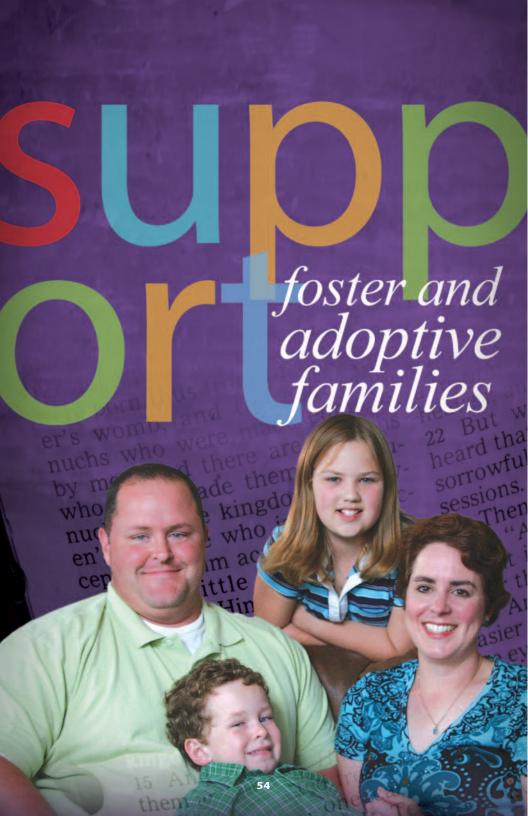
Even through all the struggles that waiting brought, we did learn to trust God in a way we never had before. We knew that he had called us to adopt, and we were going to stick with it no matter how long it took. There was a song by Twila Paris that I chose as my theme song during this time. It was encouraging to me each time I heard it:

"Could it be that He is only waiting there to see
If I will learn to love the dreams that he has dreamed for me?
Can't imagine what the future holds, but I've already made my choice
And this is where I stand until He moves me on,
And I will listen to his voice."

So, we stood where we were until we were led away from Russian adoption and toward domestic special needs adoption. God blessed us with a beautiful girl and boy who were siblings. I am so thankful for the gift God gave us in them as well as in our biological daughter who came two years after them. They were definitely worth the wait!

PRAYER GUIDE: Pray for God to remind us of the children who wait for families and to call out each of us with clarity to do our part to end their wait.





Beginning in the Old Testament, God's plan has always been to use us to care for the brokenhearted. Consider the guidelines for hospitality, the gleaning in fields, the kinship redeemer, and the year of jubilee.

We are built to live in relationship, in community. Support is one of the most significant factors in caring for orphans. Foster and Adoptive families desperately need your support through childcare, diapers, or even a listening ear over coffee. Your responsibility might just be that of support, which empowers a family to function most effectively.

Read these devotionals and pray for God to bring foster and/or adoptive families into your life. Then love them through your actions.

For more information, consult www.BeaFamily.org or www.DillonAdopt.com.





The Adoption Roller Coaster

Scripture: Philippians 2:3-4



As an adoption social work professional, Rebecca **Hackworth** has dedicated over 20 years guiding adoptive families through the international adoption process to build their families. She is the mom to six children, five of whom were adopted.

The adoption process can be such a roller coaster ride for

most prospective adoptive parents – three steps forward and two steps back. As caring family and friends, we want to show our support but sometimes we add to a family's frustration and anxiety regarding their child's adoption process when we ask too many questions – especially questions they can't answer. So how can we as "the body of Christ" show our love and support to an adoptive family who is struggling with the wait until their child comes home or is overwhelmed with the mounds of adoption paperwork to complete?

- Sending cards of encouragement is always appreciated!
- Asking "How can we best pray for you all this week?"
- Finding out things about the country or culture the family is adopting from that you admire or respect and sharing it with the family.
- Helping to promote diversity and adoption in your church so that



language. We can demonstrate Christ-like care and support through such simple acts as:

- Organizing a new baby/child shower for the adoptive family
- Delivering frozen casseroles for preparing quick meals later on days when grocery shopping and cooking are too much
- Helping with running errands
- Planning special outings with the other children in the family to give them some attention
- Giving a gift certificate for mom or dad or for the entire family to have a fun night out

But the most important way that we can show our love and support is to give a new adoptive family time alone at home with their new child. They don't really desire a lot of visitors as they focus on their new child's adjustments and build a dependable routine of care with as few new people in their child's life as possible. As difficult as that can be for us as friends and family to understand, if we remember about all the time the new parents have missed with that child, then we will see the importance of allowing them opportunities to let God knit those fragile new relationships into a family that will be shielded by the church family's love.

Keep new adoptive families in your community in your constant prayer and allow God to guide your heart about what kind of things will be the





Opening Up to Support

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 1:3-4



Bruce and Denise Kendrick lead Embrace, the orphan care ministry at Rhea's Mill Baptist Church in McKinney, Texas. Parents to seven incredible kids, avid campers, pet owners, and Diet Coke enthusiasts.

There were many factors that went into our decision to become foster parents, but the most compelling was a strong calling to care for God's children. A few months after we completed the training, paperwork and homestudy process we were licensed as foster parents with Buckner and our first placement arrived. Our friends, family, church family and neighbors all asked curious questions, and many offered their help. We turned down gracious offers for meals, babysitting and diapers. We felt that this was *our* commitment, and that we alone should be the ones providing for our foster children.

It was a lonely beginning to our fostering journey.

Many children came and and went from our home, but we stuck it out on our own. It was a hard road, but we stayed determined. Everything changed with the arrival of three young brothers to our home. They were neglected, and very behind in school. They'd spent years caring for themselves and stretched the limits of our parenting. We finally broke down and accepted the help we needed. Neighbors came over after school with snacks and sidewalk chalk. An older lady in our church bought the boys soccer cleats when the season began. A volunteer tutored the oldest brother at our kitchen table while I made dinner. Dear friends took turns babysitting the children in our home so we could have a break, or even a date, now and then.

It was such a relief.

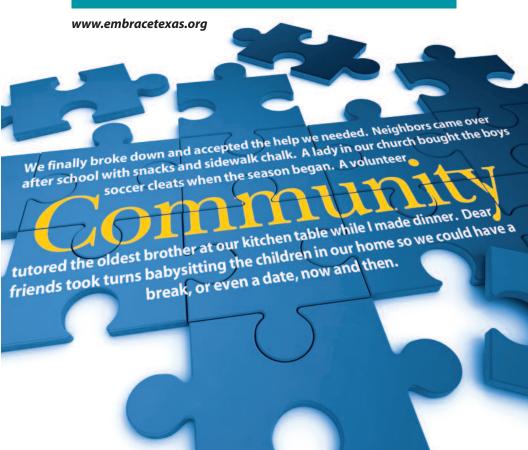
We learned that our foster children enjoyed, even needed, the caring attention of other adults. We learned that we could take responsibility for these children, and still open ourselves up to the help of others. We learned that the volunteers and friends that came alongside our family

would grow and change thanks to their time spent with our children and family. Most of all, we learned that God's plan for us was never one of loneliness. Even when we feel like no one understands the struggle we face I can remember: 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

ren come to Me,

God is comforting us, offering us mercy, with one purpose: So we can offer that comfort and mercy to others.

PRAYER GUIDE: Pray for the Lord to give strength and encouragement to all workers involved in the care and placement of children. Pray that He would draw them to Himself and renew their compassion for the children they serve.





Message in a Bottle

Scripture: James 1:27



Kyle Tresch is the Director of Operations for Dillon International, an affiliate of Buckner Adoption and Maternity Services. Kyle and Lesa have three children, the youngest of which was adopted from China in 2001 through Dillon.

The adoption process can be such a roller coaster ride In

1979, the rock group The Police released the song "Message in a Bottle" that would go on to become their first No. 1 single in the UK. The song is about a lonely man trapped alone on an island who hopes to be rescued from his loneliness by putting a message in a bottle. The song contains the recurring refrains, "I send an SOS to the world" and "I hope that someone gets my message in a bottle." It's the kind of song with refrains that replay in your head for an entire day.



to end, God's message is an SOS that He is sending out to the world on behalf all orphans and He desperately hopes that someone will get that message in your Bible. By this point in the devotional, you've no doubt encountered many of the numerous passages of scripture reflecting God's SOS to the world on behalf of orphans. Now the question is: Have you gotten that message? It's a message to God's people, the Church.

In James 1:27 the brother of Jesus inspired by God told the 1st Century Church that religion is pure and faultless when it includes care for the orphans. At the time James wrote that scripture, his world was ruled by the Romans who practiced a unique form of infanticide (killing infants) that involved abandoning unwanted newborns at a designated place outside the city gates where they would simply be left to cry out their brief life. It was the practice of the early Church to go to that designated place and rescue and care for those orphans left to die.

Now, the 21st Century Church confronts a world in which over 143 million orphans are figuratively crying outside the city gates around the globe and in our own back yard. What is God's message to the Church? Few things in scripture are more black and white than the answer to that question: The Church is to rescue and care for those orphans. But, with so many orphans, how?

Consider the number *One*: *one* orphan, *one* adoptee who might not look the mom and dad that bring her to church, *one* couple who wants to adopt but cannot afford it, *one* adoptive family in need of emotional support, *one* additional member to your family, *one* local church, *one* Sunday School class, *one* committed believer. Consider that you are *one*. Globally, the Church is comprised of approximately six billion *ones* and on behalf of the orphans, God has sent his SOS to the Church. God's heart is that you would be someone who gets his message in a bottle.

PRAYER GUIDE: Pray for the Lord to give courage, so that we will respond to the needs we see of foster and adoptive families in our own community.



The Least of These

Scripture: Matthew 25:31-40



Charles and Paula Risinger mourn the quiet every time their grandchildren leave from visiting. They live in northeast Texas on 65 acres of pine trees and pasture.

My wife and I are the proud parents of two daughters. Our daughters and their husbands have given us six grandchildren – and three of them came into our families by adoption. At the time of their adoption, they were just young children. In a way, they were a part of "the least of these" as Jesus described the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the one needing clothes, the sick and the prisoner.

About thirty-five years ago our church became involved in a ministry project to an orphanage near Matamoros, Mexico, helping to build cottages and a medical facility. In addition to working on the construction, we had opportunity to spend time ministering to the children. All our family had the opportunity to visit there and interact with these wonderful people. I believe that experience, in some way, helped to shape what later became God's call to our daughters' families to become adoptive families.

Our younger daughter and her husband were the first to explore adoption, planning to adopt a child from Russia. However, it became apparent that God was leading in a different direction – a domestic adoption of two children.

About seven years ago, I had the opportunity to make several mission trips to Latvia and one to St. Petersburg, Russia. During these trips our group visited orphanages and saw so many precious children in need of placement in a permanent family. Seeing children in an institutional orphanage setting, even one where the children are well cared for, makes one realize that the proper place for a child is in a home where they can be loved and nurtured, not an institution where the focus must be more on physical care.

Our older daughter and family began to feel God's call to adopt in Russia, and last year, they were able to bring our youngest grandson home from St. Petersburg.

Grandparents have a place in support of adoptive families. That support may take several different forms – emotional, spiritual, as well as financial. We recall the emotional trials that came as our families worked through all of the adoption process, and the spiritual battles that seem to come when we step out in faith and then things don't work out as hoped.

What is one of "the least of these" worth to God? When "the King" said, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me," He indicated the value of our service to others. We have been blessed through our support of families who wished to adopt one of "the least of these."

PRAYER GUIDE: Pray for the Lord to remind His body that "religion is pure and faultless when it includes care for the orphans." Pray that He would guide each of us to find our role.





Pure and Perfect Love

Scripture: Matthew 25:31-46



Kathleen Strottman comes to her role as the Executive Director of the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute (CCAI) after serving for nearly eight years as a trusted advisor to Senator Mary L. Landrieu. A graduate of Whittier Law School's center

for children's rights, Kathleen was proud to work on legislation and initiatives that protect the rights of children and their families. She and her husband Matt are the proud parents of three children, Grace, Noah and Liam.

That there is no greater service to God than in serving the least among us. In doing so, we are not only able to realize the purpose of our own personal God given talents, but see, if only for a moment, the pure and perfect love that our Father has for all of us. For most of my life, I have taken this verse very literally. If I allow the earthly excuses such as not having enough time or money to distract me from this call, then I run the risk of being without Him.

But after fifteen years working with orphans, children in foster care, and the families that come forward to call them their own, I have come to view this scripture in a new and deeper way. Almost any time I speak to a parent about their adoption experience, they spend the majority of the time detailing the many blessings adoption has brought into their lives; how much joy, completeness and purpose has come from providing a home for a child in need. It has always struck me how universal this experience is.

But then in reflecting about my own experience, in particular working with the young people who have spent time in foster care, I see that I definitely gain more from being with them then I give. In them, I am able to see the most perfect examples of Christ. His humility, His unwavering faith, His love, and His courage.

So maybe the lesson behind this scripture is the same as the one behind the lines of Steven Curtis Chapman's song, "What Now?"

I saw the face of Jesus in a little orphan girl She was standing in the corner on the other side of the world And I heard the voice of Jesus gently whisper to my heart Didn't you say you wanted to find me? Well here I am, here you are

What will you do now that you found Me?
What now?
What will you do with this treasure you've found?
I know I may not look like what you expected
But if you remember this is right where I said I would be.

Maybe what we are to be reminded is that if we are, as Christians, looking to find Christ, if we are craving to be with Him, then we do not need to wait for heaven, for He is here on earth. And nowhere is He more ever present than in the hearts and hands of orphans.

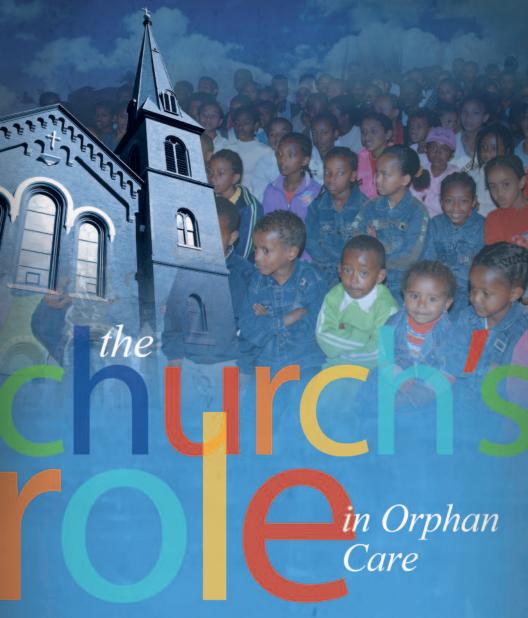
My fervent prayer remains that more people's eyes will be opened to the presence of Christ in the children who need families and that they will be awakened to the opportunity being that family is for them as Christians.

Lord, please give all of us the courage to continue to seek you out wherever you may be, and the wisdom to serve you once we find you there.

PRAYER GUIDE: Pray for God to give us a thirst for learning, so that we will understand the unique life of foster and adoptive families. Ask Him to replace our judgment with love in action.

www.ccainstitute.org





Romans 8:15

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

For several days, now, you've read about God's heart for the orphan, his design for adoption and the wonderful picture he paints in the Bible of good news, belonging and homecoming.

What can you do, though? What should be the church's response? How should a Christian move forward with this knowledge?

The next few days, you will read the words of great leaders as they describe the church's role to care for the orphan.

For more information, consult www.buckner.org, www.itsyourmission.org or www.pandulce.typepad.com





Brokenhearted

Scripture: Isaiah 1:17



Karen James and her husband Bill, their two grown children and soon to be daughter-in-law, all worship at North Way Christian Community in Wexford, Pennsylvania where Bill is the Pastor of Community Care.



"Will you allow your heart to be broken over this?" That was the question God whispered to me as I considered what I'd just heard - 143 million orphans worldwide. Through my tears of outrage I cried "Why isn't the Church doing anything about this...why isn't my church? And then ... why aren't I?

The orphan crisis is not the responsibility of world governments, or humanitarian aid organizations, although helpful. The call and command is to the Church. Over 45 times orphans and the fatherless are mentioned in scripture. Verses like Isa. 1:17 tell us to "Defend the cause of the orphan." In Prov. 31:8 we are to "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves for the rights of all who are destitute." James 1:27

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tells us that pure religion is to "look after orphans and widows in their distress." All show God's heart for the most vulnerable.

On my first trip to Honduras with Buckner in 2008 we visited an AIDS orphanage. I spent the afternoon holding a little 3 yr old named Sari and putting a new pair of shoes on her feet. We couldn't communicate well through language, but she understood love through hugs and piggyback rides. As I held her on my lap I prayed that she would know how much God loved her and come to know him personally and that despite her situation, God hadn't forgotten about her. But how will she know that unless the local Church continues to show her love and care?

The Church is the largest organization in the world, mobilized in every country. We're to be living out God's command to make Him known among the nations (Psalms 105:1) and work for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt 6:10). Historically, it has been the Church who cared for orphans from rescuing infants from exposure during the Roman Empire to establishing orphanages in England and America, thus demonstrating the value of all life made in God's image.

From that first day of asking the Lord what He wanted me to do about orphans an Orphan Care ministry at our church was birthed beginning with a group of passionate, like-minded people coming together for prayer and to seek God's direction. Today, 5 years later, we educate and support families to care for orphans in a variety of ways through adoption, foster care and international orphan care.

What could He be asking you and your church to do? Adopt a child? Start a support group or adoption fund? Provide respite care for foster families? Mentor at risk social orphans in your community? Visit orphans in another country? We can all do something; we're commanded to do something. Do you hear God asking, "Will you allow your heart to be broken over this?"

PRAYER GUIDE: Pray for God to raise up churches who will mobilize people to care for and advocate for orphans who cannot speak for themselves.



A Calling to Adoption

Scripture: 1 Peter 4:10-11



After serving as vice president for five years, **Chuck Johnson** assumed the role of President and CEO of National Council For Adoption in August 2010. Chuck led a Christian adoption agency in Birmingham, Alabama for 17 years

before becoming a full-time orphan and adoption advocate in Washington, D.C. He and his wife, Susan, reside in Maryland with their three children.

My wife of 23 years and I have been blessed with wonderful children, some by adoption, some by birth. God has shown me that His plan for my life includes helping other children find families.

I serve now as the president to National Council For Adoption--a great privilege, but not one that I had initially envisioned as part of my life plan. And while I had planned to marry and have a family, I didn't know that I would become an adoptive father or a full-time advocate for children. Along the way, the Lord changed my heart and my own plans for my life, and blessed me with a calling to serve children, birthparents, and adoptive families worldwide.

My personal entry into the world of adoption and orphan advocacy began at the age of 17 when I first committed myself spiritually to make a difference in the lives of people. I came to believe that God has special concern for children, in particular children in need of a family. While reading James 1:27, I asked myself, "What am I doing to carry out my Biblical responsibility to widows and orphans, since it seems like such an important part of living out my faith?"

I think this is a question that every believer must ask and answer himself. For some, it may mean that they adopt a child, become foster parents, volunteer to help orphaned children or children in foster care, or give of their time and resources to support organizations that make a difference in the lives of women and children. For me, it meant a call to full-time adoption ministry, as I spent 17 years working for a Christian adoption ministry, counseling women experiencing unintended pregnancy and helping children and adoptive families. This work led me

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to become an international advocate for children, birthparents, and families with the National Council For Adoption. I am grateful to go to a job every day that allows me to combine my faith and my vocation to serve children, birth parents, and families.

My wife and I became foster parents for a short time, which increased both my appreciation for foster parents and my desire to help children in foster care. This experience played a role in our decision to adopt our son Christian, now 12 years old, from the foster care system. We also adopted our daughter, Caroline, who was born with a severe birth defect; her teenage mother unable to care for a child with such special needs, and asked my wife and I to adopt her.

It was the clarity of God's call to become Caroline's parents that saw us through her unexpected death. I struggled greatly after Caroline's death, asking God why He would have us adopt her only to lose her. Ultimately, I came to understand and accept that just as He called us to the blessings and joys of parenting, He also called us and strengthened us to meet every one of its challenges.

God clearly called me to orphan ministry. Is God calling you to do more on behalf of birthparents, orphaned children and children awaiting adoption, and adoptive families? Consider this as you prayerfully seek God's will for your life. Ask Him how your gifts can be used to administer His grace to others. And then do the work He sets before you – confidently and in faith -- trusting Him to provide the wisdom, the guidance, and all of the tools you will need to accept His call in your life.

PRAYER GUIDE: Pray for wisdom and direction to individuals who feel called to serve orphan's ministry in their church. Ask the Lord to guide them to the right leaders who will help bring the vision to fruition.

For more information go to www.adoptioncouncil.org



From Adultery to Adoption

Scripture: John 8:1-12



Joey Armstrong currently serves as the Community Minister for Buckner Children and Family Services at First Baptist Church of Norman, Oklahoma. He earned his Master of Divinity from George W. Truett Seminary at

Baylor University in 2009. His passion and vision is to see the Western church rediscover its identity by bridging social and economic class gaps by adopting widows, orphans, and the unlovable.

John 8 tells us the story of the woman caught in adultery. She is humiliated, shamed and scared, knowing her life is about to end. She has no one to give her a second chance and no one to speak up for her. She is abandoned and therefore, an orphan. As her accusers cock their arms back, ready to throw, the chaos is cut by her Savior's voice, "The one without sin among you should be the first to throw a stone at her." Her corner is not so empty after all. Someone has shown her unmerited merciful love, inclusion and advocacy. She realizes she is not an orphan anymore; she has been adopted.

The church, moved by the Holy Spirit at work among us, risks itself on behalf of those that are alone, excluded and without a voice. The Church must be a community of hope and encouragement for those who are abandoned, as well as those seeking to adopt.



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Adoption is central. As a theme, it saturates the entirety of Christian scripture. As a movement, it is the incarnation of selfless familial love and hospitality. Adoption is jumping in head first into the water of the Kingdom of Heaven until you are soaked to the bone with what it means to put you and your family in a position for God to bring about his purposes on earth.

When we realize aspects of God's character for ourselves, we journey towards being glimpses of him in this world. When we experience His love as someone who does not deserve it, we work to be that love for others. When we discover Jesus including the excluded in the Gospels, we reach out to the unlovable. When we notice those of the human race who have lost their voice, we seek to advocate and be that voice for them. When we acknowledge our own adoption, we seek to adopt.

Unmerited merciful love, inclusion, and advocacy: this is adoption.

This is where the Church comes in. Just as Christ adopted the woman caught in adultery, so should the local body of believers. When the world blames, shames, and un-names, the church steps in and adopts. The church, moved by the Holy Spirit at work among us, risks itself on behalf of those that are alone, excluded and without a voice. The Church must be a community of hope and encouragement for those who are abandoned, as well as those seeking to adopt.

Whether you know it or not, God is rooting for you. He is cheering for you like the proud father that he is, and as more and more people discover the literal call to adopt a child into their family they will need to be surrounded by people through whom God cheers, encourages, and loves. The local church is not the accuser exposing the abandoned and threatening judgment. The local church is to be the Savior that adopts and supports the vulnerable and their families showing unmerited merciful love, inclusion, and advocacy.

PRAYER GUIDE: Pray that the Lord would inspire and excite numbers of churches about His desire to use them to bless orphans near and far.



Not Forgotten

Scripture: Isaiah 49:15



Candace Gray is Director of Service Offerings and Performance for Buckner Children & Family Services. She is a member of Concord Baptist Church where she serves in the Global Missions Ministry.

Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!

In December 2009, my church, Concord Baptist Church took a mission trip with Buckner to Kitale, a rural village in Kenya. This was our first trip to Kenya and we worked with excitement and diligence to prepare lessons, crafts and other activities to express the love of Jesus to the children we would encounter. Before our arrival, we learned that the children, ranging in age from 5 to 16 years old, come from a variety of situations. Some have lost both of their parents due to an illness; some live with one of their parents or other family members. All were poor. On our first day, there was one girl, in particular, who captured my heart. She had a skin condition that looked like a rash and it covered her face and her body. At age 12, Karima* was older than most of the children, yet she was quiet and withdrawn. While the other children laughed, played and enthusiastically made our acquaintance, she often stayed in the background.

We had a strong desire to have significant impact on the kids, but we felt woefully inadequate. We were nervous about being able to bridge cultural and language barriers. Unfortunately, blank stares on the first day confirmed that much of our lesson was too long, too complicated and sometimes too American. That night we reworked our plans for the week, cutting & simplifying. The lessons were greatly improved, but



God chose to use a song later in the week to communicate a transformational message. One of our team members had the idea to teach the children a song titled, "Not Forgotten." The chorus of the song says, "I am not forgotten, I am not forgotten. God knows my name."

The simple message of this song resonated strongly with the children, their teachers and our team. By the end of the week and several repetitions of the song, even Karima recognized that she was valued in the eyes of God. The Lord used this song to teach us that though we live in a different country, with a different language and different culture, our core need and desire is the same. We long to know that someone knows us by name and loves us. We long to know that we have great value. We long to know that in the midst of hard situations, God will "remember" us and provide deliverance for us. Jesus has already demonstrated his remembrance of us by sacrificing his life for our salvation and meeting our every need. Who, then, is better qualified than the followers of Christ to demonstrate to vulnerable children in the United States and in other parts of the world that they are not forgotten?

PRAYER GUIDE: Pray that God would give churches wisdom in ministering to vulnerable families and preventing children from being separated from their biological families.





Beauty and Brokenness

Scripture: Psalm 22:1-5



Jedd Medefind is the father of five children, one by adoption and one expected next year. He formerly led the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, and now serves as President of the Christian Alliance for Orphans.

The Psalms weave together both blinding beauty and aching brokenness. They sing and weep, celebrate and groan. "Taste and see that the Lord is good..." "For I eat ashes as my food and mingle my drink with tears..." "The earth is the Lords and everything in it." "The darkness is my only friend."

Why such profound contrast? Because this is the truth of the world we inhabit. When God saw all that he had made, he pronounced it, Very good! But creation has been marred and bent by sin, almost beyond recognition. And yet—thanks be to God!—there is more to the story. God has affected a great stratagem of restoration. He pursues and rescues what seemed hopelessly lost. Though sin left us destitute and alone, God adopts us and invites us to call Him Abba, and to live as His true sons and daughters.

Perhaps nowhere do we see our world's beauty and brokenness more vividly than in the plight of the orphan. What could be more lovely and very good than a precious child? And yet, what could be more tragic than to see this child forced to face the world alone, without lullaby or defense against those who would exploit and oppress?

And yet—thanks be to God!—this is not all there is to the story. God describes Himself as a "defender of the fatherless." And He calls His people to do the same. Just as he pursued and rescued us, we are to pursue and rescue the orphan. We love not only because He first loved us, but also in much the same way.

This realization carries a warning, too. We must know from the start that to pursue and rescue the orphan mirrors the Gospel story not only in its beauty, but in its costliness, too. A child's journey as an orphan always begins in tragedy. Usually, it gets worse from there. So the sacrifice and

lidren come to Mor such 13,4 God. When

perseverance required to bring healing and wholeness to this wounded boy or girl can sometimes feel like a cross.

With this in clear view, we would do well to "count the cost" before answering God's invitation to love the fatherless as He does. But if still willing to step forward, we can know this: joy awaits us that cannot be found in the comfort, control or convenience we may lose in the process. To love the orphan in her distress joins us fully in the weeping and singing, groaning and celebration of the Psalms. It reveals in action, not just words, the Gospel story. Ultimately, it allows us to experience a beauty and brokenness of a kind we can only know when we reflect God's heart for a beautiful and broken world.

PRAYER GUIDE: Pray that the Body of Christ would respond to the Lord's heart for the orphans and vulnerable children and allow their hearts to be broken with what breaks His heart.

For more information go to www.ChristianAllinaceforOrphans.org



"Just as he pursued and rescued us, we are to pursue and rescue the orphan."











