

Orphan Care, Adoption, and the Church: Historical Reflections and Contemporary Challenges

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Orphan care and adoption are hot topics within the evangelical world today. The last few years have witnessed a proliferation of conferences focused on adoption and orphan care. Two weeks from this Sunday, over a thousand churches in more than twenty countries around the world will highlight the plight of orphans on what has come to be known as Orphan Sunday. In the past decade or so, some fairly visible Christians have adopted and have started promoting adoption and orphan care from various platforms. And a good number of books have been published on adoption and orphan care, even in the last couple of years.

So what are we to think of this trend? Is this recent emphasis on orphan care and adoption just another Christian fad? Worse, is this movement another form of the social gospel in new dress? Is orphan care something new? Is it something foreign to the Scriptures and something the church has never engaged in before?

I. What Have Believers of the Past Done About the Plight of Orphans?

A. The Early Church

1. Abortion and exposure were very common in the ancient world (see, e.g., *Oxyrhynchus Papyrus* 744).

“Prior to the advent of modern medicine, most societies have utilized a form of exposure, and in view of the dangers of abortion, exposing a child was thought of as the best way of saving an infant from a life of impoverishment or disability. ...Moreover, it was common for children to be exposed in places which enabled their discovery by other adults, who might take them in” (Ray Lawrence, “Childhood in the Roman Empire,” *History Today* 55).

In the ancient world, children who were exposed usually met one of three fates: death, slavery/prostitution, or Christian “adoption.”

2. Early church history is replete with references to the fact that believers, and especially church leaders, were involved in orphan care.

Writing to the church in Smyrna about the year 110, Ignatius warned the church: “Now note well those who hold heretical opinions about the grace of Jesus Christ that

came to us; note how contrary they are to the mind of God. They have no concern for love, none for the widow, *none for the orphan*, none for the oppressed, none for the prisoner or the one released, none for the hungry or thirsty” (Ignatius, *Smyrnaeans* 6.2).

“The presbyters, for their part, must be compassionate, merciful to all, turning back those who have gone astray, visiting all the sick, *not neglecting a widow, orphan, or poor person*, but always aiming at what is honorable in the sight of God and of people” (Polycarp, *Philippians* 6.1, c. A.D. 110).

“Falsehood is not found among them; and they love one another; and from widows they do not turn away their esteem; and *they deliver the orphan from him who treats him harshly*. And he who has, gives to him who has not, without boasting. And when they see a stranger, they take him in to their homes and rejoice over him as a very brother” (*Apology of Aristides the Philosopher* 15, c. A.D. 125).

“It is the way of persecutors of the good, of those who hate truth, love a lie, do not know the reward of righteousness, do not adhere to what is good or to righteous judgment, *who ignore the widow and the orphan*...have no mercy for the poor, do not work on behalf of the oppressed, are reckless with slander, do not know the one who made them, are murderers of children...who turn away from someone in need...utterly sinful” (*Epistle of Barnabas* 20.2, c. A.D. 100–130).

Writing in the mid-second century, Justin Martyr (c. 100–165) described an early Christian worship service. After recounting how believers celebrated the Lord’s Supper, he explained what happened next: “And those who are well off and are willing to do so give as much as each desires, and the money thus collected is deposited with *the bishop, who takes care of the orphans* and widows, and those who are in straits through sickness or any other cause, and those in prison, and our visitors from other parts—in short, he looks after all who are in need” (Justin Martyr, *1 Apology* 67).

A third century document known as the *Didascalia Apostolorum* lays out the criteria for selecting a presbyter. One of the requirements in this list is that the candidate has been known as “a father to the orphans” (3.2). This document then goes on to describe a suitable candidate for the bishopric as one who has been “a lover of toil, a lover of widows, *a lover of orphans*” (3.2).

A number of early (post-Constantine) burial inscriptions speak specifically of church leaders engaged in the care of orphans, of Christian orphanages for foundlings, and of church funds being used to support the care of exposed infants (Camden Cobern, *The New Archaeological Discoveries*, 9th ed., p. 427).

A fourth century document known as the *Apostolic Constitutions* states that whenever a Christian youth becomes an orphan he or she should be adopted by “one of the

brethren... for they which do so perform a great work, and become fathers to orphans, and shall receive the reward of this charity from the Lord God” (4.1.1).

*When we first meet the mention of the adoption and bringing up of foundlings, this work appears not as a novelty, but as one long practiced. It is true that the heathen also used to take care of exposed children, but for the purposes of bringing them up as gladiators or prostitutes, or to use them in their own service.... Christians brought up the children whom they took charge of for the Lord, and for a respectable and industrious life (G. Uhlhorn, *Christian Charity in the Ancient Church*, p. 186).*

B. The Middle Ages

1. During the fourth century, Christians established many hospitals which provided care for orphans, widows, foreigners, the sick, and the poor (Timothy Miller, *The Orphans of Byzantium: Child Welfare in the Christian Empire*, pp. 174–75).
2. In the East, such hospitals gradually began to specialize in serving one or another of these categories of people, and therefore some evolved into orphanages.
3. In the West, some hospitals also developed into orphanages. And numerous orphans were raised in monasteries with at least one rising all the way to the bishop of Rome’s seat in the ninth century as Pope Sergius II (*The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Orphans and Orphanages,” by Charles F. McKenna).

*Apparently, many episcopal sees supported such orphan schools because in the eighth century... emperor Leo III assumed that provincial bishops were maintaining group homes large enough to care for and educate all the local children whose parents had left them without guardians. In addition to episcopal orphan schools, the Christian Church also supported monastic orphan schools (Timothy Miller, *The Orphans of Byzantium: Child Welfare in the Christian Empire*, p. 127).*

C. The Protestant Reformers

1. In 1525 Martin Luther (1483–1546) married Katherine von Bora (1499–1550) a former nun whom he had helped escape from a Cistercian convent. Martin and Katie went on to have six children by birth. In addition to these six, they also adopted four more children who had lost their mother to the plague. And they eventually took in seven orphaned nieces and nephews (Roland Bainton, *Women of the Reformation in Germany and Italy*, p. 30). Luther said relatively little about the care of orphans, but his actions spoke very loudly.



Martin & Katie Luther

2. John Calvin (1509–1564) was kept so busy with his work as a Reformer that he didn't get around to thinking seriously about marriage until he was thirty years old. Like Luther, Calvin's decision to marry was not an overly romantic one. Numerous young ladies were suggested to him, but he turned down each of these. Instead, Calvin took notice of a young woman in his church who had recently become a widow along with her two children who had been left fatherless. And so in August 1540, Calvin married Idelette de Bure, the widow of a former Anabaptist. Idelette brought to their new home a son and a daughter from her first marriage. She also bore Calvin three children, each of whom died in infancy. In March 1549, after less than nine years of marriage, Idelette died as well. In a letter to Pierre Viret, written shortly after her death, Calvin recounted a conversation he had had with his wife just three days before her death. Idelette had spoken to him about the children. She told Calvin that she had commended her children to the care of God. Calvin replied, "That will not prevent me from caring for them." In that same letter, Calvin explained to Viret that he had promised Idelette that he would care for her soon to be (biologically) orphaned children as if they were his own.

Nor were these the only orphaned children for whom Calvin would provide care. In 1561, Guillaume de Trie was tragically taken from his family leaving several children behind. Despite his age and deteriorating health, Calvin took it upon himself to act as guardian for these fatherless children. He wrote to Theodore Beza concerning this new responsibility: "I owe it to the memory of my wonderful friend to love his children as if they were my own. ...It would be a criminal act if I were to break the trust which has been placed upon me" (11 Feb 1562, cited in Richard Stauffer, *The Humanness of John Calvin*, p. 85).

D. More Recent Times

1. In January 1740, George Whitefield (1714–1770) the famed evangelist of the Great Awakening went to look at a 500-acre plot of land about ten miles outside Savannah, GA. Although he was in the habit of preaching outdoors to thousands, as Whitefield surveyed this particular plot he was not envisioning an enormous outdoor service, but rather a place to house orphaned boys. He wrote in his journal on January 24, 1740, "I called it Bethesda, that is, the House of Mercy; for I hope many acts of mercy will be shewn there, and that many will thereby be stirred up to praise the Lord, as a God Whose mercy endureth forever" (*George Whitefield's Journals*, p. 395). Just a few days later, he wrote, "Took in three German orphans, the most pitiful objects, I think, I ever saw. ...Were all the money I have collected [in England in 1739], to be spent freeing these



Bethesda Home for Boys (est. 1740)

three children from slavery, it would be well laid out. I have also in my house near twenty more, who, in all probability, if not taken in, would be as ignorant of God and Christ as the Indians” (*George Whitefield’s Journals*, pp. 395–96).

By March 1740, the Orphan House buildings were coming along nicely, and Whitefield had about 40 children under his care. On March 30, 1740, he wrote in his journal, “All things belonging to the Orphan House succeed beyond expectation, and some of my little flock have lately (as far as I can judge) been effectually called of God” (*George Whitefield’s Journals*, p. 404).

Throughout the next thirty years of his ministry, Whitefield would often end his sermons with an appeal for funds to support the Orphan House.

[Benjamin Franklin writing] *Mr. Whitefield...preached up this charity, and made large collections, for his eloquence had a wonderful power over the hearts and purses of his hearers, of which I myself was an instance. ...I thought it would have been better to have built the house here [in Philadelphia]...but he was resolute in his first project, rejected my counsel, and I therefore refused to contribute. I happened, soon after, to attend one of his sermons, in the course of which I perceived he intended to finish with a collection, and I silently resolved he should get nothing from me. ...As he proceeded I began to soften, and concluded to give the coppers. Another stroke of his oratory made me ashamed of that, and determined me to give the silver; and he finished so admirably that I emptied my pocket wholly into the collector’s dish, gold and all* (*Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. John Bigelow, 1869 ed., pp. 254–55).

2. As a youth George Müller (1805–1898) was the wayward son of a Prussian tax collector. But at twenty years of age, Müller was converted. In 1835, Müller determined to establish a house for orphans that would be funded by prayer alone. Throughout the next sixty years his Orphan Houses grew as Müller looked to God alone for support of (eventually) thousands of orphans who lived under his care in the five Orphan Houses in Bristol, England. All told during his lifetime Müller provided for more than ten thousand orphans without ever appealing for funds.



Several of the Orphan Houses in Ashley Down, Bristol

3. Known as the “Prince of Preachers,” every week Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892) addressed the thousands who crowded into the Metropolitan Tabernacle to hear him speak. But as Spurgeon looked at the streets of London he recognized that many people would never darken the doorstep of the Tabernacle, and he longed to see the church do something more to reach the people of London for Christ.

“In addressing his prayer meeting in the summer of 1866 Spurgeon said, ‘Dear friends, we are a huge church, and should be doing more for the Lord in this great city. I want us, tonight, to ask Him to send us some new work; and if we need money to carry it on, let us pray that the means also may be sent.’ A few days later Spurgeon received a letter from a Mrs. Hillyard, stating that she had some £20,000 which she would like to devote to the training and educating of orphan boys” (Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biography*, p. 126).

Within a few months Spurgeon had purchased land for the orphanage, and additional funds had begun to come in from various sources. In 1867 Spurgeon and the Metropolitan Tabernacle established the Stockwell Orphanage for boys (a house for girls was also opened in 1879).

As Spurgeon’s biographers record, whenever Spurgeon visited the orphanage the children would crowd around him, and he came to know many of them by name. One reporter described Spurgeon’s relationship to the children under his care: “As to the happiness of the orphans, there is no doubt about it. When Mr. Spurgeon opened the door there was a shout of delight at the appearance of their friend. It was like a welcome to an old school fellow, and was repeated in every house we entered. Not the kind of cheer that requires a lead, but one that sprang up on the instant when it was known that Mr. Spurgeon was at the orphanage” (*The Daily Telegraph*, 6 May 1880, cited in Lewis Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers*, p. 426).



Stockwell Orphanage (in 1884)

Unlike most other orphanages of the day, Spurgeon believed that the orphans should be organized into smaller family units with a matron over each group. But more importantly, Spurgeon believed that the orphans needed to be raised under the continual sound of the gospel. As Drummond noted, “Above all, Spurgeon decided that the Stockwell Orphanage should be a Christian institution, not sectarian, but thoroughly Christian. Over every bed there hung a Bible text and a motto for each individual child. ... The spiritual life of the children had top priority in the entire program of the institution. On Sunday morning the children attended the Metropolitan Tabernacle and neighboring chapels...” (Drummond, *Spurgeon*, p. 427).

To an agnostic who one day accosted him and challenged his Christian beliefs, Spurgeon pointed out the failure of the unbelievers’ organizations to take on any definite and sustained program of help to the thousands of needy around them. In contrast he pointed to the works that sprang from evangelical Christianity, and he closed the conversation by paraphrasing the triumphant cry of Elijah, vigorously asserting, as well he might, “The God who answereth by Orphanages, LET HIM BE GOD!” (Dallimore, *Spurgeon*, p. 130).

II. Why Have God's People Cared for Orphans Throughout the Centuries? And Why Should God's People Do So Today?

A. Our God has a special concern for the fatherless.

1. All people are made in God's image, and therefore they alone amidst all of God's creation bear a unique dignity and value (Gen 1:26–27).

“With the tongue we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. ...My brothers, these things ought not to be so” (Jas 3:9–10).

“Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image” (Gen 9:6).

2. The Scriptures reveal that God is particularly interested in the welfare of orphans and other vulnerable people.

“God executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing” (Deut 10:18).

“At the end of every three years you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in the same year and lay it up within your towns. ...and the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, who are within your towns, shall come and eat and be filled, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do” (Deut 14:28–29).

“...to you [God] the helpless commits himself; you have been the helper of the fatherless” (Psalm 10:14).

“Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation” (Psalm 68:5).

“In you [God] the orphan finds mercy” (Hos 14:3).

B. Our God wants his people to have a special concern for the fatherless.

1. Throughout the OT, God commanded his people to care for the fatherless.

“Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless” (Isa 1:17).

“Give justice to the weak and the fatherless...deliver them from the hand of the wicked” (Psalm 82:3–4).

“Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy” (Prov 31:9).

2. In the NT, God expects his children to care for the fatherless.

“If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: *to visit orphans and widows in their affliction*, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory” (Jas 1:26–2:1).

“[James] does not define generally what religion is, but reminds us that religion without the things he mentions is nothing” (John Calvin, commentary on James 1:27).

“One test of pure religion, therefore, is the degree to which we extend aid to the ‘helpless’ in our world—whether they be widows and orphans, immigrants trying to adjust to a new life, impoverished third-world dwellers, the handicapped, or the homeless” (Douglas Moo, *The Letter of James*, PNTC, p. 97).

Christians whose religion is pure will imitate their Father by intervening to help the helpless (Douglas Moo, *James*, TNTC, p. 86).

C. Our God is an adoptive Father.

1. As part of God’s eternal plan, Israel was adopted by God and given a place of special standing as God’s son.

“They are Israelites, and *to them belong the adoption*, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises” (Rom 9:4).

Perhaps Paul was thinking back to passages like Exodus 4, where God told Moses, “Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, “Let my son go that he may serve me””’ (Exod 4:22–23).

Or perhaps Paul had in mind a passage found in Hosea where God declared, “When Israel was a child, I loved him, out of Egypt I called my son” (Hos 11:1).

You are the sons of the LORD your God. ...For you are a people holy to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth (Deut 14:1–2).

2. As part of God’s eternal plan, Jesus was adopted by Joseph thus linking him to the Davidic line.

The NT begins with these words: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham...” (Matt 1:1). But what follows is not the record of Jesus’ biological lineage through Mary but rather the genealogy of Joseph.

The Scriptures are abundantly clear that Jesus was not the biological son of Joseph, but they are equally clear that Jesus is the Son of David. This is only possible because Jesus became the *real* son of Joseph by means of adoption.

Nor should you suppose that the custom of adoption is foreign to our scriptures, as though it were something in the traditional laws of mankind that is worthy of censure, and so cannot be reconciled with the authority of the divine books. Adoption is something that has a long history, and is familiar to the documents of the Church, that a son can be had by favor of choice as well as by natural begetting (Augustine, Sermon 51.28, A.D. 418).

3. As part of God’s eternal plan, we who are by nature “children of wrath” have been adopted by God as his sons and daughters.

“Adoption means to be placed as an adult son of God and given all the rights and privileges of a son. It is a legal or judicial position and is not an experience. It is the bestowal of a status or standing with God—a relationship. ...Believers become sons of the first person of the Trinity. Salvific adoption can be found wherever the soteriological idea of the fatherhood of God is found” (Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, 3:115).

As Tony Merida has pointed out, “The doctrine of adoption is at the heart of the gospel. Adoption was never plan B; it has always been plan A. It existed before the world existed. Paul wrote, ‘In love, God predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will’ (Ephesians 1:4–5). God planned on the act of adoption before creation” (Tony Merida and Rick Morton, *Orphanology: Awakening to Gospel-Centered Adoption and Orphan Care*, p. 71).

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, *so that we might receive adoption as sons*. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God” (Gal 4:4–7).

J. I. Packer has written, “[Adoption] is *the highest privilege that the gospel offers*: higher even than justification. ...Adoption is higher, because of the richer relationship with God that it involves. ...Justification is a *forensic* idea, conceived in terms of *law*, and viewing God as *judge*. ...Adoption is a *family* idea, conceived in terms of *love*, and viewing God as *father*” (J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, pp. 206–7).

Horizontal adoption of children is *not* the gospel, but it does reflect God's adoption of us as his children.

Our understanding of Christianity cannot be better than our grasp of adoption. ...were I asked to focus the New Testament message in three words, my proposal would be adoption through propitiation, and I do not expect to ever meet a richer or more pregnant summary of the gospel than that
(J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, pp. 202, 214).

III. How Great Is the Need Today? And What Can God's People Do About That Need?

A. How many orphans are there and where are they?

There are currently about 150–160 million “orphans” in the world.

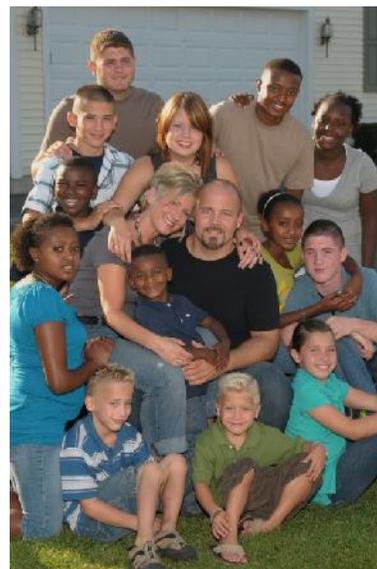
The ABBA Fund estimates that there are 40–50 million “double” orphans.

Worldwide almost 20 million children have lost one or both parents due to AIDS. The vast majority (about 15 million) of these AIDS orphans live in Sub-Saharan Africa. And roughly every 15 seconds, one more child in Africa becomes an AIDS orphan.

In the United States there are currently more than 400,000 children living in foster care. Of these, about 120,000 are waiting to be adopted.

In Michigan, there are currently about 20,000 children in foster care. Of these, about 5,000 are waiting to be adopted.

In Canada there are about 76,000 children in foster care.



Six of these children were adopted. Two of them are HIV+. All of them are part of the Twietmeyer family.

B. What happens to orphans who are never adopted?

Globally, more than 38,000 orphans age out of the system every day. This means that each year about 14.5 million orphans age out and become young adults without a family.

Of those who age out without being adopted, studies have shown that as many as 15% attempt suicide within the first two years. In one study of kids who aged out of orphanages in Russia and the Ukraine, within just a few years more than half of the girls had become prostitutes and more than half of the boys had spent time in jail.

In the United States about 20,000 kids age out of the foster care system every year.

C. What can individual Christians do about the plight of the orphan?

1. Adoption is not for everyone.

There are many legitimate reasons for not adopting.

There are also some very poor reasons for not adopting.

Whether or not you have biological children really has nothing to do with the plight of the orphan, God's disposition toward the fatherless, or the passages of Scripture which encourage God's people to care for orphans.

2. Adopt internationally.

Why consider international adoption?

Where are these children coming from?

Average Cost = depends a lot on the country, \$15–35,000*

Average Timeframe = 1–3 years

Eligibility – country specific, USCIS income guidelines

3. Adopt domestically.

Why consider domestic (infant) adoption?

Where are these children coming from?

Average Cost = \$15–35,000*

Average Timeframe = 1–2 years

Eligibility – a little more flexible than international adoption

*These expenses are significant, but in many cases they may be more manageable than they initially appear for the following reasons:

Adoption expenses are usually spread out over a year or two.



Hallee & Harper were adopted from the Ukraine. In Europe & the UK, 92% of children diagnosed with Down Syndrome *in utero* are aborted. In the US, the rate is around 90%.

Federal Tax Credit (2011) = \$13,360 (currently refundable)

Interest-Free Loans (e.g., the ABBA Fund)

Grants (e.g., Show Hope)

Some employers offer adoption benefits and/or financial assistance (e.g., see <http://www.holtinternational.org/adoption/benefits.shtml>).

Remember we are talking about a child, not a truck or a boat.

4. Become involved in foster care, either short term or as a possible path to adoption.

Why consider foster care and/or fostering-to-adopt?

Where are these children coming from?

Average Cost = essentially free (after tax credits/stipends)

Average Timeframe = depends on ages/situations you agree to

Eligibility – (in MI) you can have up to eight children in the home total, must have 40 square feet per child in bedrooms, safe environment

5. Support those who adopt.

Prayerfully

Financially

Practically

By understanding and encouraging

6. Consider supporting a solid Christian orphanage.

7. Consider taking a vacation/ministry trip to visit and minister to orphans.

D. What can local churches do about the plight of the orphan?

1. Cultivate an adoption friendly culture.
2. Inform people in the church about the needs and opportunities that exist.
3. Realize that adoption tends to be contagious.
4. Don't allow adoption/orphan care to become a sub-culture within the church.
5. Consider starting an adoption fund that will facilitate church members helping other church members with adoption related expenses.

Few things bring me more satisfaction than seeing a culture of adoption flourish at our church, Bethlehem Baptist. It means our people are looking to their heavenly Father for their joy rather than rejecting the stress and cost of children in order to maximize their freedom and comforts.

...Adoption is as far as possible from the mindset that views children as an intrusion
(John Piper, "Adoption: The Heart of the Gospel," in *Reclaiming Adoption*, ed. Dan Cruver, p. 97).

IV. Conclusion: Some Important Realities

A. Orphan care and adoption are usually costly.

"Count the cost now. Understand that God calls his people to do tough things. His adoption of you was not something done on the cheap. It cost him the life of his only Son. Our earthly care of orphans will be costly as well" (Daniel Bennett, *A Passion for the Fatherless*, p. 74).

B. Orphan care and adoption always involve pain.

C. Orphan care and adoption always involve risk.

D. Orphan care and adoption will probably change the ethnic makeup of your church.

E. Orphan care and adoption are sometimes viewed differently by husbands and wives.

Summary: Many in this room will never adopt. But as we've seen, orphan care is something that believers have been involved in for centuries. God expects his children to care about and to care for those who are fatherless in this world. And the need is great.

John Piper's Letter to His Wife Saying "Yes" to Adoption

Monday, November 6, 1995

Dear Noël,

With confidence in the all-sufficient future grace of God, I am ready and eager to move ahead with the adoption of Talitha Ruth. I want to thank you that during these years, when your heart has yearned to adopt a daughter, you have not badgered me or coerced me. You have been wonderfully patient. You have modeled faith in the sufficiency of prayer. You have always expressed support of me and my ministry even if we should never adopt. You have been reasonable in all our discussions and have come forth with your rationale only when asked. You have honored my misgivings as worthy of serious consideration. God was good to put it in Phoebe's heart to call about this child when she did, and not before we were ready.

I realize more than ever that "the mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps." This decision is not merely a tabulation of pros and cons. I would be deceiving myself to think that. Yet I am persuaded that this decision to adopt honors God more than not adopting. To my perspective it seems to be the path that will "spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples." I believe it will bless Bethlehem and not hinder our work there. I believe it is the path of the greatest love for the greatest number. And therefore I have confidence that God is pleased with it.

I choose it not under constraint or with any reservation of commitment. I relinquish every thought that, because you initiated this idea, you will bear the blame for the burdens it will bring. As with our choice to have children in the first place and with our choice to go to Germany and our choice to leave Bethel and enter the pastorate there is a common and united commitment to all that God will be for us in this path, including any "frowning providence" that he plans to sanctify us. I believe our eyes are open, though we have learned that the toothache expected and the toothache experienced are not the same. We have come through enough to believe that God's future grace will be sufficient. His mercies are new every morning and there will be mercies for every weight and wonder on this new path of our lives.

I thank God for you. I enter with you gladly on this path. Whether we live to see our daughter grown or not, we will have done well to take her in. Life is very short, whether 12 hours, like Ashley Hope, or 50 years like me, or 76 years like my father, or 94 years like Crystal Anderson. What matters is not that we do all we might have done or all we dreamed of doing, but that, while we live, we live by faith in future grace and walk in the path of love. The times are in God's hands, not ours.

With this common conviction we will, God willing, embrace our new daughter and give ourselves, with all the might that God inspires in us, to love her into the kingdom. May the Lord establish the plans of our hearts, and bring Talitha Ruth, (and the future husband God already knows) into deep and lasting fellowship with Christ. May she be an ebony brooch of beauty around your aging neck, and a crown of purity and joy on your graying head.

I love you,
Johnny



Annotated Bibliography (*recommended as a good place to begin reading)

Askeland, Lori, ed. *Children and Youth in Adoption, Orphanages, and Foster Care: A Historical Handbook and Guide*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006.

*Beeke, Joel R. *Heirs with Christ: The Puritans on Adoption*. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008.

Beeke argues that the Puritans wrote a good deal more about the doctrine adoption than is commonly thought and that they in fact viewed it as a central aspect of the believer's position in Christ. This book contains a very good chapter on the relationship of adoption to other theological realities such as regeneration, justification, and sanctification.

*Bennett, Daniel J. *A Passion for the Fatherless: Developing a God-Centered Ministry to Orphans*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011.

Written by a conservative Baptist pastor, this book explains how to develop a biblically balanced ministry to orphans.

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Bohlender, Randy and Kelsey. *The Spirit of Adoption: Winning the Battle for the Children*. 2nd ed. Kansas City, MO: Zoe Foundation, 2010.

Boswell, John. *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance*. New York: Vintage Books, 1988.

Burke, Trevor J. *Adopted into God's Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor*. New Studies in Biblical Theology 22. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006.

Carp, E. Wayne, ed. *Adoption in America: Historical Perspectives*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002.

Crenson, Matthew A. *Building the Invisible Orphanage: A Prehistory of the American Welfare System*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.

*Cruver, Dan, ed. *Reclaiming Adoption: Missional Living Through the Rediscovery of Abba Father*. Adelphi, MD: Cruciform Press, 2011.

This book is a compilation of essays which discuss the theological underpinnings of human adoption.

Cunningham, Hugh. *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500*. 2nd ed. Harlow, UK: Pearson, 2005.

Davis, Tom. *Fields of the Fatherless: Discover the Joy of Compassionate Living*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2008.

Ferguson, Sinclair B. *Children of the Living God*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1989.

Ferguson discusses the doctrine of adoption and the implications of our status as sons and daughters

of God.

- Gillespie, Natalie Nichols. *Successful Adoption: A Guide for Christian Families*. Nashville: Integrity Publishers, 2006.
This book is a fairly recent and comprehensive “how to” book about adoption. Much of this material can be found online, but this book helpfully brings it all together between two covers. On the downside, books like this quickly become outdated due to the constantly changing regulations related to adoption.
- Herman, Ellen. *Kinship by Design: A History of Adoption in the Modern United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Horn, Cornelia B. and John W. Martens. *“Let the Little Children Come to Me”: Childhood and Children in Early Christianity*. Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2009.
- Melosh, Barbara. *Strangers and Kin: The American Way of Adoption*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- *Merida, Tony, and Rick Morton. *Orphanology: Awakening to Gospel-Centered Adoption and Orphan Care*. Birmingham, AL: New Hope Publishers, 2011.
This book provides an excellent overview of much of the material discussed in this workshop.
- Miller, Timothy S. *The Orphans of Byzantium: Child Welfare in the Christian Empire*. Washington D.C. Catholic University of America Press, 2003.
- *Moore, Russell. *Adopted for Life: The Priority of Adoption for Christian Families and Churches*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2009.
This is probably the best place to begin reading about the subject of adoption. This is not a “how-to” book. It’s a “what” and “why” book. You may not agree with every jot and tittle that Moore writes. But this book will challenge and inform your thinking about adoption. In my opinion, every Christian should read this book.
- Packer, J. I. *Knowing God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973.
See especially Packer’s chapter on believers as the “Sons of God.”
- Riddle, John M. *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Shirk, Martha and Gary Stangler. *On Their Own: What Happens to Kids When They Age Out of the Foster Care System*. Cambridge, MA: Basic Books, 2004.
- Strange, W. A. *Children in the Early Church: Children in the Ancient World, the New Testament, and the Early Church*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1996.
- Wood, Diana, ed. *The Church and Childhood*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1994.

Electronic Resources

ABBA Fund: <http://www.abbafund.org/>

The ABBA Fund provides interest-free loans to Christian couples seeking to adopt. The ABBA Fund can also help churches establish and facilitate an adoption fund.

Christian Alliance for Orphans: <http://www.christianalliancefororphans.org/>

Lifesong for Orphans: <http://www.lifesongfororphans.org/>

Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange: <http://www.mare.org/>

Positively Adopted: <http://www.positivelyadopted.com/>

Learn the facts about adopting children who are HIV+. This website helps dispel some of the myths that still surround HIV/AIDS. Many families are stepping up to adopt children who are HIV+, but there is a need for many others to do the same.

Project Hopeful: <http://www.projecthopeful.org/>

Project Hopeful seeks to educate, encourage, and enable families to adopt children who are HIV+.

Show Hope: <http://www.showhope.org/>

Together for Adoption: <http://www.togetherforadoption.org/>