

# Adoption and Orphan Care: More Than a Sunday Announcement

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*"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."*  
– James 1:27 –

Last week our church recognized Orphan Care Sunday and I shared the verse above. Clearly, our Father intends—and expects—his people to care for the helpless, which in first century Palestine consisted of the fatherless and aged widowed women who typically had no independent legal status. In our time, we still find orphans and widows in need of care, but we also must care for the elderly in general and specifically for the unborn and those requiring foster care because the parents they have are incapable of caring for them.

Care for our elderly and the defense of the unborn are subjects worthy of inspection, but I will focus on those needing parents. Solutions to the need of orphan care include adoption, temporary foster care, and foster care leading to adoption. The act of adoption, in particular, speaks to our shared Christian experience. Every believer in Christ has been adopted, thus we are all “touched by adoption” since we know that Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus that we *all* were “predestined for adoption as sons” in God’s family (see Ephesians 1:5). Therefore, is there a better picture of the gospel of Christ to any observer than when a father takes in a helpless orphan, bringing that one into the family and covering that child with his own name? That one who was broken and isolated is given a new status, entirely by grace, with new siblings and new surroundings—just like adoption into the family of God.

## Assessing the Need and Counting the Cost

For these reasons, the church of Jesus should always be adoption friendly. Adoption and foster care goes to the heart of the gospel, and thus should be a concern for every family where Christ is the head of the home. Certainly, the need is there. In fact, The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission reports that approximately 111,820 of the children in America’s foster care system are currently eligible for adoption. That is almost one fourth of the children currently in the system.

Still, there is more than a need to consider if you desire to play a part in orphan care: For instance, in my own family, when we were led by God to adopt a young boy from Russia, we were inspired by the need of the many orphans trapped in awful conditions in eastern Europe. However, need and the excitement to adopt also requires informed wisdom. We had to think about expenses and the effort it would take to complete documents, not to mention the time it would take to follow God in this ministry. Indeed, those were costs we had to count.

## Seeking Grace and Finding Provision (in the Church)

That said, God's provision met us at every step. He regularly confirmed our mission to bring our new son home and assimilate him into our family as the fifth of five children. And I will add, our church family stepped up to be the answer to many a prayer. This was ten years ago.

Now, through this continuing experience of adoption, we have come to realize there are gaps in spiritual care for adopting families. While we received pre-adoption counseling, it focused particularly on physical and mental concerns, but nothing prepared us for bringing the effects of neglect into our established family and the delayed response we would realize much later. We have become somewhat proficient in discussing Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD)—a disorder often experienced by children in the foster care system—with others who were as mystified as we were by this affliction. Much of this education has been possible only because of an online support site with a mix of secular and spiritual families. We think the local church can do better.

RAD often manifests as a rejection of the adopted mother by a child who senses she was not nurtured correctly during infancy. Amazingly, the hurt from those developmental times is blamed upon the adopting mother who has in actuality greatly extended herself on this child's behalf. We have heard of horror stories where the adopted child has lashed out at family members and watched as some have yielded to the seemingly inevitable result that the troubled child must be removed from the home for safety reasons. This is the sobering side of adoption—that every orphan has emotional scars (often invisible or delayed in their onset) and the support for this type of situation is not usually there.

### **Mobilizing the Church for Adoption and Orphan Care**

But praise be to God, he is a healer as well as a redeemer. Our confidence is the same for our child by adoption as it is for the children of natural process. That assurance rests in the supernatural birth from above and our adoption in Christ. As we walk this long road, we have learned there is a need to continually encourage our brothers and sisters who are called to adopt, well after the excitement of coming home with the child. Every family is different, but every family called to adopt needs support through the different stages of development. This is squarely in the local church's mission. We must stop assuming that once home, adoptees have everything they need and are raised the same as any other child. As with our own progress of sanctification, as adopted children of God, there is need for long-term help.

That is why our church is investigating ways to set up pre-adoption counseling and post-adoption support at our local church. We need not let serious challenges dissuade us from stepping out in obedience to God's leading—adoption numbers need to rise, not drop. The picture of what adoption represents to our heavenly Father needs to be highlighted and maintained, and our new family structures need defending. And in the end, we trust the God of grace will finish the work even in these traumatized family members and bring them, healed and whole, into his kingdom.

For all of these reasons, we are having an interest meeting this Sunday, during the Sunday School hour. If you have adopted or fostered, or are considering adoption and foster care, or are interested in learning more about this ministry, come to the conference room at 10:00AM. We hope to see many adopted children of God there!