

SOUTHLAND CHURCH

FOSTERING THE FATHER'S HEART

A DEVOTIONAL ON FOSTERING AND ADOPTION

22 Day Devotional



foundations
daily devotional

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22-DAY DEVOTIONAL OUTLINE

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DAY 2: Caring for the orphans

DAY 3: Why foster or adopt?

DAY 4: God, are you calling me?

DAY 5: A word for the guys out there

DAY 6: Lasagnas and “prayer requests”

DAY 7: Weary in the waiting

DAY 8: The daily grind

DAY 9: Finding the need behind the behavior

DAY 10: Loving the less-than-likeable child

DAY 11: Finding grace, compassion and love for the parent who hurt my child

DAY 12: Lord, bless the social worker!

DAY 13: When it all falls apart

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DAY 19: Growing my character

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DAY 21: What about the widows?

DAY 22: Joy!

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Versions of scripture quotations are noted.

DAY 1

OUR ADOPTION BY GOD

 **READ:** Romans 8

Key verse: Romans 8:15, ESV

“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear,
but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons,
by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”

If you’ve been a Christian for any period of time, chances are good that you have heard the word adoption in reference to God claiming us to be part of His family. And it’s true – the clearest picture of adoption is the fact that God, Father of the Universe and Father of the broken, chose to claim us as His children.

Romans 8 paints a beautiful illustration of our rescue from slavery and fear and placement in a family with a Father who protects us and intercedes for us. The earthly realm mirrors the heavenly realm. As each child needs a caring adult to take on the parent role, we all need God’s fatherly love and protection. Without it, we cannot survive.

It is almost mind-blowing to consider what spiritual adoption by the Father offers us:

*“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?
He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not
also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge
against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn?
Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—
who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.
Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation,
or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?”*
Romans 8:31 – 35, ESV

Look at that list! Protection, provision, justification, freedom from condemnation, intercession, love – the benefits of adoption by God are overwhelming.

*“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers,
nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth,
nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us
from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*
Romans 8:38-39

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Have you been adopted into God’s family? If so, thank Him for making you one of His own. If not, reflect on what is holding you back and write it down. Take these reflections to the Prayer Room on Sunday and discuss them with a volunteer.
2. What other benefits does being part of God’s family provide? Take a few minutes to write down a list, and then thank God for these benefits. If you can’t think of any, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal them to you.
3. Has there ever been a time when you have felt the benefit of being part of God’s family? Tell God when that was, and thank Him for the experience!

DAY 2**CARING FOR THE ORPHANS**

 **READ:** James 1

Key verse: James 1:27, NIV

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this:
to look after orphans and widows in their distress
and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”

The Bible speaks repeatedly about God's heart towards the fatherless. He instructed Israel on how to feed and care for the orphaned living among them and warned the Israelites not to harm them, take advantage of them, or deny them justice.

God names Himself as the Father to the fatherless, and speaks of being their Defender and Protector. Job, who was prosperous and well respected in his community, was known for being a man who rescued the fatherless who had no one to help them (Job 29:11-12, NIV).

The Bible gives a description of what religion God finds acceptable, and it consists of only two things – to keep oneself from being stained and corrupted by the ways of the world, and to look after orphans and widows. The heart of religion is purity and love, demonstrated by caring for those who have no one to look after them.

It is rare in our society to come across true orphans – that is, a child whose parents are deceased. However, in Manitoba alone, there are well over 10,000 children who physically have parents, but whose parents are either unable or unwilling to care for them.

These children enter the Foster Care system, hoping to find someone to love and protect and care for them, yet have no say in how or who or when that will happen. Some, happily, find caring foster parents and social workers and mentors who surround them, protect them and advocate for them. Others are left to flounder without guidance, shuffling from shelter to group home to foster home to yet another shelter, never knowing the protection of a stable adult who is there for them.

So as a Christian, where does that leave us? What is our responsibility in today's society to care for the modern day orphaned child, right here in Manitoba, in Steinbach, in our community?

“Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; please the case of the widow.”

Isaiah 1:16-17, NIV

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. These verses in James and Isaiah speak of cleansing yourself from sin and helping the fatherless. Spend some time in confession. Ask God to bring to mind any sinful actions or thoughts that you need to repent of, and ask Him for forgiveness.
2. Do you know of anyone who is fatherless or motherless? Pray for this person, and ask God to show you how you might be a support to this person, whether they are young or old.
3. Ask God to show you three key things to focus on when you pray for children in Manitoba who are not part of a stable family unit. This may include words, thoughts, pictures or scripture verses. Spend some time praying through what He shares with you.

DAY 3**WHY FOSTER OR ADOPT?****READ:** Psalm 113**Key verse:** Psalm 113:7-9, NIV

“He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap;
 he seats them with princes, with the princes of his people.
 He settles the childless woman in her home as a happy mother of children.
 Praise the LORD.”

As Christians, there are many reasons to consider fostering or adopting. We know that God views helping children as true religion. Fostering is a great way to help a child – and often a birth family – find healing and love. Adoption is an amazing way to build your family when biology has let you down, or when you have a God-planted desire to create a family in a non-traditional way.

There are, however, many not-so-good reasons to open your home to a child. These include a desire to rescue a child, being financially driven, or hoping that a child will somehow fill a need within you. You need to be in an emotionally healthy place to be able to take on the extra challenges that come with fostering and adopting!

One particular word of caution - if you are planning to open your heart and home to a child, that heart and home needs to be *fully* opened. It doesn't matter if you are fostering, adopting, or considering step-parenting – if you have no intention, or even simply significant hesitations, of accepting this child fully as your own with all the rights and privileges granted to a child of your own flesh and blood, you have no business parenting this child.

Parenting in these situations is a choice, and once the choice is made, your heart and soul must be in it 110%. It's heartbreaking for children to go from one subpar situation to another. That's when they get left behind on “family” vacations because they are the foster child, are denied a proper bedroom because they are the “stepchild” who only visits four nights a month, or have to watch one foster sibling be adopted while they are not (leading them to believe that they were not good enough to be adopted). It might seem hard to believe, but these situations play out in our community on a far too regular basis.

Children are a blessing from the Lord (Psalm 127:3), and this means all children! Children bring immeasurable joy. In Psalm 113:9, the writer states that the Lord settles the childless woman in her home as a happy mother of children – and it doesn't say that the Lord opened the barren womb. Could it mean that the Lord intends to bring children without mothers to mothers without children and bring happiness and joy? I believe so!

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Search your heart. What are the reasons you want to open your heart to a child? Talk to Jesus about these reasons and ask Him to examine your heart and motives.
2. Is there any relationship in your life where you are giving less than God is asking you to? Are you harboring grudges, holding back, or treating someone unfairly? Confess and ask God to show you what steps you need to take to right these relationships.

DAY 4**GOD, ARE YOU CALLING ME?****READ:** 1 Samuel 3**Key verses:** 1 Samuel 3:8a-10

“Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, “Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place. The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” Then Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

Every time I watch a documentary for any third world child sponsorship programs, my heart is broken. My eyes fill with tears, my soul aches, and I immediately start to browse their websites, reading children's stories and adding their profiles to my checkout cart.

My heart says, “Help them!”, but eventually my head has to intervene and say, “Hey, Heart? We kind of need to pay the mortgage this month, too...”

If you feel like I do, it's hard not to dream about fostering or adopting a child, providing a child with love, and giving them a family. And this is good – it shows your heart breaks for the same things that breaks our Heavenly Father's heart!

However, fostering and adopting a child is not the same as adopting a puppy at the local shelter or volunteering to take in a needy child for a few months. Yes, fostering is designed to be temporary, but here's the thing – often, it's not! Even if the child goes home, there's a very real possibility you will maintain a connection with that child for the rest of their lives. And the baby you were told would only stay for six months at the most? It's not uncommon for that child to still be there two, three, five, and even eighteen years later!

There's only one guarantee in the world of child welfare – that there are no guarantees! Fostering and adopting can be a life-long commitment.

This is what I love about this passage from Samuel – Samuel heard God call him *four times*. Not once, not twice, but four times. When Eli and Samuel finally realized it was the Lord calling, Samuel's response was to listen and to serve. Samuel was afraid of the implications of what the Lord had told him, but he was honest and shared what he had received with Eli. Samuel was faithful and true even when he was frightened.

If God is calling you to foster or adopt, it will not be a one-time calling. When those desires stir your heart, wait and test them to see if they are from God. Does the desire come repeatedly? Do others confirm this desire within you? Do trusted people in your life who know you well feel that you would be well-suited to caring for a child? Are the people who will walk the journey of fostering and adopting with you receiving the same desires from God? Do your spouse and biological children feel this call as well? If the answer is yes, proceed. If the answer is no, wait and continue to pray for direction.

Examine why you want to foster or adopt. Are you financially motivated, hoping that fostering can be a way to allow you to stay home with your own children? Do you view fostering as a great way to win souls for Jesus? Do you genuinely love children and want to expand your family? Talk through your motives with a wise mentor; some motives are good and some are not. Getting into fostering or adopting for the wrong reasons often ends in heartbreak for all.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. When did you first have the desire to foster or adopt? Write down when these longings began, and how they have continued (if they have).
2. Do the important people in your life who would travel this journey with you have the same longings? Have a conversation with these people, and write down what you learn.
3. Look over your answers from the first two questions. Ask God for a clear assessment of whether or not He is calling you to foster or adopt.

DAY 5

A WORD FOR THE GUYS OUT THERE



READ: Psalm 127

Key verses: Psalm 127:3-5

“Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from Him.
Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one’s youth.
Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.

They will not be put to shame when they contend with their opponents in court.”

I am going to step out on a limb and make some observations that may not be completely politically correct. Before the complaint emails start flying, keep in mind these are merely observations, and that you, the reader, are free to dismiss them.

I have noticed when the subjects of fostering or adopting come up, in most couples, the woman who is more open to the idea of growing her family in this way. For guys, there seems to be a bit more of a mental barrier. There’s something about raising “another man’s child” that surfaces as a hesitation for many guys out there.

I do believe that God has generally gifted women with a natural inclination towards nurturing and caring for others. Women’s hearts are more likely to shatter into pieces as they hear about abused and unloved children, and they want to jump in and care for these little people. Guys, on the other hand, are more prone to think about what the challenges would be – the behaviors that could come up, the abuse allegations that might rock their world, the impact it would have on their life financially and time-wise. I’ve also heard many, many guys express the sentiment, “Well, I like my kids, but I’m not so keen on someone else’s.”

God created men and women to complement each other and work as a team. Men and women often see things from a different point of view. They both see different positives and negatives, possible joys and potential pitfalls. Taking both sides into consideration allows a couple to make a decision based on the full picture.

As well, bonding with a child often comes more easily for a woman than for a man. It’s important to acknowledge this and to validate any frustrations the guy is feeling while he navigates a bond with any child that has come into his life.

However, there is a special blessing for men who take on a true father role and fully embrace a child that is fatherless. Blessed is the man, the warrior, whose life is filled with children. These men will not be put to shame! That’s a pretty powerful promise. And I have witnessed this with men who have chosen to become foster and adoptive fathers – the respect they garner from others is nothing short of incredible. It’s a position highly esteemed by God!



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Guys, does your wife want to foster or adopt and you are not quite so sure that you are up for the task? Tell God where your hesitations are, and listen in prayer for what He has to say.
2. Wives, is your husband hesitating to pursue your dream of fostering or adopting? God created men and women to see different parts of the picture. Respect his hesitations and listen openly and compassionately when he shares. Journal a prayer to God asking Him to help you listen and understand your husband's reservations.
3. Husbands, ask God how He wants you to be a father to the fatherless. Share what you receive with your wife. Pray together through what you received, and ask God together for further direction.

DAY 6

CASSEROLES AND "PRAYER REQUESTS"

 **READ:** Philippians 2:1-4

Key verse: Philippians 2:3b-4, NIV

"Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,
not looking to your own interests but each of you
to the interests of the others."

There is a verse in the Message version of the Bible I have always loved – when Jesus arrives at Jairus's house only to discover the little girl has already died, the translation reads, "By now they had arrived at the house of the town official, and pushed their way through the gossips looking for a story and the neighbors bringing in casseroles." (Mark 9:23-26)

Isn't that so true? When life-changing circumstances occur to a family, people are right there, some armed with casseroles and some looking for juicy gossip (sometimes cleverly disguised as "prayer requests").

So when a foster child moves in with the family next door, or your cousin and his wife adopt a sibling group of three, which one are you?

Are you casually trying to find out why the birth parents couldn't care for the children, or what circumstances brought the child to their new home? Or are you rolling up your sleeves, bringing a casserole, mowing their lawn, and offering to baby-sit so the parents can get some much needed sleep or a coffee date to recharge as they adjust to the changes fostering and adopting bring?

We aren't all called to foster or adopt, and this is absolutely okay. God did not gift us all in the same area, and that's a good thing! Only some will be called to foster or adopt, but everyone is called to play some part.

Maybe you are gifted in working with children and can become a respite provider to a foster family, or an In Himm worker at church, which gives adoptive parents a chance to recharge in the Sunday service. Maybe you love to bake and can bring over some muffins. Or, if you are a handyman, maybe you can help with minor home repairs. You can bring coffee to a Child and Family Services office, clean toys in their office visiting rooms, or bring your pick-up truck and help a teenager who is aging out of the system to move their belongings into their first apartment. And never forget the importance of dedicated, intentional prayer support! There's no end to the many ways you can help! Are you a gossip, or are you a bearer of casseroles? Be the latter!



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. The Bible speaks strongly against gossips. It can be so easy to convince ourselves we are getting the story to properly pray for people. However, God already knows the story, so really, you don't need to know it to be able to pray for the child. Confess to God any tendency towards gossip, and ask Him for strategies on how to avoid gossip in the future.
2. Where is God calling you to help? Ask God to show you two ways you can help a child who is part of the child welfare system or a family who has taken on the task of fostering or adopting.
3. Add fostering and adopting to your prayer list, and commit to praying for foster care and adoption over the next month as God leads you to.

DAY 7

WEARY IN THE WAITING



READ: Psalm 37

Key verses: Psalm 37:3-7b

“Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.
Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this:
He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn,
your vindication like the noonday sun.
Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him.”

So you've made the decision to become foster or adoptive parents! The first part is easy – you're nervously excited as you make that first intake phone call, fill out some forms, meet with the social worker, attend orientation classes, fill out forms, forms, and more forms, get your police checks done, and fill out a few more forms. But, once the paperwork has been filled out and classes have been completed, the process can trickle to a halt.

You hear about so many waiting children who need homes, yet your file has been sitting in a filing cabinet drawer for six months while you wait for a foster home study to be completed! Or your adoption home study has been finished, but the days turn to months and even years while you begin to wonder if that phone call matching you with a child will ever come.

How do you handle it?

King David makes it sound so easy, “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him.” But if we take a closer look at the Psalms, David was filled with anguish many times while he fled from Saul, asking God why He was making him wait rather than just giving him the throne already. Psalm 6 is a perfect example of this; “My soul is in deep anguish, how long, Lord, how long?” (Psalm 6:3, NIV)

Waiting is not easy, but God always has a plan He is working out perfectly. Maybe there are things God needs to work out in you first to make you the parent He needs you to be for the child He has planned for you. Maybe the child destined for you is still on their journey, and God needs you to be ready and waiting for when that child is ready to be placed.

Maybe, for whatever reason, the plan you think is best for you isn't the plan God knows is best for you. There are one hundred million maybes, but it comes down to this – the God of the Universe knows what He is doing. And the God of the Universe loves you, and He loves your future child, more than you could ever fathom. When it all comes together in His perfect timing, you will be able to look back on the waiting and say, "Yes, God is good, even in the waiting."

God understands your longings and desires, and also your anguish and frustration in the wait. It is hard to understand while you are waiting, but know that God always has a purpose and a plan for you.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Meditate on Psalm 37:7b. What does this mean to you? Write down whatever God brings to mind.
2. Waiting can bring a lot of temptation to sin into our lives. It can be hard to wait on God and not try to take matters into your own hands, or to speak against God in your frustration. Are there any areas where you may have sinned in your weariness of waiting? Confess to God anything that He brings to mind.
3. Journal a prayer thanking God for His perfect timing and asking Him to help you and encourage you as you wait on Him.

DAY 8

THE DAILY GRIND



READ: Isaiah 40

Key verses: Isaiah 40:11, NIV

"He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young."

I recently spent a few days visiting my sister, who lives in a different province. She has three little boys under the age of five, and as my kids are now all in school and entering into their teen years, I thought it would be fun to travel down memory lane and immerse myself in the world of infants and toddlers again.

How quickly you forget how busy and grueling those years are! Children truly are blank slates, and have to be taught everything! Things you think should be intuitive aren't.

I found myself actually saying things like "don't chew on that tree branch" and "it isn't polite to walk up to strangers and screech at them ...yes, I understand that you are pretending to be a seagull, but they don't want to listen to a seagull while they are eating their ice cream".

My sister told me that if one more person advised her to cherish every moment of these years, she would smack them. Let's face it, they are cute, but it's hard to cherish a five-year-old smearing Nutella across the kitchen counter while the baby is crying and the two-year-old announces he just peed in his pants!

Parenting is exhausting – especially when you're parenting a child who is new to your home and routines (and maybe new to routines and discipline period!) Throw in some special needs and a dash of attachment disorder and whew! Can we say bone-wearying exhaustion? Will the constant reminders to wash hands after going to the bathroom, keep their chairs on all four legs and to stop hitting little brothers ever sink in?

The Bible shares that there is special grace for those who are parenting young children, whether these children are young in chronological age or simply young in emotional and social age. God knows it's exhausting – He's the one who created preschoolers! And He promises that He gently leads those who have young.

So how do we get through it?

1. Realize that you cannot and will not be the perfect parent. You will not cherish every moment. You will get exhausted. You will secretly spirit away special crafts into the garbage can and kick toys under the couch to “clean up” the living room. You will wear shirts with snot on them and sometimes put the kids to bed without brushing their teeth. You will sometimes let them have sugar cereal for supper because you just don't have the energy to make the chicken and vegetables that you know they will refuse to eat anyway. And that's okay. They will not die. They will not be damaged. Chances are they won't even remember. Or even notice.
2. Remember that God meets us where we are at and that He is gentle. He knows you are exhausted. He knows you are frustrated. He gets it. He understands.
3. Find other parents, foster and adoptive parents. Find people to connect with who understand. Fostering and adopting adds extra things to deal with, such as visits with social workers and trips to the FASD Clinic and birth family visits. Find people who get it because they are doing it as well. There's strength in numbers!



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Meditate on Isaiah 40:11. What does this mean to you? Write down whatever God brings to mind.
2. Sometimes we truly don't handle the exhaustion from the daily grind well, and we need to reflect on that, confess, apologize, and make a plan for how to handle the behaviors of our children better. Think of a particular parenting problem or irritation that you are currently experiencing. Spend some time asking God to show you strategies on how to handle this challenge.

DAY 9

FINDING THE NEED BEHIND THE BEHAVIOUR



READ: Genesis 20

Key verses: Genesis 20:10, NIV

“And Abimelek asked Abraham, “What was your reason for doing this?”

Yes, Abraham, do tell. What in the world were you thinking?!

People of all ages can behave in seemingly bizarre ways, and this is incredibly true of children. Have you ever caught your child in a tangled web of lies, only to have them insist they are telling the truth even when called on it? Or have you dealt with angry outbursts that seem to have come out of the blue for no reason? Or had a child who starts peeing their pants Every. Single. Day. even though they are six years old and have been potty trained for years?

For every behavior, there is a need behind the behavior.

Sometimes it is pretty straightforward – the toddler throws a fit every day in the car ride home after daycare, and you discover their last snack was at 2pm and it's now 6pm so they're starving! Other times, it can take some creative investigation; the behavior may not seem linked to any particular need.

But just as Abraham made what seemed like a very stupid move – passing his wife off as his sister – there was a need that drove the behavior. Abraham needed to feel safe, and believed that Abimelek would do away with him in order to take his beautiful wife, Sarah. “So, let’s manipulate the truth a little,” he may have reasoned, “after all Sarah is kind of my sister anyways - so we’ll just overlook the wife part and *ta da!*” Fear drove the behavior to lie in order to fill the need to feel safe.

When you have a child with challenging behavior, try not to take the behavior personally, even if it seems directed at you. Instead, step back and see if you can figure out the need behind the behavior. What are they trying to tell you through their actions that they can’t say with their words? Are they hungry, angry, lonely, scared? Are they starting to attach and settle in, and that frightens them because they don’t trust it will last? Did they have a bad day and just need to blow off steam? Is there something going on at school? Are they reacting to a trauma situation from their past that you know nothing of? Is there a medical need behind the issue that a doctor’s visit might uncover?

You might find it helpful to keep a journal to look for patterns of behavior and possible triggers. Talk to the child’s social worker to see if the family history or background might solve some of the mystery. Take training and read books about children who have experienced trauma and loss and attachment difficulties; this is important to equip you to deal with these situations.

We can also take some direction from how Abimelek dealt with Abraham. Abraham’s bad behavior directly impacted poor Abimelek – his household was prevented from conceiving and God threatened him with death! But Abimelek responded to Abraham with grace and compassion.

First, Abimelek discussed the situation with God to receive guidance on what to do. He sought counsel from his officials, and then calmly asked Abraham why he did what he did. He worked to right the situation, welcomed Abraham with open arms, and blessed him. What a great model for how to deal with challenging behavior!

When addressing a challenging behavior, consult God and wise counsel. Ask the child calmly why he or she did what they did, focusing on finding the need behind the behavior. Work with the child to find a solution that will right the situation, and then welcome the child with open arms and a heart full of grace.

Then be prepared to do it all over again the next time!



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Are you dealing with a challenging behavior? Follow the steps:
 - a. Consult God and wise counsel (this includes talking with your spouse or a trusted friend, or talking to professional helpers if the situation warrants it)
 - b. Ask the child why and really listen for the need behind the behavior
 - c. Work to fix the situation.
 - d. Welcome the child back with open arms and a heart full of grace.
2. Pray a blessing on your child! Thank God for the child He has placed in your life!

DAY 10**LOVING THE LESS-THAN-LIKEABLE KID****READ:** 1 Corinthians 13**Key verse:** 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. “

I cannot count how many people I know who have decided to go into fostering or adoption, believing it will be butterflies and rainbows, because they have *so much love to give*, and that they will love the child so much that everything will work out perfectly.

Sometimes that works. Sometimes the child placed is a great match and fits the family like a glove, and is easy to love. And sometimes - I will be brutally honest here and say what not many people want to say – sometimes, you will get a child who just isn't all that likeable.

What do you do when the child placed with you begins to unpack their emotional baggage, the honeymoon wears off, the challenging behaviors emerge, and you discover quirks that drive you up the wall?

What do you do when God calls you to love the child who just isn't all that likeable?

Our culture promotes the idea that love is an emotion, but really, it's not. There are warm fuzzy feelings that flow out of love and make love feel good, but in actuality, love is a choice. You can choose each day to honor God and love the child He has called you to care for.

Love is patient. It's about making the choice to try to understand where the child is coming from, and what needs might be behind the frustrating behavior.

Love is kind. This little person has been through a lot. Make the choice to be kind. Treat the child with kindness and respect.

Love keeps no record of wrongs. Once misbehavior is dealt with, let it go. Forgive and move on. Don't keep a mental logbook of every single sin and irritation the child has provided you for the day, week, or year. Start fresh. Even if that means starting fresh every five minutes!

Love always protects. This child may never have had someone who has protected them. They are vulnerable and scared. Choose to protect them. Advocate and fight for them, even when you want to turn them loose to the wolves and run screaming for the hills!

Love always trusts. Trust God. He knows the plan He has for both you and this child, trust Him to bring you through to the other side.

Love always hopes. Believe the best in your child, even when it's hard. Be a champion for them. Encourage them, and let them see that someone believes they really are someone valuable!

Love always perseveres. Even when it's rough, even after another bad day, choose to keep going. Galatians 6:9-10 promises blessings for those who continue to do good, even when it's hard. God will reward your efforts!

And, as you keep these principles as a parenting guide, you will likely one day discover you have fallen in love with the less-than-likeable child.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Are you struggling to parent a less-than-likeable kid? God knows your frustrations! Journal a letter to God telling Him what you are struggling with. Confess any thoughts or actions that need to be confessed.
2. Focus on the attributes of love listed in 1 Corinthians 13. Choose one, and ask God to show you how you can live this out with your child.
3. The Bible advises us to seek wise counsel. If you are really struggling, find someone wise who can help you develop strategies to help your child grow.

DAY 11

FINDING GRACE, COMPASSION & LOVE FOR THE PARENT WHO HURT MY CHILD



READ: Romans 3:9-26

Key verse: Isaiah 49:15, NIV

“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!”

There is a cold, hard, heartbreaking truth inherent in fostering – your child is with you because someone has hurt them. And that someone isn’t just anyone, it is their parent, the one person in the whole entire world who was *supposed* to love, protect, and cherish them.

As you fall more and more in love with your child, you will have to face your anger regarding how they were hurt. Because, unless you are a saint, the anger will be there. Even Jesus became angry and declared it would be better for someone to have a millstone tied around their neck and tossed into the sea than to cause a child to stumble (Luke 12:2). Children are innocent. They are trusting. And they are with you because someone hurt them.

So how do you do it? How do you find compassion towards someone who left a three-year-old scared and alone in a cold apartment so they could go party and do drugs? How do you love the person who fractured a four-month old’s ribs? How do you extend grace to the parent who told the fourteen-year-old you love more desperately than anything in the world that they were useless and never should have been born? How do you model Christ-like love to someone who seems the most undeserving of love?

First, we need to recognize we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Romans 3:10-18 has a long, ugly list of what we really look like without Him. You may not have left bruises on a child or broken any bones, but have you ever yelled at your child in a fit of anger and said things you’ve regretted? Have you ever uttered angry words or betrayed your spouse in a way that cut them to their heart?

We’ve all hurt people. Every single one of us.

Second, realize that every birth parent was once the child you are now caring for. Lost, scared, alone, or abused. Maybe they had no one there to show them another way, so they tried to deal with it on their own. Maybe they turned to drugs and alcohol to cope. Maybe they fell into abusive relationships in an effort to find love. Maybe their brains have been affected by Fetal Alcohol Syndrome or trauma or neglect, and don’t function in the same way yours does.

Get to know your child’s parent’s story. Try to develop a relationship with them, and truly listen to their story. What place of hurt are they coming from? Ask your child’s worker for your child’s family history. You will often find your anger melt away when you hear the

story, and you begin to wonder how they ever would have been able to find another way on their own.

Understanding truly does breed compassion.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Read Romans 3:10-12 and meditate on it. It's rather humbling, isn't it? Take some time to confess the ways you have sinned and fallen short of God's perfect expectations.
2. Think of your child's birth parents. Is there any anger or bitterness you harbor towards them? Spend some time in confession, and ask God to soften your heart to them.
3. Pray a blessing on your child's birth parents. Commit to praying for them every day this week.

DAY 12

LORD, BLESS THE SOCIAL WORKER!



READ: 1 Timothy 2:1-10

Key verse: 1 Timothy 2:1-3, NIV

“I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for all people— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior.”

The Social Worker. *“Buh-ha-ha-ha-ha!”* Can't you just hear the evil laugh in the background?

The one who never returns your calls. The one who doesn't submit your mileage to accounting so you wait for weeks to be reimbursed. The one who goes months without a home visit and then suddenly drops in without warning and tells you six things that you need to improve on during the 45-minute visit. The one who makes decisions about your child without seeking your input.

Stick around long enough, and the social worker described above will likely be assigned to your case. Or you'll have one who makes decisions that leave you in a blind panic, wondering why they are doing what they are doing to your child! Or you'll have one that never returns your calls. (...Did I mention that your phone calls might never get returned?)

Being a front line social worker has to be one of the hardest jobs there is. Crushing caseloads that no human could possibly manage, let alone manage well. Hearing the unimaginable evils humanity can do to one another. Trying to work with birth parents who hate them with every fiber in their body. Dealing with mental health issues and addictions. Being ripped apart by the media for decisions where the media only knows half the facts – and being unable to defend themselves due to confidentiality. Holding broken children and trying to reason with the parents who broke them. Leaving late and coming in early, only to find 27 new messages waiting on their voicemail. Trying to decide which crisis of the day is biggest and needs to be dealt with first. Praise and validation is close to non-existent, because hey, no parent is going to say, “Wow, awesome job! I really appreciated the way you apprehended my daughter!” ...not without a huge dose of sarcasm and maybe a weapon in hand!

I urge you – *urge you!* – to pray prayers of petition, intercession, and thanksgiving for the army of workers that plod on daily to help the children in this province. They see things you can't even imagine, things nightmares are made of.

Thank God for each and every one of the workers He has appointed as guardians of the lost and needy. Pray that God will uphold them, give them energy to get through their day, and wisdom to make decisions that are tougher and more nuanced than the average person could ever imagine. Pray that the evil they deal with daily will not harden their hearts and make them jaded, but that they will be peaceful and loving servants for these families!

And then go out there and bless them! Do you know how often social workers get thanked for what they do? Close to never! Call up your social worker for no reason other than to leave a message on their answering machine and let them know that you are thankful for the job they are doing. Drop by their office with a coffee, just because. Send flowers to put on the lunchroom table with a little note expressing your appreciation. Ask how you can support them – you can even ask how you can pray for them!



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Read Romans 13:1. God has appointed each social worker for His purposes. How does this truth change the way that you view your social worker, or past social workers that you may not have had a great working relationship with?
2. Take some time to thank God for your social worker. Ask God to show you strategies for how you can pray for your social worker, your child welfare agency, and your child welfare authority. Can you imagine what kind of positive change could be brought to the system if Christians everywhere upheld them in prayer?
3. Ask God to give you a tangible way you can show love and appreciation to your worker this week, and then do it!

DAY 13

WHEN IT ALL FALLS APART



READ: Isaiah 41:9-16

Key verse: Isaiah 41:9-10

“I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you.
I said, ‘You are my servant’; I have chosen you and have not rejected you.
So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

Sometimes, despite our best intentions and best efforts, it all falls apart. Sometimes a child needs more specialized skills than you can give, or sometimes an illness or injury prevents you from being able to care for a child any longer. Sometimes the child matched to your home just wasn't a good match. Sometimes, no matter how much we try or how much we give, it still all falls apart.

The guilt and grief can be overwhelming. Chances are good there will also be a sense of relief, and the guilt and grief that results from that can be even more overwhelming! Training you took before becoming a foster or adoptive parent likely taught you that each time a child moves, it adversely impacts their future ability to trust and form relationships with people. When you say, “I can't do this anymore,” a little life is negatively impacted, and that is **HARD** to deal with!

There is no easy answer, there truly isn't. When you have tried everything and you just can't meet the child's needs anymore, the wise thing is to step back and admit it is no longer working. Otherwise, the risk of taking out your frustrations and harming either yourself or the child skyrockets.

Keep in mind though, God still has this all firmly in the palm of His hand. He can see the big picture, and He knew this was going to happen. He still knows how it will weave into His plan!

He loves you, and He loves the child – and He has chosen both of you and has not rejected either of you. He will take care of the child, and He will still use you if you are willing, even if you feel like you absolutely failed.

Many people in the Bible failed, many in gigantic ways. King David was a lousy father, an adulterer, and a murderer. Moses had anger issues. Jonah was not only a coward; he was flat-out disobedient! And yet God still continued to pick them up, dust them off, and use them in powerful ways.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. In what ways do you feel like you have failed as a parent? Journal about where you feel that you have failed.
2. Do you struggle with a time when you had to let a child go? Bring that to God in prayer! Ask God to reveal to you what His plan for you and for the child has been.
3. Commit to praying for the child you may have had to let go. Ask God if you can still be involved with this child. Maybe it is as a mentor, weekend respite, a prayer partner – or maybe God simply needed you to be there for a specific time for this child, and that time is now done. If so, ask God to give you peace.

DAY 14

WHEN SOMEONE NEEDS TO FAIL



READ: Isaiah 6

Key verse: Isaiah 6:11b-13, NIV

“Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the LORD has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken.

And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste.
But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down,
so the holy seed will be the stump in the land.”

So often we think of adoption as a beautiful thing – and it is! A child is claimed and fully belongs, and a family is either formed or expanded. Tears of joy are shed because dreams have been fulfilled. Yet, we can't ignore that adoption can only come out of brokenness – a child is only available for adoption because his or her birth parents couldn't – or sometimes wouldn't – parent this child.

And sometimes it becomes even more complicated. As a foster parent, you fall more and more in love with the child placed with you, and increasingly fearful for their safety and well-being should they be returned to their birth parents. You know you can provide the child with optimal parenting while their birth parents might be able to muster up “good enough” parenting.

Sometimes, you find yourself praying they will fail and the child will remain with you – and then you catch yourself. As a Christian, can you pray for someone else's downfall? Even if it is for the good of the child?

Isaiah 6 speaks of how the Lord Himself orchestrates the brokenness in the land – forsaken, ruined, deserted, ravaged, sent away, and laid to waste. God is God of not just the beautiful, but of all the brokenness. He sees. He knows. He is fully in control, and often uses brokenness to bring change in people's lives.

Even in the brokenness, God leaves hope. He reminds us in verse 13 that even as the mighty trees are cut down, they still leave behind stumps, and stumps can quickly grow green shoots and new life.

As a Christian, how then are you to pray in this situation, when your greatest desire is for the birth parent's downfall? First of all, pray for safety and for healing. Pray that God will direct the brokenness and bring new life for your family, for your foster or adopted child, for the birth parents. Second, be honest with God about your fears and desires. Pour out your heart, and He will guide your steps.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Are you hoping for a birth parent to fail in order to keep the child with you? Journal a prayer to God about your fears, frustrations, and desires in the situation.
2. Regarding the birth parent, are there any words, thoughts, or actions you need to confess? Spend some time in confession and pray a blessing on your child's birth parents.
3. Ask God how to pray for this situation.

DAY 15

WHEN THE PLAN DOES NOT GO AS PLANNED



READ: Isaiah 55

Key verse: Isaiah 55:8-11, NIV

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

I recently received an email, asking for prayer for a foster child. The foster parents had just been informed the social worker was making a case plan that terrified them. The birth parent had demonstrated time and again her inability to make good parenting choices. Her lifestyle choices did not create a safe and stable home for a child. Yet, for various reasons, the case plan was to allow her another chance at parenting.

Thirty years ago, my parents got call from the adoption worker that they had a little girl matched to our family. My mom and I spent the weekend shopping to prepare a pink nursery for my new sister, and a few days later we brought her home. Three months later the same social worker called – the adoption was not yet finalized and grandparents had surfaced out of nowhere, suing for custody. As the court case loomed, the question grew large.

Why, God? Why?

Times will arise when the case plan makes no sense at best, and seems dangerous at worst. Court social worker decisions are confusing and frightening. Reunification occurs because the birth parents deserve a chance, even though all involved know the odds are high that the parent will fail. At the center of it all is a vulnerable child with no voice.

Why, God? Why?

At first glance, Isaiah 55:8-11 may seem like a pat answer. Of course God is in control, and of course His ways are higher and His purposes are better. Of course.... but your heart is breaking and you can't sleep at night from worry. It's hard to trust when it's impossible to see how anything but harm can come out of the plan.

The fact is, though, that God IS in control. His ways ARE higher, and His purposes ARE better. He knows the big picture, and He also desperately loves your child, even more than you do.

Turn to God. Lean into Him, press into his comforting presence. God is big enough to handle our questions, our fears, and our doubts.

Isaiah 55:12 continues the encouragement by reassuring us of what follows when we trust in God's plan, no matter how hard it seems; "You shall go out with joy, and be led forth in peace." Joy and peace WILL follow.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Has the plan for your child ever not made sense? Maybe you are there right now, or have been in the past. Journal about the situation.
2. If the situation has happened in the past, where can you see the joy and peace God has promised? Spend some time thanking God for being in control and bringing goodness out of a situation that did not make sense. Are there areas where you struggle with anger and bitterness towards God for a plan gone awry? Spend some time in confession, and ask God to show You how He has been at work in the situation.
3. Are you currently in a confusing situation? Tell God that even though it does not make sense, you are choosing to trust him in this situation. Ask God to show you how you can pray for His will to be done regarding your child, your family, and their birth family.

DAY 16

SAYING GOOD-BYE



READ: 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

Key verse: 2 Thessalonians 3:3-5

"But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one.

We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance."

Fostering is designed to be temporary. The goal of it is for the child to be with you for a time, for you to nurture, care for, and equip the child, and for the child to be reunited with birth family.

Sometimes the goodbye comes after raising an adopted or foster child to the age of majority, and then their intense (and normal) curiosity causes them to abandon your home and search for what might have been with their birth family.

How do we say good-bye to a child we've cared for, knowing we were only to be part of their lives for a short time? 2 Thessalonians 3:3-5 sums it up beautifully.

The Lord is faithful. Pray that He will strengthen your child and protect them from the evil one.

God will use all the things you have taught your child and prayed over your child and whispered to your child while they slept; have confidence the Lord will guide them. Pray they will take what they have learned during their time with you – the life skills, self-control, character lessons, love, the knowledge of God – and continue to use it in the next step of their journey. Pray that God will direct their hearts into His love and will keep them persevering along His path.

Whatever the length of time you have with these precious children, pour into them God's goodness and love. Pray over them. Bless them.

“Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way.

The Lord be with all of you.”

2 Thessalonians 3:16, NIV



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. When the time comes to say good-bye to a foster child, write down some ways you might prepare for this (example: highlight special verses in a Bible they can bring with them, make a scrapbook of their time with you, plan a visit with them after they have moved out).
2. What seeds have you sown into your child that you hope they will remember? Pray and ask God to commit those seeds into rich soil in your child and to provide people in the future to water and nurture those seeds.
3. Journal a prayer to God sharing how you feel about this good-bye – your fears, your hopes, your worries. Thank Him for allowing you to be a special part of this child's journey.

DAY 17

WHEN FOUNDATIONS START TO CRUMBLE



READ: 1 Timothy 5

Key verse: 1 Timothy 5:4,8 NIV

“But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God. ... Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

Fostering and adopting can be hard on a marriage.

Several common obstacles can lead to the crumbling of a marriage once a foster or adoptive child is placed in the home. Maybe one of the spouses was not completely on board but felt their hesitations were ignored or even dismissed. Or, if you had been waiting for years for a child and have suddenly gone from a carefree lifestyle to one abruptly filled with childcare obligations and demands on your attention, it's easy for one or both partners to feel overwhelmed and resentful.

Sometimes one spouse will be so wrapped up in the parent role they forget about being a wife or husband, and neglect their partner's needs. Perhaps one parent has had an easier time bonding with the child, while for the other it has been hard work with little reward. Resentment sets in. Tempers flare. Cracks begin to appear in the marital foundation.

While 1 Timothy 5 speaks primarily of a financial obligation, the same principle applies to emotional obligations: take care of your own household first.

The best thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother well. Children can sense if there is tension between mom and dad, and this tension and insecurity shakes them to the core. If you are going to become parents, it is crucial to provide a strong marital foundation first, and to nurture that relationship. The time spent nurturing your spouse is not at the expense of the child, but rather will be a great blessing of a happy mom and dad and a strong and secure foundation to their home!

Because fostering and adopting can bring added stresses and challenges, you need to more intentionally nurture your marriage. It starts with being on the same page. Put your thoughts and desires aside – no matter how strong they are – and really listen to any hesitations and worries your spouse may have about pursuing adoption or fostering. Take the time to discuss these, pray about them, and work through them. This may involve talking to trusted mentors or even seeking counselling, but most of all, it will involve respect! Respect your spouse's questions about the path you want to take, and make sure you are both ready to travel this path together.

Next, take time each day and each week to reconnect, recharge, and nurture each other. Keep those love tanks full with affectionate words, recognition and praise, appreciation, praying together, little gifts, looking for ways to serve each other, date nights, etc. Invest in your marriage by hiring a babysitter so you can enjoy an evening out together.

Third, talk, listen, own what you need to change, and come up with a plan. Don't let small irritations fester and grow into huge mountains. Commit to being able to bring up anything and everything. Really listen to each other and pray with each other and finding a way to solve the problems. Something might seem small to you, but if it's important to your spouse, you need to hear them and find a solution!

Only when you have a solid foundation, when you have taken care of your own family first, will you be able to provide solid care and love to a child through fostering and adoption.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. God has blessed you with a spouse. Think about what you appreciate about your partner. Thank God for the person He has given you to journey with.
2. Ask God to bring to mind any areas where you may be ignoring concerns your spouse may have, or any thoughts and actions that might be negatively impacting your marriage that you need to take responsibility for. Spend some time in confession. Take some time later to discuss these areas with your spouse and apologize if needed.
3. Plan something you can do to bless your spouse this week.

DAY 18**BEAUTY IN THE BROKENNESS** **READ:** Isaiah 61**Key verse:** Isaiah 61:1-3a, NIV

“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.”

There is so much brokenness in this world.

Foster care and adoption is born out of brokenness. If the world was perfect, if parents were perfect, if families were perfect, there would be no foster care or adoption. There would be no poor, brokenhearted captives living in darkness, grief, mourning, and despair.

But as God proclaims in Isaiah 61:1-3a, He does not leave us in brokenness. He turns to us in favor and orchestrates His perfect plan to raise beauty from the ashes.

Children are brought into loving families who create a safe space to allow them to grow, heal, attach, and thrive. People who long to have children have homes filled with busy feet, laughter, Cheerios on the floor, and crafts stuck to the front of the refrigerator. God can build families and bring healing in many different ways. God can, and does, bring beauty from the brokenness!

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Read Isaiah 61 and meditate on it. Write down anything that speaks to you.
2. Spend time thanking God for the beauty He has brought in your life. It is good to look back on your fostering or adoption journey and see where you started and where God has brought you and your family. Praise Him for the joy and beauty He has brought!

DAY 19**GROWING MY CHARACTER** **READ:** James 1**Key verse:** James 1:2-4, NIV

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

We had a child with challenging behaviors. Despite providing the best prenatal nutrition, a loving and stable home, consistent discipline and doing all things “right” by every Christian parenting book ever written, our darling angel had a huge chip on his shoulder and behavior to reflect it. Trying to curb his behavior and channel it in the right direction was like trying to row a rubber dingy up a raging river. It took many years before we discovered that a medical problem was at the root of his issues (an easily correctable medical problem at that!). Those years were sure full of character building!

I admit, those parenting challenges often showed the true character of my heart. Frustration at times tested my desire to react to every situation calmly and graciously. And when the dust settled and the battle of wills was over, I often had to examine my heart and character and make some serious changes.

Fast forward several years, and I am still learning. Parenting is one of those things you don't have much of a choice but to persevere through, and as my wife said to me at one point, "We can't change his behavior. We can only change how we respond to it." Words of wisdom right there.

I had to do a lot of soul searching and spend time in prayer to ask God to shape my character, root out things in myself like frustration, anger, bitterness, and resentment, and plant qualities like patience, love, and joy. It wasn't easy. But I was in control of how I responded to the behavior, and it was my choice to let God grow my character or not.

As you move along the journey of parenting an adopted or foster child, there will be many opportunities for God to develop and grow your character. The question is, will you let Him?



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Are you willing to grow in character? Ask God which areas in your life He wants you to grow in.
2. Spend some time in confession around whatever undesirable character trait God brings to mind. Ask God to show you steps on how you can change this character trait. God promises in James 1:5 that "if any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you." There is a caution that follows though in verses 6-8 though, that we must be willing to accept the wisdom God gives us, even when it is something we would rather not hear!

DAY 20

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER



READ: Romans 10

Key verses: Romans 10:1, NIV

"Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God...is that they may be saved."

In 1997, I travelled to Romania to work in a baby orphanage following the fall of communism. The orphanages were a heart-wrenching place, warehouses for tiny little souls who had been abandoned and forgotten by the rest of the world. The children there faced a bleak future, particularly the infants who were handicapped or disabled in any way.

Once they graduated from the baby orphanage at the age of two, they would be destined for the Handicapped Children's Orphanage, where they would be doomed to a life spent in a tiny iron cot with no love and little human interaction. As I spent my days cuddling these forgotten infants, there was one little girl who captured my heart. With her goofy grin and fuzzy red hair, she was absolutely precious, and with her heart defect and deformed feet, she was doomed for the Handicapped Children's Orphanage. I tried to help her the best I could, but as a teenager, there was little I could do, aside from pray.

And so I prayed – I spent the next eighteen years begging God to watch over her, protect her, and somehow, someday, find a way for her to be raised not in the Handicapped Children's Orphanage but by a family who loved her. I had no way of knowing if my prayers were being answered, and resigned myself that I might never know, this side of heaven. I had no way of knowing if she was even still alive.

In the fall of 2015, I found this little girl, now 19, on Facebook, and made contact with her and the Dutch missionary woman who had taken her at the age of five from the Handicapped Children's Orphanage and raised her and four other girls in a small apartment.

My Dutch friend confided that when they went to pick up the pre-selected girls from the orphanage, they were shocked to see "my" little girl in the group, as she was not one of the ones they had selected based on her physical care needs. They took her home and never regretted it, but they puzzled as to how she came to be among the group they took home. The mystery remained unsolved for years, until I made contact and shared what my prayer for her had been. What a powerful God we serve!

Every child needs an adult to pray for them, to intercede for them. Prayer is a powerful tool, but here's the key - someone must actually pray! Every child must have a spiritual mentor, someone to step in and cover them in prayer. Someone to guide them, to teach them, to show them the way. Be that person for a child today!



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. When you were a child, did someone pray for you? As an adult, do you have someone who prays for you? If you did or do, thank God for this blessing. If not, pray and ask God to bring a prayer warrior into your life.
2. List the children who you pray for regularly. Maybe it is your own children, nieces or nephews, or students in the Kidzland class you teach. Ask God how He wants you to pray for them. Pray through what He reveals to you.
3. Are there any children in your life who may not have anyone interceding for them in prayer? Commit to praying for them regularly. Maybe it is a foster child you know, or a child sponsored through a world aid organization, or a child in Tupendane. Be their intercessor!

DAY 21

WHAT ABOUT THE WIDOWS?

 **READ:** Psalm 68, James 1:19-27

Key verse: Psalm 68:5-6a

*"A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.
God sets the lonely in families."*

Ever notice when the Bible talks about being a father to the fatherless, it almost always follows up with a partner command to care for the widows? On the surface, it is easy to overlook this second command, as the Bible was written during a time when there was no safety net for widows. There was no Canada Pension Plan, no Social Assistance, no tidy little work pensions or RRSPs for widows to draw from.

Widows and orphans from Biblical times were both in need of protection and support, and it's easy to dismiss the connection between these two groups of people today and think,

“Oh, the government will take care of the widows.”

This past week, however, the truth about today's orphans and widows smacked me right in between the eyes.

I was visiting with a young woman who holds a special place in my heart. She is a modern day orphan, a child who grew up in the foster care system being tossed from group home to foster home to shelter and back again. Despite never having a firm family foundation, she has done well for herself, maintaining her own apartment and raising three young children as a single mother. However, because she never had a firm family foundation, she is also without the benefits that come with having a family. There is no grandma to babysit the kids so she can have a break, no dad who can change a flat tire for her when she is stranded at the side of the road, no older brother who can mow her lawn, and no older sister who can answer parenting questions.

That was when God spoke to me. He gently pointed out that the fatherless children who have no one to commit to them long term grow into the widows of today's society. The children who are left to grow up unadopted, unmentored, and unloved, become the modern day widows with no extended family to support them. And it is not just the women – it is also the young men who struggle to find a place in the adult world when they've had no one to show them what it means to be a godly man.

God calls us to defend the fatherless AND the widows. How will you respond?



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Ask God to break your heart for what breaks His. Ask God to show you what life looks like for the adults who never had someone there for them as children.
2. How can you help? Ask God to present you with an opportunity to help a modern day widow this week.

DAY 22

JOY



READ: Genesis 21:1-7

Key verse: Genesis 21:6

“Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.”

Children are an immense source of joy! Children bring life to a home – the things they do, the quips they say, and the funny anecdotes that come about as they explore and learn about life can make you laugh until you cry. Children explore and learn and grow, and they allow you to do things with abandon you otherwise might not do in your dignified adult life. You'll jump in puddles, go tobogganing, watch the latest Disney movie in the theatre, and eat Blue Bubble Gum ice cream and let its blue dye dot your nose.

Children bring with them the simplest pleasures of life – the sigh of contented baby sleeping on your chest, a wilted dandelion bouquet presented to you by chubby fingers, a teenager who anxiously scans the crowd at the school award ceremony to see if you are there and smiles and relaxes when he catches sight of you in the audience. Children have an uncanny ability to bring love, joy, laughter, and life to a family. They have a way of making you feel special and that what you are doing is worthwhile.

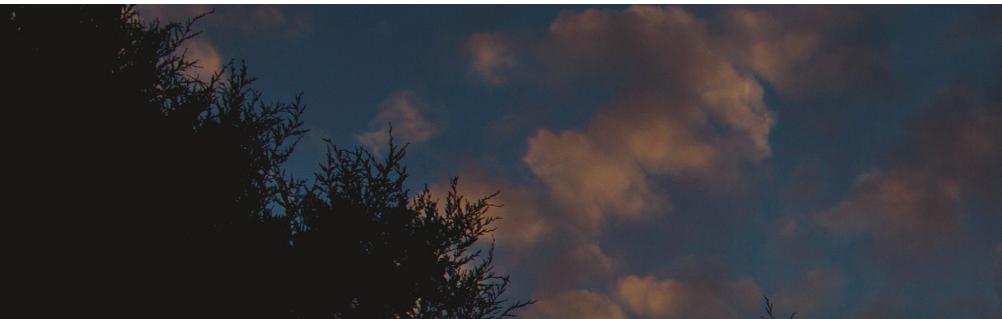
Embrace those little ones – and big ones – that God has entrusted in your care! Sing, play games, be silly, make memories! Dance for joy with them before the Lord, and cherish the precious gifts of children that He has given you.

“You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent. Lord my God, I will praise you forever.” Psalm 30:11-12



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. How has God blessed you with the children He has placed in your life? Write this down in your journal.
2. Thank God for the blessings children have brought into your life. Spend time praising him for His goodness and faithfulness.



Fostering the Father's Heart

A Devotional on Fostering and Adoption

The heart of the Gospel is adoption into God's family. We, who are Christians, are all adopted! As a result, it makes sense that many Christians feel compelled to become a walking testimony to their spiritual adoption by fostering and adopting children into their homes. This devotional will help you discover God's heart for you and His heart for the kids from hard places, whom He loves.

Romans 8:15 (ESV)

"For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'"

