



WRAPPING AROUND ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

HOW TO PROVIDE SUPPORT TO THOSE CALLED TO ADOPT



What if you haven't been called to adopt
a waiting child, but you still want to
help orphans and play a role in the
adoption process?

 We have good news for you. 

You can play a role in the adoption
journey. You can help a child. You can
support a family. You can make an
enormous difference, and here's how.

ADOPTION—GOD’S IDEA

For Christians, adoption is much more than simply providing a home for a waiting child. The Bible tells us that even before the creation of the world, God predestined us to be adopted as His sons and daughters (Ephesians 1:5). The spirit of adoption permeates Scripture, and God’s heart for the orphan pours forth from His Word.

Adoption has been described by Pastor John Piper as the visible gospel. It is proclaimed to a watching world that desperately needs to know the love of the heavenly Father.

DID YOU KNOW?

There are 127,000 children (legal orphans) waiting for adoption in the U.S. foster care system.

We know from Scripture that God loves orphans and that His Word commands His followers to care for these precious children (James 1:27).

There are many different ways to minister to God’s orphan children and to the adoptive families who have welcomed these children home.

LIFE'S HARSH REALITY FOR MANY ADOPTED CHILDREN AND THEIR PARENTS

Tragically, many of the world's children are born into families unable or unwilling to provide the secure and stable home they need to grow and develop as healthy children. Many of these children have experienced some form of early trauma from abuse or neglect. Whether they lived in U.S. foster homes or in an orphanage overseas, previously neglected or abused children who fail to receive all God intends for them may develop special needs or difficult behaviors.

For these children and the families who choose to adopt them, the road to healthy family living may be a rocky one, and it may take longer than they had hoped. Yet, in spite of the challenges, many families are making lifelong commitments to children who need opportunities to heal.



ADOPTIVE FAMILIES NEED YOUR HELP

Due to these challenges, many adoptive families desperately need support from their church families. As is often the case in other areas of life, however, asking for help can be difficult to do.

Many adoptive families may interpret their struggles as failure, question their calling to adopt or, worst of all, feel abandoned by the God who called them to the journey of adoption. But He who called them is faithful. There is hope for the future!

“Be strong and courageous . . . for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Deuteronomy 31:6

WHAT’S MY ROLE?

Struggling adoptive families need their church families to wrap around and support them during times of trials. When churches do this, they mirror our heavenly Father, who wraps His arms around us during times of joy as well as times of trial.

While the suggestions in this booklet may not apply to all situations, they represent a general “cry of the heart” of adoptive families who welcomed home an emotionally wounded or struggling child. The goal is to provide practical guidance for churches seeking to support adoptive families.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Before trying to provide support to a family in need, it is vitally important for pastors and church members to understand that children who experienced previous trauma may have a difficult time adjusting to their new adoptive family—no matter how committed and loving the family may be. Understanding this is vital for effective ministry.

DID YOU KNOW?

Adoption from foster care costs very little.

Healing for these children doesn't usually happen overnight, and adoptive families need their church families to walk with them through their struggles.

Churches can no longer think that typical parental expressions of love alone will “cure” the child. For many of these children, their souls are scarred and their hearts are hurt. As a result, time, understanding and unconditional commitment are essential to the child's healing process.

It's also wise to remember that the last thing adoptive parents need is simplistic answers from people who understand nothing of their unique calling and struggle. These parents do not need admonitions that they are either too hard on little cutie-pie or not firm enough with that strong-willed child. This approach will alienate the already struggling family.

The emphasis for all involved cannot be on a quick fix for the children. Rather, with time and God's grace, we can slowly help these children heal.

HOW DO WE WRAP AROUND OUR ADOPTIVE FAMILIES?

Families struggling in these situations need compassionate, non-judgmental brothers and sisters in Christ to walk beside them to help bear their burdens.

Each helps the other and says to his brother, "Be strong!"

Isaiah 41:6

Adoptive families need others to WRAP around them with prayer and practical help. Here's an easy way to remember their needs:

W. R. A. P.

wrestle in prayer respite care acts of service promises of God

The background features a light blue and green wavy pattern. A faint, stylized figure of a person is visible in the bottom right corner.

W.

wrestle in prayer

The Bible says the Enemy comes to steal, kill and destroy. For previously wounded orphan children, the Enemy stole their childhoods, killed their dreams and destroyed their futures. But that's not the end of their stories. Christ has come that these children may have life and have it to the full (John 10:10). God wants to restore and redeem their beginnings. He has a plan and a future for these children. Remember, He “sets the lonely [ones] in families” (Psalm 68:5-6).

So when a Christian family welcomes a little child in Jesus' name (Luke 9:48); provides a loving home; and introduces her to the One who made, loves, heals and delivers her, the Enemy does not stand idly by. The spiritual warfare involved in rescuing orphans is very real and often overlooked. Adoptive families need you to wrestle in prayer on their behalf.

PRAY FOR:

- Strength and patience.
- Grace and mercy.
- God's truth to be revealed to the families amid the schemes and lies of the Enemy.
- Spiritual eyes to see the truth behind their struggle and strength to exercise their faith and trust in their mighty God.
- Ears attuned to the living God, who will walk them through their trials.

DID YOU KNOW?

A child in foster care can wait five years or more to have a forever adoptive family.

ALSO PRAY SPECIFICALLY FOR THE CHILD

- That God would heal wounds of rejection, abandonment, fear and mistrust.

DID YOU KNOW?

The average age of a child in foster care waiting for an adoptive family is 10 years old.

- That God's love, which never fails, will cover him in all he does.
- To know and believe that there is hope in Christ.
- To trust in and receive her new family's love and desire to help her heal.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

James 1:22

TAKE ACTION

- Seek out a group of believers who will commit to pray regularly.
- Communicate to the family that there is a prayer team that would count it a privilege to intercede on their behalf.

The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

James 5:16

- Know that your enthusiasm and initiative will help the family trust that they aren't "bothering you" with a seemingly endless list of struggles and will allow them to have confidence in your prayer partnership.
- Ask the family for specific prayer requests and assure them those requests will be held in the strictest confidence. It is crucial for the family to be able to be transparent with their specific needs.

- PRAY . . . FERVENTLY and OFTEN.
- Let the family know you're praying for them regularly. For the struggling adoptive family, prayer will help move them toward wholeness and healing in Christ.





R.

respite care

No matter how wonderful, committed and loving adoptive parents are, they need a break from the demands of caring for their children. Respite care is defined as “short-term or temporary care... to provide relief to the regular caregiver” (Dictionary.com).

For adoptive parents who struggle with challenging children, respite care is crucial to the well-being of the family. Times of respite allow parents to focus on their marriage, take time to regroup, and enjoy much-needed peace, quiet, and rest.

This is easy, you might think. Like babysitting, right? Well, not exactly. There are several unique aspects to respite care:

- Respite should not begin until the child has been in the home for several months. Make a note on your calendar to begin to offer respite at or after the fourth month.
- You must get to know the children beforehand and spend time with them along with mom and dad. Being a consistent presence in their lives communicates a genuine concern for them and their well-being. This can include birthdays, graduations and milestones as well as during illness, challenging behaviors and school changes or difficulties. Building this foundation of trust is crucial.
- The respite must be significant (long) enough to be worth the trouble of preparing for it. Keep in mind that transition periods are often challenging to these children.



- Respite time shouldn't be a "vacation" for the children where they are free from the rules of daily life. Effective respite should not induce a longing in the children to go live with the respite providers. Children must still do chores, homework and follow the same general rules.
- All decisions and communication from the respite provider should affirm the adoptive parents to the child. Parents must clearly present boundaries and limits so respite providers can offer consistent care.
- If possible, provide respite in the children's home in order to maintain as much of the structure and schedule as possible. There are times, however, when parents and other siblings may need quiet time at home; If so, the respite can happen away from home.

TAKE ACTION

- Take the time to get to know the children. Talk with them and pay attention to their interests.
- Ask the parents if you could have the privilege of partnering with them in ministering to their children by providing them a time of respite.
- Suggest specific full days or weekends.
- If a family is brave enough to ask for help, respond enthusiastically. If you can't provide respite when they ask, suggest a specific counter date so they know you are serious about your offer to help.

DID YOU KNOW?

A recent survey of Americans found 45% believe children enter foster care due to juvenile delinquency. The reality is these kids have been neglected, abused or abandoned.



A.

acts of service

One of the keys to effective acts of service is that they are offered enthusiastically, in a spirit of love and are specifically designed to meet the needs of the family. Being aware of the dynamics of adoptive families and children will aid in identifying needs that can most easily be met.

Another key to effective acts of service is to make the offer as low maintenance as possible for the adoptive parents. However kindly intended, if the offer creates additional stress or work for the parents, it will be counterproductive. Watch for cues and try to determine if what you've asked the family to do creates unintended consequences.

This list of ideas will help get you started.

- **Meals.** Find a team of people to take meals the first few weeks the child is in the home. Selecting one person to coordinate and communicate with the family is important. Ask for the family's food preferences and what time they usually eat.
- **Errands and Shopping.** Don't say, "Let me know if you need anything," because you'll likely never be asked. Instead, tell them you're going to the store that week and ask if they have time to give you a list. If they can't right away, be flexible. Or keep a running list of their regular items such as detergent, toothpaste and so on. Ask them for the brand names they use—this type of attention to detail communicates great love and concern for their needs.

DID YOU KNOW?

Each year, more than 25,000 youth exit foster care without an adoptive family or support structure.

- **Laundry.** Pick up the laundry, take it home or to a laundromat, and return it folded.
- **Yard Work.** If the family has several children, organize a yard cleanup party and supervise the children as they work. Pizza is a great reward.
- **Cleaning.** Housework can take away a good deal of the family's bonding time. Identify a time when the family will be out of the house and offer to vacuum, clean bathrooms, or wash linens and remake beds. This may be difficult for a family to accept at first, so give them the opportunity to decline the offer without feeling pressured.



- **Financial Assistance.** Financial difficulty can accompany a family who chose adoption. If families have adopted internationally, the process can be extremely expensive. Providing a monetary gift to help offset expenses can be a huge blessing to a family and a great way to play a significant role in the adoption.
- **Gifts for the Homecoming Celebration.** We think of baby showers for families expanding by birth, but gifts are also appropriate when a family expands through adoption. Gifts are a fun way to involve the church community and celebrate God's gift of adoption. For families adopting an older child, gift cards are a great way to support and bless that child.

TAKE ACTION

- Make it a point to really consider the many ways you might bless an adoptive family. The options are limitless!
- Again, paying attention to the family's needs is important. When serving the family, be sensitive to the amount of time you stay to visit. Typically, it isn't wise to stay too long past the pleasantries, as the stress level will be high and a new child shouldn't be overwhelmed with too many new people. The new child needs calm and quiet time to bond with mom, dad and any siblings.
- Go for it! Make an offer and give it a try.

DID YOU KNOW?

The federal government offers up to \$10,000 in tax credit for adoptive families.





P.

promises of God

Throughout Scripture, God makes many promises that can encourage us during the different seasons of our lives. His Word is living and active, but His powerful truths sometimes get lost amid pain and struggle.

Providing encouragement with God's Word through notes, calls or e-mails can be a powerful source of comfort and strength for families. Hope-filled words combined with listening ears, understanding hearts, kindness and mercy will deeply resonate.

 Who is our God? He is strong and mighty.
He is more than able. Keep your eyes on Him. 

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

Psalm 68:5-6

"I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?"

Jeremiah 32:27

*He is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called,
chosen and faithful followers.*

Revelation 17:14

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."

Revelation 4:8

“There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.”

1 Samuel 2:2

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.”

Revelation 22:13

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea. . . . The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. . . . ‘Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.’ The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah

Psalms 46:1-2,7,10-11

Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.

Psalms 147:5

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

Psalms 147:3

And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:19

DID YOU KNOW?

Empty nesters or parents of older teen children tend to make great adoptive families for a waiting older child.

The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.

Psalms 9:9

The LORD will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

Psalms 121:7-8

Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!

Isaiah 30:18

MY FOCUS IS ON GOD—NOW WHAT DO I DO?

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:18

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 3:5-6

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:28

*But I trust in your unfailing
love; my heart rejoices in
your salvation.*

Psalm 13:5

*Come near to God and he
will come near to you.*

James 4:8

*“Then you will call, and the
LORD will answer; you will
cry for help, and he will say:
Here am I.”*

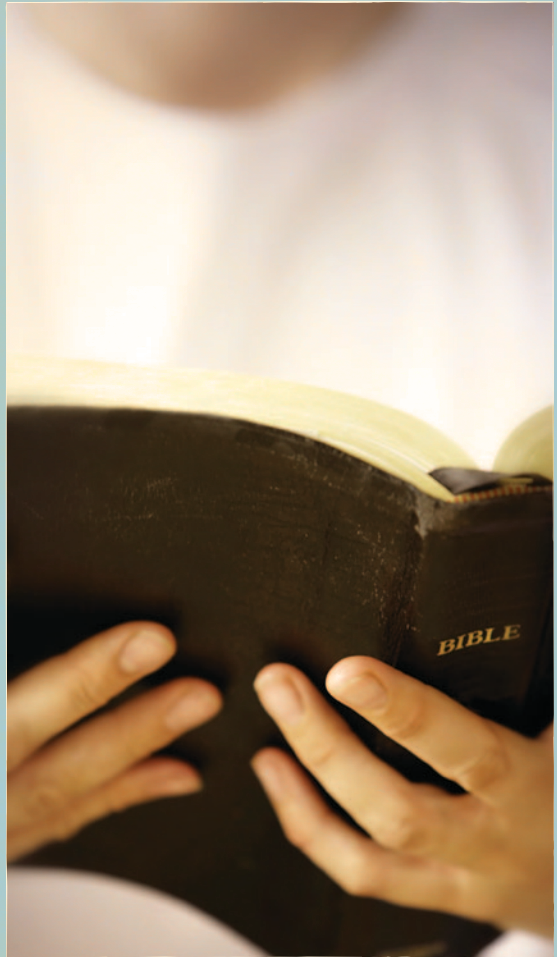
Isaiah 58:9

*“Call upon me in the day of
trouble; I will deliver you,
and you will honor me.”*

Psalm 50:15

*Let us not become weary in
doing good, for at the proper
time we will reap a harvest
if we do not give up.*

Galatians 6:9



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

James 1:2-4

DID YOU KNOW?

Once parental rights are terminated and appeals have been exhausted, birth parents have no recourse for regaining custody of the child.

We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Romans 5:3-4

Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever.

Psalms 125:1

“You will be secure, because there is hope; you will look about you and take your rest in safety.”

Job 11:18

FEAR NOT

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear.

1 John 4:18

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

2 Timothy 1:7

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach 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 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 gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.

Isaiah 61:1-3

DID YOU KNOW?

There are more than 130 million orphans throughout the world.

TAKE ACTION

- Don't be afraid to communicate truth in love to adoptive families. Knowing they have your support and prayers is helpful to them.
- Buy a box of cards and periodically send them an encouraging note.
- Even writing out prayers for the family can be a huge blessing.



THAT'S A W.R.A.P.



While not every family is called to open their home to a child in need, everyone can be involved in caring for orphans. Take time to explore how the Lord may be asking you to serve the adoptive families in your community. Often it's the small gestures that mean the most.



Helping Families Thrive™

iCareAboutOrphans.org

© 2008 Focus on the Family

Scripture quotations are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®.
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

F01117T