

God's Precious Promises for Those Called to Foster and Orphan Care

Christians are strong supporters of adoption and foster care, and they adopt and foster at a higher rate than the general population. A survey from the Barna Group (2013) found that 5% of practicing Christians have adopted, compared to 2 percent of all Americans. Similarly, 38% of practicing Christians have seriously considered adoption, compared to 26% of all Americans.

In regard to foster care, the pattern of findings is similar. Three percent of practicing Christians have fostered, compared to 2% of all Americans; 31% of practicing Christians have seriously considered fostering, compared to 11% of all Americans.

Reflecting God's Heart

Why do Christians adopt and foster children at a higher rate than the general population? Part of the reason may relate to Christianity's strong emphasis on caring for vulnerable children. In Christian adoption circles, we often talk about James 1:27 (BSB), which says, "Care for widows and orphans in their distress." Even though not every child who enters foster care or who is adopted privately or internationally is an orphan by definition, the value of looking after a child in need relates to many situations.

Another aspect of adoption and foster care that is incredibly beautiful is that it mirrors God's relationship with us. The core message of Christianity is about that reconciliation and redemption. This perspective also speaks volumes to our children's journey. We can often feel as though their current behavior defines their future. We feel this way because our

daily interactions with them can leave us exhausted and dismayed. We also see our children's frustration with how things are going. The combination can lead to hopelessness. But because of grace, no one needs to be hopeless, including our kids. And if you decide to engage in adoption or foster care, know that you are engaging in deep, holy work that is close to the heart of God.

A Complex Journey

Christian families who adopt or foster often feel a strong call from God to enter this journey. They often have a huge passion for loving and caring for children and a longing for them to be part of a safe and healthy family. Stepping forward often means making huge sacrifices—giving of their time and finances, taking on additional stress—to bring children into their home.

Then the problems mount. Adoptive and foster parenting are not your average parenting gigs, which most of the world does not understand. Children impacted by adoption or foster care have often experienced trauma that drives their emotions and behavior, whether they remember it or not. Their symptoms are the truth they are not yet able to speak and describe. Difficult behaviors or reactions such as hoarding food, aggressive behavior and running away are often the result of past trauma. Some children may have difficulties attaching to the parents, and the normal positive reinforcement that parents usually expect (hugs, snuggles, "I love yous") may not happen.

I saw children embarrassed to let others know they were in foster care, like it was a secret that needed to be kept. I saw biological children affected by the trauma of their new sibling and feeling overlooked as their parents needed to give more time and attention to their healing child.

Marriage relationships may also hit a rough patch because of

all the added strain, and single parents may get exhausted because they have to be “on” 100% of the time. Feelings of grief, anger and disappointment can emerge because what they hoped their family would be like (for example, affectionate, well-behaved) is far from their reality. This journey is complex.

These experiences can disrupt one’s relationship with God, which is normal. We all go through fluctuations over time in how we experience God. But this particular struggle can be exacerbated by a deep misunderstanding of God and what God promises us.

Persevering Through Pain

Families often feel as if they are following what God wants for their life and are making huge sacrifices to obey. Both parts of that statement are typically accurate. They assume that because of their faithfulness and sacrifices, God should reward them by making everything work out. I certainly am guilty of this mindset.

Usually we have some set of predetermined beliefs about what it means for everything to work out, such as well-behaved children who love and appreciate their parents for the sacrifices made. When reality falls short of expectations, the feeling is that God has broken His promise.

I worked with a couple, Grayson and Leslie, who often felt this way. They were so connected with God and their church community, spending such an intensive time on wisdom and discernment, that they were absolutely confident adoption was what God wanted them to do. They probably wouldn’t have said this out loud, but they both had the belief that if they followed what God wanted for their life, things would work out: their kids would develop normally, do well in school, and love and appreciate Grayson and Leslie as parents.

When their kids struggled, the couple began to get frustrated

and even doubt God. Things were not working out as they had expected, so they began to question whether they had heard God correctly in the first place.

At some point, we had an honest conversation about what God ultimately promises us. He never promises that life will be easy or comfortable. In fact, Jesus actually seems to promise the opposite. “In this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33a, NIV). Jesus said His followers would be persecuted as he had been persecuted (John 15:20) and that the world would hate them (John 15:18–19). Even Jesus lamented and felt deep sorrow. Before he died, Jesus cried out to God, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46b, MEV). We might be uncomfortable with Jesus expressing deep sorrow, but it was an honest part of his experience.

If Jesus can cry out to God, “Where are you?” and “Why is this happening?” perhaps this can say something to us. Struggle and lament are important aspects of our human experience. We are not promised a life without challenges.

Standing on the Promises

So what can we count on God for? God promises to be with us in the midst of our struggles and difficulties. Jesus promises us trouble in this world (John 16:33a), but thankfully, He doesn't leave us there alone. He continues by saying, “But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33b, NIV). Paul writes that he is “persuaded that neither death nor life, neither angels nor principalities nor powers, neither things present nor things to come, neither height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38–39). That's a pretty comprehensive list, and the message is clear. God is with us through everything—the highs and lows, good and bad times, and successes and failures. We aren't promised an easy journey; we are promised that the God who has overcome the world will be with us every step of the

way.

You can be assured that God is with you in whatever stage you are in in your adoption/foster journey, but you can also know that there are ways to get the tangible, spiritual and emotional help you need to help your family flourish. We all need supportive, grace-filled relationships with people who accept us right where we are. There are helpful parenting techniques that can be used with children who come from traumatic backgrounds. And sometimes we all need help with tangible resources like money, supplies and respite care.

If you need help with this process, please reach out to us and visit .

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