

God the Father's Life-Changing Declaration Over You This Christmas

A circle of kindergartners sat before me, each eagerly waiting their turn to voice their Christmas wishes. I chose Max to go next.

"And what would you like for Christmas this year, Max?"

His little chipmunk face became very serious, and with great solemnity, he looked me in the eye and declared, "A sword."

"Wow!" I said softly in awe. "That would be a pretty amazing gift."

A few other children took turns making their excited requests known. "A bike," "A basketball," "A dollhouse."

I then turned to a newer child in the class. Having recently been placed into a new foster home, it had been just a few weeks since he joined this little company of 5- and 6-year-olds who called me their teacher. Though all of the children in my class came from impoverished homes, I knew this boy was the poorest of all. At 5 years old, he was without a mom or dad, without a family, and in his little heart, he saw himself as having no identity either. He bore the soul wounds of one who'd been abused and rejected, and now he lived with strangers.

What would this little boy request as a Christmas gift? My heart ached to ask him, because I knew that deep down inside that 5-year-old was a cry for so many things. A cry that went far beyond a child's desire for a bike or a basketball or a dollhouse. When I looked into his eyes, I could devastatingly feel his silent, resonating ache to be wanted,

to be loved and to belong.

"What would you like for Christmas?"

That little one rocked back and forth for a few moments, his eyes glued to the carpet. He was a shy and withdrawn boy, and I watched with a wringing heart as he mustered up the courage to speak in front of his peers.

He then responded, "A Christmas tree."

I thought about how small a request this was. But then I began to think again about his other wants that he hadn't voiced in our kindergarten circle.

Family, Love, Permanence

As I considered these longings in his young heart, I realized that just as the Christmas tree seemed like so little to ask for, neither were these other desires such tremendous requests. He *should* have a mom and a dad, and it was an injustice to him that he did not have either.

I'm made to remember the words that Jesus spoke as His time for death drew nearer. "*I will not leave you as orphans,*" He promised (John 14:18). God isn't unaware of the orphan's plight and the desperate longings that cry out from within these lonely hearts.

In speaking this promise, He was saying to us, "*You are not unwanted. You are not unloved. You are not alone. You are meant to belong to the Father.*"

Before the world's foundations, adoption stirred in the Father's heart. He wanted us.

He marked us with a destiny to be brought into His family through Jesus Christ.

And so the Father sent His Son to pursue.

Jesus descended to the earth in the humility of a baby's frame. And through this babe, the Father declared His desire over us.

"You are chosen, valuable, worthy of love."

Looking into the eyes of this tender Child, we see a God who has come near, and has withheld nothing from us. We were far off. Lost. Orphaned. And the Father reached out with His Son, and brought us in. With passionate intent, Jesus went to a cross so that we, orphaned as we were, may enter the Father's arms.

Now, as we lean into the embrace of our Father, who has made us His own, may we marvel again at the awe and the beauty of our own adoption stories.

And may we be compelled to imitate the very expression of this love that has been lavished upon us, that we too would embrace the orphaned, ones like that little boy who simply wanted a Christmas tree. And may they be given new names, just as the Father has given us new names.

We are no longer orphans—but sons and daughters. {eoa}

Kinsey Thurlow *is a minister at the International House of Prayer in Kansas City. She is an advocate for the fatherless and her husband, Jon is a worship leader and minister at IHOP-KC.*