

WATCH: The New Face of Adoption Isn't a Newborn Baby

When we hear the word *adoption*, most of us immediately think of a baby. It's understandable because that is what our American culture teaches us it looks like.

You think of a sweet couple with a nursery prepared in advance, waiting for the call that their baby has arrived so they can go and pick her up. I have some wonderful friends who've had this joy and miracle—praise Jesus for those stories. Babies need to be adopted; the sooner, the better for their natural attachment and care.

Yet there is another route of making a beautiful decision to adopt a child, one who is actively waiting. For National Adoption Month, let's consider these precious ones who count each day they live without a forever family—America's foster children.

They are fully aware that they lack a mom and a dad. They live with a foster family or in a large group home, sometimes without experiencing a human necessity: real, authentic connection with people.

Not all children in foster care can be adopted, because they have their family working to restore their situation and bring them back home. Yet of the 415,000 children who entered foster care last year, 108,000 of them *do not* have family to receive them. They are waiting to be adopted, perhaps by a family like yours.

Many remarkable organizations work hard daily to find these 108,000 children a forever family. One of my favorite groups is Heart Gallery of America, a nonprofit collaborative project that utilizes the power of story and striking visuals to increase the number of adoptive families for foster children.

These 208 Heart Galleries across America have a wide range of volunteers, including photographers who take pictures of the children and videographers who produce short video bios. After I first scrolled through and began to experience a few of the children's stories, hours later I was never the same.

These precious ones are waiting *right now*. While their dreams consist of all kinds of unique life plans, one of their strongest desires is having "a kind mom and dad." Every time I look into their eyes and truly listen to these children in foster care, my heart breaks. I believe yours will too.

As a foster mom, I see up close the divinely inherent need for forever attachment. They desperately need the simple opportunity to call out for "mom" or "dad." They need to feel an embrace of a dad's scratchy beard and know there will be plenty more safe embraces like that.

They need to know they are irreplaceable, valued and desperately wanted. They need to know that even when they mess up, get angry or act out—that they have a loving, consistent parent who will set boundaries and love them no matter what.

So I'm going to ask you a favor. I want to give you a face to see and a voice to hear so you don't forget. The favor I'm asking of you is only to watch and listen. I want you to see his face and I want you to listen to his voice. That's it. That is all I'm asking.

Mario, age 17, has been in the foster care system since he was "one or two years old" in his words. He still dreams of having a family—"Any family," he says.

Nearly a half-million children enter foster care every year; if there was an average demographic, statistics show it would be a 9-year-old Caucasian boy. But really, these children are all ages and all demographics.

They need strong families open to see, hear and love them.

This November, during National Adoption Month, perhaps we should reconsider what the majority of adoptions *could* look like.

Take time to explore the stories. While you are praying for the face you see or the voice you hear, pray about being their family. Another step is sharing their stories and championing their dreams to your own friends and family. You could be helping a child find his forever family.

The number of adoptions that are finalized in foster care each year has remained flat over the last decade. Let's begin to change that number. Pray about what adoption could look like in your own special, God-ordained family.

*Since 2008, **Natalie Brumfield** has served as Birmingham chapter leader for Bound4LIFE – a grassroots movement to pray for the ending of abortion and for revival worldwide. She works as children's director at her local church and volunteers at a local pregnancy care center. Natalie and her husband Matthew live in Birmingham, Alabama and love being foster parents.*

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