


a

RESOURCE
GUIDE

for

PASTORS &
CHURCHES

HOW YOU CAN HELP
ADOPTIVE
FAMILIES



Dear Friend,



first, we want to take this opportunity to thank you for your interest in adoption. We know from God's Word that adoption is close to the heart of God. In fact, we know from Scripture that all of us who have placed our faith in Christ have been adopted! (ROMANS 8:15; EPHESIANS 1:5)

Throughout Scripture, God clearly calls us to care for vulnerable children and to welcome them in His name. A child whose physical, emotional, mental and spiritual needs are met will make amazing progress, even in the face of the most daunting challenges. Many of these children come from hard places but are desperate to be loved. We want to help find families for these kids because we believe that every child is a precious gift from God.

Adoption redeems brokenness. Adoption gives a child the chance to belong.

The support of a pastor is an enormous blessing to adoptive families. You cannot imagine how much your affirmation and interest will encourage them! We pray that you will fully embrace the Scriptural theme of adoption for everyone in your church – God Himself has brought each of us into His family through adoption! There are many in your church who need to really experience their adoption into God's family, both spiritually and physically. So many are broken through their family of origin; the scars remain, but pain and rejection is redeemed through the gospel! Pastor, tell the good news – and use adoptive families to illustrate it! Blessings!

As you lead your church community in caring for adoptive families, we invite you to tell us how this work impacts your church. Please email us at letters@fotf.ca.

This resource guide is a compilation of educational articles for pastors. The material has been reproduced from Focus on the Family Canada's adoption care website at Waitingtobelong.ca. Visit this website for additional information, plus similar guides for pre-adoptive families, post-adoptive families and friends and relatives of adoptive families.

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For the Lord your God
is God of gods and Lord of lords,
the great God,
mighty and awesome,
who shows no partiality
and accepts no bribes.

*He defends the cause
of the fatherless*

and the widow, and loves
the foreigner residing among you,
giving them food and clothing.

And you are to love those
who are foreigners,
for you yourselves were
foreigners in Egypt.

01

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**HOW PASTORS CAN CHAMPION
FOSTERING AND ADOPTION**

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How pastors can champion fostering and adoption



PRACTICAL WAYS TO NURTURE AN ADOPTION-FRIENDLY CULTURE IN YOUR CHURCH

by Phil and Jen Wagler

The New Testament writer James had an adopted older brother. It took time, but he eventually came to see that this sibling was no rival; He was Christ the Lord.

Scripture is silent on most of the dynamics within the home of Mary and Joseph, but something in James' life experience, combined with his love of the Hebrew Law, the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and his awakening to the wonder of the incarnation that came so close to home, inspired James to write, "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" (JAMES 1:27). What our Father in Heaven accepts as the faultless display of the believing life must include the care of the fatherless and motherless.

The Christian Church has been at the forefront of providing care for parentless children for centuries, with James' words a key spur. These words must inspire us still and, in these days of so many broken homes and abandoned children, pastors must be at the forefront of calling the followers of Jesus to foster and adopt.

WHY SHOULD PASTORS PAY ATTENTION TO THIS ISSUE?

First, because it is rooted in the very nature of God Himself.

The Scriptures reveal a God who makes spiritual orphans His children through adoption. The Apostle Paul writes, "For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by Him we cry, "Abba, Father" (ROMANS 8:14-15).

God is the adoptive Father of many daughters and sons. Pastors must pay attention to the needs of the orphan because, if we don't, we are not paying close attention to the heart of God. And if we're not paying close attention to the heart of God, we will not be speaking and teaching rightly about who God is and we will be half-baking our theology.

Second, members of your church family are living the multi-faceted realities connected to adoption and fostering.

On the one hand, you have couples struggling with infertility who are desperately seeking to enter parenthood, and you will inevitably also have some who have given up a child. On the other hand, you will be preaching every week to some who are fostering or adopting and several who are fostered or have been adopted.

Take even a random survey of your people and you will discover just how living a reality this is among your flock.

Further, if your church is even remotely involved in the community, you will encounter those with apprehended children and find yourself staring social instability right in the face. If you do not pay attention to this issue, you are ignoring how the reality of a sinful world hits the first place of human development – the relationship between child and birth mother and father.

Third, the statistics are stunning. In Canada more than 80,000 children are in foster care – a number similar to the population of Nanaimo, British Columbia or Kanata, Ontario, and larger than Fredericton, New Brunswick or Medicine Hat, Alberta. Of these 80,000 children in foster care, 30,000 are legally available for adoption. Worldwide, UNICEF reports the number of orphans is somewhere between 143 and 210 million – that’s about five times more than Canada’s entire population. Enough said.

Fourth, the opportunity is so great. If the Church takes seriously the call to live this pure religion, we could see some of the most hurting and wounded in our society brought into the healing embrace of Jesus and His Church. Foster and adoption is an opportunity to show and tell our faith in one of the most holistic ways possible.

It should be considered abnormal – and even heretical – for God’s people not to be about this element of faultless religion.

Further, Christians are often sought out by family and child services because of the quality of care they provide. Thus Christian families are providing a powerful apologetic for Biblical faith in a post-Christian, secular society. In addition, it is a powerful declaration of our desire to reduce abortions.

Fifth, obedience matters. “Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.” Thus commands the Lord from His divine council seat in Psalm 82:3-4.

Both Old and New Testaments emphasize the charge to embrace the orphan. Therefore, we who lead God's people and shape a Biblical ecclesiology must be obedient in raising the profile of this tangible expression of the heart of God.

BUT HOW? HOW DO WE PASTORS INFLUENCE THIS TYPE OF CULTURE IN OUR CHURCHES?

First, preach it. It's in the Bible; don't avoid it. The very human stories of barrenness and human frailty are replete in Scripture. The commands to care for the orphan are everywhere. And, don't forget, adoption is clearly the Biblical image of how we all enter God's family by faith alone, through grace alone.

Second, expose it. Find ways to have stories of adoption and fostering told from all sides, but do it with honesty and sensitivity, and lace it with the hope of the Gospel. Find space for agencies and organizations to be profiled among your people.

Third, learn about the unique challenges facing adopting and fostering families. Many adoptive and foster parents feel in over their heads because they are dealing with wounded children who aren't always excited that someone "chose" them. Often these parents find it very difficult to participate in what everyone else is excited about and are sensitive – rightly or wrongly – to the judging eyes of others with "normal" kids.

Don't jump to conclusions about adopted and fostered kids when they push every button a Sunday school teacher has (and some they never knew they had). Find a way to equip your children's ministry volunteers to respond well to the uniqueness of these great kids.

Fourth, make the care of the orphan another one of the unquestioned ministries of your church. It could be argued that this has more Biblical precedence than Sunday school, youth ministry or many of the other things we can't imagine not doing. Make adoption and fostering expected. It should be considered abnormal – and even heretical – for God's people not to be about this element of faultless religion. It should simply be what Christians do.

Of course, not everyone can or even should foster or adopt, but a church family can make it easier for people with a call to open their homes to do so. Make financial assistance available to those adopting internationally or privately. Equip caregivers to provide respite for weary parents (because many adoptive and fostering parents just can't hire any babysitter and even extended family members find it difficult).

Beware of making an idol of the nuclear family and instead teach what the Scriptures say about the family of God and how the local church is an expression of that family bound together, not

by human blood, but by the blood of the Lamb. The truth is, for many people, the Church is the only “real” family they know in our fractured social fabric.

Fifth, consider modelling it. Don't do it just to be a do-gooder or martyr for the cause – the needs of these kids are too precious and precarious for that – but do pray about how you as a leader might somehow lead the way. You might never be an adoptive or foster parent, but you could serve at an orphanage, learn about your local family and children's services, or be a big brother or big sister. You *are* shaping the culture of your church; consider how you are shaping this aspect of it.

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I will not leave you
as orphans;
I will come to you.

JOHN 14:18

02

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**10 WAYS TO PASTOR
ADOPTIVE PARENTS AND THOSE
CONSIDERING ADOPTION**

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10 ways to pastor adoptive parents and those considering adoption



MAKING ADOPTION A MISSIONAL MOVEMENT IN YOUR CHURCH

by Jason Kovacs

There are many ways that you can express your pastoral care for those considering adoption and those who have adopted already. As an adoptive father and former pastor, I offer a few thoughts on how to help adoption become a Biblically-based, heart-led, missional movement in your church and not merely another program on your church's list.

- 1. Develop your own heart for the fatherless.** God calls Himself a “father to the fatherless” (PSALM 68:5) and emphasizes throughout Scripture His special care for orphans. In fact, the very heart of the gospel is God's passion to not only redeem sinners but to adopt them as His very sons and daughters (EPHESIANS 1:4-5).

Many adoptive parents and those pursuing adoption feel alone in their churches because it seems like no one understands. By communicating that adoption is fundamentally connected to the gospel and the nature of God you will challenge the view that adoption is a “plan B” if a couple cannot have children biologically.

- 2. Do a Biblical study on God's perspective on orphans.**

As you develop your heart for adoption, pass this on to your people in your preaching. You can start by simply looking up all the instances in the Bible referring to the “fatherless.”

- 3. Educate yourself on basic facts about adoption and orphan care.** Did you know there are roughly 30,000 children waiting to be adopted today in Canada and over 132 million orphans worldwide? That is a starting point to stir your heart to pray and cry to God for His justice and grace to be poured out on their behalf.

Some websites that are helpful in raising awareness of these issues are . . .

- Cry of the Orphan (Cryoftheorphan.org)
- Adoption Council of Canada (Adoption.ca)
- ABBA Canada (Abbacanada.com)

Your awareness of this issue will speak volumes to the church you lead. Whether it is through your preaching, teaching or just regular conversation, your church will begin to hear this and will gain God's heart and perspective on adoption.

Your understanding will also touch those who have adopted and who are considering it.

- 4. Ask questions.** Listening is one of the most powerful expressions of your care. Learn to ask the right questions. Here are a few good ones to ask:

- Why are you considering adoption? Are you both on the same page? If not, where do you differ?
- Do you both have the faith for adoption?
- Are you aware of the risks, ups, downs and unknowns of adoption?
- Have you talked to other adoptive families about their experience?
- Have you been praying together about this?
- Where do you feel called to adopt from?
- What kind of support do you have in place?

- Are you aware of the cost of adoption? How will you pay for it? Will you need help?

- 5. Remind them that they desire a good and God-magnifying thing.** Encourage those pursuing adoption with God's heart for the fatherless. Encourage them with God's promises to direct their steps (PROVERBS 16:9). Encourage them with God's faithfulness to provide.
- 6. Keep on encouraging them.** Those who step out in faith to adopt enter a journey filled with many ups and downs. Keep supporting them throughout the process. Ideally, they will have a care group or some close friends that will be able to do this as well.
- 7. Provide financial counsel and help.** The majority of couples adopting are challenged by the high costs. Any ways that you can provide encouragement and help financially will express love in a very tangible way.

One way you can do this is by establishing a church adoption fund to offer grants and loans to members. You can visit Hopefor100.org for an example of what one church in Texas is doing.

- 8. Cry with them and celebrate with them.** The majority of adoptions are filled with great highs and great lows. There are often many tears shed due to failed placements and other setbacks. There is also unparalleled joy in being matched with your child and bringing them home.

Do what you can to enter into their experience. Embody the compassion and empathy of Christ in the hard times and magnify the joy of the Father in the celebration.

- 9. Celebrate adoptions publicly in services.** Give time during worship services not only to teach on God's heart for orphans, but also to celebrate specific adoptions. You can perhaps do this as part of Sanctity of Life Sunday or in conjunction with another special day such as Mother's Day or Father's Day. Also, November is National Adoption Awareness Month.

There are many ways you can publicly celebrate adoption during the service such as having an adoptive family share their story, honouring adoptive parents in the congregation or taking a special offering for your church adoption fund. Be creative!

- 10. Don't feel like you have to have all the answers.** Use the wisdom and experience of the Christian

adoption community. There are a growing number of resources available, including many churches that have ministries aimed at promoting and supporting adoption (see Christianalliancefororphans.org).

Encourage those in your church who have a passion for adoption to lead the church in caring for the fatherless and supporting adoption. And remember you are not alone! There is a community of others to support you and above all, God, the father of the fatherless, is with you to provide all that is needed to follow His call to care for the "least of these."

**Referrals to websites not produced by Focus on the Family Canada are for informational purposes only and do not necessarily constitute an endorsement of the sites' content.*

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Sing to God,
sing in praise of His name,
extol Him who rides on the clouds;
rejoice before Him –
His name is the Lord.
A father to the fatherless,
a defender of widows,
is God in His holy dwelling.

*God sets the lonely
in families,*

He leads out the prisoners
with singing;
but the rebellious live in a
sun-scorched land.

03

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**FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE CHILDREN IN
YOUR CHILDREN'S MINISTRY**

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Foster and adoptive children in your children's ministry



HOW TO MEET THEIR UNIQUE NEEDS

by Wendy Kittlitz

Once upon a time, our church welcomed its first baby by adoption. She was black, in a sea of little white faces. Gradually, other families began welcoming children into their homes. Some were adopted, some fostered and others were birth children with special needs. Suddenly, one day, we looked around and realized that fully one-third of the children in our children's programs fell into one of these groups! And most of the others were siblings of these children.

This presented some challenges! Some children had learning difficulties, some had emotional challenges, some were still figuring out what it meant to be part of a family, and some had significant behavioural issues.

Recently, a story was related that broke some of our hearts: an adoptive parent was asked not to bring their child to Sunday school anymore because he was too disruptive.

Children's pastors and ministry leaders can be an enormous support to foster and adoptive families, but they often miss this opportunity simply because they do not understand the unique needs of these families.

Here are a few practical suggestions to help you support foster and adoptive children in your children's program:

1. Invite an adoptive or foster parent (or a few) to share with your leaders some of the unique circumstances they face in parenting their children. Brainstorm together how Sunday school teachers might use some of the strategies these adoptive parents have learned for managing the children's behaviours.
2. Consistency is *extremely* important to these children. Whenever possible, having the same teacher or leader will improve learning.
3. Educate yourself about some basic issues in adoption, such as the need for attachment, children's fears, grief and loss, transracial adoption, how God views adoption, etc. Think about how you can apply this learning to your programming.
4. Teach your Sunday school children to be compassionate toward the needs of others. Maybe you could "adopt" an orphanage or support a program through Compassion Canada or World

Vision to increase understanding of the larger needs of children around the world.

5. Become aware of some common issues in the lives of waiting children: fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD), autism, sensory processing difficulties, the effect of trauma on brain development, etc. You need not be an expert, but learn a little so you are at least conversant with the terms. One very helpful place to start is Empoweredtoconnect.org.
6. Understand that your children's programs are vitally important to both the children and the parents you serve. The children need a safe place to learn about God and interact positively with other children. Their parents need the respite to have a time to worship and reconnect with God without having to supervise their child. Your ministry matters and makes a real difference to these families!
7. Other educational settings (schools) can sometimes add to the stresses these families experience. They often have to advocate for the services their children need, while helping the children navigate

misunderstandings and prejudice amongst their peers. If church programs can be a place where children are accepted and integrated, that is a tremendous gift to them and their families.

Anything you can do to learn more about these issues and increase understanding within your ministry will help make the church a more hospitable place for foster and adoptive families.

James reminds us that "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows . . ." (JAMES 1:27). *Thank you* from all these families for whatever you can do to make your church a family that includes and nurtures those who so need the love of God.

Wendy Kittlitz is vice-president of counselling and care ministries at Focus on the Family Canada. She has worked as an adoption professional for 15 years and is also an adoptive mom.

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For those who are led
by the Spirit of God
are the children of God.
The Spirit you received
does not make you slaves,
so that you live in fear again;
rather, the Spirit you received
brought about your
adoption to sonship.
And by Him we cry,

“Abba, Father.”

The Spirit Himself testifies
with our spirit
that we are God’s children.

04

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ADOPTED KIDS IN YOUR YOUTH PROGRAM

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Adopted kids in your youth program



HOW TO OFFER THE “HOME CHURCH” THESE KIDS NEED

by Wendy Kittlitz

Adolescence can be a tumultuous time for teens as they wrestle with many deeply personal issues. For adopted children, this life stage presents even more challenges and stressors.

Understanding their unique needs will help you develop an “adoption-friendly” culture in your youth ministry. Here are some important issues to keep in mind as you minister to adopted teens.

Identity In the teen years, kids begin trying to figure out who they are and who they want to be. For the adopted child, questions often arise about their birth family – questions such as *Who are they? Should I find them and spend time with them? Can I do so?*

Issues of rejection or loss may arise from these questions. Many will wonder what was “wrong” with them that made them unable to be parented by their biological parents.

Independence Separating from parents – mentally, emotionally, spiritually and ultimately physically – is a process

that starts in adolescence.

Kids may need guidance to do this in ways that are respectful to their adoptive parents. Adoptive parents may feel even more threatened by their child’s attempts to “leave the nest” than the average parent.

Youth in your program will be looking for others (peers, adults, leaders) to validate this separation process and assist in it. Work at helping them maintain appropriate relational ties while encouraging them to make their own choices – hopefully choices based on the Biblical principles you are communicating to them.

Intimacy Always remember that an adopted child has experienced a disrupted attachment in his or her early life and that this may make navigating intimate relationships more rocky. Their need to love and be loved is just as great, but their ability to give and receive love may be somewhat impaired.

Encourage them to learn what real intimacy is, first in the context of building great friendships, and later, in romantic relationships. Point them to the importance of receiving the love of God deeply in their hearts and souls before seeking this in human relationships. Knowing God’s love will be foundational to any relationships they develop.

Sexuality Adopted kids, who may question their lovability, may be more prone to confuse sex with love. Be clear about the difference and talk about it often. Legitimize the need to feel loved, but point out that only loving someone in a committed marriage leads to healthy sexual activity. Challenge assumptions that sexual activity will lead to a loving relationship. It rarely does!

Adopted kids who have little information about their birth father may be realizing, for the first time, that their biological parents' sexual activity may have been less than ideal. (Rape, incest or premarital sex often lead to a child not being raised in their biological family). This may be a sensitive topic, so be aware of this and be willing to speak to a kid candidly and confidentially about these issues if they need that. Remind them that God redeems human beings' shortcomings.

“Non-adopted” kids Teens are often looking for a new paradigm, whether the one they have grown up with is good or not. Youth ministry is an amazing opportunity to invite kids to try on God's family as the identity they will adopt for life.

Remember that most youth programs include kids who do not come from Christian homes, kids who are neglected and abused (even within Christian homes), and kids who connect with their youth leader but are not connected elsewhere. Although these kids are not “adoptable” physically or socially, they are kids for

whom your youth program may become “family.”

This is a great opportunity for a church to “adopt” kids temporarily, if not permanently. They each need to be adopted, for real, into God's family. Be sure to offer them the opportunity to do so.

Be aware of the presence of these kids and find ways to make them feel welcome in the context of your larger church's activities and programs. If they can find answers to life's questions in God's family, they will be better prepared for all of life.

Finally, pray for all the kids you serve. They will one day form families of their own. Pray that they will create healthy, godly families that will nurture children – their own children, and perhaps adopted kids as well.

Wendy Kittlitz is vice-president of counselling and care ministries at Focus on the Family Canada. She has worked as an adoption professional for 15 years and is also an adoptive mom.

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JAMES 1:27

05

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WRAPPING AROUND ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

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Wrapping around adoptive families



HOW TO PROVIDE SUPPORT TO THOSE CALLED TO ADOPT

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.

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 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 behaviours.

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 here 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.

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.

... 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.

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, nonjudgmental 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
Respice care
Acts of service
Promises of God

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.

Also pray specifically for the child:

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

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 wellbeing. This can include birthdays, graduations and milestones as well as during illness, challenging behaviours 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.

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.

- **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.

To read the remainder of the booklet Wrapping Around Adoptive Families, visit Focus on the Family Canada's adoption care website at Waitingtobelong.ca.

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But when
the set time
had fully come,
God sent His Son,
born of a woman,
born under the law,
to redeem those under the law,
that we might receive

adoption to sonship.

Because you are His sons,
God sent the Spirit of His Son
into our hearts,
the Spirit who calls out,
“Abba, Father.”

GALATIANS 4:4-6