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Newsletter / April 2013

Status Update: The ministry finances continue as before. We are managing to get by each month, but only just barely, and we still struggle to make ends meet each month. Please continue to pray for the finances of this ministry, that God would bless us mightily and allow us to keep doing the work He has called us to do.

In This Issue:

- [From the Director](#)
- **Spotlight:** Kroger Community Rewards
- [Completed Adoptions](#)

Prayer Requests:

- We encourage you to pray fervently for the children of the world who are waiting for their families to find them.
- Pray for the adopted children and their families, particularly as they go through the sometimes-painful process of getting to know each other and becoming a family.
- Pray for The Shepherd's Crook Ministries, particularly in this time of financial crisis. Pray that God would deliver us and allow us to continue doing this important work in His name.

From the Director

What is it that makes a human, human? I mean, what is it that makes us special, unique? We are told in Scriptures that man was made in God's image. [1] At what point is a human not a human, or not "in God's image"? Is there some standard definition that says, "If a living organism looks like this and possesses these features, these capabilities and characteristics, then that organism is a human"? Is it a physical description, such as two eyes, a nose and a mouth, two arms and two legs, and the ability to stand upright and walk? Is it the possession of a certain minimum mental capacity to separate us from the lower animals?

I have two children who were born missing partial limbs. Since they are incomplete, are they not quite fully human? Is the absence of a hand or a foot sufficient to disqualify them from the designation of "human"? Some people I've heard of have more significant limb deficiencies, in some cases an entire leg or arm, and in others both legs, or both arms. I even know of a public motivational speaker who is missing both arms and both legs. [2] Since he so obviously doesn't conform to the "normal" definition or description of a human, is he something less than human?

I have another child with severe brain damage, who will never be able to walk or put together a coherent complex sentence. She has significant cerebral palsy. She can't contemplate abstract thoughts or contribute to society. In fact, she will always be a drain on society, needing ongoing medical care and therapeutic intervention which will likely increase as she gets older. Is she less than human because of her faulty and broken brain? There are many, many people whose brain damage and consequent disability are far more significant than my child's. Are they somehow not quite human because of this?

I repeat my original question: just what is it that makes a human a human, a creature unique among the created order, made in the image of God? This question is not as easy at it may at first appear, and it has plagued philosophers and ethicists for a very long time. I, of course, am not qualified to argue such a philosophical question, but I can at least posit a working answer. For my purposes, and consistent with what we find in Scripture, I think it sufficient to say that a human is one descended from human parents. End of discussion. If a child is conceived by two human parents, a mother and a father, then that child is a human. Period. We can trace this argument all the way back to its beginning, to Adam and Eve. God defined both Adam and Eve as human, and they are the ancestors of all nations. Thus, we can with concrete logic and confidence affirm that all children of human parents are human, and thus are made in the image of God. All other attempts to define a human will, likely, fall short at some point, because people are sometimes born with birth defects that will disqualify them from any qualitative definition of "human."

We recently experienced, vicariously, an amazing celebration of life and affirmation of the sanctity of all human life. Some friends of our family—the friendship began through our eldest daughter when she was in college—recently had a baby. During the pregnancy, at thirteen weeks gestation, it was discovered that the baby suffered from a profound defect called acrania. In this condition, the skull of the developing child fails to form. The condition is often accompanied by anencephaly, in which the brain itself fails to develop, though the brain stem does. This young couple decided to name the baby, who was confirmed in utero to be a girl, Naomi Grace. They were advised to terminate the pregnancy through abortion, as the baby had zero chances of survival. Brian and Sarah, the parents, decided to leave the timing and decision completely up to God, continuing with the pregnancy so long as He continued to sustain it. This was a difficult decision, as the delivery was uncertain and Naomi Grace could quite possibly be stillborn. What would be the point of it all? They knew that Naomi Grace would not survive, not for very long, and so why bother going through the pregnancy?

Brian and Sarah knew, deep in the core of their being, that the child Sarah was carrying was not a mass of tissue, not merely a fetus, and not an inconvenience. Sarah was carrying a child—their child—made in the image of God and of infinite worth to Him, and to them. It didn't matter that doctors had told them there was no hope; their hope was in Someone else. And so they decided to carry Naomi Grace to term, and to cherish and enjoy whatever time they were given with her.

Naomi Grace was born alive on February 27, 2013, at just before 7 p.m. She was with her mother and father, and she was beautiful. Though flawed and broken by the world's standards for the "perfect baby," she was "beautifully and wonderfully made." [3] Brian and Sarah introduced Naomi Grace to her brother and sister, and to her grandparents, and to her aunts and uncles, and to a room full of people who loved her. Her life was honored and cherished, and her Maker was worshipped. There were tears, certainly; but there was also laughter and celebration. God chose to give them fifteen precious hours with their tiny baby before calling her home, and her wise parents—wise beyond their years and inspiring to all of us—did not waste a minute of that time. If you would like a glimpse into the brief life of this child of God, you can **view a video** put together by her parents.

I would like all of us to learn from these mature young people and from their example of courage and grace in the face of adversity. We can all learn what it is to trust God and to celebrate the gifts He gives, even the gift of an "imperfect" and oh-so-brief life. Every human life is a gift from God, and He expects His people to see the gift in each life, and to cherish and celebrate each and every life, no matter how much that life may deviate from the standard of perfection observed by the contemporary world. Praise God! Praise Him for Naomi Grace and for her parents, and for every child, even and especially those with special needs. For indeed, it is in these special children that we catch glimpses of our own need, and of the amazing love of a Father who loves us in spite of our defects, in spite of our brokenness, and in spite of the fact that we reject the very love He extends to us.

Soli Deo gloria!

Notes:

1. "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." Gen. 1:27
2. Nick Vujicic was born with tetra-amelia syndrome, meaning the congenital absence of all four limbs. See **Life Without Limbs** to learn more about this amazing and talented man.
3. "For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them." Psalm 139:13–16

Spotlight: Kroger Community Rewards

Last year we became a participating organization in the Kroger Community Rewards program, which makes it extremely easy for people to support charitable organizations. We want to thank everyone who signed up last year. In the past year, we have received a little over \$1,300 from Kroger, and that really has helped our General Fund. The only catch to the program is that Kroger automatically resets each organization's supporters every year, so anyone who signed up for this program before April 1, 2013 will have to re-enroll on-line. If you haven't signed up for this yet, now would be a great time to do so. The process is simple and only takes a couple of minutes to finish. (**Click here** to see a tutorial, which will walk you through each step.) Just in case you're wondering, let me briefly explain this program.

The Kroger Community Rewards program is very straightforward in how it works, and it's a way for people to support our General Fund without having to give anything else out of their own pockets. All you have to do is to shop at Kroger, for groceries and/or fuel. Kroger has committed \$4,000,000 to donate to charities through this program over the next year, and that total will be distributed quarterly, \$1,000,000 at a time. Each organization that is a part of this program will receive a check based on the percentage of total purchases made by their supporters. So, for example, if TSC's supporters account for 1% of all purchases made through this program in a quarter, then we would get a check from Kroger for \$10,000. It really is that easy, and we are praying for more people to sign up and take advantage of this way to help.

If you have any questions about any of this, please write to us at **info@theshepherdscrook.org**.

Thank you very much!

Greg
Administrative Assistant

Completed Adoptions

The following children have come home to their adoptive families since TSC began in 2000. We include them as representatives of all of the children who have come home. Their faces provide just a glimpse into how significantly these lives are changed, as the children transition from the hopelessness and aloneness they once knew, to the comfort and security that come from belonging to a family. Thank you for helping us make these dreams realities, both for the adopted children and for their families.



Phoebe, in China



Phoebe, at home in Florida



Tabitha, in China



Tabitha, at home in Florida



Tamar, in Vietnam



Tamar, at home in Washington

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