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Newsletter | September 2012

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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: that God would bless us financially and allow us to continue doing this important work in His name

From the Director

As I sit to write this column, late in August, the brouhaha over recent comments by Pat Robertson, the founder of the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) and host of *The 700 Club*, continue to resonate around the Internet. In case you missed it somehow, I'll give a brief recap.

On the August 16 broadcast of *The 700 Club*, Pat was posed with a question from a viewer. The viewer was a single mom with three children, all adopted internationally. This mom was distressed because the men she was dating—she didn't elaborate on how many men were involved—seemed to like her just fine, until she let them know about her adopted children. At that point, each of these men had fled the scene. They didn't mind the fact that the woman had three children, just that they were all adopted and all from different countries. The viewer was asking, "Why are these men reacting this way?"

Robertson's co-host, Kristi Watts, began passionately to denounce "these men" and their attitude, going so far as to describe them as "dogs." But Pat quickly took over and defended them. He said that "no one wants to take on the United Nations," presumably referring to this viewer who had adopted from three different countries. He cited a dear friend of his who had adopted a little boy from Colombia: the child had brain damage and "grew up weird." He said, "You're not a 'dog' 'cause you don't want to take on that responsibility," and "You don't have to take on somebody else's problems." In defense of this position, he said, "You just never know what's been done to a child before you get that child. . . ." And finally, to make sure that no one would misunderstand the mindset of CBN and *The 700 Club*, he said, "We minister to orphans all over the world, thousands of them. We love orphans! We love helping people!" But then, to be clear about where he stood personally, he said, "But that doesn't necessarily mean that I'm going to take all of the orphans around the world into my home."

So, why am I joining in this discussion, adding my voice to the hundreds (maybe thousands) who've already chimed in to express disapproval and censure of Mr. Robertson and his comments?

I feel that Kathy and I have a voice in this discussion because of the fact that we have adopted so many, all originally from other countries, and that the majority of the ones we've adopted have some form of physical, mental, or emotional disability. We are more qualified than most to address the unique challenges that accompany adoption and the raising of children whose backgrounds are virtually unknown. However, I want to make clear that my intention in this column is not to disparage Pat Robertson or his organization. I have opinions about the comments he made and the milieu from which they emerge, but those opinions are not particularly germane to this discussion. I will leave that alone.

There is no question that adopting a child, whether from here in the U.S. or from overseas, exposes the adoptive family to the ramifications of all of the unknowns in that child's history, whether that history is brief or lengthy. The older the child is at the time of the adoption, the greater is the likelihood that pre-adoption factors will have negatively influenced the child's development to date. But even a very young infant comes with questions as to developmental factors: what sort of pre-natal and post-natal nutrition and medical care did the child receive? What genetic anomalies might the child have inherited? Did the biological mother expose the pre-born child to the effects of alcohol or tobacco or drugs? And so on. There simply are no guaranties.

But all of this discussion is, in one way or another, beside the point. (It may be just the point in some contexts, but not in this one, as I hope to show.) The first question to be addressed, before we can talk about the burdens we may be inheriting in the process, is, why do we adopt? What is our motivation or rationale for bringing these "foreign" children, these "damaged" little ones into our homes and families? Regardless of what else is true of the comments made by Pat Robertson, it is true that a person—or a family—has a choice as to whether or not to take on the problems of another person. Adopting is precisely that: choosing to take on the problems—and everything else—of another person, to make that little person a part of one's own family. The decision to adopt, regardless of the specifics, involves the acceptance of a degree of risk. And conventional wisdom dictates that the better informed the adopting family is as to the issues their new child will face (or bring with him), the better prepared they will be to handle them and the more likely that the adoption will be successful. This means being aware of any medical conditions and their short- and long-term requirements and impact, any emotional trauma the child has been subjected to and the ways that trauma may manifest in the future, and any other conditions or complications that might cause problems for the child and the adoptive family.

But there is a trend in adoptions today that is, in a sense, turning conventional wisdom on its head. This trend is characterized by choosing to adopt, not to add children to or fulfill a need in the adoptive family, but in obedience to God's precept to minister to the orphan. There is no better or more complete way to minister to the orphan than by making him a permanent part of a family. (I note, in the interests of clarification, that adoption is not the only way to minister to the orphan, and is indeed not possible for all orphans. But I passionately believe that adoption is, as I said, the most comprehensive, the most healing, the most meaningful way of doing so.) In such cases, the most important question to be answered is, "Am I fully committed to this adoption, to this child?" Another way to look at it is, "Is God leading me to do this?"[1] A great deal of prayer and consideration are necessary in weighing that question. Extended discussion between husband and wife, and between parents and children, is critical. This should never be a decision or course of action entered lightly into.

Once that question is answered in the affirmative, then the rest is easy. Having committed to pursuing the adoption of a child, the follower of Christ is put onto a course in which that child becomes, immediately and irrevocably, a member of that person's family. That new family member may not yet be physically present, and it may in fact take quite some time to bring him home. But that is merely a detail. Additionally, that new family member may come with baggage—emotional, physical, mental, or otherwise—that will present challenges for the family. But the viewpoint should be the same as if the child had been born into the family rather than adopted into it. A family does not reject a child or sever a relationship with a child because the child is born with a disability or with complicating factors. In the same way, a child adopted with a disability or with complicating factors—even when such factors were not known to the family prior to completion of the adoption—should not be rejected or discarded. The adoptive bond should be considered as permanent, as complete, and as irrevocable as the bond at birth. Even if the adopted child should turn out "weird." [2]

Our perspective on adoption is probably not in agreement with much of what you will find in the adoption community today. But I believe it represents the perspective you will find in a comprehensive reading of Scripture. Please understand, though: I am not being cavalier about the challenges faced by the adopting family. The children we have adopted have stretched us in ways I wouldn't have imagined possible. There have been times when the only thing keeping us going was the knowledge that God had led us on this course, and the commitment to remain true to Him and His calling, regardless of what it cost us to do so. I do not promise an easy course, nor a carefree life. What foolishness! Jesus said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me." (Luke 9:23) The first-century listener would have known what it meant to take up one's cross. One who took up his cross was on his way to his own execution. Following Christ is not about being comfortable and living an easy life. It is about sacrifice, privation, and suffering. Jesus also said, "In this world you will have trouble." Even in the case of adoption, the Christian should not imagine that life will be without troubles, without trials, and without challenges. But the other half of what Jesus said, when He promised that we would have troubles, is key: "But take heart; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) We can trust Him to lead us through whatever life brings us, so long as our commitment to Him remains foremost. (Ref. Matt. 6:33,34; John 15:1–11) To the one who approaches life, and adoption, from this perspective, the rewards are beyond description.

Soli Deo gloria!

1. This is sort of a double-edged question. In a very real sense, all Christians are equally called to this work of ministering to the orphan, though not all are equally called to adopt. In another sense, God leads His people in specific instances and in ways that are sometimes mysterious. It is not always possible to discern His leading as clearly as we would like. So on the one hand, all who claim the name of Christ should be working to care for the orphan and should at least consider adopting; but on the other hand, God sometimes will lead a person or a family more specifically into a particular adoption.

2. Obviously, if the child's issues are such that they present a danger to the other members of the family, then steps have to be taken to keep everyone safe. Those steps will be different in different situations, but the bottom line is, the child is still your child. This would be true if the child had been born into the family and ended up with emotional or mental issues that presented a danger to the family. And it should be true in the case of a child adopted into the family.

Spotlight: China

By Greg Godwin, Administrative Assistant

Two months ago in my Spotlight column, I took a closer look at some of the lesser-known countries in the context of international adoption. In that article, I mentioned that China, Russia, South Korea, and Ethiopia have consistently been among the top five countries that U.S. families have adopted from over the past decade, and that most people know someone or know of someone who has adopted from one of these countries. At first glance, it might seem that there is no need to draw any extra attention to these countries because their orphans are being adopted in large numbers year after year. That, however, would be the wrong conclusion to draw, and I hope that my article from July didn't give that impression. Allow me to explain why it is necessary to advocate earnestly for the orphans of these countries, too, by focusing on China.

Not only has China been among the top five so-called "sending countries" to the U.S., but it has actually been the leading sending country every year except one, since 2007. U.S. families have adopted 66,630 children from China during the years from 1999 through 2011,[1] which is a huge number, and I am deeply thankful that all of these children now have families. But that number is perhaps not as impressive as it initially seems to be, once it has been put into perspective. China is the world's most populous nation, with 1.3 billion residents.[2] The most recent estimate, in June of 2011, places the number of mainland Chinese orphans at 712,000.[3] This appears to be a rather conservative estimate, but let's stick with this number which represents, for lack of a better designation, the best-case scenario.

If there were 712,000 orphans in China in the year 2010, then that means that all of the children adopted from China since 1999 account for only 9.4% of the total number of orphans. That means that thirteen years worth of adoptions doesn't even make up a tenth of the orphans currently in China. But the picture gets worse. From 1999 through 2005, there was a general upward trend of the number of children adopted from China by U.S. Families, reaching its apex in 2005 with 7,903 adoptions. That trend, sadly, has reversed since then, falling to just 2,587 adoptions last year—the lowest number since 1995.[4] Over that same period, the number of orphans in China—again, going with the conservative estimate—has risen 24% to its current level.[5] It cannot be seen as a good thing that the number of orphans is increasing at the same time that the number of adoptions is decreasing. That is sad news indeed.

The picture is not entirely bleak, though. China still has one of the most predictable and efficient adoption processes of any country, something that Kristie and I are learning first-hand as we are working to adopt two little girls from China right now. The relatively smooth nature of the process (no adoption is as smooth or quick as the adoptive parents would like) would, I imagine, make adopting from China an appealing option. It is almost always easier to venture into a situation where one knows what to expect than it is to venture into an unknown situation. China has also begun to make adopting a bit more accessible, as just last year they began allowing single women to adopt special-needs orphans under certain circumstances.[6] And because of the strong history of U.S. Families adopting from China, there are resources readily available for adoptive parents. So, as we pray for adoptions to increase in the lesser-known countries of the world, let us not forget to pray for the orphans in China and other nations with historically strong adoption programs. We should not take it for granted that China will always see thousands of its orphans adopted each year, and we should also not be satisfied with the number of adoptions completed each year because of the ever-larger number of orphans who remain behind. The more research I do into the plight of orphans around the world, the more I am amazed at the depth and breadth of the need of these children and, consequently, of the work that is left to be done on their behalf.

1. http://adoption.state.gov/country_information/country_specific_info.php?country-select=china

2. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China>

3. <http://china.globaltimes.cn/society/2011-06/661073.html>

4. <http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/FactOverview/international.html>

5. <http://china.globaltimes.cn/society/2011-06/661073.html>

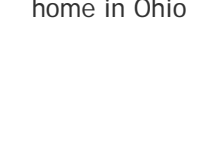
6. http://adoption.state.gov/country_information/country_specific_alerts_notices.php?alert_notice_type=notices&alert_notice_file=china_1akl3

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.



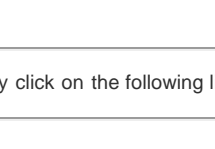
Amanda,
in Guatemala



Amanda, at home
in Texas



Carson,
in China



Carson, at
home in Ohio



Christa,
in China



Christa, at
home in Ohio

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