

Sons and Daughters Adopting Children

Dan Hamel
July 25, 2021

Not long ago a young man named Dane Anderson went to Craigslist and posted an unusual ad. He uploaded this photo [please view the video recording of this sermon to see the photo] and said he and his friends needed a generic father figure to help them with a backyard BBQ. Here's what he wrote:

We will be throwing a backyard BBQ on June 17th. We all range in age from 21-26, and while most of us know how to operate a grill, none of us are prepared to fill the role of "the BBQ Dad." That being said, we are in need of a generic father figure to show up from 4pm to about 8pm and man the grill. Duties include:

- Bring your own grill (though we will provide all the meat).
- Refer to all attendees as "Big Guy," "Chief," "Sport," or "Champ."
- Talk about dad things like lawnmowers, building your own deck, and Jimmy Buffet.

A minimum of 18 years' experience as a father is required.

He concluded by saying: "THIS IS A REAL AD. Do not hesitate to call if you are interested. Preference will be given to applicants named Bill, Randy, or Dave."

Not only did a ton of people read and fall in love with his ad, several dads, including Jim and Scott, showed up and played the role of a dad on the grill for this group of twenty somethings. Obviously, that's comical, but it highlights a very pressing reality: younger people are in desperate need for older people to show up and pour into their lives.

We are in week two of a series called "Sons and Daughters," in which we are talking about God's heart for kids, God's love for children, and what that means for us as we invest into the next generation. Last week we talked about protecting children and advocating for kids who are yet to be born. Today we get to talk about fostering and adopting children, and our attention moves to protecting and advocating for kids who have already been born, but for one reason or another—because their parents are no longer here or because their parents are no longer able to care for them—are in great need. When we talk about adoption, everything for us begins with who God is and what He has done for us.

- John 1:12-13—"Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."
- Ephesians 1:4b-5—"In love [God] predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ."
- Romans 8:15b—"The Spirit you received brought about your adoption . . . And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'"
- 1 John 3:1a—"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"

The Bible not only tells us that on our own we are sinners who need to be forgiven. The Bible also tells us we are children who need a father; we are orphans in desperate need of a family. And that is the essence of Christian message. Oftentimes in the past, theologians and preachers alike have made the essence of the gospel message about justification. Justification is the process by which God forgives our sins when we place our faith in Jesus Christ. This is a true and wonderful doctrine which should be taught and celebrated. There is nothing wrong with this, but justification is not the ultimate theme of the Bible. The primary tension point in Scripture is not that God is a righteous Judge who needs to find a way to forgive

guilty defendants in His cosmic courtroom. The primary tension point in Scripture is that God is a loving Father on a mission to bring His rebellious and orphaned children back into His family. The essence of Christianity is all about adoption. Adoption is the process by which God brings us into His family. For the last 500 years, justification has been the central focus of the majority of Christian preaching. The majority of gospel presentations are about helping people realize they have sinned, and they need to place their faith in Jesus so their sins can be forgiven. How different might things be if the primary message Christians shared with the world was not about God as a Judge looking to forgive someone, but God as a Father, looking to adopt someone: God as a Father, willing and able to pay the ultimate price to bring you into His family, to make you a son or daughter, to share His infinite resources with, to lavish His unlimited love on you for every millisecond of all eternity.

That is who God is; that is what God has done for us. We are people who have been adopted by God and brought into His family. And because of that, as God's people, when we look at a world and see children in need, kids without homes, boys and girls without mothers and fathers to care for them, we should pray about doing for them what God has done for us. And we should be willing to go to great lengths, we should be willing to pay a high price, to bring them into our family, to make them a son or daughter, to share our resources with them, to love them. That is what God has done for us, and that is what He wants us as His followers to be willing to do for others.

James 1:27 tells us: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: . . ." How might we expect God to finish that sentence? To share your faith with your family members, neighbors and coworkers? To financially support important causes, to be faithful to your spouse, or to read the Bible and pray? We all know that personal worship, fidelity in our marriages, generosity to people in need, and evangelism matter greatly to God, but pure and faultless religion is defined by God Himself this way: "to look after orphans and widows in their distress." Real religion looks like finding people who have lost their family and being willing to invite them into yours.

When Jesus was in His earthly ministry, often certain adults and even His own disciples would try to keep kids away from Him, so that the children and their childish concerns and distractions wouldn't be a nuisance to Him. And yet we read in Matthew 9:14 that when Jesus saw kids, He said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Jesus welcomed children. Jesus wanted to be surrounded by children. Jesus loved children. And followers of Jesus are called to do the same.

The need in our community for fostering and adoption is literally as high as ever. In large part because of the opioid crisis, the number of children in the foster system in Indiana has nearly doubled in the past 10 years to over 30,000. There are thousands and thousands of children in our own city who need either short-term care or long-term care. And our city has no idea what to do with them! Presently there simply aren't enough homes for them. What would it look like if the churches of our city, collectively hundreds and hundreds of thousands of believers, said, "We'll open up our arms, we'll open up our hearts, we'll open up our homes, we'll love those kids!" What if believers in Indianapolis said, "Every kid in our community who doesn't have a family to belong to is welcome in ours. Every child who doesn't have a safe home to live in is invited into our home. Every child deserves a mother figure and a father figure who will unconditionally love them, and through unconditionally loving them, will show them a picture of the unconditional love God has for them."

That's the sort of vision that we want to pursue as a church. Can you imagine the impact that would have in the lives of those children, who happen to be among the most vulnerable among us? Can you imagine the impact that would have on our city and our social workers, and the ripple effect it would send throughout the state of Indiana and beyond? When Jesus talked about being salt and light in the world, I

believe that's the sort of thing He had in mind. Jesus didn't plan for us to simply have a marginal impact; He intended His followers to transform the entire landscape of whatever environment they found themselves in, upending the conversation, reversing societal norms, and revealing the truth and love of God.

I have a lot of friends who have done fostering or adopting, some who have done both. I reached out to several of them recently and asked them to share part of their story with me. I think you'll be encouraged and blessed by their responses.

When I asked my friends why they chose to foster or adopt, the answers were all over the board:

- God put it on my heart to adopt internationally on a trip I took to Haiti when I was 16.
- We felt called to adopt after six years of infertility.
- I felt called to foster when we got a call saying that a distant family member was in crisis and couldn't raise their three-year-old daughter on their own.
- We decided to adopt because we felt God called us to live on mission as a family, but to do so without necessarily leaving our home.

When I asked about what made it hard initially, people shared their unique experiences:

- It was difficult to overcome the fear of the unknown with foster care.
- My husband and I weren't on the same page at first, especially about the timing.
- Filling out the paperwork felt like completing a masters' program.
- The financial side of things was very daunting at first. We weren't sure how God was going to provide.

When I asked about the most difficult aspect of their journey, people were vulnerable and honest about the challenges:

- One mom talked about how her biological son would look at her in her eyes as she fed him, but her adopted son, because of his attachment disorder from the orphanage where he was neglected, wouldn't even hold her gaze for a second. In fact, it took him until his elementary school years before he would give her a full hug.
- One mom talked about dealing with the long-lasting effects of fetal alcohol syndrome on her child.
- Another parent talked about the identity issues her teenager deals with.
- One set of parents talked about how hard it was, as a foster family, to see their kid go back into an environment they knew would be harmful for a child they had been loving for two full years.

Every one of these families was honest about the unique challenges foster and adoptive parents face. They made sure to dispel any romanticized image of adoption where you swoop in as the hero. They said a lot of days are just hard. But they didn't do it because it was easy. They did it because they wanted to make a difference in the life of a child in need. And they wanted to do for others what God had done for them.

But when I asked about the greatest joys they've experienced in the journey, the answers inspired me beyond words.

- One couple said: “When we met our son, he was in an orphanage, suffering from neglect, malnutrition, and abuse. It means more than words can say to know that we’ve been able to give him a home, a family, unconditional love, the ability to reach his highest potential, and the opportunity to know Jesus.”
- One mom said, “In order to build trust with my foster daughter at bedtime we would read a Bible story and pray together. I would then touch parts of her face saying, ‘God made your hair, God made your eyes, God made your nose, God made your mouth, etc. God made you, God loves you and you can trust Him no matter what. I love you; goodnight.’ Before long, my little girl began to do the same to me. She would touch parts of my face and tell me that God made me, that God loved me and that I could trust Him no matter what. My heart still melts 10 years later.”
- One set of parents said: “We often wondered if we were doing enough with our lives, if we were really making an impact. But while we were fostering, we never once wrestled with that question. Every day we felt like we were contributing to God’s kingdom in a powerful way.”
- One dad said: “The greatest joy was watching our son make the decision to become a follower of Christ.”

There is one family at our church that has such an inspiring story of adoption that I wanted to give you some time to listen to their story. [Please view the video recording of this sermon to see the video.]

What an incredible story! Just as they mentioned in their video, not every family is called to adopt a child, or in their case three kids. Not every family is called to foster. But everyone can do something. And for so many families, having the support of a community and a church is what makes all the difference. Take a look at this picture [please view the video recording of this sermon to see the photo] from a book on adoption and fostering. Keren and I have personally not yet felt it was time for us to bring a child into our home, but we’ve been able to help in almost every one of these ways. And it has brought us so much joy. There’s one family that brings a child into their home, but there are a dozen ways that their community can help support them!

This is something God is calling us to be about. God has adopted us. He rolled up His sleeves and paid the ultimate price to bring us from orphans who were stranded and alone to being sons and daughters in the family of God. He paid the price for us to have the love of family, and He’s calling us to do the same. It’s not going to be easy; it’s not going to be romantic; it’s not going to be without challenges. But it will make a difference in our world, a difference in our city, and a difference in the life and the eternity of each child. As we conclude, let’s read James 1:27 one more time: “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress.” Let’s be the church, let’s be the followers of Jesus who take God at his word and do that well.

Keren and I were up late last night, sitting in bed and talking. I decided to scroll through my phone and randomly came across an email I sent exactly one year ago, July 24, 2020. It was a letter to my daughter. See, I created an email account for each of my kids before they were born, and on a regular basis I send them an email, telling them about what’s going on in their life, how they are growing, trips we’ve taken. One day they’ll open these and see letters from their dad throughout their entire life.

This is the letter I sent to my daughter a year ago yesterday. It’s titled, “Your First Letter.”

Advent,

I can’t believe this is the first letter I’m ever writing to you. I’m almost speechless. Words cannot express how excited your mom and I are to meet you. As of this moment, your mom is 28 weeks

pregnant with you. When we found out we were having you, and that you are a girl, your mom jumped into my arms and began to cry and cry, unstoppable tears of joy! That moment pretty well sums up how we feel. WE LOVE YOU SO MUCH! We can't wait to meet you and hold you and welcome you into our family.

Yesterday your mom and I spent time working on your nursery. We hung a painting, a mirror, and drapes, and got things in order. The time spent preparing for you has increased our excitement for meeting you. We have been praying for you and thanking God for you without ceasing. You are such a wonderful, precious, beautiful gift!

I'm writing this to you now so that you'll know, for your entire life, that there has never been a time when you have not been wanted, chosen, cherished, and loved. Even before you ever open your eyes or take a single breath, you are our treasure, you are rejoiced over. And my love for you and your mom's love for you is just a small sliver of an expression of God's love for you. Psalm 139 tells us that right now, this very moment, God is knitting you together in your mother's womb. His eyes see your unformed body. You are being beautifully and wonderfully made. All the days ordained for you are written in His book. And I cannot wait to watch them unfold.

Advent, I love you with all I am. I am so thankful and proud that you are my little girl. You have all my heart. And you always will!

Love,

Dad