

AN ADOPTION STORY

by Howard Green
A homeschool dad in Jamesville NY
FamiliesByGod Ministries

The last woman to enter the room looked apprehensive. Clinging to her was a bedraggled child, dressed in soiled, unmatched clothing. We knew the child was ours because we recognized her from the few photos we had received. At least it looked like her, and there were no more behind these two. But was she really so thin? And so sad?

The woman who had raised the girl from an infant eyed us suspiciously when we sat down next to her. Reluctantly, she gave the girl to my wife. The child instantly let out with a wail. Startled, my wife handed her back to the now-crying woman. The girl clung tightly and ceased crying. After several more unsuccessful attempts at this handoff, the woman asked through a translator if all the children in the photo she had received were ours. We answered that they all were. She wanted to know how we would be able to pay attention to this one when we had so many others. We responded that we and she would do well, while wondering how this could be her business. She was the foster mother, paid by the Chinese government to do this. We had been selected by that same government to become the forever family for this little thing. They already knew that we had five biological children.

Seeing that many of the other families had accomplished their transfers uneventfully and had left the hotel meeting room, my wife and I quietly conferred with the agency's in-country guide and decided that we had best take the child and leave,

screaming or no screaming. As my wife took the girl, the foster mother laid her head on the table and sobbed. We dashed out, into the elevator and up to our room, engulfed in the shrieks of a terrified, traumatized little girl, being taken away from the only mother she had ever known.

As we removed her filthy clothes and gave her what was probably her first bath, we realized that this 15-month old child weighed 13 pounds, less than our cat at home. We also noticed that she had a bruise on her scalp from what appeared to have been from an IV. Only later did we learn that she had come close to dying the previous month from diarrhea and dehydration. In fact, perhaps the only reason she had received the simple life saving care was because she was marked for American adoption. When we arrived back in New York two weeks later, we had our pediatrician check her out. Within days we were called by the county health department because she had tested positive for a reportable gastrointestinal bacterial infection. We told them the child's story which satisfied them. And a single round of antibiotics cured her and she started to gain weight.

So began our life with Emily and our adventure in adoption.

Whatever were we thinking? We already had five delightful children. Surely this was enough? Surely our lives were full and rich. Surely we already had enough, hadn't we? My mother certainly thought so. When we had announced that

my wife was pregnant with number five, my mother's immediate response was "Oh no!"

So why did we adopt? It was God who got our attention. We knew of the many infant girls in China who are abandoned because of that country's draconian and immoral population control policies. We understood that these children are destined to grow up without families and without hope. And we knew that of all people in the world, we were in a good position to do this. We live in America with its high standard of living and we were already seasoned parents. We reasoned that family is what we do.

God motivated us to take the next step, that is, to actually make the decision to adopt, in several ways. One was through a book called *The Whole Life Adoption Book* by Jayne E. Schooler, which had been recommended on the Focus on the Family radio broadcast. One idea in particular made sense to us. The author refers to "voluntary redemptive suffering" on behalf of the adopted child. It means that as followers and imitators of Christ we have the privilege of willingly and gladly undertaking the sacrifices required that can bring about redemption for an unfortunate child. This redemption does not mean salvation, of course, but rather the supplying of what every child needs: a father, a mother, a home, and love. In the process, perhaps, with God's grace, it may also mean a chance to lead the child to her Savior.

Another way God spoke to us was Randy Alcorn's book, *The Treasure Principle*. Financial considerations loomed large for me, the provider of the family. "How in the world can I do this?" I thought. "I won't possibly be able to send them all to college." Alcorn, in this splendid little volume, challenged us to take personally Jesus' words in Matthew 6:20,

"Store up for yourselves treasures in

heaven.” How do we do that? By following Paul’s instruction in 1 Timothy 6:18-19, “Command them to do good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up for themselves treasure as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.” By pouring our resources into a child who needs a family, we would be sending our treasure along ahead of us, truly “treasure in heaven.” We American Christians are certainly Paul’s “them”--“those who are rich in this world.”

Another way that God motivated us was to help us to understand His heart for the defenseless. The Scripture revealed to us that God has an unrelenting concern and compassion for those who are “without.” And that his primary means of supplying the needs of the defenseless is us. Where do the Scriptures tell us this? Consider:

James 1:27 “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. “

Who is to look after them? We are.

Psalm 68:5-6 “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families.”

Which families would these be? They’re ours.

Psalm 82:3 “Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless.”

Who is to defend them? We are.

A small book which fleshed out these ideas for us was called *The Fields of the Fatherless* by C. Thomas Davis. The author says,

“It is through our hands the Father’s love comes, it is through our voices His voice is heard, it is through our efforts and those of the church that His care is revealed to the ones the rest of the world has forgotten.”

We also considered the passage in Romans 12 about giving our bodies as living sacrifices. Christ’s sacrifice was intensely physical. His body was torn. He demonstrated the physicality of the gospel for us. We too must learn to practice the physicality of the gospel. To be living sacrifices, we must use our bodies and our things. It’s one thing to know about “those children over there” and perhaps to write a check. But it’s quite another thing to bring one of these actual children into your home and make her your own. We became challenged by the Spirit of God to become “living sacrifices” by imitating the physicality of the gospel.

Finally, and powerfully, we considered the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:5, “Whoever welcomes a little child like this

name, welcomes me.” Is it possible that this can be true, that if we should welcome a child like Emily into our family, we are welcoming Jesus at the same time? We decided that we could not pass up this opportunity. We chose to welcome Jesus. We traveled to China and brought Emily home.

We had taken our oldest two girls to China with us. What a positive experience they had. They witnessed first hand all the abandoned girls our group of couples were bringing home. Fifteen couples, many of whom were Christians, were changing fifteen little lives. Our daughters also saw the many, many children left behind in the orphanage. Within days of our arrival home, they were already plotting our next adoption. This time it was to be a boy and a girl named “John” and “Margaret.” We, of course, grinned and said, “Yeah right.”

Our family felt full. Life was again busy and happy. Emily was fitting in. But we also began to think, “This is good. This is really good. Maybe....”



One day Liz called me at work saying that she had been reading an article about adoption from Ethiopia. She asked, "What do you think?" I said, "Send for the packet." The packet arrived and included pages of photos of available children. One group of four siblings caught our eyes and our hearts. They caught our minds as well as we began to understand the staggering proportions of the AIDS crisis in Africa. Since China was now closed to us due to the number of children in our family, Ethiopia was now beckoningly open. We applied, and several months later, four of Africa's fourteen million AIDS orphans were in our home.

They were some of the lucky ones. They are not infected. And they have escaped the future that awaited them in Ethiopia, a country where the life expectancy is just over 40. These thousands of child-headed families have no means of support; these children become prostitutes, thieves and beggars, if they live that long.

Our children were shell-shocked when they arrived. We discovered later that one of them had thought that we might kill her when she arrived. We spent the first months dealing with head lice, ringworm, parasites and tapeworms, and playing "Third world meets First world." Novelties such as doors, stairs and electricity were soon enough worked through. But the poverty they had come from, we began to realize, was far more than a mere lack of things. Their poverty is a pervasive poverty of the mind and of experience. They had received no education beyond the fragments that had been attempted at the bustling orphanage in their year there. As we started to incorporate them into our homeschool, it became clear that they had little capacity for critical thinking or the comprehension of abstract concepts. Ideas such as time, space, age, history, measurement, the future--these all had no meaning. All they knew was "now," and "now" had only been gray.

Homeschooling has been marvelously adaptive for these children. It has allowed us to build relationships while we work individually with them to fill in the many deficits in their backgrounds. They have proven to be eager learners and are making steady progress. As their English skills improve, teaching and learning have become easier.

The daily contact of homeschooling has also given us the chance to identify and work on character issues. The younger ones have been predictably resilient, while the older two, also predictably, are dealing with identity, loss, and grief. New country, new culture, new food, new language, delayed education, dead parents, puberty, new siblings, new parents. We are there for all of it. They are not spending eight hours every day with

the local public school administrators. They're with us, learning about the Savior, learning to deal with their lives from a Christian, not a secular, world view.

One might expect that the non-adopted children would feel resentful at the addition of newcomers. After all, won't it mean less for them? Less time and attention from parents, fewer things, less space as more children are fitted into the bedrooms? Perhaps in some families this might be so. But exactly the opposite has been true in our family. Our children have enthusiastically embraced this vision with us. They have enfolded each new child and are helping them to enter into the Green family culture. They are learning the lessons of Scriptures in a real-life laboratory. What better way to teach children that different skin color is simply an evidence of God's brilliant creativity? And where else can you learn more vividly about what poverty is and what AIDS is? How better to teach a child that "a generous man will himself be blessed" than by living a life of generosity? Our family is a living laboratory for all of us in "the royal law found in Scripture 'love your neighbor as yourself.'"

When we asked our ten children what they thought of adopting two more, the vote was enthusiastically unanimous, even after we explained the changes this would entail. This was proof to us that being an adoptive family is having a salutary effect on our children, both adoptive and biological. So we will travel to Ethiopia this fall to bring home two brothers, ages 5 and 7, who lost both parents to warfare and who each have a limb damaged by gunshot wound.

Is your life an exciting adventure? Ours is. Once you embrace the principle of "voluntary redemptive suffering," and when you make God's broken heart for the defenseless your own, you will have embraced as well a life of grand adventure. And you will have changed the life of a child forever. Change a life and change the world.

Howard and Liz Green live and homeschool in Jamesville NY. They are part of a ministry called FamiliesByGod which promotes international and domestic adoption to Christian families. They and others are available to speak on adoption issues to churches and other groups. Contact them at FamiliesByGod@earthlink.net.

Resources:

- Great Wall Adoption : www.gwadopt.org (China adoptions)
- Adoption Advocates International
www.adoptionadvocates.org (Ethiopian adoptions)
- World Vision International: www.wvi.org (AIDS in Africa)