SIGNS FOR HOPE

Written by Chip Penland. Chip and his wife, Traci, have adopted two deaf/HOH children from China and now have three children under the age of 5. Traci was adopted from El Salvador. Chip is a CODA (Child of Deaf Adult) and is the pastor at Kirby Woods Baptist Deaf Church in Memphis, TN. Chip and Traci are both Signs for Hope board members.

During one of our many bus rides in Guangzhou, I met a couple adopting two precious girls with Down syndrome. As the overly large bus navigated narrow streets, the father and I discussed the lengthy adoption process and the never-ending barrage of bills. "How's your church been?" I asked. His reply, one that has stuck with me over the last year was, "Our church did not support us at all during the (adoption) process." He went on to disclose the reason behind their lack of support, "We were told that the goal of the church is evangelism, not adoption."

I truly hope that theirs was an aberration, an uncommon occurrence, yet experience tells me otherwise. Time after time, adoptive parent after adoptive parent, I have heard the same story. Couples in need of financial assistance, prayer support, and physical presence are left to navigate the dark waters of adoption alone, devoid of the help the Body of Christ is *supposed* to provide.

I should point out that these are people who attend evangelical churches that seek to honor the Lord in all things. How, you may ask, did they miss the boat? Why is it that the church is eerily silent on a matter as critical as orphan-care? I am not entirely sure, however, I have a hunch…

I believe that the reason the church has largely been silent on the issue of adoption and orphan-care lies in the distinction between personal and corporate ministry. Personal ministry is what *you* do in order to serve the Lord. Corporate ministry is what *we* do to serve the Lord. Personal ministry is done alone, without the input or support of the Body of Christ. Corporate ministry is done together with the Body of Christ. Personal ministry is accomplished by one set of hands. Corporate ministry is accomplished by many sets of hands.

When churches apply this distinction to orphan-care, adoptive parents often hear, "We would love to help you in your adoption, but we care for orphans by supporting the local children's home." The support of a local children's home is important, yet so is the support of couples wishing to adopt. It is a mistake to focus on one and neglect the other.

In some cases, adoptive parents hear, "We would love to help you, but that is not the mission of the church." In this scenario church authorities view adoption as *your* way of honoring God, not an avenue by which members of the church can minister to one another. It is no wonder that many assume adoption

is simply another way to grow your family. **Thus practically, James 1:27 is viewed as a personal directive not as a charge to the church as a whole.**

How does God view orphan-care? Is it a personal ministry or a corporate ministry? I must admit that I personally would reject this question as absurd. I have thought long and hard and have had very little success in discovering ministries that can truly be described as personal. We are the *Body* of Christ. Everything we do, or do not do, has ramifications for our brothers and sisters in Christ. To consider your ministry as only a personal endeavor is to become disconnected with the family in which God has placed you.

My reasoning alone is not sufficient to answer this question. It is fortunate that God has recorded His response in the first chapter of Isaiah. In verse ten, God begins to chastise His people, the Jews, for their empty sacrifices and superficial worship. In fact, God uses harsh language to communicate His disgust at their burnt offerings, prayers, and incense. As you read these verses, you may think that God is angry because the Jews were worshipping idols. After all, this is a recurring theme throughout the Old Testament.

Verses sixteen and seventeen tell us that God was angry because His children were sinful and neglected the widow and orphan. In this passage, God rebukes the nation (corporate) for neglecting the orphan. He does not select individual couples and rebuke them for not supporting orphanages or adopting. Instead He rebukes the nation as a whole. This not only occurs in Isaiah, but is repeated throughout God's dealings with His people, Israel.

What makes us any different? If God expected the nation of Israel to corporately minister to orphans, how much more will He expect the church as a whole to lift up the cause of the orphan?

Recently a couple in our church decided to begin the adoption process. Although they made the decision and the commitment to adopt, I told our senior adults that *we* are pregnant. We, as the Body of Christ, are waiting anxiously for our newest member to arrive. We, as the family of God, are preparing to support this family as they enter into the ups and downs of adoption and bonding. We, not they, are pregnant. Together. Why? Because *this* is what God expects.

Chip, also preached at the Southern Baptist Convention of the Deaf in Bolivar, MO in July, "Pure Religion: Caring for the Orphans". Click "Conference Videos" to watch/listen.

God is addressing the Israelite leaders:

"Hear the word of the LORD, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the instruction of our God, You people of Gomorrah."

"What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?" Says the LORD.
"Bring your worthless offerings no longer; Incense is an abomination to Me."

"So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood."

"Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good. Reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

~Isaiah 1:10 & 11, 15-17

From my heart to yours ...

Chip's article is a great segue into a God-story I have been waiting to share with you for sometime now. Just after God's call to "coordinate the adoption of deaf orphans in the world" (March 2008), Joseph suggested I contact Emily Chapman, the now married daughter of Steven Curtis and Mary Beth Chapman. I finally did this in November of 2008. Emily very quickly connected me to Johnny and Beth Carr. Johnny was the Director of Church Partnerships for Bethany Christian Services. The Carr family had recently adopted 2 deaf children, a son and then a daughter, both from China. Since then they have adopted a third deaf son, domestically, and now have 5 beautiful, amazing children. I immediately emailed Johnny and then spoke with him by phone in late December. Plans were made for me to fly to Pensacola, FL, in February 2009, to visit with the Carr family, for the weekend, in their home. As I look back, what a great foundational experience this was for me, in so many respects.

In May of 2009, at the Christian Alliance for Orphans, Summit 5, (Irving Bible Church, TX), Johnny introduced Charles and me to several of his friends and co-laborers in the orphan care/ adoption ministry. In March of 2010, I asked Johnny to join us for our Share His Hope (SHH) orphan care conference in Asheville. He shared with us, then, that God had been doing some miraculous things in China as a result of their deaf son, James', adoption several years before.

Johnny and Beth, along with their two biological children, had traveled to China to bring James home. They met the Chinese woman who had taken such good care of James. She was the director for the deaf school, which was located very close to James' orphanage. The day they met, Beth, through the translator, thanked the woman for all she had done for James. She told the woman that she, too, was a deaf educator. Over the next days and weeks this Chinese woman was so impacted by an American family who would travel half way around the world to adopt a deaf boy, that she began to seek answers for "why" on her own.

A year or so later, the Carr family returned to China to do some mission work at James' deaf school and orphanage. Little did they know, at that time, what God had been up to because of their obedience. Johnny shared with us, at Share His Hope, they never mentioned God or Jesus either time they traveled to China or met with this woman. They simply obeyed God to do what He called them to do, adopt James, and help do whatever at his deaf school and orphanage.

The Chinese woman began emailing Johnny and she shared how she had done some research into his family's history and found that Johnny was a "minister"—actually, at that time Johnny was a Southern Baptist pastor. That prompted her to find a Chinese Bible, which she began to read on her own, and she, herself, had become a follower of Christ. Just prior to the SHH conference

Johnny had received an email from his sister in China, with photos attached. The photos were of more than 12 deaf children who had decided to follow Christ and were waiting to be baptized. He shared them with us during the conference. In the email she also shared that her husband was baptized on the same day. Since that time, countless others across China have begun following Christ because of her evangelistic efforts.

I believe adoption and caring for orphans IS evangelism! The "VISUAL" gospel! This is the horizontal—earthly -manifestation of the perpendicular—spiritual—adoption God, through Christ, has made available to us.

This story is proof that actions can speak as loud as, and sometimes louder than words! This is in addition to the fact that many adopted children, from other lands and cultures, are being brought up in Christian homes and are becoming followers of Christ. I also hear story after story of deaf children who are being adopted saying one day they want to return to their native-lands to share Jesus with their Deaf people there. Deaf people are among the top unreached people groups in the world with less than 2% knowing of and following Christ. The hearing people have been unable to significantly impact this group with His gospel, why wouldn't He use the adoption—earthly and spiritual—of deaf children to evangelize the Deaf World? And just maybe, it will spill over onto some of the hearing people, as well.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20.

Often we think of The Great Commission—Matthew 28:18-20—as a command with two parts, when in fact, it is one command which is all-encompassing including the baptizing AND the teaching of everything Jesus has said. It is not one without the other—but making disciples is both. Time consuming, huh? Life long, in fact. And the "go" part of Jesus' command is more literally translated "as you go", meaning in our everyday lives whatever we are doing and wherever we are, we are to be making disciples with whomever we are with. This includes…adoption and orphan care! This is the lifestyle of a believer who is now alive, but once was dead, and has now become Jesus' hands, mouth and feet here on this earth. It is Christ who is now living in and through us, causing Him greater glory as we obey Him one step at a time…AS WE GO!

I am excited to share with you a great opportunity to help the orphan crisis and one of our own SFH families. Lifesong for Orphans has given the Penland family a $4,000 matching grant to help lower their adoption loans for Rosalee and Trey. For every dollar donated, up to $4,000, Lifesong will match it. That's a total of possibly a reduction in the Penland adoption loans by $8,000. Do Not Miss This! Simply go to the Lifesong for Orphans website to give. Click "Give to an Adoptive Family". Under Gift Preference, click "Adoption Funding". Under Adoption Gift Preference click "Family Specific". Then enter the Family Account Number "3206". And "Penland Family" under family name. Just Do It!

There is a new Signs4Hope blog post: "Are You Blessed?"

As always, we thank you for your prayers! Having wisdom and discernment to know what it is God desires in this mission-focused ministry, called Signs for Hope, is a constant plea. If you are involved in global orphan care (which includes adoption), for any length of time, you realize what a faith-building work it is. Rarely, does God allow things to go without a struggle, but it is walking with Him through that struggle we become conformed more closely to the image of His Son and are given greater opportunity to bring Him the greatest glory possible!

If God's Holy Spirit touches your heart to give to Signs for Hope, please do not hesitate. He knows our needs before we do and He will direct you at just the right time to meet those needs. You can give on the Signs for Hope website or by mailing a check to Signs for Hope, PO Box 460, Fairview, NC 28730.

I do love you, but He loves you more!

Becky

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In You, the fatherless
find compassion.
- Hosea 14:3