SIGNS FOR HOPE

Never Stop Learning!

That phrase is widely used in many different places. Often, I have thought of it as something we must be intentional about and pursue, but as I ponder this more deeply, I really do not believe learning is something we only choose to do, but rather something that never stops as we live each new day.

It seems this season of my life is constantly involving more education and more training. Why do we mistakenly assume this is supposed to happen by our early to mid-20's and we are done? In fact, the opposite for my life has been true having received my first 4 yr. college degree at the age of 49, in 2008.

In September, I was in Texas attending the Trust Based Relational Interventions Professional Training (TBRI) provided by Texas Christian University in conjunction with Show Hope. The Empowered to Connect conference I have been attending and helping schedule ASL interpreters for, over the past 4 years, was where I learned about this training. I completed the 10-week pre-training coursework online prior to coming and I plan to complete the post-training coursework—also online—so that I can become a certified presenter for TBRI. Show Hope granted me a $3,000 scholarship to receive this training and I so want to be a good steward of this huge blessing. While the training is focused on how best to empower, connect and correct children who come from "hard places," those in the foster care system and those who have been adopted, I have always believed and am still convinced this training is beneficial for everyone who touches the life of any and all children. This training will not only benefit families here in the states who have adopted deaf children, but also those who provide care for deaf children around the world. This is also impacting those who are not deaf, as I must share this beneficial information with all others. What is the purpose of learning something this valuable, if it is not shared with everyone else?

After Joseph & Kate's wedding in Denver October 4th, Charles returned to NC, but I flew to Los Angeles to receive presenter training (Oct. 9 – 11) offered by the National Center for Biblical Parenting,. I believe this training will become the sure foundation for the Biblical training Signs for Hope will provide for families adopting deaf children and for caregivers of deaf children around the world. This foundation has been one I have sought and prayed about for two years or more. This is the missing puzzle piece for our SFH ministry as we share the Hope of Christ by facilitating care for deaf/HOH orphans throughout the world.

Jonathan & Michelle Walterhouse

I asked Jonathan Walterhouse, our newest Signs for Hope board member, to share whatever the Lord placed on his heart. Michelle, his wife, is a SFH advisory board member. Jonathan will be joining me in LA for the NCBP training in October, as well.

"The Great Unknown"

Have you ever said “Yes” reluctantly? You know... the time when someone asked you to do something with or for them and they said "...just trust me!" So, because of who they are and your friendship - you said “Yes,” but you were still a bit hesitant because of the unknown. What about the times you've said “No”? Or, the times you feel a tug at your heart to step out and do what seemed impossible? I'd like to suggest that we miss out on countless blessings in this life because we allow the unknown to become the mountain that obstructs instead of the mountain that God wants to help us overcome. May I submit to you that perhaps, as you are reading this right now, God is preparing you to soon find yourself in the middle of a situation in which you have NO idea what to do or why you are “there”?

I feel such a stirring in my heart as I write this. I believe God has me writing this because of what He is about to do in me, but not just in me - in my family's life as well. You see, there have been many “unknowns” in my family's history. In the 10 years and 6 months that my wife and I have been married, we've walked through several “unknowns.” Granted, some were certainly not as challenging as others, but the feeling at times towards God of "What are Y-O-U doing?" was prevalent all the same. My prayer is that you will find this to be an encouragement.

Let me offer some context by sharing a bit of my family's story. My wife, Michelle, and I have three beautiful children. We have two boys and one girl. We've had the humble privilege & blessing to grow our family both biologically and by way of adoption. More on that as we go along.

Both of our boys experienced some health challenges as infants/toddlers. Jaiden (our eldest) required the assistance of a feeding tube in order to gain weight. Actually, he ended up with three different types of feeding tubes before the final version - a Gastrostomy tube (g-tube) by which we fed him for over 6 months. By the grace of God, his body eventually began to thrive on its own and one looking at him today would never know the trouble he once faced. In this instance, as young parents, we felt the weight of the great unknown.

Levi (our youngest), had a bit more difficulty. He too was diagnosed with a condition called "Failure to Thrive." At a mere 10 months old, he had to have a g-tube placed in order for his body to receive the nutrients he needed to gain weight. After being kept for a 24-hour observation after the tube placement he was released late in the day. We arrived home exhausted, yet relieved that God had provided in the manner He had and trusted that things would only get better going forward, just as it did for Jaiden. The great unknown wasn't so great this time around... this wasn't quite the uncharted territory it was the first

time. Then came the morning after... I was at an early staff meeting when my phone rang. My wife knew where I was; she knew it was not convenient for me to answer. Suspecting it was important, I stepped away from the meeting to answer. Then came the words a parent never wants to hear about one of their children – "he's blue & barely breathing..." another great unknown.

It would take a book, rather than an article, to relate to you all the things God has done since we arrived at the conclusion that God was leading us to adopt. Suffice it to say, it was a time of many great unknowns. From every step of the paperwork process to every single dollar that it took, God showed up and showed out in mighty ways throughout the process. Edyn Grace officially joined our family on December 5th, 2013. We spent almost 6 weeks in Peru and saw God work in great ways while there. From the people we stayed with that became like family, to the friends of said individuals who had the connections to get Edyn (our newly adopted daughter), the Peruvian passport she needed to leave the country, in less than an hour—yes, a legal and travel worthy document in less than an hour. Then there was the awesome experience of visiting the US Embassy in order to get her US Visa. We got an appointment on a Friday - they don't give appointments on Friday. Oh, and let me add to it - it was the Friday before Christmas when loads of people had taken off to head home to the US for the holiday. Finally, there were the kind Delta agents with whom we spoke on the phone on the same Friday that allowed us to move our flights up by 3 days (at no extra cost) in order to get home sooner and avoid the Christmas Eve flight into Atlanta. (That's just a FEW of the awesome experiences we were blessed to see first-hand.)

I shared all these "unknowns" through which our family has traversed to say this - The great unknown became known to us in time but only in and through the One who already knows it all.

That said, I ask - what "unknown" is God calling you into right now? I'm confident this is exactly what the band called Hillsong United was contemplating when they penned the words to the song called "Oceans." One line of the song says about our great God - "Your grace abounds in deepest waters. Your sovereign hand will be my guide. Where feet may fail and fear surrounds me, You've never failed and You won't start now".

Will you join me in stepping out into the great unknown to serve our great God and glorify Him in so doing?

Jonathan

Opportunities for Praises & Prayers

The first-ever SFH Austin, TX deaf adoption get together! What a beautiful day Sunday September 21st was in Austin, but even more beautiful were the families that gathered at a park to eat, play and fellowship. Those families who were able to join with us:

Bergerons, Browns, Collicotts, Dubbs, Finks & Worrells

I am truly blessed by these families and others that were unable to join us on this special day!

Please continue to pray for our Liberian brothers & sisters. I have had the opportunity to stay connected with those in Liberia (hearing and Deaf) through Facebook private messaging, go figure, something new since my March trip. I have LOVED being able to stay connected with them in this way. Yes, it has been challenging to know what to say, but sharing His truth with them is enough. Even though Ebola has prevented my traveling back to Liberia this fall, being able to watch the Word of God encourage and empower my brothers and sisters, one-by-one, has been inspiring, to say the least. Yes, His promises to you and to me are the same for those in Liberia! Yes, His Word is alive! This kind of one-on-one communication could not happen apart from Facebook, so please thank God for this technology. Yes, He is in the midst of the mess of Ebola and the collateral damage it is causing. Be assured, God is still on His throne in Liberia and everywhere else for that matter!

While in Austin, I also had the distinct privilege of meeting the newest member of the Worrell family, Mia. She just turned 14 about two weeks ago and her journey to the Worrell family was truly orchestrated by God. She is precious! Full of life, smiles constantly and is weaving her way into the hearts of all the Worrell family members and those she meets. Mia was already Chinese Sign Language fluent and could read and write Mandarin when she arrived in the states in June and she has picked up ASL and written English in the Worrell family's ASL-rich home, rapidly. Tom and Tracy found out about Mia needing a new family soon after she arrived here from China and after much discussion and prayer felt God leading them to be her family. "She is the missing puzzle piece!" both agree. Many Signs for Hope families also felt God leading them to help in the process of prayerfully and financially bringing Mia to them. Praise God for His faithfulness throughout this arduous process to bring Mia "home" and ask Him to continue to be with this family during this transition time. Mia is still waiting to be admitted to the Texas School for the Deaf, so please pray that can be sooner rather than later.

God places the lonely in families.~Psalm 68:6

More Opportunities for Praise & Prayers

Please be praying for the Colvin's, Kris and Barbi, as they will be traveling to China to bring their deaf daughter, Baylee, home October 10th – 25th. Pray also for Grayce Fleet the ASL interpreter who is volunteering her time and talents to travel with them. Thank God for Lifeline Children's Services as they are equally sharing Grayce's travel expenses with SFH for this trip. What a blessing!

Pray also for Grayce's family as she is away, for husband Eric and for the daily schedules of their 5 children to all be worked out.

Continue to lift up the many families processing through the varying stages of their deaf adoptions. Fund-raising, filling out paper-work, waiting for the next step in the process to come to pass provides for some great training ground for additional learning to cause them to depend more fully on God for each and every obstacle (opportunity) and/or detour (God's timing and ways) that occurs. Pray also for families who are struggling to connect with their adopted deaf children on a deeper level, reaching deep within their hearts to heal their hurts and brains, providing an avenue ready to receive the heart-change that only Jesus gives.

Passport to Deafness on November 8th, our Asheville area fall Deaf awareness and silent auction event, is now in the planning stages. Please be praying for those who are working with me to create an experiential environment to help us all learn more about how deafness affects a great number of our population and every population around the world. If you are any where near Asheville on November 8th we urge you to come to Asheville Christian Academy between 9:30 and 12:30 for this multi-sensory experience. If you would like to volunteer to help with this event or if you have something you want to donate for the silent auction please email me asap. I will send out additional information about this event, as time gets closer.

The Empowered to Connect conference in DC (ETCDC) and sharing what God is doing through Signs for Hope with Open Bible Deaf Church (OBDC) in College Park, MD last month, were certainly events I will not soon forget. There were six SFH families in attendance at ETCDC and some additional God-connections were also made. The folks at OBDC paid close attention as I shared with them on Sunday, September 14th. They had great questions and I am so thankful for God's touching their hearts to support SFH not only prayer-wise, but also financially on a monthly basis this year. Please pray for God to continue to lead them as several were interested in doing more and possibly joining us on a trip to Liberia in the future.

Finally, thank you so much for your prayers and words of encouragement as we experienced my email being hacked and hijacked for several days last month. As far as I know, there was no one who was deceived by this and everything seems to be back to "normal"—whatever that means.

From My Heart to Yours ...

Fear, I believe, is our life's greatest motivation. Unfortunately, I am not talking about 'the fear of the Lord,' but I am talking about what I have been learning all week, here at TBRI training, and before. Fear is the root of the traumatized child's unacceptable behaviors. Fear - for their own lives, since no one provided adequately for their needs and nurtured them early on and they were forced to become dependent upon themselves.

Fear feeds into frenzy - the intrinsic primitive of survival-mode. For the traumatized child, any amount of trauma in utero and beyond—fear learned from that trauma actually prevents logical brain function from developing and restricts the brains ability to think critically. Fear is the root of anger. Let me say that again...fear is the root of anger! Fear causes the innate desire to flee. Fear causes the inability to move, to become paralyzed. Hence...Fight! Flight! Freeze! That is the visual for FEAR!

Well over 100 times the words, "Fear not" or "Do not be afraid" appear in the scriptures. Obviously, God knew how much and how drastically fear would impact our daily lives. Any time He or one of His messengers appeared to someone those words of comfort were uttered, first. I wonder just how much they continued to "fear" even after they were told not to? I wonder just how much you and I continue to operate in fear-mode even when He tells us, "Fear not!" and when He provides innumerable promises to share His love and care for us beyond anything we can truly fathom?

Felt-Safety is a term that is used in our TBRI training. Felt-Safety comes from the perspective of the child, not the parent or caregiver. The opposite of fear is the feeling of being safe. When does a traumatized child feel safe? Is it when their parent or caregiver tells them, "You are safe, now!"? Is it when their parent or caregiver imposes their own feelings of safety onto them, falsely assuming that suddenly this child naturally will feel safe in this "safe" environment they provide? Because of the brain alterations due to trauma, the traumatized child cannot instantly switch from a lifestyle of forced self-survival, self-preservation, into a lifestyle of feeling safe, releasing complete dependence onto someone else for that safety. Felt-Safety must be earned by the parent or caregiver, over time. When the traumatized child "learns" they can trust that parent or caregiver, consistently, the miraculous begins to happen inside the brain. It begins to develop again. The restrictions of brain function begin to be lifted and the ability to begin to think critically is birthed. Simultaneously, there is a burst of language development and cognitive—learning—abilities increase.

All to often, brothers and sisters, you and I are paralyzed by fear. Fear that God might allow something to happen that will "hurt" us or hurt someone we love. Fear that we can't live up to God's standard and we will disappoint Him. Fear that someone will think we are too radical in our obedience to Christ. And the list goes on and on. However, IF we know and believe God's truths and promises intimately and we have a track record with Him, those fears should not be so...or at the very least they should be short lived. The facts should cancel out our fear...but the fact remains...they do not. We are still flawed in our ability to truly internalize God's truths, 100% of the time. Do you have better picture and understanding for the traumatized child, now?

Prior to following Christ we were in survival-mode, or self-preservation. It's a paradigm shift, for sure. Once you and I begin to follow Christ wholeheartedly and begin learning more about Him from His Word and from doing life with Him every day, we begin to surrender that old life of feeling like we must meet our own needs and keep ourselves and those we love "safe."

Felt-safety in the arms of Jesus! Don't you long for that place of release and sweet relief?

I love you all, but He will always love you more!

Becky

Stay Connected with Signs For Hope ...

www.signsforhope.org
www.signs4hope.blogspot.com
beckyblloyd@gmail.com

Check out some recent SFH blog posts!