Awakening to Gospel-Centered Adoption and Orphan Care

Tony Merida       Rick Morton

Foreword by David Platt, author of Radical
“Orphanology presents a gospel-centered theological and practical approach to an often-neglected sphere of ministry. Morton and Merida call Christians to reflect God’s image as redeemer, defender, provider, and father, and take up the cause for those who have no voice. It is engaging, thorough, accessible, and a convicting joy to read.”

—Ed Stetzer, coauthor of Transformational Church, www.edstetzer.com

“I wept as I read the great truths in Orphanology. Not just because it reminded me of forgotten details in the adoption story of our son Rudy, or because it compelled me to a greater place of action for the nearly 150 million orphans in our world, but more than anything because it ignited worship and thanksgiving for a God who would adopt ME! Orphan me. Abandoned me. Fatherless me. Undeserving me. . . . Thank you, Tony and Rick, for this powerful book.”

—David Nasser, pastor; author of A Call to Die

“Orphanology challenges believers to be instrumental in rescuing the weak and fatherless, thus fulfilling the Great Commission! As an adoptive father and pastor, I believe this book has the potential to transform the body of Christ’s approach to orphan care and ministry.”

—Kevin Ezell, president, North American Mission Board

“Orphanology is a clarion call for everyone who calls themselves a believer. It articulately weds together the proclamation of the gospel and the caring for orphans . . . spurring us to envision God-sized ideas for bringing solutions to this crisis. Do good. Read this book.”

—Andy Lehman, vice-president, Lifesong for Orphans; board member, Christian Alliance for Orphans

“Orphanology is another great resource every church that cares about the orphan crisis should have. This book will not only give you good theology about caring for orphans, it will also give much needed practical help.”

—Johnny Carr, national director of church partnerships, Bethany Christian Services

“Brilliant. I cannot imagine that one could read this and remain neutral or disengaged in respect to orphans and the church.”

—Micah Fries, pastor, Frederick Boulevard Baptist Church, St. Joseph, Missouri
“Orphanology is an excellent resource for the adoption and orphan care movement. As you read the personal stories recorded in these pages, you’ll be moved to tears . . . and then to action.”
—TREVIN WAX, AUTHOR OF Holy Subversion: Allegiance to Christ in an Age of Rivals

“Orphanology is compelling exposition of Scripture wedded to compassionate exhortation. It is my prayer that this book will be a catalyst to engage families and churches for the sake of orphans around the world and across the street!”
—TIM BRISTER, PASTOR, GRACE BAPTIST CHURCH; DIRECTOR, PLNTD NETWORK

“Simple, straightforward, convincing, and convicting. I am thrilled at the renewed interest in orphan care and adoption that is sweeping through the evangelical church. This book reflects this movement, and will stoke the fires of it too! We bless You, Lord, for moving so powerfully among your adopted sons and daughters.”
—DANIEL L. AKIN, PRESIDENT, SOUTHEASTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

“A must-read for pastors and church leaders, the other half to the fight for life.”
—DAN DARLING, AUTHOR OF iFaith

“Wonderful. Insightful. Merida and Morton have captured the wonder of the marvelous beauty of adoption.”
—KIMBERLY SOWELL, AUTHOR OF Soul Shaping

“Orphanology shows us how much God cares about orphans and why we should too. Read this book and then ask this simple question, ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’ God’s answer may surprise you and change your life forever.”
—DR. RAY PRITCHARD, PRESIDENT, KEEP BELIEVING MINISTRIES; AUTHOR OF The Healing Power of Forgiveness, Stealth Attack, and An Anchor for the Soul

“Reader beware! As I read, I could not help but see my own past complacency regarding this global issue for what it really is—selfishness. The gospel kills selfishness and cultivates Christ’s own compassion and love for the fatherless.
—GEORGE G. ROBINSON, DMISS, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF MISSIONS AND EVANGELISM, SOUTHEASTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

“If even a fraction of the vast population of those who call themselves Christians would practice a little orphanology, then the world would notice our being salt and light and more than ever glorify our Father in heaven.”
—JASON DUKES, AUTHOR OF Live Sent
“Merida and Morton’s book is as inspirational as it is informative. This book will lead to transformation of children who will be adopted, loved, and cared for, and also to the transformation of anyone who reads and takes its content seriously.”

—Mark L. Russell, PhD, Author of The Missional Entrepreneur

“God loves orphans. I hope this book will be widely read by pastors and other church leaders, couples considering adoption (may their tribe increase!), and any Christian who wants to be a part of what God is doing to lead His church to love all the little children of the world whom Jesus loves.”

—Nathan Finn, Assistant Professor of Church History and Baptist Studies, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Tony Merida and Rick Morton have done the church a huge favor with this book because they have clearly shown that adoption and orphan care are gospel issues and have given us intensely practical ways to move our churches to action. This book has especially impacted me because my mom grew up in an orphanage. For a decade she waited in vain for a father to come for her. This book will help churches everywhere say with their Lord Jesus to millions like my mom around the world, ‘I will not leave you as orphans; I will come for you!’”

—Jonathan Akin, Pastor, Fairview Church, Lebanon, Tennessee

“Read at your own risk! You are about to discover adoption is more crucial, more feasible, and more of a blessing than you ever imagined. This is not a book that will touch you. It is a book that will change you, and you will be glad that it did.

Pregnancy is not the only way to become an expectant parent. Tony Merida and Rick Morton are going to draw you into the heart of a mighty movement of God and release a river of love you did not know you had.”

—Chuck Kelley, President, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

“Rick and Tony have written an important book for the church today. While adoption has increased in popularity over the years, many do not fully understand its biblical and missional aspects. If the church can grasp this, lives will be transformed like no other point in history.”

—Mark Matlock, President, WisdomWorks Ministries
ORPHANOLOGY
To our precious wives,
Kimberly Merida and Denise Morton,

and

to our beloved children:
Nastia, Erick, and Nicholas Morton

and

James, Angela, Jana, Victoria, and Joshua Merida
We are headed to a country with reportedly more than 5 million orphans. I’m trying to prepare myself for the gripping images of abandoned children, hungry children, lonely children, disfigured children, unwanted children. We’re taking with us two duffel bags of shoes to give away at the orphanage, hoping to provide a little joy and comfort to some children’s lives. But there’s so much more to do. And my heart breaks for these kids... And I’m trying to prepare myself... I haven’t slept all week. I haven’t been able to get the thought of his little smile out of my mind, especially the picture of him holding up a dry-erase board with *Merida* written below his name.
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It was February 15, and we had just landed in Kazakhstan. We were greeted at the airport by our translator. She directed my wife and me to a taxi, where we all took our seats to ride to the orphanage.

“What kind of work do you do?” our translator asked.

“I’m a pastor,” I said.

She responded, “A pastor? Why are you a pastor? Don’t you know that there is no such thing as God?”

I replied, “Well, I would beg to differ with you.”

Such was the beginning of a long conversation that lasted until we came to the orphanage. Upon arrival, we left our conversation behind to focus on the moment ahead. My wife and I were about to be introduced to our first son, Caleb.

We were ushered into a small room where a nurse in the orphanage met us. She shared all sorts of medical information with us about Caleb.

And then it happened.
A woman rounded the corner with a precious ten-month-old boy in her hands. Words cannot adequately describe the immediate swell of emotions that enveloped the room. The woman handed him to my wife, and then to me, and for the first time Caleb looked into the eyes of a mom and a dad.

The next four weeks were filled with all the work and paperwork needed to make Caleb’s adoption official. These days were also filled with a multiplicity of conversations with our translator about the gospel. We explained to her how God, in His inexpressibly holy love, sent His Son to live the life we could not live and die the death we deserve to die so that everyone who trusts in Him can be reconciled to God as His child. We shared how, by God’s grace, we had been adopted into His family, to know Him as Father and enjoy Him as friend. We told her that this was the motivation behind our wanting to adopt Caleb. Adoption was an expression in our lives of the gospel in our hearts.

She listened . . . and she watched. Over four weeks, she heard us talk about the gospel, and over four weeks, she watched us live out the gospel (albeit an imperfect demonstration at times!).

And then it happened.

It was our last night in Caleb’s city, and as we prepared to board the plane, our translator pulled me aside. “I need to tell you something,” she said.

“OK,” I replied, “what is it?”

“Last night, I trusted in Jesus to save me from myself and my sins. I believe that He is the Lord.” Then she said with excitement, “Now I am a child of God!”

A smile swept across my face. I rejoiced with her, encouraged her, and shared with her some initial steps that she could begin to take as a Christian. Time was short, though, and the plane was ready to leave. So I picked up Caleb, and as my wife and I boarded the plane, we looked back, holding a child in our arms while waving good-bye to a child in His arms.

The gospel and adoption are beautifully woven together by the gracious hand of God. In Christ, God has shown His love to us as our Father. He has reached down His hand of mercy to us in the loneliness of our sin, and He has raised us up as members of His family. Consequently, one of the clearest displays of the gospel in this life is when redeemed men and women extend a hand of mercy to children in need and bring them into their families.

I am grateful for Tony Merida and Rick Morton. Tony and I have been good friends for many years, and the power of the gospel is clear in this
man’s life, family, and ministry. Rick was there when my wife and I first started contemplating adoption, and I can still remember sitting in the Mortons’ home, listening to them share the ups and downs, joys and struggles of adoption.

These two brothers know the gospel, and these two brothers know adoption. I am grateful for the time and energy they have put into making this invaluable book available to us. In the pages ahead, you will find strong biblical foundations, warm personal illustrations, and clear practical exhortations. I am confident that, as you read, you will find yourself continually captivated by the love of the Father in heaven and ultimately compelled to show His love to the fatherless on earth.

— DP
Like life, this book is a narrative about brokenness and redemption. *Orphanology* focuses on orphans and adoption, but at the center of this book, like all of life, is God’s eternal story, the gospel. It’s really that simple. Yet in the stir of life we can often lose the simplicity. We can miss the point. We can miss the gospel.

That was me. I was that guy. I was a good guy God had rescued from his sin at a young age. At 11 years old I trusted Christ and began to follow Him. I became part of the church and never left. Adolescence was tough, but I never left the church. I struggled with a call to pastor; it was scary. God was patient. I submitted to God’s call, and He led me to a wonderful mate. She was God’s gift. All was the way it was supposed to be except, as the months and
years passed, there were no children. We really wanted children. We loved kids. Our whole lives were wrapped up around kids. Over a decade in youth ministry we spent lots of time with other people’s kids, yet none of our own.

As the years passed we tried everything. I can’t count the number of doctor visits and fertility clinic consults. The crazy thing about it all was the unconscious disconnect that continued to linger in our lives. We never realized that our struggle to parent children was a gospel issue. Sure, a great part of our desire to parent was the desire to raise children to know Jesus and to serve Him, but it wasn’t about mirroring the Father as an adoptive parent or as the Rescuer of the fatherless. The thought honestly never crossed my mind. Actually, as we came to grips with our infertility, our full understanding of God as an adoptive Dad was still forming.

Practically, I was the slowest to come around to the idea of adopting. My questions seemed huge (although they seem so silly today!).

*Could I really love an adopted child like my own?*

*Can we afford an adoption?*

*How can we be sure the child will be healthy?*

*What happens when the child wants to meet his or her “real” parents?*

*Should we tell children they are adopted?*

My wife was so insistent, so I prayed and I studied, and I began to see something amazing. The crazy thing was that it had been there all along! God had adopted me.

I had read that many, many times, but I had never truly seen it! The Most High God has adopted me! So, did He love me like His own? Did He tell me that I am adopted? Did He worry about my health or did He provide for my progressive growth in His image? How much did He pay for my redemption? Wow!

My questions started to seem pretty small. During the same time God was drawing us to adopt, He gave me the great gift of meeting and teaching alongside Russ Moore at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. We found out that the international adoption process can be an unpredictable roller coaster ride, and I am sure that I was an emotional basket case more than once over the twists and turns in the road. Russ was a source of confidence for me as we waded through the waiting and the paperwork. He and his wife, Maria, had adopted their sons Timothy and Benjamin from Russia about a year earlier,
and he was always good for an encouraging word or sincere promise for prayer. I will never forget one conversation in particular. I was lamenting about how hard it was to adopt our son and how long it was taking; Russ looked at me with a smile and said, “Yes, but in this process you will learn things about the heart of God that you might not otherwise know.” That was prophetic.

What God has unfolded before us over the last several years has been a great journey of understanding Him, His story, His plan, and His people more. It’s not that we have it figured out by any means. It’s that we see something of Him a little more clearly.

There is another reason for this book for me. It’s not all about adoption. I guess I have always had some level of awareness for orphan ministry. My parents were older than those of my peers. When Dad was a preteen in 1929, the Great Depression hit in the US. His mother was a young widow with four kids under the age of 11. Times were tough, and my grandmother lived true to her steady, practical, German values. At one point, the salary she received from her job working in the office of a local physician, Dr. Ross, could not provide for her family—even with the money my dad and my oldest uncle were contributing from their paper routes and other odd jobs. For a time, my grandmother had to place her two youngest (a son and daughter), into a local Catholic orphanage for them to receive food, clothing, and shelter. These two of my dad’s siblings were social orphans, and this experience changed them. It also changed my family.

My daddy loved his little sister and his little brother more because of this experience. I could always tell, by the way he talked about them. He always grieved their separation and, although he never talked much about it, the scar was always there. Their youngest brother, Ken, always maintained the role of protector that he learned in the orphanage.

My grandmother was not allowed to see her daughter while she was in the orphanage because she was so young. Grandmother would tell stories of standing by the fence at certain times or choosing odd times and routes to go to work or the market in order to create “chance” encounters to see her baby across the playground fence.

I am still amazed about how openly my aunt talked about this experience over the years. My uncle Ken went to be with Jesus when I was a youngster, long before God had given me the experiences or the thoughts that would have made a real conversation about their time in the orphanage of much good
for either of us. And I wonder whether that will even matter to us by the time I see him again in eternity. I suspect that we will both be overwhelmed in the presence of the Father, and it won’t matter so much.

What I am fairly sure of is that God’s call to care for the fatherless here on earth includes many kids like my aunt and uncle were—social orphans, who still have a living parent but are stuck in an institution in the hands of a bureaucratic machine—and that breaks my heart. Over time, God has used those family reminiscences to heighten my sense of commitment to orphans of all kinds, no matter how they may find themselves orphaned. Thanks, Aunt Arva, for being so transparent! I love you for having been so compassionate and real in all those discussions.

If you are concerned with the more than 147 million orphans across the world who will go to bed tonight wondering who will care for them, please read this book. This is an effort to help reduce the learning curve with regard to what the Bible has to say about orphans, and how the church and individual Christians can live out the gospel by ministering to the fatherless. I hope these words not only will remind you of God’s command to care for the fatherless, but will challenge you to become involved personally on behalf of the fatherless while giving you practical answers and outlets to begin.

— RM

TONY MERIDA

I just received some thrilling news about 30 minutes ago. My wife texted me saying that we passed our court hearing in Ethiopia for the adoption of our fifth child. We are overjoyed with the anticipation of loving this little guy; teaching him the Scriptures; equipping him to live a full life; and watching this 45-pound six-year-old grow up!

Our newest son’s parents died of an illness and he has no brothers and sisters. That’s all about to change through the wonder of adoption. Soon, he will have one Ukrainian brother and three Ukrainian sisters. He will also have five Ethiopian cousins.

I never dreamed that we would fill up a minivan with five children. I certainly never dreamed that I would be writing this book on adoption and orphan care. That is, not as of about five years ago. Like Rick, the act of caring for the fatherless through mercy ministry and adoption is a new focus
in my life. I was never against adoption. But I had never really considered it seriously until about 2007.

After observing the adoptions of both my sister’s and other friends’ kids, coupled with my study of the doctrine of adoption and ministry to the fatherless in the Bible, my heart began to burn. Adoption and orphan care became a serious burden. I repented of my lack of participation in caring for the millions of orphans and began praying about what I could do. Soon, my wife and I were looking for an adoption agency, choosing a country, considering how to pay for it, and beginning the process of bringing home some children.

As I travel around the world speaking at various events, I typically talk about adoption and orphan care whenever it’s fitting. After initially speaking a few times on the biblical foundations of orphan care and adoption, and sharing our adoption story with others (you’ll read this in chapter 1), I kept getting questions. Questions about practical matters such as funding, orphan hosting, foster care, how to lead a church to do orphan care, and more. I sensed that Rick and I should write a book to help expound on these subjects with grace and clarity. We don’t claim to be experts; rather pastoral advocates for the fatherless who want to address the questions and provide some of the answers we are experiencing. Each chapter looks at a key question we’ve asked ourselves and others have asked us.

Of course, this is not simply a book about bringing home the fatherless or about providing food and shelter for them. It’s about the gospel. If there is a running theme through Orphanology, it’s that Rick and I are calling for an awakening to the key answer for reaching the world’s orphans: gospel-centered adoption and orphan care.

We are not mere humanitarians. We are leaders in the church who have been changed by Jesus Christ. Everything that we talk about in this book is a reflection on the gospel. Every challenge that we state is motivated by the gospel. Adoption is a real-life illustration of the gospel. It shows us how God transforms spiritual orphans into family members. He changes our names, identities, and families by His grace. Orphan care is acts of mercy that flow from the heart of one who has been changed by the gospel. So, as you read this book, my prayer is that you would love the gospel more deeply and out of that reflection, go display God’s Fatherly mercy to a world in need.

— TM
The deepest and strongest foundation for adoption is located not in the act of humans adopting humans, but in God adopting humans. And this act is not part of his ordinary providence in the world; it is at the heart of the Gospel.

John Piper, “Adoption: The Heart of the Gospel”
HOW IS GOD’S ADOPTION OF US SIMILAR TO OUR ADOPTION OF CHILDREN?

Our prayer as we begin this journey together is for you to experience 1 John 3:1, “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.” And if you are a Christian already, please consider afresh God the Father’s personal, particular, and persevering love for you, His adopted child. May your consideration of this love God gives create in you a desire to reflect His love to orphans.

Whether you adopt, support those who adopt, or choose from the many other ways to minister to orphans that are discussed in this book, we ask God to use these stories and principles to awaken in you His will concerning these children’s lives.

OUR ADOPTION OF CHILDREN

My wife and I began our adoption journey in 2007. Our first real desire for adoption began when my sister (Lisa Bond, whose family’s story is in this chapter) brought home two boys from Ethiopia, Beniam (who was
four) and Derara (who was seven). I remember us anxiously going home to Kentucky to meet them. My sister already had a biological child whom we loved deeply. But we wondered how these boys would respond to us. As soon as we met them, our hearts melted. We love these boys and miss seeing them regularly. (Later my sister would adopt three more after finding out about Derara’s three other siblings).

A burden for orphans often develops by simple exposure to them. If you hold an orphan or visit an orphan, or watch an adopted child grow up in a loving family, then I believe your heart will be moved with compassion. Kimberly and I had witnessed the grace of adoption in some of our friends’ lives a prior to my sister’s journey, as well, but this close familial connection had a deep impact on us.

The second step of our journey occurred shortly after interacting with my sister’s children. I came home one day and said, “Baby, I want some kids.” Kimberly said, “Where from?”

I said, “I don’t care. Let’s fill the house with children.” (I must confess that I selfishly wanted to adopt from the Dominican Republic or Haiti because of the number of middle infielders in the major leagues, but my wife insisted that this wasn’t good motivation!)

In addition to our initial questions and discussions, that year we were serving at a summer camp and our assignment was to teach on James 1:27 and other texts that dealt with the poor and needy. The study of theses passages together with our personal experience and new awareness of the plight of orphans radically affected us. We began looking at adoption agencies, and then settled on a wonderful Christian agency that worked with a few selected countries. One of these countries was Ukraine. I had a history with Ukraine already. I had taught at a seminary there a few times, and fell in love with the people. My friend Rick had also adopted his son Erick, whom we had grown to love, from Ukraine. So we began the paperwork.

After a lengthy process, 18 months later, the phone finally rang. We thought we would travel in the summer, but we were told that we had to be in Ukraine in a few days, on April 8, 2009. I went to the office, gave my sermon notes to Rick, found two plane tickets, packed, grabbed some stuff for infants, and set out to adopt children. Our paperwork, or dossier, reflected an approval for up to two children, aged five or under. We had dreams of bringing home two little ones.

When we arrived to look at possible children for adoption, we were very
tense. We only had about an hour, as people were in line behind us. I can’t possibly tell you the emotions that were welling up inside of us. This day was about to set off a chain reaction that would affect many lives for years.

We expected to see pictures of hundreds of kids. Instead, we looked over only a few options, which never felt good for one reason or the other. Then the worker said, “How about three?” So they showed us a sibling group of three, one of them was 14, which didn’t feel right. Then, from the other room, another worker passed through our meeting, apparently finished talking to another prospective couple, with about ten minutes or so left, and asked, “How about four?” I looked at Kimberly and said, “Why not?” I’ve always wanted a lot of kids. I just didn’t think we would get them all at once!

When they set before us pictures of four children, all siblings, I looked at them for a second, sat back, and said, “Yes.” I then looked at Kimberly, who nervously grinned, and said, “Yes!” Four children, not two children, who were ages 4, 6, 7, and 9! We had been married five years, and were about to have a 9-year-old!

I called my sister to ask her if we were crazy!? I needed someone to tell me no, and she was the one person that I knew would say, “Go for it.” She preached me the following sermon:

*Sorry I missed your call; I was getting ready for work. Mom called me yesterday morning when I was getting ready and told me about the kids. She was super excited. I was shocked. Honestly, I thought you’d go over and get one baby and come home. LOL. So, when she told me, I cried off ALL my makeup and had to get ready all over again. (I’ll get you back for that!)*

*As to the question of if you are crazy . . . yes, you are. But so was God to send His Son. So was God to forgive us, to adopt us. So was Jesus to be murdered and homeless and penniless. . . . By living out a reckless faith, you are more Christ like than ever before. . . . And, of course, you will be giving a mom and a dad to four older children who otherwise might not ever get one.*

Then she quoted Mother Teresa’s question and answer to me: “*How can there be too many children? It’s like saying there are too many flowers.*”

That’s all I needed to hear.

Two days later, Kimberly and I journeyed about eight hours south with
our local facilitator (whose driving taught us more about how to pray!) to meet the sibling group of four. We walked into the chief inspector’s office, where we discovered that the kids’ files had already been pulled aside because they were about to be placed in separate foster homes the following week. By God’s gracious providence, we had arrived just in time.

We then went to the orphanage where we met a vivacious orphanage director speaking Russian rapidly, asking us if we wanted tea and if there were alligators in Mississippi. She kept going on about how pleasantly surprised she was that we would consider adopting four kids. She repeatedly asked, “How old are you?” and “Are you sure about this?”

Our heads were spinning from the rapid Russian discourse, and then the four kids walked in . . . holding hands.

Our heads were spinning from the rapid Russian discourse, and then the four kids walked in . . . holding hands. Shoes torn, clothes looking ragged, faces pale, and they didn’t know what was going on. We gave them a few gifts and tried to greet them lovingly. The girls were thrilled with a stuffed animal, and James immediately began playing with his car.

The orphanage director told them that we were interested in taking them home forever. She told them that if they were to go with us, they would get a bedroom, a bike, and other goodies, but to stay would mean they would get nothing! (She actually said that.) Then she said, “But it’s your decision.” She went to each child to ask her or his decision, and they each said yes. Then she had the kids leave the room and asked us for our response. When she asked us if we wanted to take the kids home, it was like asking me if I wanted red meat for dinner, “Yes, of course.” So the process began.

James then wrote a letter for the court saying he wanted to be adopted along with his sisters. The words were written in Russian on plain white paper with the sentence slowly drifting downward (I wish I had that letter). We then met one of James’s teachers and she was quick to tell us of all the stuff that James could do. He simply shook his head and smiled. She then told us that the kids in her class recently sang a “mama song” that contains lines about longing for a mama. This precious teacher told us that a few days earlier, James refused to sing it because he didn’t believe he would ever have a mama.

Eleven days later we had a court date. We picked up the kids and prepared
for the legal process. Kimberly stood up first and the kind judge asked her a series of questions like, “Are you ready to give up your quiet life?” After Kimberly finished speaking eloquently, I stood up and had to speak to the judge and present my request:

*Your honor, I believe every child on earth is valuable and deserving of a loving family. We believe that we can provide a loving family for these children. The world is full of orphans. And after studying all of the possible locations, having traveled to Ukraine, and having interacted with adopted Ukrainian children, we believe that this is where we are supposed to be. And I would like to ask your kind permission to adopt these children, to change their names to James Arthur, Angela Grace, Jana Sophia, and Victoria Joy, as well as to change their birth certificates, making us the official parents of the children.*

One by one, the judge addressed the kids. He asked them things like, “Do you want to go with these people?” “Where are you going?” “What are their names?” (To which, James said, “Mama and Papa.”)

When he got to our smallest, Victoria Joy, he asked her, “Have you ever been anywhere outside of Mattviika?”

She said, “I went to the circus one time.” It was priceless. The whole court erupted into laughter.

The judge granted our petition, and after a few more weeks, we were all set to return to the United States. As we worked to complete the remaining in-country documents during our last few days, one of the workers asked us if we knew what the kids’ mother’s name was. We didn’t. She told us and we were overwhelmed. You see, Kimberly had dreams about having a daughter named Lydia and had told her sisters, who were having babies, to reserve that name for her daughter. But since we liked the girls’ first names (Angela, Victoria, and Jana), we decided not to use this name. So, when the worker told us, “The birthmother’s name was Lydia,” we were astonished. We actually did have a Lydia that will forever be part of our story. God continued to confirm His purposes for us through numerous experiences like this one.

I will never forget our last day there. We took each kid a backpack with some new clothes that we had bought at Mothercare. Kimberly gathered the
two older kids, and I took the two younger ones. These little girls went nuts over the clothes! They began counting their socks and giggling over their new outfits. They immediately took off the clothes they had worn everyday since we had been there, put on their new denim jumpers, and took the old clothes back to the class (underwear and all!). I couldn’t help but think of Paul’s words about how Christians, rescued by God, have put off the old clothes, and put on the new clothes in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 4:22–24; Colossians 3:5–14). A radical change in identity had taken place.

Overall, we spent 40 days in Ukraine. Before getting on our train, our driver, who spoke little English, said, “These kids have no hope in our country.” Reportedly, 70 percent of unadopted girls end up in prostitution and 80 percent of the boys end up in a life of crime. Hearing him say thank you caused me to swell up in tears. We boarded an overnight train with Happy Meals from McDonald’s, a piece of the homeland. We were alone with the kids for the first time, with little means of communicating, journeying back to Kiev and eventually to Hattiesburg. James began to snore that night. It was the sweetest sound I’d ever heard.

When our 27-hour trip was over and we got off the plane in Hattiesburg, I saw Kimberly’s dad, a man I respect, who is a father of four. I was so ready to weep by this time. I put my head in his chest, and we both began to sob like prom queens! Many members of our church greeted us at the airport, and when we got home, our house was decorated (and adapted for four instead of two!) with pictures of the kids and us on the mantle and in the bedrooms. And so it began.

**God’s Adoption of Us**

Of course, the greater work of grace is not our adoption of kids, but God’s adoption of us, through Jesus Christ. Traveling to another country to adopt is one thing, but for God to leave heaven for earth and adopt sinners is an act of amazing grace. It’s important for us to consider the similarities between God’s “vertical adoption” of sinners and our “horizontal adoption” of kids.

Apostle Paul uses the word for “adoption” (huiothesia, meaning, “to place
as a son”) only five times in the New Testament, even though the concept itself is taught elsewhere in Scripture. These five occurrences appear in Paul’s letters to three churches of a decidedly Roman background: Galatia, Ephesus, and Rome (Galatians 4:5; Romans 8:15, 23; 9:4, and Ephesians 1:5).

Other than the one reference where Paul spoke of the Old Testament idea of Israel’s special position as God’s children (Romans 9:4), the remaining four references describe how spiritual orphans become God’s children.

This picture of adoption is central for understanding the gospel because it involves the full scope of God’s gracious work of salvation—past, present, and future are all seen in this description of salvation as adoption. God chose us in eternity past (Ephesians 1:5), He brought us to a place of faith in the present, and He promises to complete what has started on earth in the future. Regarding our future, we understand that we are adopted “now” (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5) but have “not yet” received the fullness of God’s grace that will be revealed to us when He returns (Romans 8:23).

Indeed, the doctrine of adoption is deep and glorious. John Piper presents “eight similarities” about God’s adoption of us and our adoption of children in his sermon, “Adoption: The Heart of the Gospel.” I’m indebted to Piper for first pointing out these similarities to me. I’ve meditated on them for a few years now, as I’ve considered them in view of my family’s adoption story. As you read, I pray you will be freshly amazed by God’s adopting mercy and grace. As a result, may this understanding of God’s grace to you spill over into practical acts of mercy for the fatherless in our world.

ADOPTION INVOLVES PURPOSEFUL PLANNING

O ur adoption of children takes serious planning. Kimberly and I had to make arrangements. We got a minivan. We changed the rooms. We thought about names. We looked at financial matters.

A lot of work goes into this planning, and a lot of resolve to finish the work. But God’s plans of spiritual adoption are far superior.

Paul writes to the Galatians:
But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

—Galatians 4:4–7

Notice in the first line, “the fullness of time”. According to God’s divine timetable, God sent forth Christ to redeem and adopt us for His glory. In other words, this wasn’t the last resort for God. No, it was His sovereign plan. At just the right time, God sent forth the Savior on a rescue mission.

To the Ephesians, Paul reaches back before the foundation of the world and says:

Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.

—Ephesians 1:4–5

Paul heaps phrase upon phrase to show us God’s wise and gracious plan. He says that God purposed to adopt us “before the foundation of the world” and that He “predestined us for adoption as sons.”

I admit that I cannot fully understand this dimension of God’s grace. I think it’s beyond the reach of my three-pound, fallen brain to fully comprehend. What is clear to me is that Paul writes Ephesians 1 as one lengthy sentence of worship (note the phrases, “blessed” [1:3] “to the praise of his glorious grace” [1:6]; “to the praise of his glory” [1:12]; “to the praise of his glory” [1:14]). Paul clearly intends for his readers to be swept up in the worship of the Triune God who has lavished grace upon sinners. It’s sad when people prefer to read this passage and only play philosophical gymnastics, trying to explain how human choice and God’s sovereignty work together. Both are taught in Scripture. Don’t miss the point: If you know Christ, you should fall on your face in worship before the Father because it’s only by His gracious plan that you do.
ADOPTION REQUIRES THE RIGHT QUALIFICATIONS

Not everyone is allowed to adopt children. This is a good thing. The world is full of crazy people who wish to harm children. Consequently, those who wish to adopt children must go through a series of background checks and questioning sessions. Our social workers and governmental workers knew more about me by the time we were finished than my parents know! They checked our finances. They checked to see if our home was suitable and safe for children. They checked our past history. We had to meet certain qualifications.

Jesus Christ alone had all the right qualifications to save us and make us children of God. Paul says, “God sent forth his Son, born of woman” (Galatians 4:4). Notice that God “sent . . . his Son” but He was “born of woman.” Which was it? Both. This verse causes us to consider the virgin birth and the incarnation. Only Jesus was qualified to redeem and adopt us because only He is the God-man. Only Christ could be the mediator between man and God (1 Timothy 2:5); only Christ could be our sympathetic high priest (Hebrews 4:15); only Christ could be the Savior because He is the only one with all the credentials. His blood on the Cross was the blood of God (Acts 20:28), atoning for the sins of finite creatures, making us ex-orphans. Praise God, the Son, the only One who could rescue us, did just that!

ADOPTION IS COSTLY

Perhaps the biggest question and obstacle to adoption is the price. It costs a lot of money to adopt children. It also costs time, commitment, and painful changes. It’s not the path of least resistance. Kimberly and I had to go through physicals, background checks, and a number of interviews and questioning segments, along with the worries about how to pay for it all. We were told adopting one child would be about $16,000, plus travel and paperwork.
Galatians 4 reminds us that it cost God the Father infinitely more to adopt us. Paul writes, “God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (1 Timothy 2:5; emphasis added). Jesus redeemed us. He purchased us. He freed us. How? Paul answers that in Galatians 3:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.”

—Galatians 3:13

While it costs us a lot to adopt children, it cost God the blood of His own Son. It cost Christ to give up His whole life, in obedience to the Father. Christ, the one who “endured the cross” (Hebrews 12:1–2) came to redeem us and make us part of the family.

ADOPTION SAVES CHILDREN FROM TERRIBLE SITUATIONS

Any kid without a mom or dad is in a terrible situation. That alone is devastating enough. Others have added to this terrible emotional and physical abuse from their past. Some are sick. Others are depressed and hopeless. Before the orphanage picked up my sister’s son, Beniam, he was living on the streets, and just three years old. Her next addition to the family, a little girl they named Mercy, was diagnosed with HIV.

Millions of other orphans have never experienced some of the enjoyments that we take for granted. No Christmas. No birthdays. No dad to take them to a baseball game; no mom to help them do multiplication; no one to tuck them in at night and pray with them. No family vacations. No father-daughter dates. No father-son fishing trips. Perhaps my most vivid memory of the state of orphans in orphanages was seeing about 25 beds in one room. There was barely room to go through there. I think about that picture when I hear Steven Curtis Chapman’s song “Heaven Is a Place” when he says, “When there’s no one left in the orphan’s bed.” I long for the new heaven and new earth, when orphanages are no longer necessary.

Without minimizing the terrible experiences of orphans, I want to remind
you that we were in a worse state spiritually. Paul tells the Ephesians that we were dead in our sins; that we followed Satan; that we were full of disobedience and depravity; and objects of God’s wrath (Ephesians 2:1–3). And then he uses those two words that are so sweet, “But God.” He said, “But God . . . made us alive together with Christ” (Ephesians 2:4–5). Out of God’s grace and mercy, He brought us out of our terrible situations and brought us into a relationship with Him through the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:13). In Galatians, he says that God took us from slavery to sonship (Galatians 4:1–7). Don’t ever get over the fact that when we were hopeless, without God and under the judgment of God, God came in His mercy to make us part of the family in Christ Jesus.

ADOPTION INVOLVES A LEGAL CHANGE

When we set out to adopt, and then selected our kids, it was not official until the legal process was over. I will never forget when the judge slammed the gavel and made the children legally ours. Everything at that point changed. They were our children. Their birth certificates would state that we were the parents, and they bore our name. The identities of the children changed forever. Even though they were outside our families, they were legally declared our children by the one with the authority to declare it so.

Theologically, Christians share a greater blessing. Salvation is often described with terms like justification (declared righteous), redemption (set free), or reconciliation (at peace with God). The concept of justification is taken from the courtroom. God declares us righteous before Himself based upon the work of Christ, who took the penalty that we deserved. By faith in Christ, God credits to us the merits of Jesus.

But our salvation is not just a legal transfer. It begins with a transfer, but it leads to a familial relationship. Our spiritual identity has changed. We are legally God’s children. This is why J. I. Packer says, “Adoption is the highest privilege of the Gospel; higher even than justification.” It’s not more important than justification. You must be right with
God the Judge. But it doesn’t stop there. This legal transfer brings you into the family of God.

ADOPTION INVOLVES THE SPIRIT OF SONSHIP

I wondered how the children would respond to us, and how long it would take for them to call us Mom and Dad. I’ll never forget the second day in the orphanage when Angela said, “Mama” and the next day when she said, “Papa.” I know these are our kids, not just because the legal work is done, but because of experiential connection we share. That’s why when people ask us how our lives have changed I tell them that it just seems natural. There is a mysterious element in adopting children that’s hard to express.

Similarly, Paul reminds the Galatians that God “sent the Spirit of his son into our hearts, crying “Abba! Father.” Abba was a term of endearment. It was a word Jesus used when He was praying in Gethsemane, “Abba Father” (Mark 14:36). Everywhere Christians go they can be sure that their Abba Father is with them because of the Spirit of sonship in our hearts. To the Romans, Paul writes, “You have received a spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Romans 8:15–16). Because we have the Spirit of sonship we need to not fear, but trust and obey in our heavenly Father.

ADOPTION TRANSFORMS THE CHILD IN EVERY WAY

I remember visiting my sister during the early days of their adoption. Derara was watching television. I asked him what he was watching, and he said, Walker, Texas Ranger. It was his favorite show. Beniam could show me how different baseball players stood at home plate preparing to hit (even though he had never seen a baseball game in Ethiopia). The boys took on phrases, mannerisms, and the language of their parents. They bore all the marks of the family.

I’ll never forget an example of James taking after his father. My first Sunday back home, I was leaving around 3:00 P.M. to return to the church for the 6:00 P.M. service. James insisted on going with me, even though he had many new toys to enjoy. I told him it would be a while, but he said, “Me, church.” He sat
with me in the study as I prepared and then went with me to sit in the front row. I looked over at him and saw that he had his *Jesus Story Book Bible*, his water bottle, and his toy cell phone. I was also carrying a Bible, a cell phone, and a water bottle!

When we are adopted spiritually, everything begins to change because God begins sanctifying us, making us like His Son. Paul says, “*All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God*” (Romans 8:14). We begin to walk according to the will of the Father, bear the marks of the Father, and imitate the Father (Ephesians 5:1). In fact, Jesus says true followers of His desire to let others see our good deeds and give glory to our Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16). That is a radically different pursuit than a world who doesn’t know Christ (but desperately needs to know Him!).

**ADOPTION GIVES THE CHILD THE RIGHT TO BE AN HEIR OF THE FATHER**

If God in His gracious providence gives Kimberly and me biological children, then we would include them in our will the same way that our adopted children will be included. Our four kids are our heirs. They will never be treated less than children that we may have biologically. They will inherit whatever we have.

Spiritually, we are heirs of God. Paul says, “*If children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ*” (Romans 8:17). To the Galatians he says, “*If a son, then an heir through God*” (Galatians 4:7). Paul draws on the Roman background to make these theological statements. Interestingly, several Roman emperors adopted boys for the purpose of conferring on them certain authorities and privileges. Julius Caesar adopted Octavian; Octavian adopted Tiberius, who adopted Gaius Caligula. Gaius Caligula’s uncle adopted Nero just four years before Paul wrote Romans. He and the other rulers were legally sons. We have been given something infinitely greater; namely, the privileges and blessings that come from being an heir of the Father of glory!

The value of the inheritance is determined by the worth of the one who

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“*Whom have I in heaven but you [O LORD]? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.*”
gives it. Our glorious God promises to grant us an inheritance; and in fact, He Himself is our inheritance! Of all the things God could give us, the most precious satisfying reward in the universe is God Himself. The psalmist said, “Whom have I in heaven but you [O Lord]? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you” (Psalm 73:25). God’s people will dwell in God’s presence forever, and there will be nothing more satisfying than this (Revelation 21:3).

Because of the glory of our inheritance that awaits us, we struggle on earth. Paul says that this present suffering produces holy longings for our “future adoption.” He says, “[We] who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:23). In light of the unspeakable joy that awaits the believer when his adoption is fully realized, Paul could write these encouraging words:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

—Romans 8:18

Be encouraged, child of God. Your inheritance awaits you. You will be with your Father forever, apart from the presence of sin, in the warmth of His eternal presence.

GOD SAVES

As I write this paragraph, Kimberly and I are weeks away from traveling to Ethiopia to adopt our fifth child, a son from Ethiopia. We desired a brother for James and wanted to adopt from another part of the world. When prospective boys were shown to us, our hearts leaped for a little boy named Eyasu, which is basically Joshua in English. Joshua’s biological parents died of an illness, and he has no siblings. Interestingly, the name Joshua means “The Lord saves.” What a perfect name! It will serve forever to remind us (and him) that our adoption of Joshua is only a reflection of the most important adoption, the spiritual one that comes from the God who saves spiritual orphans.

Indeed, the gospel transforms not only our identity and eternal destiny, but when rightly understood and applied, it will also transform how we see the world and serve the world. Let us meditate much on the doctrine of God’s
adoption of us. The name might not be Joshua, but it might as well be, if we are Christian. God saved us from our desperate condition, through Jesus (whose name in the Greek Old Testament is exactly the same as “Joshua”). May we continue to grow in our gratitude to the God who saves, and may we radically extend His redeeming love to a world in need.

See the need of the orphan. Feel the need and consider doing something of eternal value by caring for the fatherless in practical ways. Consider adoption. Help adoptive parents. Raise awareness. Develop a fund. Host orphans. Underwrite an orphanage. Do something. Do something for the good of the fatherless and the glory of the God who has made us ex-orphans through Jesus Christ.

— TM

CONTEMPLATING HOW ADOPTION SHOWS THE GOSPEL AND CARES FOR ORPHANS AS GOD INTENDS

AN ORPHAN STORY— RYAN AND LISA BOND

A little over four years ago I sat in a Wednesday night service at Southland Christian Church and watched a film about the fallout of the HIV/AIDS crisis. Orphans. Millions. My seven-year-old son, Noah, sat to the left of me, and my husband of two years sat to his left. I watched as my young son’s face resonated with the children on the screen. His father is Ethiopian. He looked up at me with big, tear-filled eyes and said, “Momma, they’re Ethiopian like me!” As tears streamed down my face, I thought, But they are not like you. They have no parents to love them. I then felt God’s voice stronger than I had ever felt: Some of those will be your children. I sat in stunned silence for a few minutes. My children? Really God? Did you forget about my past? You see, I had been forgiven much. The natural response to that type of forgiveness is to love much (see Luke 7:47).

I kept this quiet for a couple of months (not my norm). On a long drive with my husband I said, “God is calling me to adopt some kids from Ethiopia.”
He grunted and said, “Well He’s not calling me. We have our hands full already. Three is enough.” Ryan, married previous to our marriage, had two children, Adam and Lauren, who came to us on school breaks and for the summer. You know what I said back? Nothing! Now that’s the work of the Holy Spirit. I just sat quietly knowing.

Many months passed with little talk about adoption. Then on the morning of May 9, my and Ryan’s birthday, I woke up to a letter on my nightstand. A letter and a check! The letter read, “I am ready. I feel it too.” The check was enough for the home study.

Two months later, I was cooking dinner and received a call from our case manager. She asked if I had looked at the waiting child photo listing.

“Yes.”

She asked if I was interested in anyone in particular.

“I don’t know.”

She knew of our desire to adopt two boys and my preference that they would not be leaving behind other siblings. She sent me to my computer screen to look at two unrelated boys. I had looked at them earlier because I was looking for siblings. She told me the older of the two, Derara, seven, was leaving behind a little sister who was dying.

“It would help him if you adopted another younger child at the same time,” she said. She then led me to a three- or four-year-old boy named Beniam, who had been living on the streets. He had great big eyes and no smile.

And I knew. I slid in my computer chair, put my face in my hands, and wept. After gaining some composure I called my husband. Still crying, I whispered, “I just saw our boys!”

Six months later, Ryan, Noah, Noah’s dad (Dawit), and I boarded Ethiopian Airlines to go pick up our young sons. We arrived in Addis Ababa on December 31. We were met at the airport by Dawit’s cousin, who drove us to his parents’ house where we spent our first night. After greeting Noah’s aunt and uncle and having a meal, we turned in for the night. None of us slept, not a wink. Ryan, Noah, and I shared a room with twin beds, and we simply lay there talking. Like kids on Christmas eve, the morning couldn’t come quickly enough.

The day you meet your adopted children is like no other day in your life. We were driven into the compound and my mind was a swirl of questioning thoughts: What if I don’t recognize them? What if they don’t like me? What if I don’t know what to say? As we pulled through the gates of the compound,
I saw him . . . Derara. He was wearing his traditional Ethiopian clothes. I began to cry, knowing that this child—this special gift—had put on his best for us. This, the day he got new parents, he wanted to look his best.

We got out of the cab; he came over to us; and I wrapped him in my arms. I loved him. I loved him before I ever knew him. Before he was ever born, God knew this moment would take place. As he left my arms and went to Ryan’s, little Beniam Teraku inched toward me. I picked him up and held him. He was so tiny. He looked so sad. I prayed for strength to help him heal from the hurts he’d experienced already in his young life. Dawit was behind us snapping pictures. He wasn’t there for the birth of our son Noah, but he was our cameraman for the birth of our new family. Derara and Beniam were not the only ones getting a front-row seat to God’s redemptive, restorative character.

A few months after we had been home, Noah came downstairs and said, “Momma, Derara is crying for his little sister. He does this every night.”

I went upstairs, climbed in bed behind him, curled up, and cried with him. “We will find her. We will find her, and we will bring her home,” I whispered.

The next morning, I emailed our pastor and relayed the story Derara had shared with us of his sister being taken from him during the night at his first orphanage. I told him we wanted to find her, and we wanted to bring her home. Somehow I knew she wasn’t dead. He invited us onstage to be prayed over that same weekend. We were onstage on a Saturday night. Kaleab was found Tuesday! One orphan girl among millions! We started our paperwork.

One year later, as we began preparations to go pick up Kaleab, we were again summoned to Derara’s bedside. By this time, he was speaking English and had told us about his whole family and the deaths of his parents. “I want you to find my older brothers and sister and give them the money I have in my bank account.” He had about two hundred dollars in his account. We contacted the attorney who had worked with us on his adoption. He said he knew where the family lived and could take us there when we arrived. Less than two years from our first adoption, we boarded the flight to pick up our baby girl, four-year-old Kaleab.
We met her the day after our arrival in Ethiopia. The drive was filled with much the same emotion as on our first trip. When the gate to the compound opened, my heart leaped. I was scanning the porch for her; it was full with about ten little snotty-nosed four-year-olds, and I didn’t see her—and then she came out slowly on the hand of the nanny, walking down the stairs, both shy and proud, and I began to cry. She was—she is—so beautiful.

The next day found us in a car to Woliso, Ethiopia; we were going to meet Kaleab and Derara’s older brother and sister. I was dreaming of which of those four-year-olds I’d come back for the next year when I again sensed God speak to me. I knew this drive was not to visit my children’s siblings but to visit my children! I wrestled with God. God I don’t want these old kids. It’s too hard. God I want one of the little ones. Isn’t that enough? I can’t do this. I kept hearing in my heart: “I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper and not to harm you. Plans to give you a hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11).

We met Selamawit, Biruk, and Guta at the gate of their home, a small three-roomed shanty. Selam and Guta were thrilled to see Kaleab, showering her with kisses, and they were gracious and friendly with us. Biruk was guarded and standoffish.

We spent the afternoon showing them pictures of Derara and other family. They shared a meal with us. We got to meet aunts, uncles, cousins, and even Grandma. That evening, we left, heavy-hearted, knowing we were leaving our family behind. Knowing, as Biruk had told us, he was sending Selam and Guta to Immanuel orphanage. He could no longer afford to feed them.

Shortly after we arrived back in the US, we began making the necessary contacts to adopt these two older siblings. Funny how less than three years ago, I wanted no girls. I wanted a child who was leaving behind no other siblings, and now we were planning our fourth and fifth adoptions. What I had thought of as harmful to me, God meant for good (Genesis 50:20).

One year later, we boarded a plane to Ethiopia. This time, we were accompanied by ten-year-old Derara. His grandma didn’t even know it, but she was getting her wish to see her grandbaby once again.

We arrived in Ethiopia, and our case manager told us that she had a surprise for us. We walked up the stairs of the guesthouse to our room, and out of the door bounded Selam and Guta! We all hugged and cried. And we all thanked God for His goodness and His faithfulness!
In six years, we went from one child to eight! There have been hard times. There has been opposition. I had to change and learn how to be this “megamom.”

I still have work to do. People often ask me how I do it: “How do you keep up with the laundry? How do you get everyone to their activities? How do you spend time with each child?” The answer is simple: I don’t.
Orphan care is more than just adoption. At the heart of orphan care is grace. Grace that flows from Christ’s redemptive work on the Cross. Grace that reconciles us with God. Grace that we extend through the care of orphans and others.

The needs are urgent. Who will stand up for these tens of millions of children around the world? Or closer to home, who will step up to provide loving, Christian care for children in America’s foster care system?

With openness and integrity, Rick and Tony speak from firsthand experience. Orphanology details practical ways to get involved such as:

- Assisting adoptive parents in down-to-earth fashion
- Raising awareness of the crisis in orphan and foster care
- Developing a fund to assist potential adoptions
- Hosting orphans for a summer
- Underwriting an orphanage
- Starting an orphan care ministry in the local church

“Rarely have I been stunned by a book. I was stunned by this one. It is drenched in biblical Christianity. I genuinely think it should come with a warning. Consider this your warning. God may seriously upset your future plans as you interact with these pages. I imagine that you have asked Him often to lead you. He may use this book to lead you in a way you never imagined. But as Tony and Rick can testify, it may lead you to some of the greatest blessings on this earth.”—STEVE FARRAR, author of Point Man

“The orphan is not a cause. The orphan is not an issue. The orphan has a human face, and that face is Galilean. Jesus tells us that when we see the poor, the weak, the vulnerable, the tossed aside, we see Him there. Tony Merida, one of the most brilliant and passionate preachers in evangelical Christianity today, calls us to remember the orphan as we follow Christ.”—RUSSELL D. MOORE, author of Adopted for Life

“Tony Merida and Rick Morton have gotten to the heart of the question as to why it is the calling of the church to engage in the plight of the fatherless. Their thoroughly biblical and pragmatic answers to that question are a long-awaited wake-up call to the American church.”—MATT CARTER, lead pastor, The Austin Stone Community Church

About the Authors

Tony Merida and Rick Morton are living examples of James 1:27—they have a combined eight adopted children between their families.

Rick, along with his wife, Denise, played an integral role in the cofounding of Promise 139, an international orphan-hosting ministry. He serves as discipleship pastor at Temple Baptist Church in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and has numerous youth ministry publications to his credit.

Pastor, professor, and father of five, Tony Merida has quickly become a leading voice in the growing movement for adoption and orphan care. His passion for the fatherless is evident through his writing, teaching, and speaking. Find out more about Tony online at www.tonymerida.net.