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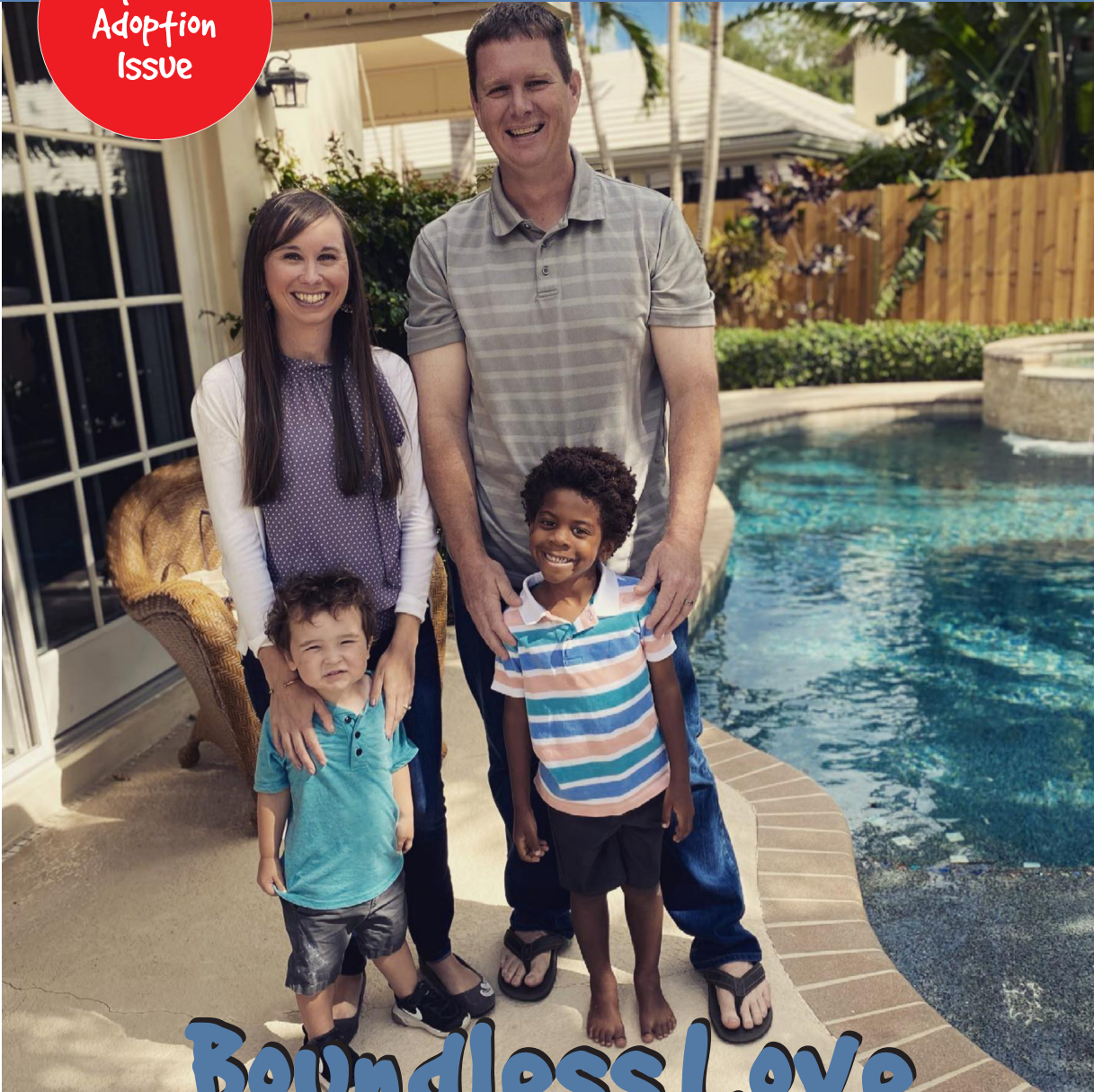


The Believer's Byline

A Publication of Thrive Christian Press

Winter
2022

Special
Adoption
Issue



Boundless Love

By David Scott Fields II

Adoption is one of God's greatest gifts. Without it, none of us would ever see the Kingdom of Heaven. We are told in Scripture, "In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1:5-6 - NASB). Every believer is redeemed through this special form of adoption, so it is hardly surprising that many faithful followers of Christ would want to imitate their Creator through another form of adoption - the kind that gives loving homes to so many children in need. This issue of The Believer's Byline will focus on four families who have participated in the ministry of adoption.

SOUTH FLORIDA - We begin with the story of a dear couple from Florida, Matt and Erin, and their two precious adopted sons, Benji and Charlie. Like any faithful Christian couple, the love Matt and Erin share with each other and their sons began with a love for Christ and His Church. As Matt explained, "The short version is we met here at church, and we started serving in children's ministry together and that led to dating and marriage."

Now over eight years into their marriage, Matt and Erin can certainly look back and see God's faithfulness, but the journey has been far from easy. Erin picked up the story of their adoption journey here saying, "We had a hard time getting pregnant because of my health issues. We hadn't really talked

about it [adoption], but it was always one of those things in the back our minds, like Plan B." Erin received counsel from a friend reminding her that not everyone is called to adoption. Erin's friend's question was simply, "Do you just want to be a mom or do you want to have your own kids?" In the moment, Erin honestly did not have a response, but as He so often does, the Lord used time to bring about the answer.

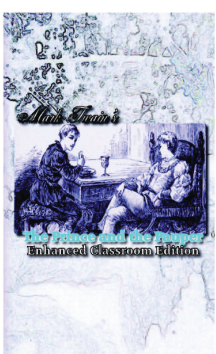
Erin would later return to her friend and mentor, who had recently adopted. In the process of that adoption, Erin's mentor had heard the story of Benji's birth mother. She had conceived him after being raped and was going to give the baby up for adoption once he was born. At the time, Erin's mentor thought Erin's brother and sister-in-law might be interested in the adoption. They were foster parents at the time. However, she did not realize that the Lord would use that mother's story to begin a stirring in Erin's own heart. As she put it, "I became softened. I think that's when I learned I just wanted to be a mom. I didn't really care if it was biologically."

The Lord used time to prepare Erin, but once that happened everything else started speeding up. She went home and told Matt the incredible story of the soon-to-be born little boy needing a family. Matt's response was encouraging when he said, "Okay, let's talk about it." But as Erin related, her response was, "Well, we kind of need to know in like a week!" Matt chuckled at that memory, and no doubt such a fast deadline seemed like an impossibility. Thankfully, Matt and Erin serve a God who specializes in the impossible.

The reason for the tight deadline was that the birth mother would soon be presented with books introducing potential parents to her. From these details, she would choose the couple who would raise her son. Matt and Erin wasted no time. First, they sought counsel from a family in their church who had also adopted. Their number one question was, "How do we think through this?"

Erin was 100% committed by that point, but multiple barriers to the adoption still stood in the way. Far from least among them was the financial barrier. As Matt detailed, "It's between \$30,000 and \$40,000 to adopt. You have to pay the attorney's fees, and then you pay all of the birth mom's living expenses and the medical and all that."

Though both Matt and Erin were working at the time, it was still a huge amount to come up with.



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FOLLOWING FATHER'S EXAMPLE A Joyful 'toon by Mike Waters



Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. EPHESIANS 5:1-2 NIV

The Believer's Byline - Adoption Series



There are grants and scholarships for families looking to adopt, but these are never certain. Ultimately, Matt decided, "Let's put our book in. If the Lord wants us to have the baby, He will pick us and if not He won't."

And He did! After reviewing the books of the perspective families, the birth mother chose Matt and Erin. As Erin explained, "She picked fast! She got our books and said, 'That one!' It was definitely the Lord's will." Then Erin added with conviction, "It was good for us because we really had to trust the Lord." At the time, the birth mother had another six months to go in her pregnancy. Usually matches are not made so early, but it was done this time because of her very difficult circumstances.

Matt then went on, "We began doing research and found a bunch of scholarships, and the Lord provided in many weird and mysterious ways." One of those ways was through the \$14,000 tax credit offered to adopting families, but this is not available until the year after the adoption is finalized. Even so, the Lord proved faithful, and six months later they were able to bring little Benji home.

And Matt and Erin's family did not stop growing there. In the course of time, they decided they wanted to have a sibling for Benji, and that is where Charlie's story begins. Says Erin, "We met her [Benji's mother] with six months to go, but he [Charlie] was already born." Prior to this, two previous attempts at adopting a sibling for Benji had fallen through. However, with Charlie they were told, "I have a baby already born, so this is going to be fast!" Charlie was two weeks old when they learned about him, and by week five the birth mother had chosen Matt and Erin to be his parents. Recalling the swiftness of it all, Erin said, "We got the call that we were picked on Monday and picked him up on Thursday. It was a

whirlwind!"

After hearing the stories of these two incredible parents and their adopted boys, I had to ask, "What do you think has been the greatest reward and the greatest challenge of being adoptive parents?" For Erin the primary benefit is "...the spiritual picture of adoption. You being strangers to these children. You do not know them at all. Then all of a sudden they are at your table, and they get all the benefits of your family - forever! We don't stop loving them. We don't give them back. Just like with Christ. We start as His enemies. We don't know Him at all, and then all of a sudden we are part of His family - forever!"

Matt and Erin also related the fact that for Benji, one of the miraculous benefits of his adoption was sustaining his life itself. Says Matt, "Especially with Benji, he would probably be dead. With all of his health issues, his birth mother would not have known what to do. The Lord saved him physically and hopefully the Lord saves him spiritually." That is a prayer that will no doubt be shared by every minister of the Word who meets Benji and Charlie.

The greatest challenge, as Matt explained, is knowing when and how much information to reveal to the boys about their birth families. A day comes sooner or later for most adopted children when they ask, "Where do I come from?" For now, Matt's answer is, "Little minds. Little information. They don't know much now, and they don't need to. As they get older, we'll explain more and let them know what is going on. We probably won't let them meet their birth parents until they are 18, but at 18 they can make their own decisions."

Until then Matt and Erin will continue to look to the Lord and His Church for love,

support, and wisdom as they continue to navigate the waters of what it means to be adoptive parents. As we wrapped up the interview, I asked, "For anyone considering adoption, what advice would you give them?" Matt was spot on with his counsel, "Definitely pray about it and ask the Lord for wisdom. It is not for everybody. Some people just want to have their own children, and that is totally fine, but adoption is great, we love it, and we wouldn't trade it for anything." Erin then added, "Seeking wise counsel from people who have already done it is helpful and asking questions. And I think the biggest thing is again, do you want to be a mom and dad, or do you want to have your own biological children?"

Matt and Erin's adoption story is far from over. They are currently in the queue awaiting the possibility of adopting another child. Says Erin, "We would love a girl - but, of course, we love boys too." It is my prayer that the Lord will continue to bless this sweet family. I also pray that their story can be an inspiration to those considering adoption. Matt and Erin chose to trust the Lord, and He came through with His sure provision and boundless love - as He always does.

Mental Math

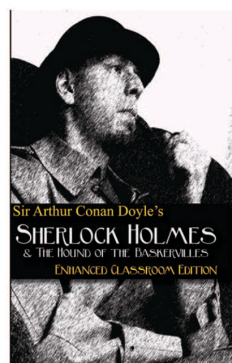
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Directions: The missing values are the whole numbers between 1 and 9. Each number is only used once. Each row is a math equation. Each column is a math equation. Remember that multiplication and division are performed before addition and subtraction.

Famous Fictional Adoptees

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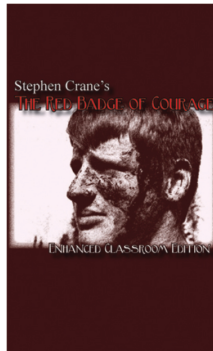
- Annie Rapunzel
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JUPITER, FLORIDA - Several years ago, I had the pleasure of serving alongside Mrs. Carrie Fors in Children's Ministry at Grace Immanuel Bible Church of Jupiter, Florida. It was probably only the first day of knowing her when I learned that she and her husband, Jesse, have a huge heart for the ministry of adoption. In addition to their three biological children, the Fors have adopted four children from the foster care system here in Florida. Theirs is among the most powerful adoption stories I have ever heard. What follows is that story. Actually, in this interview, I asked very few questions. It seemed the Lord had already prepared their hearts with exactly what to say, and I sat in awe of the Lord's graciousness as I listened to their story unfold.

Jesse began by recounting how he and Carrie first met. As he explained, "We met at a family get-together for my side of the family. She was actually friends with my niece, so we kind of knew each other because she worked at a bank I was doing business with." There was an immediate interest between the two, but there was also a problem. Jesse was not a Christian at the time, and as Carrie added, "Shame on me, because I was a professing Christian."

Jesse continued, "She should not have expressed an interest in me, but she was different. I had dated other girls, but there was something refreshing about her, so we embarked on a relationship together." The two had many great times together, but soon enough the Lord would bring their differences to the forefront. Though raised in the Catholic Church, Jesse had absolutely no interest in it. The instant he was old enough, Jesse decided he would never darken the door of a church again. Carrie, on the other hand, attended church every Sunday.

As she explained, "The strange thing was, when we first met, after a few hours of talking, he asked, 'Are you a Christian?'" At the time Carrie was convicted because she did not think she had given him any indication that she was a believer, but she told him that she was. Jesse then remarked that his mom wanted him to marry a Christian, but it was a generic term to him. If you believed in God, you were a Christian. If you didn't, you were an atheist. He had absolutely no context for what a relationship with Christ would look like.

Eventually, Carrie began attending Grace Immanuel, and she brought Jesse along. As he put it, "It was okay. It wasn't the Catholic Church with all the calisthenics of standing and kneeling and all that. The pastor was a good speaker, dynamic - interesting." In the process of time, the Lord used the fact that the Gospel was being shared in a way unlike Jesse had ever heard before in the Catholic Church to begin drawing him closer to Christ. He made a profession of faith early on, but as he related, "Knowing that [Carrie] shouldn't be in a relationship with someone who wasn't a Christian - part of that drove my profession of faith. Looking back, I don't know that the Lord actually saved me then, but I do know there was some conviction of sin in my life." It took many years before Jesse was certain of his standing before Christ. Though several had erroneously told him that if you did not recall the day and time of your salvation, you weren't really saved, it was the coming of Pastor Jerry Wragg that made things much clearer. "It's actually God's work. God is



By David Scott Fields II

the one who makes you alive. You make a decision, but that is not what saves you," Jesse explained.

As Jesse and Carrie grew both in Christ and closer to each other, they were married and decided they were going to start a family. However, this presented a rather amusing conundrum for the two of them. Jesse had grown up in a large family of nine kids, yet he hated the chaos and noise that came along with it. At the start of their marriage, he would have much preferred for he and Carrie to have a smaller family. Carrie, on the other hand, had grown up with only one sibling isolated in the wilds of Jonathan Dickinson State Park, where her father worked as a ranger. As such, she loved the idea of having a huge family of her own. The chaos and the noise that would come with it were of no consequence. Carrie laughed as she said, "We are very opposite!"

The couple had talked about adoption before ever getting married. In fact, Carrie had been imagining it since she was a child - pretending to adopt children, reading books about orphans, and often bringing her mother articles about children needing placement. However, though Jesse had always loved children, he was not too keen on having a lot of them. Even so, the idea of children without a home easily tugged on his heart. They got their family started with their three biological kids, but then after two miscarriages with unknown causes, Jesse and Carrie decided not to have any more biological children. Little did they realize, the Lord was not done growing their family.

Adoption continued to be a thought in the back of their minds, but it was not something they had ever followed through with. They knew the Lord had already blessed them greatly with their three kids. However, as the years rolled by and they began to realize the great need for adoptive parents, the Lord brought the idea back to the forefront. And they realized that this would not be about growing their family (though that would come naturally). Rather, this would be about serving in any way they could. As Carrie shared, there are over 400,000 children needing to be adopted here in the United States alone

and countless more around the world.

So, about 14 years ago, they began looking into the process more seriously. They didn't know where to go at first. With the options of private adoption, overseas adoption, and foster adoption, it was hard to know which would be the right fit. Jesse did not want to be a foster parent because he did not want the children leaving their home. This would be an all or nothing proposition for the Fors. Soon enough, they realized there were plenty of kids in the United States needing homes, so they decided to focus their efforts here instead of looking abroad. As it would turn out, they got their foot in the door of foster adoption right at Grace Immanuel.

As Carrie explained, "There was a woman going [to GIBC] who had two foster children with her, so I just asked her one day, 'Are these kids up for adoption.'" The kids were. Their parents' rights had recently been terminated, and a forever family was needed for them. The Fors began praying, and they shared the idea with their kids. However, the Fors kids were upset with the idea - especially the idea of adopting two older kids. Carrie and Jesse knew they needed their kids onboard with the idea, so they backed off of this opportunity. In His graciousness, the Lord provided a permanent home for the young brother and sister with another family at GIBC. However, he wasn't done working on the Fors just yet.

At the time, Jesse's sister was in a mentoring program where she taught an adult literacy class. While there, she met a woman who was the foster mother of an 18-month-old who she was not going to adopt. Jesse's sister gave the Fors the caseworker's phone number, and they called immediately. Hope seemed dim with that call. Over 50 applications had already been received for the little boy, and the caseworker had been told not to accept any more. However, speaking

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with the Fors, she said, "For some reason, I feel like I need to take your application, but you need to get the home study to me in three days."

For those unfamiliar with the process, an adoption home study normally takes six to eight weeks, and the Fors had no idea where to start. Again, the Lord provided the answer right in their own church. The Fors were told, "Call Melanie!" Specifically, Melanie Kotecki who worked at *Place of Hope*, a foster and adoption facility. Melanie had their home study done in two days. Next, there was a ten-week class to take in only two-weeks' time. Melanie again came to the rescue, finding a teacher who came to the Fors' home and taught the whole class in just two 15-hour weekends. What should have taken several months from start to finish was completed in just two weeks. How great is our God!

Even so, the Fors were told not to get their hopes up. They were forewarned that since they were not actual foster parents and their application was really late, it would be virtually impossible that they would be chosen as the placement for the young boy. However, in faith they kept their application in and a few weeks later they were informed they were among the four remaining candidates. There was a long silence after that, and the Fors were left wondering. Then the day finally came. As Carrie recalled, "I get home one day, and I start to play the messages on our answering machine. At the same time, a friend had just come to the front door, so we are listening to the messages together and it's them calling, telling us we have been chosen for this little boy." Carrie recalled her friend getting a funny look on her face as the message played. You see, the main caseworker who called was her neighbor that she had known for years. It was one of many miracles that occurred during the process.

Another occurred as the Fors began visitations with the boy, Ryan, and Carrie began to post on social media that they had been accepted as his adoptive parents. Another family from Grace Immanuel reached out and asked to learn more about Ryan. When two and two were put together, the Fors learned that this family had lived right next door to Ryan when he was a newborn. As Carrie put it, "They would babysit Ryan because his mom would be such a mess that they were trying to protect him." When Ryan was ten months old, his birth mom told this family that she had given him away. In reality, the police had come and taken him. Not knowing where Ryan was, this family had prayed for him. A year later, their prayers were answered as Ryan became forever a part of the Fors family.

Ryan is almost 14 now. When he was about five, his biological mother gave birth to his brother, and the Fors attempted to pursue adopting him as well. Usually, it is state mandate that siblings be placed together. However, due to several loopholes in the system and caseworkers not doing their homework, this opportunity fell through. It was because of this that when a nine-month-old baby girl became available a few months later, the Fors were among the first to be

called. The approval process ended up being so easy this time around, and the little girl, Taylor, was in their home within six weeks.

At the time, with three biological kids and two adoptive kids, it would have appeared to any outsider that both the Fors' hearts and their home were full, but the Lord was just getting things warmed up. Not so far down the road, three nieces and a nephew of one of Jesse's cousins in the Carolinas were in foster care in Port Saint Lucie. She wanted to get them out of the system and adopt them, but she didn't know where to start. She reached out to the Fors for help, and specifically to Carrie. Carrie started to work with her and advocate for her in the system. One of the nieces and the nephew ended up being adopted by the foster parents they were living with. This left two remaining, but out of state adoptions can be incredibly difficult. At every turn in the process,



there seemed to be another dead end. This went on for two years before Jesse's cousin and her husband decided they couldn't continue.

By that point, Carrie had been advocating for these kids for years – though she and Jesse had never met them. It seemed only logical that the Fors continue to fight for them and bring them into their own home. Carrie recalled, "I asked him 'What do you think?' And he said no...at first." However, in the end, both the Lord and Carrie prevailed, and the Fors once again submitted an application to become adoptive parents. This time the process was far from easy. As Carrie explained, "The system is broken. The problem is the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing... they don't pass information on... and the turnover rate is high. The average time for a caseworker is three months." However, the Fors had learned they needed to be fairly aggressive in the process, so they did not give up. They continued to rely on the support of their friends, family, church, and ultimately the Lord, and finally the girls, Layla (7) and Hailey (6) found a home with the Fors.

Over the years, Jesse and Carrie have continued to be open to welcoming new children

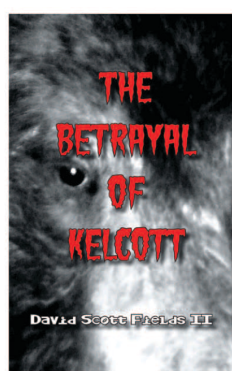
into their home. In fact, during 2019-2020 they provided a temporary home to a teen girl who had been part of a failed adoption. This girl, now 15, still calls Carrie and Jesse Mom and Dad, though she currently lives in a therapeutic foster home as she deals with her past.

As we wrapped up this incredible interview, Carrie and Jesse shared these words of caution for those looking to adopt, "Be careful. You may not experience the child that is going to be so grateful that you adopted them. Especially foster adoption – these kids have been through abuse or neglect. Rather, go through it with the mindset that this is a ministry. The kids may never appreciate it, but that is not why you do it. You can't go into it with the Superman or the hero mindset because you are going to be greatly disappointed if the child is not bowing at your knee and thanking you. We've seen parents frustrated by that, but they are kids. They are not always going to be thankful."

Jesse concluded by saying, "It's such an incredible parallel to the Gospel for us." One judge, who they actually suspected of being a believer, reminded them that through adoption children literally and legally become part of your family forever. It is exactly the same with the Gospel. As Romans 8:15-17 reminds us:

"For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons and daughters by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him."

God's grace, provision, and most of all love are abundantly evident in Jesse and Carrie Fors. They would be the first to tell you being adoptive parents is not easy. In fact, it may be one of the hardest things in life. Nevertheless, I am convinced they have proved true and faithful models of Christ for all the children who have entered their home. I am truly grateful for the opportunity I had to sit down with them and hear their story. I pray it will inspire others to take a similar journey, always keeping in mind the true purpose of adoption and parenthood in general is to model Christ and bring lost souls into His Kingdom. Truly that is the most amazing ministry of them all!



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Hint: Search "Adoption" in NASB.

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PARBHANI, INDIA - Busy airports are a hallmark of the Thanksgiving holiday. As countless strangers brush past each other, it is easy for one face to blend into another and for each story and each destination to become little more than a footnote in your own travel plans. Were you to sit down with any of these travelers, you would no doubt hear countless tales. Each is worthy of its own telling. However, if you happened to find yourself struggling through the long lines of Miami International Airport this past Thanksgiving, you might just have chanced upon Shawn and Lauren Waller, a couple from Hobe Sound, Florida with a Thanksgiving story unlike any other. You see, on November 23, 2021, they were not making their way to a family get-together in some frosty northern state. Rather, this year their plans took them to an orphanage in the heart of India to meet and bring home their new daughter, Jubilee.

My friendship with the Wallers began seven years ago before Shawn and Lauren were married – but only just shortly before. However, even long before their marriage began, the Lord was preparing their hearts separately for the journey they would finally make together this year. As Lauren shared on their site www.walleradoption.com, "Shawn's story begins in 2004. In his freshman year of college, the Lord brought him to repentance and salvation when confronted with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. While attending college to become a physical therapist like his dad, the Lord gave him a heart to see others come to know Christ, both in this country and abroad. As he was considering medical missions as a means to do that, the Lord directed his heart to take a short trip to Brazil. During his time there, he was brought to the favelas, or slums, where he saw many children living in the streets suffering from malnutrition, starvation, and poor health. It seemed a dark place with no hope. While he couldn't physically bring the children back to the States, he brought their faces and their stories home with him in his heart. This was the first seed that God planted deep inside him prior to meeting me."

Still pre-Shawn, some years later in 2011, Lauren made her own international missions journey to Purani



The Year of Jubilee

By David Scott Fields II

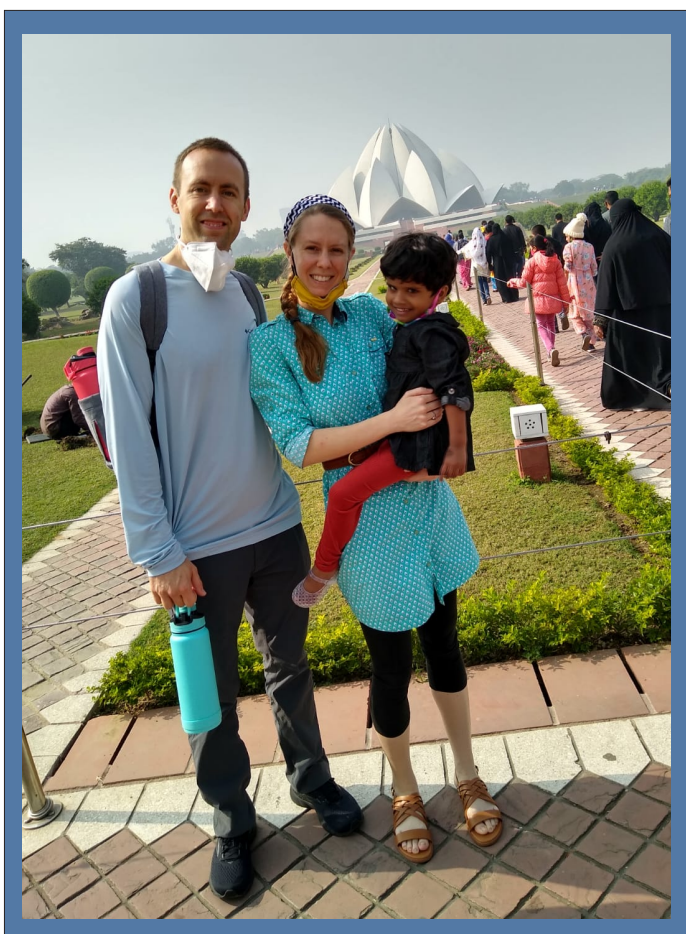
Khondi, India where she and her team would "share the matchless treasure of Christ with children [they] had never met." Of her own story Lauren says, "What we encountered far surpassed any of my expectations. It was clear that the Lord didn't only bring us there to work on others' lives — He had work to do in ours. At these children's camps is where the Lord really started teaching me of the value of children and the value of every human life. Each child is made in the image of God and is a life worth loving (Genesis 1:27). And those gorgeous, eager brown eyes begging for more melt even the hardest of hearts. For the first time, I began to have the desire of having my own children."

Tragically, only three days after this trip, Lauren found herself unconscious in a hospital bed after enduring a horrific car accident. As she put it at the time, "...life was fleeting and the thought of children further." Even so, the Lord is gracious, and after a long and difficult recovery, Lauren was restored to her family and friends, and three years later she married Shawn – the love of her life.

Lauren's accident, which involved a traumatic brain injury, continued to have consequences even years later. Infertility was a real possibility, and Lauren's memories of her life-changing trip to India were "dim, unclear, and a distant, faded, partial-memory." Even so, the desire for children was still strong. As Lauren explained, "...with infertility front-and-center, the strong desire for children, and India still on the mind — however dimly — adoption quickly became an option."

A subsequent pregnancy and then miscarriage, drove home the point to Lauren that she did indeed want children – both biological AND adopted. The Wallers named their unborn child Anaya, which means "God Answered." Though they will not meet Anaya face to face until Heaven, the baby's name proved very appropriate. As Lauren explained, "God answered so many prayers with the fleeting life of Anaya. He answered our prayer for a child — however brief. He answered the prayers for the desire of a child. He calmed my fears of 'will I have a desire for my children? Will God change my heart?' God answered."

In the midst of the recovery and heartbreak from the miscarriage, Shawn began researching adoption options. Ultimately, the Wallers targeted India as the place from which they would adopt – the place where Lauren's longing for children first began. In addition to this, India has the largest orphan



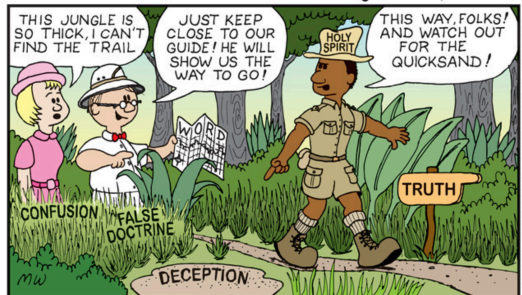
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| Akela | Waingunga | Shere Khan | Tabaqui |
| Bandar-log | Bagheera | Baloo | Lungri |
| Gray Brother | Buldeo | Cold Lairs | Raksha |
| Man-cub | Kaa | Mowgli | Seconce |

JUNGLE GUIDE

A Joyful 'toon by Mike Waters

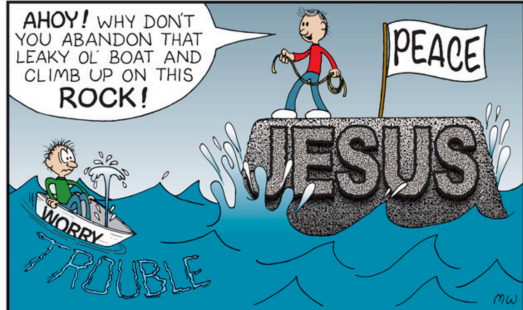


But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

— JOHN 16:13 NIV

PEACE ROCK

A Joyful 'toon by Mike Waters



I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

— JOHN 16:33 NIV

The Believer's Byline – Adoption Series



population in the world – over 30 million. To put that number in perspective, it outdistances the population of the state of Texas by more than a million people. Additionally, life is brutal for the children of India. Baby girls are often buried alive just for being born female, and children are abandoned on the streets and put in orphanages for the most trivial details. For these reasons, India was the only country the Wallers considered in their adoption journey.

So on Christmas Eve 2019, the Wallers submitted their pre-application for adoption. They decided to work with Lifeline Children's Services through the process, but they were warned to be ready to play the long game. According to Lifeline's estimates, the adoption process from India could take anywhere from two to three years.

A little over thirteen months later, on January 31, 2021, Lauren shared on walleradoption.com that they had finally been matched with a prospective little girl. At first, because of their own expectations and ideas of what they could handle, they decided to decline the opportunity. However, after spending several days reviewing both her file and that of several other children, they decided they wanted to take a closer look at this little girl. And yet, more roadblocks popped up. More families were interested in the girl – and these families had been waiting longer. The Wallers knew they needed to wait, pray, and trust in God's timing and provision. And the words of a dear friend brought great comfort, "No one is going to adopt your child." Whether it was this child or another, the Lord had already decided whom the Wallers would adopt – and as Lauren would share on her March 12, 2021 post, "We know who she is!"

She was actually the same girl they had been connected with previously, and the Wallers were elated. As Lauren also wrote that day, "What came before this post was the longest, shortest, most challenging, most emotional, most amazing, and about-any-other-superlative-you-can-think-of-est month ever." One of these amazing things was connecting with a new friend who actually speaks their little girl's language – something spoken by only 6% of India. (How great is our God!) Long before the process began, the Wallers had decided they wanted to name their little girl Jubilee, which means a season or occasion of joyful celebration – and the Wallers certainly had a lot to celebrate,

but the work was not done yet.

What followed were several more months of paperwork, dealing with officials and regulations in multiple countries, and a home study. Then came October 2021. In that month, Jubilee became their child verbally, they received Article 23 (which validates the adoption in the United States and other Hague Convention Countries), applied for emergency Visas, received her birth certificate, and her passport. All that was left was to plan the trip and go get Jubilee!

With all this excitement, and despite the whirlwind of their lives at the time, Shawn and Lauren were gracious enough to sit down with me for an interview just about ten days before they left for India. Having already built plenty of background for my article through their website and our personal conversations over the last almost two years, I decided to begin our interview with the present. I asked, "How has the Lord sustained your faith through this long process?"

Shawn shared first, "When you think about the Christian life, we are called to wait on many things." Shawn is no stranger to waiting – waiting on a spouse into his late 20s and now waiting on a child into his late 30s. However, during his season of waiting he has been admonished by Psalm 84:11, "For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly."

Shawn knew he needed to live his life uprightly and accept Christ as his helper and portion, and trust that the Lord ultimately knew what was best for him. This season of waiting prepared Shawn for the long international adoption process. He added, "Things don't happen in the time I want them to happen, but God knows better than I know." This reality forced the Wallers to lean on Him, which in turn strengthened their faith through the process. With so many things going on behind the scenes that they were unaware of, it was gratifying to know the Lord held every detail firmly in His hands.

One of those details came to the forefront when they saw a video of Jubilee for the first time. As Lauren recounts, "We saw this little girl who was way past walking age, but wasn't walking. But we saw her trying so hard. We saw her get up – fall down – get up – fall down... probably six or eight times before the video ended. All with a huge grin. I saw some things in that video that I was concerned about, but Shawn saw that great determination. Seeing that determination and her willingness to try, we said, 'We want that girl!'"

As mentioned earlier, Jubilee's file was, at the time, under review by another family, so the Wallers had to wait to see it again. That family actually fell in love with her and very much wanted to adopt her. However, because the father was in the military and deployed, they did not feel right about moving forward with her until he was back home. They had to say no, and the file came back to the Wallers – who had also fallen in love with her and were ready to become Jubilee's parents.

Since that time Shawn and Lauren have been able to have video chats with Jubilee, including one on her birthday. Jubilee is still trying to process as much as a five-year-old can the idea of adoption and

who Shawn and Lauren are, but these brief chats have been very encouraging for the Wallers. I asked if Jubilee spoke any English, and Lauren responded saying, "We have actually heard her speak more English than Marathi, but that is a total of five words." This language barrier will be one of many challenges to overcome, but the Wallers are excited to take them on. As Shawn put it, "We're basically starting at zero and working our way back up."

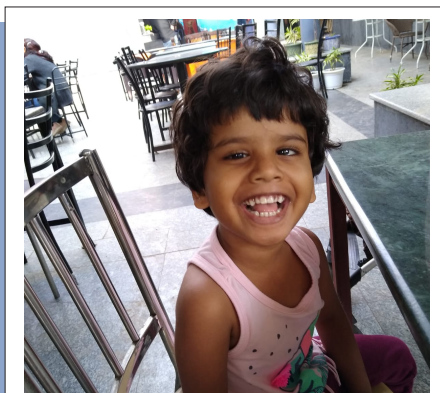
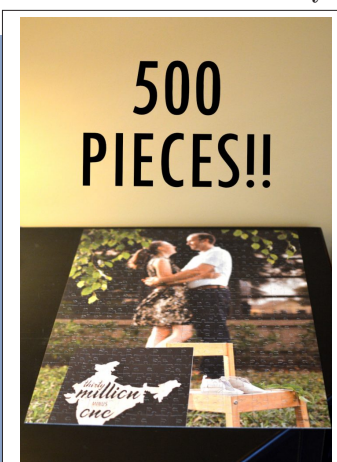
With all the anticipation, paperwork, video chats, phone calls, etc. it might seem like Jubilee has been a part of the Wallers' lives for years, but, at the time of our interview, Jubilee was not home yet. Fast forward to a little over a week later, and the Wallers were finally on their way to India – a journey beginning on November 23 in Miami with a flight to Newark Liberty International and then overnight to New Delhi, India nonstop. Once in New Delhi, they got their bearings and rested overnight in a hotel. Then it was back to the airport for another flight to Jubilee's state of Aurangabad and an airport where people literally get dropped off by camel. Shawn joked that he might just show up at the orphanage by camel, but it is a four hour journey just by car – so maybe not.

Finally, after almost two years since the adoption process started in 2019, on Friday, November 26, 2021, the Wallers made it to the orphanage in Parbhani and met their new daughter face to face. As Lauren shared on her Facebook page, "Introducing Jubilee Arti Elizabeth Waller. The Lord is abundantly kind, and we are smitten."

The Wallers spent a total of two weeks in India. After meeting and picking up Jubilee, they returned to New Delhi for embassy, medical, and exit permit appointments. They also spent time bonding as a new family and doing some sightseeing. Finally though, it was time to return home, and on December 8, 2021, the instant their plane touched down on US soil, Jubilee officially became an American citizen!

Not only that, but she became Shawn and Lauren's daughter in every way. As Lauren explained, "We're even on her birth certificate!" This again is the perfect picture of the Gospel. Though as sinners we are born into the wrong family, through Christ we are adopted into God's family and our names are written not simply on an earthly birth certificate, but in the eternal Lamb's Book of Life. I very much look forward to seeing this gospel picture unfold in the lives of the Wallers.

Shawn, Lauren, and Jubilee are all safely back home in Hobe Sound now. They were welcomed back by their church family with balloons, banners, singing and prayers of gratitude to the Lord. Everyone was excited to see them and elated to meet Jubilee. We will catch up with them again in a future article of *The Believer's Byline* and hear all about their amazing and certainly miracle filled adventures in India. For now though, one thing is certain, and it is bringing great joy to the many people who love Shawn and Lauren – The Year of Jubilee has begun!



PRINEVILLE, OREGON - Having the opportunity to meet with, interview, and write about all the families in *The Believer's Byline* Adoption Series has been incredible. My goal from the beginning has been to show adoption from multiple points of view. So far, I've covered private adoption, foster adoption, and international adoption. I believe each of the families I have written about would agree that their experiences have come with extreme challenges as well as boundless blessings. Even so, for each of these families, the process of raising their adoptive kids is still in progress, so for this article, I would like to focus on a family where the adoptive children have been raised all the way into adulthood. That family happens to be my own.

No, I am not personally adopted, nor do I have my own adopted kids. However, from the time I was about six, foster and eventually adoptive children have been part of the Fields family's life. My parents, Dave and Glenifer, met in Cape Carteret, North Carolina back in 1980. At the time, my dad was finishing his tour of duty in the Marines and my mom, a native North Carolinian, was a schoolteacher in Cape Carteret. They were introduced by mutual friends, and by June of that year, they were married and on the road to Oregon, my dad's home state.

They settled in Stayton, Oregon to be near my dad's parents and so that he could train to be a paramedic at Chemekata Community College in nearby Salem. Fast forward just over a year later, and in June 1981, I was born. A year and a half after that my brother Jake was born, and for the next several years our family continued to live in Stayton. Eventually though, my dad was hired as a paramedic and firefighter at the Crook County Fire Department in Prineville, Oregon, so my family made the trek across the mountains to the town where my brother and I would spend the rest of our childhoods. However, the Fields family was still not quite complete.

You see, day by day, something was stirring in my mom's heart. As a schoolteacher, she had the opportunity to work with multiple students who were in foster care. Learning each of their stories, she started to feel the tug toward becoming a foster parent herself. It did not take much convincing for my dad to agree, and shortly thereafter, they opened their home to any child the Lord willed. And, of course, the Lord willed that they cut their teeth as foster parents with teenagers! My mom laughed as she recounted, "We learned you have to grow into teenagers." At the time, my brother and I were still quite young, so it was a bit of a learning curve for my parents working with teens. Eventually though, these teens returned to their own families or went to other foster homes. It would not be until two particular younger kids came along that the Fields family would be changed forever.

The first was my adoptive sister, Rene', who is just a little less than five months younger than I am. Generations of the Fields family had been relatively without daughters. In fact, until two of my cousins came along, the Fields family went nearly 90 years without any girls being born. So getting to add Rene' to our family was a special blessing.

My brother Beau joined us a few years later. He was only a toddler at the time, and he was only meant to be a temporary foster child. However, the Lord always has better plans, and now over 30 years later, Beau is still part of our family and my brother.

Both Rene' and Beau were eventually adopted by my parents. As with any adoption, their individual adoption journeys were long and far from easy, but they were also filled with the clear evidence of God at work. Now, decades later, all the Fields kids are grown, and Rene and Beau both



The Fields Family A Special Editorial

By David Scott Fields II

have families of their own. Perhaps in a future article they'll have a chance to share their stories in detail, but as I wrap up the first printed edition of *The Believer's Byline*, I decided I would focus this article on the advice, wisdom, and encouragement my family would give to both prospective adoptive parents and prospective adoptees. I pray their insights will be a blessing to any concerned.

My parents were the first to share and to remind prospective adoptive parents that, "Adoption is a special calling. Probably every child entering into the adoption process without exception comes from a background of pain. You, as God's chosen parents for them, have to be willing to enter into that pain - and love them through it. There will be days when you will be exhausted, frustrated, and even in tears yourself, and you will wonder if you can even make it through to tomorrow - but you will. Just trust God and remind yourself that He is with you through it all. After all, these are really His kids in the first place, and in His perfect timing He will show you those days of joy - and you will learn as much about His love from your adoptive kids as they will from you." My mom added that it is also important to be open to doing things differently, and family counseling can be very helpful during the teen years. Above all my parents advice to prospective adoptive parents is, "Never stop loving!"


For adoptees and about to be adoptees, my sister Rene' shared, "If you are adopted realize that this family chose you. God brought you all together and you should feel special that your parents chose you. Your relationship will be more fulfilling if you appreciate this and hold it close to your heart. I don't recommend looking for your biological family. God put you in your current family for a reason. Look forward toward where you are going and not to where you have been. If you have not been adopted yet remember God has a plan. Make good decisions, make goals, and have a relationship with God and you will have endless opportunities and will

break whatever family or life cycle you were apart of. Never believe you are a victim. You may have been a victim of some sort, but don't let that be an excuse to not strive for the best. Your decisions now depict how hard your adult life will be. Throughout life, God puts people in your life to guide, protect, and be your friends. Keep them close always. They are also your family."

My brother Beau shared, "If I were to give any advice to a kid about to be adopted, it would be that just because you are being accepted into another family that does not mean that you are not still part of your biological family. You are so incredibly blessed that a family was willing to add you to theirs. I would tell them to embrace every aspect of it and to not feel guilty for leaving their old life behind. It is a beautiful thing once you realize that your heart is capable of loving an adopted family just as much as your biological family. I would tell them that not all kids are this blessed and that it is a gift."

I hope I have proven in this series that adoption is a beautiful thing. It takes you from one often broken family and gives you full legal rights and status in a new family. Those rights can never be revoked - even your very birth certificate is changed! It is the same in the kingdom of God. Galatians 4:4-7 remind us, "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." May the earthly picture of adoption always remind us of this eternal reality every Christian shares. For we are all adopted into one family, and one day we will stand together and cry, "Abba, Father!"

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Instructions: The letters from each cell are below the puzzle. Try to rebuild the original message by choosing the letters for each cell.

Chronicles of the Imagination Characters

B C P K M B V J B D T T Q L K T M H B M J H B A E
 Q L G O J J L E P E A G N S I A E T E I O S R G Z
 U N G P T N W S U E S C W P R Z J E R A B S K N Y
 D J J Q B I S D U J B H P L Y M B A S R G G G E D J
 J U X Q F N T S A R E O Y B J J D R Y S H E M S U
 O O I O W R R R D N R F Y J U H B M D R A L Y U X
 B G S F L S Y G O Y A E E Q I I N V A F G E Y S F
 T A I I N H K Y E H H I K S Y G L O R I A X S D B
 X E C C A K D K T T S V R I D H R Y D L B C D O P
 L E O G P H I O D T M X A U H S O J G D B I E R C
 N R P H P P C D A A O L P K X D A Y R V A C C M U
 G A A X S H P E S O J C S G A K I C W A I B L I C
 B O W L D K L R K J D K S W A W G C F A H V A N S
 N N R O Q K S C O Y Q S G H V B A Q Y B O T Q X E
 E A T O F R T G R R R A N G G K X F Y J C I V K R

- Abaddon
- Gakic
- Joshua
- Lizard Face
- Noah
- Shortstop
- Asherah
- Gloria
- Josiah
- Mary
- Scotty
- Sparkey
- Berry
- Jesus
- Leif
- Moses
- Seth
- Spikey
- Cak
- Joseph
- Licen
- Nimrod
- Shem
- Toby

Numerous Numerals

Instructions

	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	226
+	-	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	49
x	+	+	x	-	-	+	+	÷	509
+	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	139
43	+	-	+	+	x	+	+	+	19
+	+	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	-26
4	x	+	+	-	-	-	+	+	19
-	-	x	-	-	+	+	÷	x	-26
8	-	+	21	+	+	49	-	x	-26
+	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-1269
424	-15	-398	44	1611	109	-93			

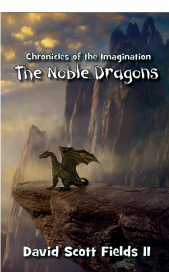
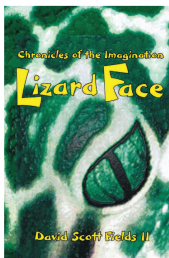
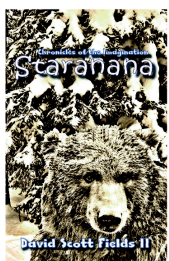
1. The missing values are the whole numbers between 1 and 49.
2. Each number is only used once.
3. Each row is a math equation.
4. Each column is a math equation.
5. Remember that multiplication and division are performed before addition and subtraction.

Free at Last!

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
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S F S S Y F
 Y S T V L F X Y S R Y X L Y U S O V J X X
 Y U S O Q T G G E X V J X X T R K X X X

Instructions: Each letter in the phrase has been replaced with a random letter. Try to decode the message.



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