

“Foster Children: Mending Broken Hearts”

— By Dr. Gretchen Wilhelm

“The Lord builds up ... He gathers ... He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” Psalm 147:2-3

I became a foster child advocate quite unexpectedly. I was a new teacher, just graduated from college, when I met a little boy named Tommy. He walked into my classroom on the first day of school and changed my understanding of the experiences of children in the foster care system. His difficult story unfortunately is not unique.

Tommy was born premature and addicted to heroin. Abandoned at the hospital, he went through the traumatic weeks of drug withdrawal as a premature baby completely alone. After passing through four different foster homes in his first two years, he was finally adopted by an elderly foster parent when he was three years old. However, this new legal guardian was suffering with undiagnosed Alzheimer's and during the devastating progression of the disease, Tommy was his adoptive guardian's primary caregiver by age four; helping her eat and bathe herself. He was eventually forcefully taken from the home and again placed in the foster system.

Alone, ashamed, and devastated by the death of his adoptive “mom” from Alzheimer complications, Tommy was convinced that he was a bad kid and that everything was his fault. He fell behind in his education because of the constant changes in living situations and his high stress levels. The year he walked into my classroom was only one year after he had been adopted for a second time. Although he was still struggling to catch up, Tommy had been transformed by the love of his Christian adoptive family. He was now the star of the soccer team and the sweetest little boy you could meet. That year he personally discovered the love of God and through counseling he understood more about his pain. His forever family showered him with love and encouragement that allowed him to be a kid for the first time in his life. God was mending a crushed little heart and, as his teacher, I got a front row seat to this miracle.

GETTING INVOLVED

I love the passage in the book of Job where it states that Job was known as a “father to the needy” and that when he became aware of a need, he would investigate it and assure that justice was done on behalf of the victim (Job 29:16). With knowledge comes the requirement of a response. If a child was abandoned

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IN FOCUS



All The Children

— By Amy Wilson, Editor

According to the latest research from www.kidscount.org, over 412,000 kids, or over 1,100 per day, enter the Foster Care System in the United States. As we all know, collecting data for children in many traumatized situations is very difficult, but if the numbers are this high in just the United States, can you image how high they are throughout our world? As Jason

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on your doorstep beaten, emotionally broken, and physically starving, I believe that each of us would do everything necessary to comfort and defend that little one. The reality is that there are so many children that live on our doorsteps in the foster system that fit that description. Here are a few ideas how you can immediately open the door and start intervening to bring hope to the crushed little hearts that are waiting for us as the church to step in and defend them:

- Consider completing your local DSS foster parent paperwork and training so that you could be eligible to minister to a foster child in your own home. No matter what time of life you find yourself, you can make a difference by providing a safe home for a child.
<https://www.scfamilies.org/prospective-foster-parents/faq/>
- Prayerfully explore adoption from the foster system. Thousands of children are waiting, praying, and hoping for the love of a forever family.
<http://www.adoptsc.com/foster-care/>
- Contact the Forgotten Initiative and learn how to minister to local foster families and social workers in your area.
<http://www.theforgotteninitiative.org>
- Start a prayer and advocacy group for orphans at your local church.
<https://hopefororphans.org>
- Join the Foster Movement Network through the Christian Alliance for Orphans
<https://cafo.org/nfci/>

THE CHURCH AS THE ANSWER

As believers, we have the ultimate answer in the person of Jesus Christ to mend the broken hearts of children. I would recommend the **WRAP approach**. This is something that I have applied in my own life to create a lifestyle of care for orphans, widows, and families who are engaging in fostering and adopting vulnerable children.

Wrestle in prayer. Dedicate one hour a week to learning about children in the foster care system, see their faces on your state's Heart Gallery site, and then spend one hour praying for them weekly.

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Johnson well states in his blog, www.jasonjohnsonblog.com, “Kids in foster care are not the government’s kids, they are God’s kids and therefore the Church’s responsibility.” All children, regardless of their “status” in our government systems, are our responsibility as part of the body of Christ. God calls each Christian to care for the “least of these”, but what about the, “Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven,” as Jesus calls the children in Matthew 18:1-5?

Whether or not God has called you specifically to foster a child, everyone can (and should) help a foster child. The below chart demonstrates a beautiful way that the Church can come along side foster families, and ultimately, the children they love and care for every day.

One family bringing a child(ren) into their home while others wrap around them with tangible support.

See the “Wrapping Around Foster and Adoptive Families” graphic on page 7.

As you read through this issue, please lift these precious children up to God. Also, please ask God where you can take part in making a difference in the life of these children because as we know, “Whatever (we) do for one of the least of these (children) we also do for Him (Matthew 25:40).” We pray that the resources you find on the last page of this Barnabas will give you a great place to get started! ■

Serving Him Together,

Amy Wilson, Editor

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About the Author

*Gretchen Wilhelm is
an adoption/foster care advocate.*

*She has an adoptive daughter named
Eliannah and another daughter Tirzah
in an orphanage in India waiting
to come home.*

*She is an educational consultant and
currently works for Edmentum Services
training teachers in blending
learning pedagogy.*

*Dr. Wilhelm has worked in orphanages
and foster systems on four continents.*

*She is the founder of the
Defend Conference
for local churches and communities to
offer education and connection points for
the church to become involved in defending
the cause of the fatherless.*

*Originally from Cleveland, Ohio,
Gretchen currently lives in Fort Mill,
South Carolina.*

*You can contact her via email at:
Gretchen.Genesis24@gmail.com*

Respite care. Do you personally know a family who has adopted or is currently fostering a child? Sponsor a date night, offer to bring them a meal, invite them on your next family outing, offer them your vacation cottage on the off-season, etc. There are so many ways you can offer respite to those who are engaged in the hard work of mending broken children's hearts, emotions, behaviors, and education.

Acts of service. Offer to tutor the children after school, be that safe person that they can call when they are frustrated, or provide a mentoring relationship and take the child out every week for a park visit or an ice cream cone.

Promises of God. Through your prayers and your actions you can communicate and claim the promises of God for these families and children. Write notes with scripture and encouragement every week, pray with the children on the phone, or see them at church once a week and tell them how special they are to God. ■

Get involved today

by downloading the

*W.R.A.P. brochure and prayerfully consider
how you can become activated to love a
broken child from the foster system today.*

<http://icareaboutorphans.org/wraparoundadoptivefamilies/>



When I Awake...I Am Still With You

— *By Aisling (“Ashling”) Zweigle*

Delving into the stories of children-at-risk will break your heart. These children, some traumatized as child-soldiers or exploited in the sex trade and child labor, are loved by a God who knows them.

You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. Psalm 139: 1-10 NIV

I have spent hours studying the best we can hope for in a child's life. I heard it once said that those trained to detect counterfeit bills spend much of their time studying the real thing. I have been thinking about that in light of a child's basic needs for love. At birth, we enter into this complex world in need of nurture. Nurture brings hearts and minds to life, activating centers of the brain, setting the stage for ongoing body regulation and the empathic ability needed for every single relationship that follows. This is a big deal. Nurture is life. It is God-designed.

Reflecting on the filthy frenzy of the cycle of violence and the enduring warmth of the cycle of attachment, I read Psalm 139 again. I hear something I have never heard before. “When I awake, I am still with you” (Psalm 139:18b). It strikes me to the core. There are children in this world desperately needing to know someone whose love, in God's mercy, they are still with. Some of them live on the other side of the globe. Some of them live right next door.

This reminds me of children I cared for many years ago—I still remember their names, faces, laughter, and cries. These children were regularly placed in new homes (with new parents), new courts (with new judges), new social agencies (with new social workers). It is hardly a wonder that children like these find their ability to attach and build relationship not just tarnished, but broken. This makes me ache. How desperately these children need an advocate.

This hits home for me. When I close my eyes, I can still imagine myself as a five-year-old clinging to the hand of the social worker who walked me from her tan car, wearing a tan suit, to the foster care home my sister and I would stay at for a few days. Our family was in crisis. I can't remember the social worker's face, but I remember feeling safe with her. I remember what it felt like to be reunited with my mom days later. Like the broken, smashed-up world got taped back together, further mending still pending. Then the church came flooding into my life. And through the years there were these forever adults, people who kept showing up to cheer me on while I grew up. It would be easy for me to say about them, even when I wake, I am still with you! They taught me about a God who loved me like that.

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OUT OF THE MOUTH OF BABES



Dedicated to children who hear their Father's voice

Questions from Foster Children....ones that no child should ever have to ask.

How long will I be here?

Am I going to be able to spend Christmas with my Mom and Dad?

Why is my sibling being adopted, but I'm not?

Why can't I live with my siblings?

Why wasn't my home safe?

Why am I here (in foster care)?

Is my dad in heaven?

Why don't you hit me when I'm bad?

Why did my mom let me have beer?

Why are you nice to me when I'm not being good?

Why can't I go home?

Why didn't anyone come to my family visit?

** A heartfelt "Thank You" to Jon Sampson for providing these questions from Foster Children and for the many resources you will find on our last page. Jon works as a Foster Care Recruiter at Thornwell (www.thornwell.org) in Clinton, South Carolina. ■



A New Story

—By Wendy Dezan

Isaiah 43:19 Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. (ESV)

Sit quietly with your 2017 calendar in front of you and open it to the fresh page of January. Do you feel the newness, the possibilities? The old year is done. The new year is there before you, just waiting to be experienced. Can you perceive it—the “new thing” God is doing in you and around you?

One of my favorite Bible stories is of the man from the Gerasenes (Luke 8). Jesus has just calmed a storm and quieted the wind and waves (Luke 8:22-25), and now He’s about to quiet the tempest in a person.

Jesus and the disciples cross the lake, and as soon as Jesus steps ashore, He is met by the demon-possessed man (Luke 8:26-27). This man’s life is all about pain and torment. He has no social connections, doesn’t wear clothes, doesn’t live in a house, and he roams restlessly in the tombs. His life is among the dead. His interactions with people are all hurtful—being captured, chained hand and foot, and kept under guard. Yet despite the bondage, the demon exerts his power causing the man to break free and retreat again to solitary places (Luke 8:29). Can you feel the man’s hopelessness?

As Jesus steps out of the boat, the man runs to Him. Not away from him as he has done with every other person. To Him. Despite his pain, his shame, his sin, and all the demons—or precisely because of all this—he runs to Jesus. Jesus immediately commands the impure spirit to come out of the man (Luke 8:29). No lecture. No waiting for him to get his act together. Jesus simply responds to the man’s need for deliverance and healing.

You know the end of the story. The man is set free from all the demons who have been running and ruining his life (Luke 8:30-33). The people of the village find the man “*from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus’ feet, dressed and in his right mind*” (Luke 8:35) and cured (Luke 8:36). This man has opened a new calendar. The past has gone; the rest of his life is beginning. He is restored physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually.

What is happening as you look at that new page of the calendar before you? Are you thinking of past mess-ups, problems, or personal faults? Are you considering how others have hurt or disappointed you? Do you have any sense of hopelessness? There’s a “new thing” that Jesus is ready to do in your life. A new year to be written, and it begins with hope and with action. Follow the example of the man from the Gerasenes. Run to Jesus. Fall at His feet. Let Him write a new story for your future. ■

About the Author

Wendy Dezan has served with WEC International/Rainbows of Hope since 1998, in South Africa until 2007, and then as the Rainbows of Hope International Coordinator from 2008 - 2013. Wendy holds a Bachelor of Education degree from McGill University in Montreal, Canada. She loves the Lord, teaching, mentoring workers, learning new things, and delights in being with children and youth! Wendy now resides in Canada where she enjoys spending time with her four wonderful grandchildren. She continues to be an advocate for children at risk and in crisis through the local church and Rainbows of Hope.



When I Awake...I Am Still With You

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Friends, this brings me to wonder how many children are waiting for a forever face in their life. Children not living far from you as you read this. They need us to show up and listen to their heart-wrenching stories; or watch those stories lived out in real-time. These stories are made up of the things that have been done to these children. They are also made up of those things done by these children in fits of rage, confusion, avoidance, and despair. They desperately need someone who sees something good in them anyway. What would it take for one child near you to know you? What would it take for them to say, when I awake, I find myself ... still with you? ■



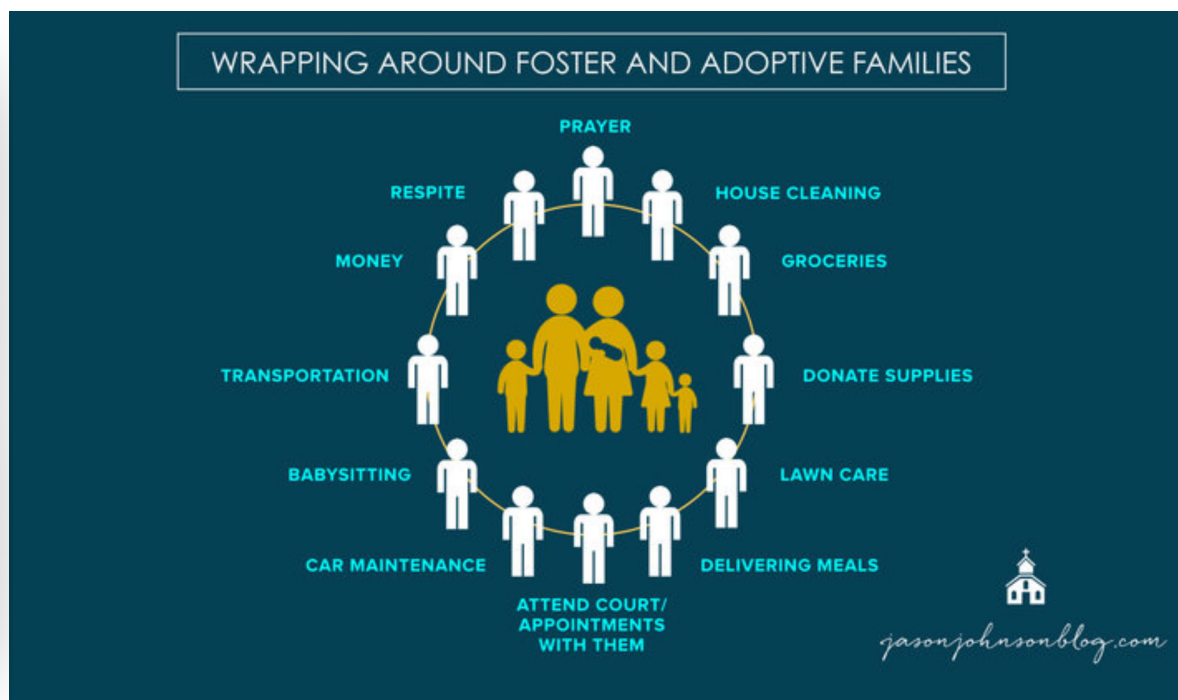
About the Author

Aisling Zweigle has worked with children throughout her life, in the US and Canada, where she and her husband have pastored. She served as Children, Youth and Families Pastor in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Aisling has taught as a licensed Early Childhood Educator in Canada. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from MidAmerica Nazarene University in Olathe, Kansas, USA. Aisling earned a graduate level Cross-Cultural Ministries Diploma from Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri, USA. She is presently completing a Master of Arts in Religious Education in Holistic Child Development at Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary in Manila, Philippines. Her thesis research is on the role of attachment and trauma-informed care for children in residential care. She has led child development trainings in Canada, Africa, and the Philippines. Aisling serves as missionary and child advocate on the Asia-Pacific Region for the Church of the Nazarene with her husband and two sons.

All The Children

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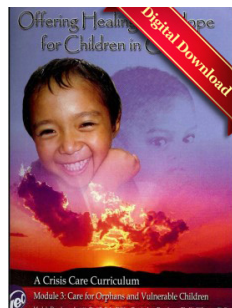
IN
FOCUS



Making it easier to
bring healing and
hope to children
in crisis

Healing and Hope for Children in Crisis

NEWS
EVENTS
RESOURCES



Resources recommended by CCTI
for working with Children

Books

Maybe Days:

A Book for Children
in Foster Care by
Jennifer Wilgocki

Infinitely More:

by Alex Krutov

Surviving the

Storm: The Life of a
Child in Foster Care
by Julia S. Charles

Module 3: Care for Orphans and Vulnerable Children

An outstanding resource developed by Janette Pepall, B.A., DW, for CCTI. This 14 lesson module would serve anyone well who works with foster children or who desires to understand their needs better. See CCTI website

Videos Links

Foster Care Support Foundation Film:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CnO25IzzYgU>

** www.fostercare.org is a wonderful resource for families who foster and need supplies and also where people can go to make donations to help families who foster children.

“Removed”
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lOeQUwdAjE0>)

“Remember My Story: Removed Part 2”
(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I1fGmEa6WnY>)

Website

www.cafo.org - they have a great foster care division that works to equip and unite individuals, organizations, and churches to benefit kids in need.

<http://jasonjohnsonblog.com/#theblog> - writes a great blog on foster care and church based foster care ministry

www.togetherwerise.org - organization that packs bags with some toiletries and comfort items for foster kids so they don't have to carry around their belongings in garbage bags



For Information On:

- **CCTI Curriculum—**
Offering Healing and Hope
for Children in Crisis
- **Other Resources**

Go To : www.crisiscaretraining.org



Crisis Care Training International is a
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