

TOGETHERFORADOPTION

Caring for Orphans While Soaked with the Sense of Exile



Recently, I was deeply moved by something that I read in a letter that J.R.R. Tolkien wrote to his son Christopher. As I reflected upon his words, it occurred to me that he touches on something that is profoundly relevant to the global orphan crisis. Tolkien writes:

We all long for [Eden], and we are constantly glimpsing it: **our whole nature** at its best and least corrupted, its gentlest and most humane, **is still soaked with the sense of 'exile'**. If you come to think of it, your (very just) horror at the stupid murder of the hawk, and your obstinate memory of this 'home' of yours in an idyllic hour (when often there is an illusion of the stay of time and decay and a sense of gentle peace) are derived from Eden (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 110).

One of the challenges for Christians in the Western world is that we are often guilty of trying to dry up our profound "sense of exile" with the non-absorbent paper towels of the incomplete joys of this world. That's not to say that it is wrong for Christians to enjoy themselves in the here-and-now. God gives His children many good gifts that we are to enjoy now with gratitude in our hearts. But our here-and-now enjoyment was never meant to be the way we deal with the deep ache of exile. When we deal with our "sense of exile" by using God's good gifts to self-medicate, we will find ourselves moving *away from* the world's most needy rather than to them. Self-medicating people are not easily mobilized for self-sacrificial service.

The reality is that we are in exile. Eden has been lost. We are exiles in the here-and-now ([1 Peter 1:1](#)). The period of time in which we live as exiles is deeply marked by suffering and unrest ([Romans 8:18](#)). The presence of 143,000,000 vulnerable and orphaned children in the world is irrefutable evidence of that fact.

Although we find ourselves in exile – *still soaked with a deep sense of Eden-lost* – God has not left us to wander aimlessly within it. He has not left us alone to cope with our deep sense of exile through self-medicating behavior. No, Jesus entered into our exile, became a man of sorrows, was forsaken by the Father at the cross in order that he might lead us out of our exile into eternal belonging. Jesus endured the very worst of our exile in order that he might bring us home!

What Jesus did through his life, death, and resurrection has provided us with “a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul” (Hebrews 6:19-20) in the midst of our exile. As a result, we can enjoy the incomplete joys of this world without using them to deal with our deep sense of exile. Only when we rest in what Jesus has already done to one day bring us back home (Romans 8:19-23) are we able to move toward our world’s most needy.

The gospel takes those who are marked with a deep sense of exile, frees them from the “need” to self-medicate, and moves them out to serve the orphan, the widow, and the marginalized. Only by the power of the gospel can we do the self-sacrificial work of caring for orphans while soaked with the sense of exile.

**Article written by Dan Cruver, Director of Together for Adoption. You may e-mail Dan at: dan.cruver@TogetherforAdoption.org.*