

welcome home



Eight Steps to Adoption



FAMILYLIFE'S
HOPE *for*
ORPHANS

How blessed is he

who considers

the *Helpless*... —*Psalm 41:1*

► YOUR HEART

We proclaim what the Bible says about God's heart for the fatherless and challenge believers to align their hearts with His.

► YOUR HEAD

We provide practical, biblical information regarding the process of adoption, foster care and church-based orphan ministry.

► YOUR HANDS

We provide assistance in addressing the physical, emotional, social, developmental, and spiritual needs of the fatherless in the United States and around the world.

The number of children worldwide without families to love and care for them is overwhelming. There are 5.5 million orphans in Africa, 3.5 million orphans in Asia, 1.5 million orphans in Eastern Europe, 400,000 orphans in Latin America, and 135,000 children available for adoption in the U.S. foster care system.

It's easy to forget that each and every one of these orphaned children is precious to the Savior. Throughout Scripture we see God as " ... the helper of the orphan" (Psalm 10:14). I am convinced that Christians should be leading the international dialogue about our responsibility to provide a home and a family for those who have none.

That's why we started FamilyLife's Hope for Orphans in 2003. Hope for Orphans is an educating and exhorting ministry dedicated to supporting and helping the fatherless and connecting those children with loving, Bible-believing families. In accomplishing this goal, Hope for Orphans aims to help you in three primary areas:

- Your Heart: We proclaim what the Bible says about God's heart for the fatherless and challenge believers to align their hearts with His.
- Your Head: We provide practical, biblical information regarding the process of adoption, foster care, and church-based orphan ministry.
- Your Hands: We provide assistance in addressing the physical, emotional, social, developmental, and spiritual needs of the fatherless in the United States and around the world.

I believe that as adopted children in God's family, believers should be the first to reach out to orphaned and abandoned children around the world. Yet many are unaware of the great need, or of God's call on the church to be actively involved in helping the fatherless.

I cannot escape the words of James 1:27a: "This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans ... in their distress." Nor can I turn a deaf ear when I know the heartbeat of the Father resonates with the needs of the fatherless (Psalm 10:17-18).

Perhaps God is calling you and your family, or someone in your church, to change a precious little one's life today. What an awesome opportunity you and I have to reach the world for Christ, one home, and one child at a time.



Dennis & Barbara

Dennis Rainey, FamilyLife President,
and his wife Barbara Rainey

The adoption process can seem *overwhelming*

A recent survey of women 18-44 years of age revealed that out of almost 10 million women who have ever been married and have considered adoption, only two percent have actually taken steps to do so.*

When it comes to adoption, there are a number of reasons so many people get stuck between thinking and doing. However, we believe that many of the fears, uncertainties, and doubts that keep people stuck have good answers that are not always readily available to the Christian community.

That is why we have created this guide. Within these pages we provide not only some of the answers to the questions you already have, but also the right questions as you proceed in your research of adoption and in determining God's will for your life.

This guide is not designed to take you through every detail of the adoption process. Rather it is meant to give you a general overview of the adoption landscape. There are many factors that make everyone's adoption experience a little different. There will be points at which we will direct you to another resource to learn about certain subjects in greater detail. You will become familiar with basic adoption terminology and we will equip you with some practical tools to help you get started on the adoption process.

Throughout this guide, any time there is information that is specific to one of the three types of adoption, it will be found in a color-coded box as indicated here:

U.S. FOSTER CARE ADOPTION

INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION

DOMESTIC ADOPTION

The first time an important adoption term appears, it will be in bold print and italics to indicate that its definition can be found in the glossary at the back of this guide.



Our hope is that this guide
will ultimately help lead you to the
Center of God's will
for your life.

† FamilyLife recognizes that many Christian singles have an interest in adoption. Our use of the phrase "couples" in this guide is not meant in any way to exclude you. It is our belief that God's design for the family includes a father and a mother for specific purposes, and it is best when a child has both. We also recognize that God has used singles in ministry and as parents in many ways. We encourage singles considering adoption to seek the counsel of their church elders and pastor in regard to this decision.

*The Family Portrait, ed. Bridget Maher, Family Research Council, Washington, D.C., 2002.



The Heart of GOD

Getting to know someone is hard work. It takes time and persistence. Knowing someone means discovering new things about what they like and dislike. It means learning what pleases them and angers them. It means finding out what their priorities are—what really matters to them.

The same is true for God. Knowing God requires determining what He likes and dislikes, what pleases Him, and what angers Him. Knowing God requires finding out what matters to Him.

In his book, *Fields of the Fatherless*, C. Thomas Davis writes, “If you searched the Bible from front to back, you’d find many issues close to God’s heart. But you’d also notice three groups of people coming up again and again. They appear so many times, in fact, you have to conclude that God mentions them purposely to make sure they are at the top of our priority list.”

Who are these three groups of people? They are orphans, widows, and aliens

(or strangers). These are three groups of people that especially matter to God. Deuteronomy 24:19 illustrates God's care and provision for these three groups. *When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God bless you in all the work of your hands.*

In addition, Proverbs 23:10-11 demonstrates another one of God's attributes specifically as it relates to the fatherless: *Do not move an ancient boundary stone, or encroach on the fields of the fatherless. For their Defender is strong; He will take up their case against you.*

God doesn't stop at caring for and defending those close to His heart. He tells us that we must do so as well if we want to practice pure religion. James 1:27-28 says: *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

Not only has God commanded that His people care for those in need, but He has also modeled and ordained the institution of adoption. Anyone who has placed their trust in Christ has been adopted into God's family. Ephesians 1:4-5 tell us: ... *In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.*

Adoption is a legal transaction that redeems another. God did that for us through His son. We have the wonderful opportunity to do that in the life of a child.

Caring for the fatherless is not simply a compassionate and kind act, and adoption is not merely an additional means of growing our families to the desired size. Caring for the fatherless and adoption are at the very heart of God. Caring for orphans is about obedience . . . it is about knowing the God whom we serve.

Vindicate the weak and fatherless; Do justice to the afflicted and destitute.

—Psalm 82:3

A Father to the fatherless,
a defender of widows,
is God in His holy dwelling.
*God sets the lonely
in families ...*

—Psalm 68:5-6a

Tens of Millions of Children in need of Forever Families

There are literally tens of millions of children around the world in need of “forever families.”

This growing need is driven by numerous factors including broken homes, alcohol and drug addiction, extreme poverty, and the AIDS epidemic. Children over 5 years old and those with ***developmental disabilities*** and emotional needs are often avoided and ignored. In many countries, orphans who live their entire childhood in an orphanage have only a worse fate to look forward to at age 18. A staggering number of young men turn to crime while young women live a life of prostitution for survival. Many die of suicide or crime within a matter of a few years after leaving the orphanage.

So where is the Church?

As Christians we are often known for what we are against, but the world doesn't know what we are for. Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth ... you are light of the world ... let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:13-14, 16).

Imagine for a moment what would happen if the Church stepped forward and took God's commands concerning the fatherless seriously. What would the watching world be forced to conclude?

It would see that Jesus Christ is alive and is working through the lives of His followers to care for those who mean so much to Him.

As a Christian, whether you are talking about adoption, caring for orphans, or any other issue in life, all decisions boil down to this one question:

**Are you available
for how God
wants to use you?**

You could spend days pouring over the statistics about children in every corner of the world who desperately need homes. You could spend months thinking about whether you have room for one more. Ultimately, the only thing that matters is whether God is asking you to do something. If He is, are you available to do it?

Our prayer for you as you read this guide and continue in your research about adoption is that you would clearly hear from God and that when you do, you will obey Him. If these two things happen, you will be blessed beyond imagination.



Four MYTHS About Adoption

Many people are interested in adopting, but never move forward because they lack the right information. Following are the truths about four common adoption myths:

1) "Adoption costs too much."

Reality: Depending on the circumstances, the cost of adoption ranges from nothing to \$30,000. But you may not know just how much assistance is available for parents who adopt. For example, you can take advantage of the \$10,000 federal adoption tax credit.

In addition, grants for thousands of dollars are often available to families pursuing adoption. Other options may include adoption funding programs at your place of employment, reductions in fees for ***special needs adoptions***, and financial assistance from your church. All of these make adoption affordable for almost anyone willing to pursue the available options. *In the end, if the Lord is calling you to adopt, He will provide the finances for your child.*

2) "Isn't there a great chance that a child's birth parents will get a child back after the adoption?"

Reality: In modern adoption, laws have been established that nearly eliminate this possibility. It is practically unheard of in international adoption. In domestic adoption and adoption out of foster care, this possibility can be avoided by obtaining competent legal advice. This kind of counsel will ensure that all legal papers are signed before the child is placed.

3) "Adopted children probably have many emotional issues I won't know how to handle."

Reality: It's true that some children who have had traumatic experiences may have an increased chance of having emotional and behavioral issues. But the truth is that any child, adopted or biological, may present these types of challenges. Any hurt child, whether adopted or biological, desperately needs a Christian family to help him navigate through his difficulties from a biblical perspective. You might feel a certain child is beyond your ability to handle, but if you remain available to how God might want to use you, He will equip you to raise your child.

4) "I may not be able to love an adopted child as I would a biological child."

Reality: While many people fear this very thing *before* adopting, it is difficult to find parents who actually do struggle with this issue after they've adopted. According to research, 95 percent of adoptive parents say they experience a strong attachment to their child. In addition, this same study concluded that adopted adolescents are as deeply attached to their adoptive parents and extended family as their non-adopted siblings (*Growing Up Adopted* study, Search Institute, Minneapolis, 1994).

The Three Basic Types of Adoption

Adoption is a means of meeting the physical, emotional, social, developmental, and spiritual needs of a child through the legal transfer of parental rights and responsibilities for that child from birth parents to adoptive parents. Adopted children have all of the legal rights and benefits of birth children.

The three primary types of adoption are adoption out of the U.S. foster care system, international, and domestic.

*Private or independent adoption is a concept you will encounter as you research adoption, though it falls outside of the scope of this guide and will not be covered in detail.

Private adoption is typically done through an attorney who assists the adoptive parents in working with birth parents on the conditions and requirements of placing the child.

With this method, adoptive parents often have more control over decisions and there are usually fewer requirements. The waiting period may be shorter and the costs can be much less than going through an agency.

However, there are some important risks to consider. The chance of birth parents changing their minds at the last minute is much greater than with adoption through an agency because of the lack of pre-placement counseling in private adoption.

Also, it is also important to be aware of unethical lawyers or facilitators who exploit families for financial gain.

U.S. FOSTER CARE ADOPTION

Description

- There are an estimated 500,000 children in foster care in the United States, and about 135,000 of these children are considered available for adoption. These children vary in age and have been placed in the system for a number of reasons including neglect, abuse, and abandonment. The fact is that many of these children have endured tremendous pain and need someone to love them with the unconditional love of our Savior. Generally, the adoption of a child from the U.S. foster care system would take place through a state's human services department or (in many states) a private agency.

Advantages

- Cost is free or almost free. Many of these children qualify for monthly *subsidies* and Medicaid that may continue until 18 years of age.
- Little to no chance of custody issues after placement

Cautions

- Limited availability of infants
- Higher incidences of long-term emotional and medical issues. Sometimes these issues are unknown at the time of placement.
- The process can differ from state to state.

Other Considerations

- Post-adoptive help and counseling may be limited in your state, so you will need to take the initiative in seeking counseling if necessary.

INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION

Description

- These adoptions involve children in foreign countries who live in an orphanage or in some cases, foster care within that country. International adoption is generally done through an agency with expertise in a few particular countries. It is governed both by U.S. law and by the laws of a given child's birth country. The laws on international adoption vary widely from country to country and can often change. It is therefore especially important to work with an experienced agency with a track record of successful adoptions from a given country.

Advantages

- Little to no chance of custody issues after placement
- Timeline for adoption is fairly defined and is usually completed within one year

Cautions

- International adoption can be a complicated process in which laws and procedures change.
- Medical conditions can be hard to predict.
- Unanticipated costs

Other Considerations

- Travel to a child's birth country is required in most (but not all) cases. Some countries require two trips. This can be a wonderful opportunity to educate yourself culturally so that you can pass important cultural elements on to your adopted child. However, you should be aware that travel to certain countries is not for the faint of heart.

DOMESTIC ADOPTION

Description

- In domestic adoption, the birth parent(s) has chosen to place the child (usually an infant) in an adoptive home and has, in most cases, selected adoptive parents.
- Domestic adoption is done through a licensed *adoption agency* or privately through an attorney* that specializes in local or U.S. adoptions. Adoption through an agency is a regulated and supervised process in which the agency takes care of most of the details.

Advantages

- Pre-adoptive and post-adoptive services are usually provided both for birth parents and adoptive parents.
- Greater chance of adopting a newborn

Cautions

- Unpredictable and often extended waiting period
- Potential of last-minute change of mind by birth mother
- High costs due to agency fees and medical bills for birth of child

Other Considerations

- It is important to consider in domestic adoption the "*open vs. closed*" *adoption* continuum. Please view our diagram in the back pocket of this guide or visit familylife.com for more information on this important subject.

The EIGHT *steps* *of* Adoption

The following pages are designed to walk you through the eight major steps of adoption. These eight steps will help you to know what you can generally expect from the adoption process.

Before you begin the adoption process you will want to get a list from your agency of the specific steps involved in adopting through them. Rules and procedures change depending on your agency, your state of residence, and the country or state you adopt from.

Step 1 *One* Arrive at some basic DECISIONS about adoption.

Step 2 *Two* Evaluate AGENCIES.

Step 3 *Three* Investigate adoption FUNDING options.

Step 4 *Four* Gather and submit the necessary PAPERWORK.

Step 5 *Five* Complete the HOME STUDY.

Step 6 *Six* Determine which CHILD you will adopt.

Step 7 *Seven* WELCOME the child into your home.

Step 8 *Eight* Finalize your ADOPTION.





1 Basic DECISIONS

The decision making process involved in adoption can seem daunting. However, God knows what is best and wants His best for you. Our job is to faithfully seek Him and trust Him for everything else. Arriving at basic adoption decisions involves four main components: information, prayer, godly counsel, and self-assessment.

Information

Every prudent man acts out of knowledge ... —Proverbs 13:16a

Making wise decisions is impossible without information. People who make errors in their decision about adoption tend to fall into two categories. First, some will decide not to adopt before ever gathering accurate information. They make assumptions about adoption that are not necessarily grounded in facts and base their decision on those assumptions. The second category includes those who decide to adopt, but do it based primarily on emotional experiences. Both of these errors can be avoided through the careful collection of reliable information.

There are a number of great resources from which to gain information. Some of these resources can be found in the back pocket of this guide. When visiting websites, interviewing professionals, and reading books it is important to keep in mind at all times that many of these resources are not derived from a Christian worldview. This can also be true of resources offered by “Christian” agencies and organizations. Gather all information with a critical eye. If you are unsure of the perspective of a particular resource as it relates to God’s Word, ask a pastor, elder, or another trusted spiritual leader in your life.

Prayer

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.

—Proverbs 3:5

Throughout the process of adoption it is important for couples to pray together on a regular basis. We must focus on Him as we examine our motives and pray for His strength and leading. It is important to note that your prayer together should not only focus on the topic of adoption but rather on every-

thing in your lives. As you align your entire lives with God's desires, His plan for you concerning adoption will become apparent.

Godly Counsel

Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed. —Proverbs 15:22

Sometimes the best view into our hearts and souls is through the eyes of someone else. Often, others see things that we are simply blind to. It is important to seek counsel even when we think a trusted friend may tell us something different from what we want to hear. You never know who may be carrying God's message to you.

The best people to seek out are those who exhibit a close relationship with God and have a track record of making good decisions. It is important to remember, however, that every piece of counsel you receive is not necessarily God's will. These pieces must be considered together and in concert with the other three parts of the process.

Self Assessment

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. —Psalm 139:23-24

Adoption is a great thing. However, there are many people who do great things for the wrong reasons. Being honest with yourself is crucial, not just for your well-being but also for the well-being of the child you might bring into your home. The following are a few of the questions that can help you to identify some of your motivations:

- Is our primary motive in considering adoption to be obedient to God?
- Have fertility treatments been completed (if applicable)? If not, why are we pursuing adoption and biological birth simultaneously?
- How will adopting change the current dynamics of our family?
- Do I believe that adopting a child will somehow improve my struggling marriage?

We realized that adoption was not about our desires, our needs, or us; rather it was about what God wanted to do through us. —Kristin, adoptive mom

GETTING STARTED ...

- Attend FamilyLife's "If You Were Mine" adoption workshop or an informational meeting from an adoption agency.
- Attend an informational meeting from your state child protective services department on adopting children from state foster care.
- Speak to families in your church that have adopted from overseas and domestically to gain insight from their experience.
- Attend a Christian adoption support group if there is one in your area.
- Read *Two Hearts Praying as One* by Dennis and Barbara Rainey.

Evaluate AGENCIES

Not all adoption agencies are created equal. Some are large organizations that have been in operation for more than a century. Others operate with a very small staff from a home. Some agencies depend on contracted professionals and hired facilitators, and some operate almost entirely with paid staff. None of these features necessarily determines that one agency is a great choice and another a poor one. There are several factors to consider.

Finding a good agency is much like finding a good physician. Look first for experience—especially with the particular type of adoption (and particular country, if applicable) you are pursuing. Finding an agency that is forthright about financial matters is a must. Talking to friends and acquaintances about their agency experiences can be a very helpful way to discern the real strengths and weaknesses of an agency. You should not expect a perfect agency any more than you would expect to find the perfect doctor. However, a track record of integrity and commitment to customer service is always important.

In addition, an agency's commitment to caring for birth parents and providing the emotional support they need is important to look for. A good agency will keep the birth parents' best interests in mind, providing good pre- and post-placement counseling and support if the birth parents decide not to place the child for adoption. Remember that God is a God of justice and expects us to insure that justice is executed on behalf of those in difficult circumstances.

In most states you can visit directly with the governmental entity responsible for licensing and oversight of agencies about complaint history. Contact your state's human services department for details (state contact information can be found in the back pocket of this guide or at familylife.com.)

Each family must be diligent in interviewing prospective agencies and identifying the one that most fits your expectations and style. For this reason, we suggest that after your research, you build a list of candidate agencies that you then interview and evaluate. Some families even develop a spreadsheet of comparative



Important questions to ask your agency:

U.S. FOSTER CARE ADOPTION

(Questions for both state and private agencies)

- What training and post-placement supervision and support is offered?
- What is this state's practice regarding the provision of subsidies and Medicaid for children adopted from foster care?

INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION

- How many years has your agency been placing international children?
- Can you provide a complete description of all fees and when they are due (this would include everything except travel and **home study** fees unless you require the home study be paid for through the agency)?
- What are your agency requirements that may be in addition to country requirements?
- When given a **referral**, will I get a written summary of medical and other important data and any photographs or videos?
- What will this summary include?

DOMESTIC ADOPTION

- How long have you been placing children, and how many did you place last year?
- Can you provide me with a complete description and itemization of all fees?
- Can you provide me with a timeline for when certain fees are due and what your refund policy is?

Visit www.familylife.com for more answers.

data to help them isolate the differences. You may be tempted after meeting an agency worker you are comfortable with to pass over the tough interview process and assume that because you have found a good Christian person that he will do a good job with your adoption. Unfortunately, kindness and spirituality do not determine competence when it comes to adoption.

It is also important to recognize the responsibilities you will have in working with an agency:

- Read all contracts, handbooks, and program packets before calling for help.
- Submit documents in a timely fashion.
- Complete the required training.
- Work with only one agency at a time. (It is unethical to do otherwise.)
- Be available, if necessary, to travel on short notice.

Once you have made your agency selection you will complete the adoption application to let the agency know that you are now serious about pursuing the next steps. Please note that in most cases when this document is sent in, the application fee is not refundable.

GETTING STARTED ...

- Develop a spreadsheet of questions and fee categories that you can fill in as you do your research.
- Visit agency websites to fill out as much of the spreadsheet as possible before calling them directly.
- Ask friends and acquaintances about agencies they have used and the experiences they have had with these agencies.
- For more agency information visit www.familylife.com

We knew God would
steer us to the agency
that had contact with

Our Child.

—Chris, adoptive dad



Investigate Funding options

One of the greatest challenges to adoption for many couples is what they have heard about the cost. It is true that international and domestic adoption can involve a significant amount of money. In many cases, this amount is more than most couples feel they have to spend.

There are many legitimate costs associated with the placement of a child that people do not anticipate. These expenses are real. As believers in Christ, however, we know that our God is able to provide all that we need. The truth is that when God calls a couple to adopt, the financial hurdles provide places to see God demonstrate His reality through provision in ways never imagined.

It is also important to understand that words like “prices” and “fees” are related to goods and services. However, when the Bible speaks of the redemption of a person, it speaks of paying a ransom: “Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28).

If your biological child was held captive and a ransom was demanded, what would you do? You would do whatever it took to pay the ransom and bring your child back home where he belonged.

If God is calling you to adoption, there is a child out there that He has ordained as your child. In order to bring that child home where he belongs, you will have to pay the ransom.

There are many resources available today to help families with the cost of adoption:

Federal Adoption Tax Credit

Under this law adoptive families can receive an income tax credit for their adoption expenses, up to \$10,000. To learn more about the credit and how it works, you may order publication 968 from the IRS by calling 1-800-829-3676, or by accessing the IRS website at www.irs.ustreas.gov.

Adoption from state foster care

In many states couples who adopt children from a state foster care system will pay little to nothing. If the child has special needs, you can receive a monthly subsidy as well as Medicaid for that child.

Employee adoption benefits

Many corporations assist employees with adoption expenses. Contact your human resources department for more information. For a list of employers that offer such benefits call 1-800-TO-ADOPT.

Military families

The U.S. military will reimburse active duty personnel up to \$2,000 in adoption expenses after adoption finalization has occurred.

Foundations

A number of foundations have been established to help fund adoption expenses. Many churches committed to orphans ministry have started developing grant programs for members needing help. Some foundations offer assistance for certain types of adoption. For example, some foundations exist to provide help to families adopting internationally. When dialoguing with foundations, be sure to clarify the parameters they place on their assistance.

Special Needs Adoption

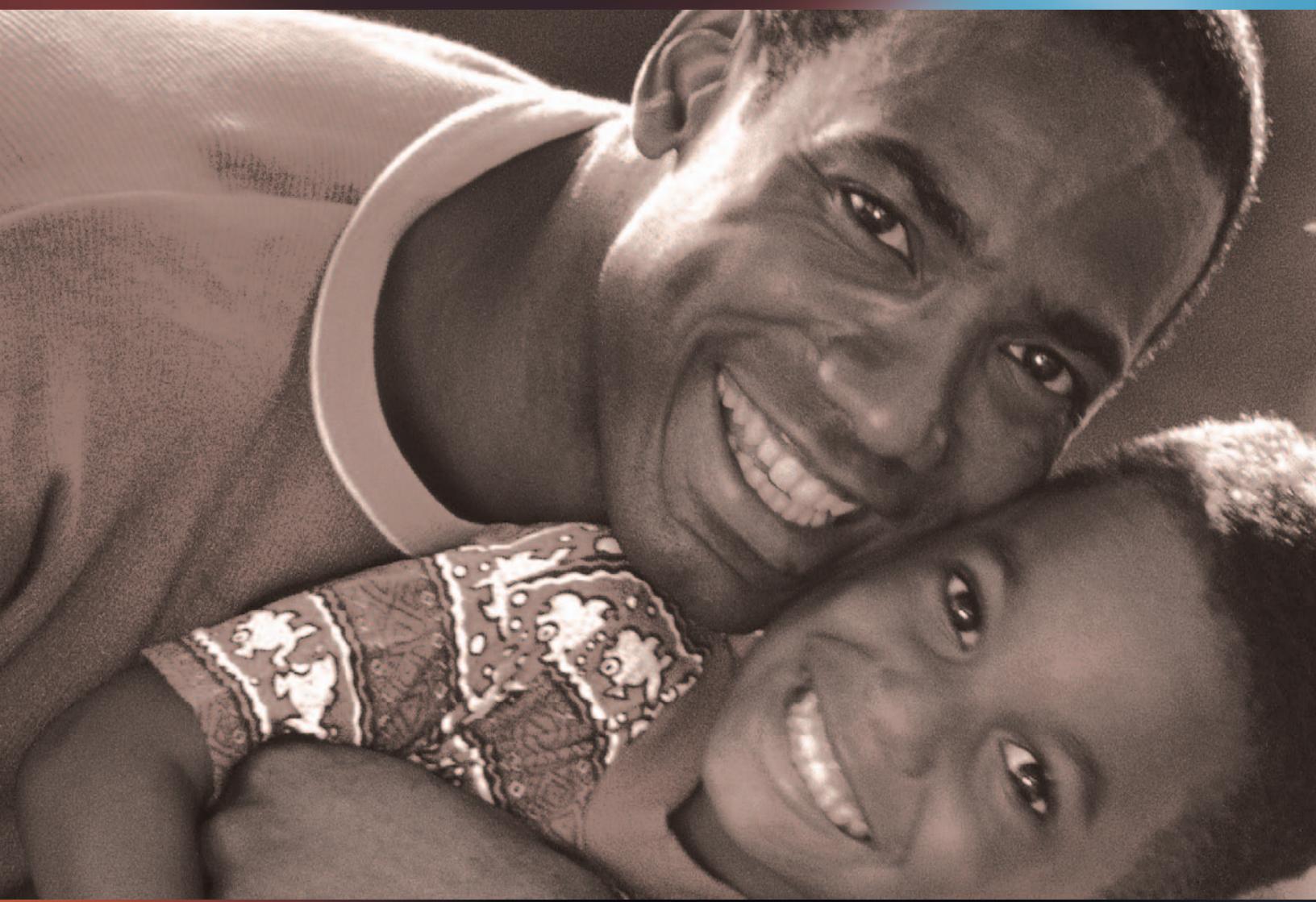
Many agencies offer significant reductions in fees for children with special needs. The definition of what conditions qualify as special needs can vary from agency to agency. Some are long-term conditions while others are treatable and correctable.

The Bottom Line ...

If God calls you to adopt He will provide the way for the ransom to be paid.

GETTING STARTED ...

- Visit www.familylife.com for a list of foundations that provide assistance for adoptive parents.
- Speak with your employer about possible adoption benefits.
- Investigate the regulations that relate to the Federal Adoption Tax Credit and determine how much assistance might be provided for your family.



Submit PAPERWORK

The next step is to attend an orientation or training meeting with agency or state representatives. Your social worker will give you a list of documents you will need to begin collecting—birth certificates, employment confirmation, doctor's reports and letters from personal references. You should also receive a list of the paperwork that must be completed and submitted. A good agency will assist with this process.

You may have heard from others that the paperwork is endless. It will eventually end, but there is a lot involved in completing this stage. However, the best way to tackle it is to complete one paper at a time. This stage will be a key determining factor in how long the adoption process will take. It is usually best to give this responsibility to the spouse most gifted in administration. Keep a copy of everything submitted on file just in case something is misplaced.

GETTING STARTED ...

- Request from an agency a comprehensive list of the documents you will need to fill out and the documents you will need to gather. Remember that the required documents will vary based on the agencies, states, and countries involved.
- Create a checklist from these documents and place in a visible location.

INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION

You will be required to submit paperwork and meet certain requirements of the USCIS (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services—formerly the INS). This will include submitting specific paper work for requesting the child's visa (the *I-600 and I-600a*). Also, you will put together a *dossier*—a collection of legal documents about the adoptive family that is required by a given country to finalize an adoption in their court system. Your agency will be able to provide you a list of documents required by the country from which you are adopting.



Complete the HOME STUDY

INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION

In international adoption, you will want to make sure that the agency conducting your home study will be acceptable to the country you are adopting from. Certain countries have restrictions on what agencies can conduct the home study.

The phrase “home study” might lead one to believe that an intimidating government official with white gloves will come into your home, hoping to find dirty dishes in the sink and other incriminating evidence against you. The truth is, the home study is the part of the adoption process where a trained social worker meets with you in your home. The purpose of the home study is to:

- Educate you about adoption.
- Meet the state's requirements.
- Report honestly to the court about the safety and preparedness of your home.
- Ensure that you are the right family for the child in need.

It will include questions about your finances, employment history, marriage, parenting style, leisure activities, and your expectations about adoption. The social worker will visit with each member of the family.

In most cases the process can be done in a couple of months. Sometimes it takes longer, depending on the social worker's caseload and on family cooperation.

Home studies can be free when adopting from the state and range from about \$1,000 to \$3,000 with private agencies.



GETTING STARTED ...

- Request from your agency a list of what will be included in the home study.
- From your agency's list compile a list of “to do” items that will allow you to prepare your home.
- In many cases, an agency other than the one processing the adoption will conduct the home study if your adoption agency is in another state. If this is the case, make sure you know what agencies your adoption agency will accept home studies from.



If God is calling you to adopt, He has chosen a child for you. As believers, our job is to discover who that child is and to remain open to who God provides. First Samuel 16:7b provides a helpful reminder at this stage: "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

You will be asked by your agency to fill out a form that lists numerous physical, emotional, and behavioral characteristics. You will then prayerfully go through this form item by item and decide whether you would be willing to adopt a child with each of these particular characteristics. This can be a difficult and heartbreaking process, knowing that by checking "no" you are saying no to certain children.

U.S. FOSTER CARE ADOPTION

In adoptions from the state foster care system, often you will be able to inquire about a specific child or sibling group from a photo listing. You should ask the social worker to share as much information about the child as possible. Often, for the sake of a child's emotional well-being, you will be asked to commit to adopting a child before visiting the child in person, though that is not always true.

INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION

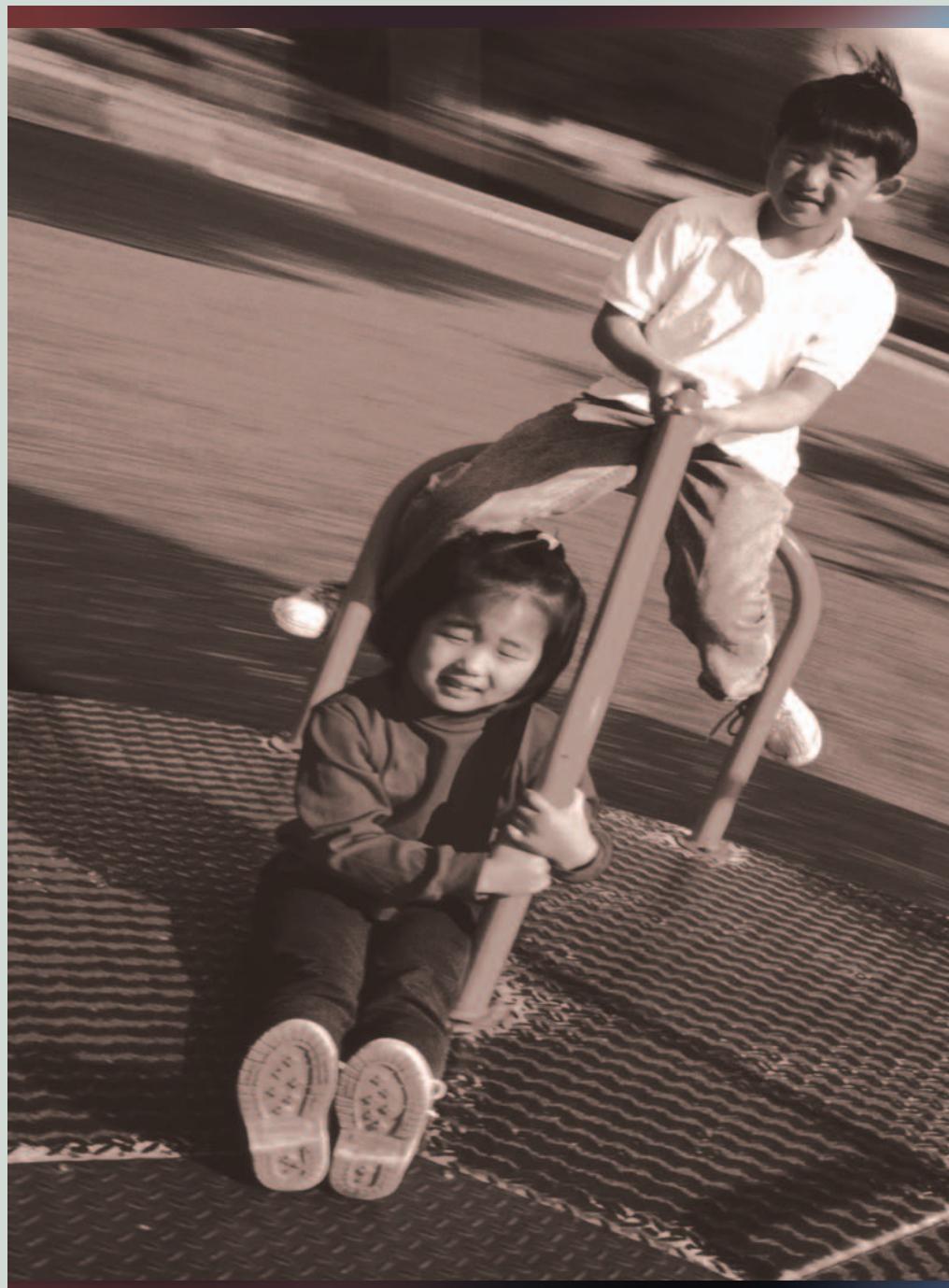
Usually after you have submitted your preferences about sex, age, and medical needs, you will receive the referral of a specific child or you will be invited to visit specific candidate children.

At this time your agency will normally provide a picture, perhaps a video, and background data on the child. You should be thorough in asking questions about how the child is being cared for, what caregivers have noticed about the child's likes, dislikes, and personal needs. You will then accept or decline the referral.

DOMESTIC ADOPTION

In domestic adoption you will be asked by your agency to develop a family profile for birth parents to review. Your family profile will generally be contained in a scrapbook and will include a letter of introduction that tells the birth parents about your family. It will also include a number of pictures that will help them get to know you.

The agency will show their birth parents different profiles to choose from. There will be a number of couples waiting, just as you are, to be chosen by birth parents. For this reason, this part of the process can take an extended period of time. After your profile is selected, often a meeting will occur to confirm the selection. Once the birth parents have confirmed the selection, the process will proceed. However, you should plan on at least one failed match due to a change of mind by the birth parents in domestic agency-based placements.



It is important to be honest with yourself during this process. It is okay to say “no” to certain things. However, remember that God may have prepared you for certain children you could never have imagined adopting. Remain open to His leading, pray carefully, and seek godly counsel.

The determination of which child you will adopt varies depending on what type of adoption you are pursuing. If you are adopting internationally, it will also depend on the country you are adopting from.

In all three channels of adoption, now is the time to review carefully with your family doctor or a specialist in adoption medicine all of the medical conditions of the child and the implications for care and treatment.

GETTING STARTED ...

- Ask your agency for a list of the conditions that children may have and begin praying through it, asking God for wisdom and to help you see things through His eyes.
- Visit photo listings and ask God to speak to you about the child He has chosen for you.

God knew which child
He was leading us to adopt
and He didn't try to
Keep it a secret.
We were so happy to find her!
... and then him!

—Selena, adoptive mom of two



Welcome the child HOME

The day you have been waiting for is almost here! This is an exciting time for the whole family. You have placed a picture of your new family member on the refrigerator and have been praying for your child each day. You are eager to set up the child's room and make everything just right. As this day approaches, here are a few things you will want to do in preparation:

- Inform your insurance company about the expected addition of a new family member. Most group health plans are required to cover an adopted child from the date he or she is placed in your home, if you notify them within 30 days. Also, if you are part of a qualified group plan, under federal law your insurance provider must fully cover the adopted child when they enter your home regardless of pre-existing conditions. Make sure to notify your insurance company in writing immediately after arrival.
- Prepare your child's living space and needed items (bed, clothes, toiletry items, etc.).
- Touch base with your pediatrician or family doctor for a scheduled exam.
- International children will need to have blood work and other screenings done.



GETTING STARTED ...

- Make a “to do” list of things that need to be done in preparation for your adopted child’s homecoming.
- Identify other couples who have adopted in your church or community and make initial contact with them.
- Read about your adopted child’s culture so that you can help them in the transition to your family.
- If you have other children, make a “countdown” calendar to help them anticipate homecoming day.

- Talk to your other children about the arrival of a new sibling and how this will result in many changes for the family. It is also a great time to discuss how physical adoption is a picture of our spiritual adoption in Christ.

Welcoming your child into your family is a time of great excitement and blessing, but it can be exhausting and even difficult when the new family member is grieving the loss of caregivers. It is very typical that there is a transitional period before the child and parents bond. Know that these difficulties are normal and that they will pass. The three most important things you can do during this time are to:

- Pursue personal time with the Lord.
- Pray regularly with your spouse for your family and the adjustments.
- Stay connected to others who have adopted. (Adoptive parent support networks are available and can be incredibly helpful.)

We could see how God had prepared our hearts and theirs to love each other right from the first meeting. We just knew it was a God thing. —Susie, adoptive mom of two



U.S. FOSTER CARE ADOPTION

Children adopted from the foster care system can be placed as soon as the parents complete all of the necessary steps and receive approval. After the child is placed there will generally be a six-month “foster-adopt” period, during which time a county social worker will make regular visits to monitor the adjustment process of the child into your family.

The adoption is not finalized until this period of time has elapsed. Check with your state agency for amount of time that is designated in your state.

INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION

In international adoption, most countries will require the parents to travel to the birth country and sometimes spend several days to several weeks in country, meeting judicial and other requirements of that country. Then the new parents and child will spend two to three days at the designated American consulate to receive immigration documents for entry into the United States.

There are a few countries that don’t require travel to the birth country and allow escorts to bring the child to the United States when all paperwork is completed. This approach requires a six-month follow-up period by the social worker before the adoption can be finalized.

It is important to realize that your child (even an infant) will notice that the smells, food, and language have all changed from what has been normal. This can create stress and grief and should not be automatically interpreted as “attachment disorder.” Having a “phone friend” that speaks the child’s native language can be incredibly helpful during this time of adjustment.

DOMESTIC ADOPTION

In private agency-based domestic adoption, many birth parents request the presence of the adoptive parents at the birth. Typically, as soon as the birth parents agree (or are allowed) to terminate parental rights, the new parents are allowed to take the child home. In some states there is a waiting period of several days during which time the birth parents have the opportunity to choose to parent their child. Check with your agency for the regulations in your state.



Finalize your Adoption

The last step of the adoption process is the judicial hearing for finalization. In many domestic cases this will occur about six months or more after the child arrives in your home. However, in some international cases this step can occur sooner, since in the eyes of the birth country finalization takes place upon meeting all the in-country requirements.

Usually this judicial proceeding is held in a judge's chamber and is arranged by an adoption attorney that your agency recommends or that you select yourself. The hearing will be fairly short, and after a few basic questions the judge will sign an adoption order. At that moment you gain permanent legal custody. In international cases, even though you have in some cases finalized in the country of origin, most adoption attorneys recommend you re-finalize in your county to prevent any question of custody and entitlement to your new child as an heir.



GETTING STARTED ...

- Request information from your agency about the requirements for finalization in the specific type of adoption you are pursuing.
- Begin thinking about how you will celebrate! Visit our celebrate adoption forum at familylife.com/hopefororphans website to see how other adoptive families have chosen to celebrate this special day.

Post-placement services for adopted children and their adoptive families

Once your child is in your home, you will feel in some ways like you have reached the end of a long journey. However, in other ways you will feel like you are just getting started. There will be many new things to learn about loving your child well. As your adoptive child adjusts to the new environment and to family members, you may encounter times when questions and challenges arise. It is crucial, at these times, that you have the necessary resources in place for your family. You will want to ask your agency whether they offer any post-placement services such as counseling or support groups.

If not, you may know of other couples in your church who have adopted and would be interested in starting a support group. A church-based support group can provide important spiritual and emotional support and will provide a platform for speaking to others in your church about the joys of adoption and God's heart for the fatherless.

As you learn and grow from your adoption experience you will be a source of strength and wisdom for many others who will come after you to care for the children that are so close to God's heart.

While finalization was a significant event,
it only legally confirmed what we had known in

our hearts

for months—

**That our boys
were made *for our family!***

—Dan, adoptive dad of twins

Some Final Thoughts

This guide is dedicated to communicating the blessings of adoption. Caring for the fatherless is at the very heart of God. However, we want to be clear about something: Not all Christians are called to adopt.

God's Word teaches us that the body has many parts with different functions. The hand should not believe that it is more spiritual than the ear. There can be a danger when the message of adoption is given to Christians. Some might simply assume that it is more spiritual or pleasing to God to adopt, or to adopt a large number of children. But adoption is a calling.

We at FamilyLife's Hope for Orphans encourage you not to allow adoption to slip onto the back burner until you have settled this one issue:

Has God called you *to Adopt?*

If He has, we want to be a resource so that you can move ahead in obedience. If He has not, we want to help you find other ways that you can live out His command to care for orphans. While not everyone is called to adopt, everyone is called to care for the fatherless. Some of the ways to do this include:

- Praying for children in need of forever families
- Participating in mission trips to orphanages
- Volunteering with local state agencies to mentor children in the state foster care system
- Volunteering at a crisis pregnancy center
- Helping to organize an orphans ministry at your local church. You may find our guide to starting a church orphans ministry helpful in this process. (Visit familylife.com to download or order this resource.)

Adoption is one of the greatest blessings you will ever encounter. It is also, at the same time, one of the greatest challenges you will ever encounter. But to those who are called, His grace is sufficient and His blessings assured.



Glossary

Dossier: In international adoption, this is a collection of legal documents about the adoptive family that is required by a given country to finalize an adoption in their court system.

Adoption agency: An organization that is licensed in the state (or states) where it operates, which facilitates the placement of children with adoptive parents. Agencies can be non-profit, not-for-profit, for-profit, or governmental in nature.

Closed Adoption: In these adoptions, the birth family and the adoptive family do not share any identifying information about themselves, and do not communicate with each other, either before or after the placement of the child. The adoptive family will, however, receive non-identifying health and other background information about the child and the birth family before the placement takes place. The birth parents may also receive non-identifying information about the adoptive parents.*

Developmental Disability: This term refers to a severe and chronic impairment which can be attributed to one or more mental or physical impairments. These require specific and lifelong or extended care that is individually planned and coordinated, and which had an onset before age 22, and which is likely to continue indefinitely. The condition(s) must create substantial functional limitations in three or more of the following areas of major life activity: 1) self-care, 2) language skills, 3) learning, 4) personal mobility, 5) self-direction, 6) potential for independent living, and 7) potential for economic self-sufficiency as an adult.*

Home Study: A home study is sometimes called an “adoption study,” and is a written report containing the findings of the social worker who has met on several occasions with the prospective adoptive parents, has visited their home, and who has investigated the health, medical, criminal, family, and home background of the adoptive parents.*

I-600 and I-600a: Forms required by the USCIS (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services) to designate an orphan in another country as an immediate relative of the prospective adoptive parents, so that the child can be issued a visa, allowing him or her to be brought into the United States.

Open Adoption: Every adoption of this type will be different, based on the type of relationship that the birth parents and the adoptive parents have agreed to. Both identifying and non-identifying information about the adoptive parents and the birth parents is shared with each other; this can include last names, addresses, and telephone numbers. In some open adoptions, the birth parent and the adoptive family know each other and have ongoing communication about the child.*

Referral: The presentation of biographical information and a picture of a specific child to prospective adoptive parents by an agency in international adoption.

Special needs adoption: The adoption of any child who has physical or emotional challenges that decrease the likelihood of adoption. Determination of a child as “special needs” depends on the state guidelines and even the agency involved. In many cases, the fees involved in adopting such a child are reduced. Often, medical conditions are treatable and correctable.

Subsidy: When adopting from the U.S. foster care system, your state will sometimes offer monthly financial assistance for a determined amount of time. In some cases this subsidy is guaranteed until the child reaches 18 years of age. As a part of the subsidy package, health insurance (Medicaid) is often offered for the child until 18 years of age as well.

Trans-racial adoption: The adoption of any child that is of a different race than either of the adoptive parents. Several special considerations should be made whenever this kind of adoption is considered and professionals with experience with these kinds of placements should be consulted. In most cases, your agency can be a resource in this regard.

*Definition borrowed from the glossary found at www.glossary.adoption.com



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A Father to the fatherless,
a defender of widows,
is God in His holy dwelling.
God sets the lonely
in families ...

—Psalm 68:5-6a