



## No Orphans Here

*By Jon Wells*

“Where are you going to go when you are done with treatment here?”

I have asked this simple question thousands of times to thousands of kids. Today, the answer was typical.

“I don’t know . . . they took my parent’s rights away a long time ago. They took everyone off of my contact sheet- I literally don’t have anyone on my call sheet left.”

In our line of work, we run into many, many children who have no families. When parents abuse their kids, a judge often terminates their parental rights. Other kids have simply been abandoned. Some are the children of parents who were killed. Whatever the case, I talk to so many little kids; so many teenagers who have no family anymore. Whether we like the label or not, they are orphans.

But we have no orphanages, no orphans here in

America! We have residential facilities; we have treatment centers. We have children who are ‘wards of the state.’ We have ‘foster kids.’ If you go to Mexico, or India, or some far-off African nation, you will find orphanages and orphans aplenty. But there are no orphans here.

Nonetheless, I’m going to use the term. I have had years of experience and a front row seat to learn all about how life as an orphan works. An orphan has no person to lay claim to. He belongs to no one. He has no idea where he is going to next, because he has nowhere to go.

An orphan expects little help when she is in trouble. An orphan has no one to turn to when she is confused or facing a challenge. She understands that it is all up to her; she is going to have to pull herself up by her bootstraps cause there isn’t anyone to lift her up. Orphans live with a deep and abiding sense that they are on their own.

No Orphans Here continued ...

I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you . . . -John 14

Orphans struggle to trust other people. They wrestle with the constant suspicion that friends will abandon them. In fact,

many of these kids will intentionally blow up relationships with foster parents or staff members in order to head off the impending collapse that they suspect is around the corner.

Orphans often internalize the brutal life experiences that they have endured. Those who have been abandoned come to accept that they are not worth keeping. Those who have endured rejection learn that they are rejects. After all, if your own parents don't want you, what does that say about you? Worse yet, what if they hit you? What if they lock you up in the basement for weeks at a time, or put out their cigarettes on your arms? Not even an animal deserves that kind of treatment. These youth allow the pain in their story to inform them about who they are.

These kids have no idea how to move forward into healthy adult relationships. How in the world could they engage in friendships or marriage with all of this relational baggage weighing them down? Kids who are adopted out of the system have to fight through all of this resistance, and adoptive parents often struggle to understand why things aren't working out.

*Orphan.* You and I are too sophisticated to use the term anymore, but the semantics are irrelevant. An orphan knows deep down that he has been left to his own devices; the matter is settled.

It is no wonder that God chooses to use adoption as a picture of how He relates to us. Repeatedly throughout scripture we are reminded that we have

been adopted into the family of God; that God is a loving father, and we are

precious to Him. The problem is, I don't know how to live out that reality. I am learning that I am much more comfortable living out the story of an orphan.

When I face a challenge, my first inclination is to work the problem and find a resolution. It doesn't feel natural to cry out to my heavenly Father, much less trust that He will take care of me. When I face a financial hurdle, I assess my resources and look for ways to make additional income. Only later does it occur to me to ask the One who holds the universe in His hand. When I face a health problem, I consult online resources, doctors, and friends. But what of the One who fashioned this body from the dust?

The passages that refer to divine adoption seem to me to be more about the theological necessities of salvation, not God's desire to relate to me as an adopted son. I have seasons when I struggle with doubt and wonder if God is truly committed to my sonship. *Maybe He is having second thoughts. Did God know what He was getting Himself into when he adopted me? What if I have come all this way only to find that this whole salvation thing isn't going to work out after all?*

The baggage I carry in my orphan identity is more significant than I first thought. The roots of independence and doubt run

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! -1 John 3

The Spirit you received does not make you live in fear again; rather the spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by Him we cry 'Abba, Father.' -Romans 8

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## But I Can Walk Now

*By Aaron Jeffers*

My leg got ripped pretty bad. I thought I had a solid footing, so I let all my weight fall. It was obvious that I did not when my feet did not land on that trusty, but rusty iron step. I was hanging off the side of a fiberglass boat, and the side of that step caught the lower part of my ankle where the tendons attach to the calf. Painfully hooked on that step, two hundred pounds of my flesh wrestled with gravity. Needless to say, gravity won. It tore two grooves out of my leg, each over four inches long.

I had no idea how bad it was until the next morning when I woke up with a nasty infection. I had a fever, and my leg was swollen. I sent a picture to a nurse friend of mine, and found out the only remedy was to scrub that sucker out. That night I writhed in pain as I got all the infection exfoliated, and then I treated it with anti-bacterial salve and gauze. My leg is healing, and I can walk now.

The kids who we encounter in residential are not by nature 'bad kids.' I think of one boy whose dad molested him from early childhood all the way to adolescence. I think of a girl who loved her mom. When mom wanted a companion to take heroin with her, she got her own daughter addicted. Then, to pay for the drugs, mom prostituted her out to pay for the addiction.

These kids remind me of my recent fall. They naturally looked for support in their life like the rest of us did when we were children. The reliable step that was supposed to be there ended up cutting them emotionally and spiritually so deep. What wound like that wouldn't invite infection? We see kids cutting themselves and running away from campuses or foster homes. These youth will seek out sex, or feverishly indulge in drugs or any substance that will produce a high. Many times I hear adults nonchalantly cast an all-encompassing judgment. "They're just a bad seed that will never change; they'll probably be a sandbag to society for the rest of their life."

I'll never forget when I was mentoring with Brett Bailey, and I was asking him to give me his advice on working with these kids. He said something to the effect of this: "When you see these kids acting up or acting out, that is why God put us here: To work with these kids. God's glory can shine through them, but we have to call that glory out so it can shine. I tell them that there's a good person inside of them, and they can rise to a higher standard."

I have seen some of these kids really turn around. It can be painful when God scrubs out the emotional and spiritual infection of bitterness and hurt. But the healing that comes afterwards through the grace and forgiveness of the Holy Spirit is breathtaking. I'd have to say that one of my favorite parts in this ministry is watching kids spiritually walk again; to see God give back that innocent smile and breathe life into a child's heart. It is a privilege to witness dry bones walk and hard hearts get replaced with a new heart. Not only that, but they receive a new life.

**"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." -2 Corinthians 5:17**

Every year, thousands of children and teens are sent to the residential facilities we serve to receive help with the overwhelming problems they are facing.

*At **Days of Hope** we continue to insist that God's solution to all of the innumerable challenges these youth face is found in the person of Jesus Christ.*

We are a not for profit, inter-denominational Christian ministry that seeks to address the spiritual needs of children and teens who are in residential psychiatric care at facilities throughout central Missouri. We are supported by the prayer and gifts of individuals and churches in our community. We work



alongside many dedicated professionals including educators, therapists, doctors and nurses, child care workers and so many more who strive to help these children who have been scarred by every form of abuse, abandonment, neglect, and harm.

Through the ministries that are offered at Days of Hope, Bibles are distributed, pastoral counsel, services, and groups are provided, and these children are given an opportunity to respond to the gospel message.

*No Orphans Here continued ...*

deep. And like any other adopted orphan, the prescription for a successful adoption is simple. The love and commitment of the adoptive parent must be bigger than the old habits and doubts of the orphan.

Paul reminds us in his letter to the Romans of the immeasurable depth of God's love for His adopted kids. In spite of my weakness, His affection for me prevails. Like any other adopted kid, I may flail around for a bit. My misgivings are small and passing; His commitment to me is like the incoming tide, relentless and irresistible.

It has taken me a long time to really believe that I have the right to ask anything of my heavenly Father. These days I find myself asking for something specific.

*Father, I only know how to be an orphan.*

*Teach me how to be a son.*