

The Needs of Adopted/Foster Children

Article Three of Three: Needs of Foster Children

This article will explain some of the elements and components of foster care. This article will not dig deeply into specific areas or needs of foster children. Instead, it will provide an overview of how the church body can exercise true religion (James 1:27) in supporting and loving those involved in the foster care process.

The word “foster” is certainly a beautiful word filled with many biblical applications. It means: to promote the growth or development of (a child), to bring up (a child), to cherish (a plan, hope, etc.) in one’s mind. We are indeed thankful that many families have felt the call to minister to the needs of children in a very unique way by opening up their homes to fostering opportunities.

In America, there are 463,000 children in foster care; 24% were placed in a relative’s home. 46% of those children were in foster care for less than a year. 52% of the children left the foster care system to be reunited with their families. (2008 information per childwelfare.gov)

The church family can be helpful to those involved in this service of care in a number of ways, three of which will be expressed in this article: 1) Display a proper blend of sensitivity and empathy, 2) Display the love of Christ, and 3) Display the power of prayer.

Display a proper blend of sensitivity and empathy.

We might recall a time in our life when our family needed to move, change schools, or find another home to live in. Whether the event was positive in nature or rooted in sadness, the act of changing homes can be very impactful. As created beings, we tend to gravitate towards routine, normalcy, consistent habits, and expectations. The Bible is filled with examples of the struggles that the Children of Israel encountered during their times of being exiled and carried away to other lands. Jeremiah records the picture of a mother weeping for her children because they were not home, but in exile (*Jer. 31:15*).

Children enter the foster care system because something is wrong in their home and the level of adequate care for them is missing. No matter how we see a “foster child” act, we always need to extend the mental grace of empathy and remember that this child has had some very tough experiences in their young life. Just because they have moved into a Christian home doesn’t automatically bring healing from these experiences. We know that just because someone goes to church on Sunday, it doesn’t automatically bring sanctified behavior on Monday. Healing will take time and purposeful action from “foster parents” that is rooted in love. There are many additional elements of attachment (trust, security, safety, etc.) that are woven into the behaviors of foster children. Those elements, while common in all children and families, are especially magnified in the heart and mind of those in foster care.

God’s brilliant design of the connection between infant and mom/dad is hard to describe. Most parents are very thankful for that connection, because biological parents have their struggles also. Even in the worst possible dysfunctional and abusive situation possible, most kids WANT to be home with their family. It is wise to remember that and display the appropriate sensitivity to children in these situations. A common, well-intentioned mistake of someone trying to be encouraging usually includes phrases and words said to the child about “how thankful they should be

for being in a better place/home right now". Yes, that is true, but that comment is not sensitive to the child's desire and longing to be in their own home. We can encourage foster children by letting them know how thankful we are for the chance to get to know them.

Display the love of Christ.

Jesus was very generous in helping us understand the "why" and "who" of love:

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have LOVE one to another (Jn 13:35). When ye have done it unto one of the LEAST of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me (Matt. 25:40).

A beautiful part of our church family heritage is the expression of love and care that is displayed among the brethren. James 2 is a powerful example of showing the fruit of caring for all, regardless of one's position or current situation. Parents can make an effort to remind their children who share the same Sunday School class with a foster child to go the extra step in reaching out to the new church friend. Saying "good to see you today" and "so glad you are here" go a long way in breaking down walls of uneasiness for someone who is new. When the new child can be invited to sit at their lunch table, or for afternoon service, or maybe over to ride bikes on a Sunday afternoon; these can be some of the purest displays of Christ's love to one in need. The church family in general can be blessed and strengthened when we go out of our way to greet the foster children. How kind it is to also provide a word of encouragement to the foster parents, who may (or may not) have had a pretty trying week. What a testimony of Christ's love when those children return to their original homes and talk about how they loved church because everyone was so nice to them.

Display the power of prayer.

The church family can have the joy (Phil. 1:4) and fervency (James 5:16) in prayer for the child and the family. Foster care responsibilities encompass the additional needs of scheduling with: case workers, court hearings, meetings with biological family, etc. At any moment- any of those scenarios can be very anxious for all involved and the need for them to be blanketed in prayer is immense. What a blessing when members of the congregation take the time to ask foster parents of specific things to pray for.

For those with this type of need, the church family can be a great strength and resource through its display of sensitivity, empathy, love and prayer. May God continue to bless all those involved with this ministry.