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Newsletter | January 2014

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Prayer Requests:

- Pray for all of the children of the world who are about to age out of their orphanages.
- Pray for the people in Ukraine, and especially the children and the orphans, in the midst of the civil unrest and the government's retaliation.
- Praise God for continuing to keep us going, financially, and do not cease praying that He would raise up additional monthly supporters to allow us to keep doing this important work.

From the Director

I'm sitting on the couch in our family room, computer on my lap, four-year-old Roslyn on the couch beside me. It is Wednesday morning, somewhere around 11 a.m.

It is January 22.

On this date, forty-one years ago, the United States Supreme Court declared that the abortion of an in-utero, living human was a "fundamental right," within certain limitations. Subsequent court decisions in the years since Roe v. Wade have expanded the so-called "right," to the extent that virtually any attempt to limit access to an abortion, at any point during pregnancy, is rejected on the basis of legal protection, guaranteed at the highest judicial level in the land.

And so here we are, in January of 2014, looking back at the harrowing fact that more than fifty-five million Americans have been killed in the name of a woman's right to choose. Fifty-five million. That is a staggering number. There are actually only twenty-three nations in the world with populations above fifty-five million; conversely, there are more than two hundred and twenty countries whose populations are below that mark. The fact is almost overwhelming, and the tragedy is even greater than the aggregated loss of human life—though it is hard to imagine anything greater. The lives of women who've gone through one or more abortions are irrevocably changed as a result, even if the women themselves appear to be unaware of it. And the collective sin of this nation, in allowing such a massacre of the innocents, is surely grievous to the God who made us all.

And the question that must be asked is, why? Why is this supposed "right" so important that it justifies the killing of another human? The truth is, that question has never been satisfactorily answered. Instead, the crucial question is dodged, usually by asserting that the in-utero baby is not really human. No, it is an embryo or a fetus, or merely a collection of cellular matter, or a potential human rather than an actual human. Others argue that the fetus becomes a human at the "point of viability," the supposed moment in the development of the child at which he or she could survive outside of the womb. To pin something so important as the definition of a human on a concept so vague as the "point of viability" is dangerous and untenable. The gestational age at which a baby can survive outside of the womb has been changing steadily throughout the history of modern medicine. My son Colin was born at twenty-six weeks gestation, and somehow he survived, in spite of having been born in the second-poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. A hundred years ago, the survival of a twenty-six-month fetus would have been unthinkable. The current medical understanding puts that point of viability somewhere around twenty-two weeks gestation, but for how long? How much more time will pass before that gestational age drops, perhaps below twenty weeks?

And of course, all such reasoning is beside the point. The Bible teaches us that the moment at which an unborn baby becomes a human is the instant of conception. And so, any time an in-utero baby is intentionally killed, an actual human, made in the image of God and possessing infinite worth, has been murdered. Now, I don't want to sound self-righteous and condemnatory. I know—better than some, I think—the transforming power of God's forgiveness of sin. There is forgiveness for those who have sinned, whether that sin was in deciding to abort one's own baby, or in participating in the medical procedure to kill a baby, or in the manner in which the baby was conceived. There is forgiveness and redemption through the matchless grace of God. But there is a difference between asserting the availability of forgiveness for the sinner, on the one hand, and in legalizing sinful behavior as an expediency, on the other.

I mentioned that Roslyn was sitting beside me on the couch. Roslyn, like four of my other kids, has spina bifida, a congenital malformation that results in an incomplete closing of the spinal column. This exposes the child to a variety of neurologic issues, such as partial paralysis, loss of functionality, and an ongoing risk of infection and other complications. Spina bifida is one of the many conditions which, when discovered prior to birth, can lead healthcare professionals to recommend therapeutic abortion. And yet, what joy these children are to us. And we know many other families with disabled children, and every one of them feels blessed precisely because of the presence of those children in their families. Oh how much we would all have missed out on if these children had been killed before birth.

The Shepherd's Crook is a ministry devoted to helping to find permanent homes for needy children, from all over the world—we minister to the "least of the least." And in that light, we are staunchly pro-life. There is no more vulnerable group of children needing homes and families than those still in the womb. We would love to see every unwanted pregnancy result in a full-term birth followed by adoption. That is our prayer. Please join us, as we look back ruefully to that infamous date forty-one years ago, in praying that God would forgive this nation and help us, as a people, turn away from this most egregious sin.

Soli Deo gloria!

Spotlight: Aging Out

Every year, countless orphans around the world "age out" of orphanages. In most countries there is an age at which orphans are no longer eligible to be adopted. That cutoff varies from one country to another, but it is generally in the range of fourteen to sixteen years old. According to some estimates, as many as thirty-eight thousand orphans age out every day.[1] Even if that figure is too high, it's still the case that there are children around the world who become unadoptable every day. One of these children is a young lady in China named Mindy. Her story serves as a reminder of what can happen to orphans who aren't adopted.

As Mindy's fourteenth birthday approached, the agency that had been advocating for her adoption was getting increasingly worried about her future. Although a few families had asked about her, no one had committed to her adoption, and it was too late for anyone to complete her adoption. She was definitely going to age out. Girls at many orphanages around the world are often allowed to stay on at the institutions as nannies when they age out, but Mindy's cerebral palsy made her physically unable to do so, taking away one of her options. Other orphanages have programs to train children—especially boys—for factory work or farming, and orphans who have aged out can pursue those avenues. Sometimes, however, when such options are not available, children who have aged out are simply dismissed from the orphanage, with nowhere to go and no skills to help them get a job or a place to live. While precise statistics proved to be elusive in my research, there is plenty of evidence to affirm that many former orphans fall into lives of crime and prostitution (with some girls being trafficked as sex slaves), and it's been estimated that about ten percent of former orphans reach such a depth of despair that they take their own lives.[2] This is the fate that awaits many—it's probably fair to say most—of the orphans who are not adopted in time, and so the fears about Mindy's future were quite real. We were all glad to hear that her orphanage agreed to let her remain there for the time being, even though she can't help out as a nanny. This is not a long-term solution for her, however, and so there is still work being done to determine what can be done for her. She is going to need ongoing medical treatment and therapy because of her CP, and while there are some places in China that can help children like Mindy, they are simply unable to accommodate every child who needs such help. (We will update you all if Mindy is able to move to a place like that, so please pray for her in the weeks and months ahead.) Even if it weren't for her special need, Mindy would still be facing an uphill battle in her home country just to get an education and secure a job.

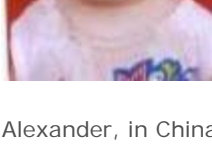
Amy Eldridge from Love Without Boundaries posted an article on her blog in March 2010 that highlights the difficulties facing children who age out in China.[3] This is not meant to represent the attitudes of every country in the world, but to give us a glimpse into the attitudes surrounding orphans in China. My wife and I encountered some similar attitudes in Ukraine when we were there a few years ago to adopt our daughter Mikaela. Even our adoption facilitator, who was extremely fond of Mikaela and other special-needs children, was quite surprised to learn that people with Down syndrome and similar disabilities can have jobs at McDonald's or as a bagger at a grocery store, for example. I only mention that to point out that expectations for special-needs children or orphans—and especially for orphans who have special needs—are not the same in other countries as they tend to be here in the States, and so they don't have the same kinds of opportunities that are available to them here. These children's situations are truly desperate, and that should not be forgotten.

Thankfully, however, there are some people and organizations who are working in various parts of the world to provide the kind of support network and training these children need but can't get anywhere else. These initiatives are widespread, covering Ukraine[4], Colombia[5], and Russia[6], to name just three. So, the next time that you hear about a child who is about to age out, take a moment to put yourself in his or her shoes and consider the difficulties that lie ahead, and pray earnestly that a family would step forward to adopt. It's certainly not easy to adopt an older child, but the difficulties facing a parent shouldn't necessarily overshadow the genuine need that that child has. Be encouraged that older children are regularly adopted; in fact, in 2013, TSC families adopted five children who were about to age out, and we are deeply thankful for that. And they are not the only older children who have come home to their forever families through TSC over the years. In March, you'll meet a few of them and hear a bit about their stories. For now, continue to pray specifically for the older orphans of the world, that they would have what they need to develop into godly men and women, no matter what they may be faced with today.

[1]: <http://www.hfgf.org/statistics.pdf>
[2]: <http://www.orphanhopeintl.org/facts-statistics/>
[3]: <http://www.lwbcommunity.org/adoption-of-older-children>
[4]: <http://www.christianalliancefororphans.org/blog/case-study-category/life-skills-training/>
[5]: <http://www.orphanhopeintl.org/haven-homes/>
[6]: <http://www.theharborspb.org>

Completed Adoptions

The following children have come home to their adoptive families since TSC began in 2000. We include them as representatives of all of the children who have come home. Their faces provide just a glimpse into how significantly these lives are changed, as the children transition from the hopelessness and aloneness they once knew, to the comfort and security that come from belonging to a family. Thank you for helping us make these dreams realities, both for the adopted children and for their families.



Alexander, in China



Alexander, at home in Minnesota



Isabela, in Guatemala



Isabela, at home in Pennsylvania



Kristina, in Russia



Kristina, at home in Ohio

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