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Newsletter / March 2013

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Prayer Requests:

- We encourage you to pray fervently for the children of the world who are waiting for their families to find them.
- Pray for the adopted children and their families, particularly as they go through the sometimes-painful process of getting to know each other and becoming a family.
- Pray for The Shepherd's Crook Ministries, particularly in this time of financial crisis. Pray that God would deliver us and allow us to continue doing this important work in His name.

From the Director

A few days ago we sent out a critical update, sharing our desperate need for prayer and for funds. We wanted to update you briefly on where things stand now.

We are so very blessed by all of the messages full of love and encouragement from many of you, and we rejoice over the number of prayers we know are being offered up on our behalf. And of course, we are so thankful for every donation that has come in since we sent that message. We have received about \$10,000 toward our target of \$30,000, and so we continue praying and waiting.

As Kathy and I have been sitting in a hospital room for the past two weeks with our son Owen, adopted from China a couple of years ago, we have had a lot of time to think about what all of this means. We have seventeen children still living at home—children who must be provided for, children who need the medical insurance provided through our job with The Shepherd's Crook. This crisis has, once again, forced us to examine the possibility that we will be unable to write paychecks and pay TSC's bills—that we will be forced to shut down the ministry.

We have been asked if we know what our plans are for our family if TSC does fold. The short answer is that we have no real plans. No definite ideas. The longer answer—though this may sound strange—is that, in the ten years since we started this ministry, we have seen God repeatedly take us back to a place of total dependence on Him; we have felt clearly that He was asking us to follow Him in obedience, trusting Him to illuminate each step of the path, and even giving up any thought of a "safety net." He has required us to empty our retirement fund to cover some of our own adoptions, and ultimately to live on a salary that not only doesn't allow us to put by any savings, but even requires us to trust Him to make up the difference between what comes in our monthly paycheck and what's required for living each month. We have lived this way for more than ten years now, and God has never failed to provide for our family. There have certainly been some very lean times; there have been long periods of silence in response to prayers we felt urgently needed to be answered. But He has provided for our genuine needs—always in His time—and He has taught us many things both about His character and about our weakness through the process.

"Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own." (Phil. 3:12)

We don't want to paint a picture of ourselves as spiritual giants, because there have definitely been periods when we struggled much with fear about the unknowns, and when we took our eyes off of Him and began looking at our lives through the world's ideas of success and responsibility. When we go through such times, we begin to doubt our decision to release our plans for our future and trust Him to guide us along His path, on His timetable. We can always recognize when we lose sight of His face in this way, because fear and panic begin to intrude upon the peace that comes only from knowing that the God of the Universe has held us firmly in the past and is holding us now, and will continue holding us faithfully in our future, regardless of what that future holds.

God has faithfully granted us a sense of peace over the past week or so, as we've waited for answers or clear leading from Him. At this point, we feel that we are supposed to keep waiting and crying out to Him for deliverance. We have a number of ministry items up in the air—families in the process of traveling to bring their children home; many, many children needing our voice on their behalf as they wait and wait for families; agencies asking for our help. We do believe He still has work for us to do through this ministry, and we will continue asking Him to provide what is needed to get us through this current crisis.

One of the most touching letters we received in response to our recent update was from one of our TSC families. Their sweet little adopted daughter came home years ago as a TSC child after a difficult adoption process. She is now old enough to join her family in praying for this ministry and the children we try to help. Her mother wrote to tell us that, as they were explaining to their children the severity of our need just now and the possibility that TSC might not be able to continue, her daughter "grabbed me and buried her head in my chest and began to cry as though she were heartbroken." Wow. This from a child saved by God's grace through the work of this ministry! This moved our hearts so very much. It's indescribable to be allowed to be a part of stories like this, and we long to continue being a part of those stories for as long as God wants to use TSC. And we are so very grateful to all who come alongside us in this work. There are so, so many of you—more than we even know, I'm sure.

So, we continue to wait and pray. God has not told us that it will be an easy road when we choose to obey Him and follow the path He has for us. That is true for us as directors of this ministry, for each of our staff members, and for every adoptive parent who heeds His call to go out and rescue one of His sheep.

Soli Deo gloria!

Spotlight: Both Ends Burning

Earlier this month, a trailer for a documentary about adoption was released and has since been making its rounds on Facebook and Twitter. Many of you have probably seen it or at least heard of it. The film is called "STUCK" [1] and it is being done by Both Ends Burning, a non-profit organization that is concerned about the state of orphans around the world.

One of the first things that struck me about Both Ends Burning (BEB) was their passion for making it easier for orphans to be adopted into loving families. Craig Juntunen, the founder of BEB, was formerly a professional football player and then a successful businessman, and he has brought his business acumen to the world of adoption. Last month, I mentioned the inefficiency that seems to plague international adoptions; the goal of BEB is to bring some common sense and efficiency to the process. In March 2011, Craig spoke at the eighth annual Adoption Policy Conference in New York, and there he outlined some of his thoughts about the international adoption process. Here is an excerpt from that speech:

"We do not have a demand problem; there are plenty families who would like to adopt a child. We do not have a supply problem; we've all seen the stats that show how many kids do not have the love and guidance of a family. The conclusion: we have a process problem. In response to this conclusion, I've started the Both Ends Burning campaign. Both Ends Burning is a global campaign to transform the process of international adoption. For the purpose of serving the needs of orphans, the current system is a liability and is literally penalizing and damaging children. It compromises the human potential of children by condemning them to institutional care." [2] (Go to the 7:45 mark.)

According to the figures quoted in BEB's trailer, it takes on average almost three years and \$28,000 to complete an international adoption. The lengthy process and the high cost, coupled with the frustrating and complicated paper chase, have almost certainly played a role in the decline of international adoptions over the past few years. We've talked about this before, and the trend continues to be one of decline. In 2004, there were 22,991 children adopted to the U.S. from around the world. That number has fallen to only 9,319 in 2011. [3] Given all this, BEB wants to initiate change in the international adoption process in the hopes that in making it easier for families to adopt, more orphans will be adopted and therefore know the love of a family.

All of this sounds very promising to us. We agree that the process as a whole is broken and could be run much better. But, we also have some reservations about their final vision. Later in that same speech, Craig said that their ideal scenario would be to have one central non-profit organization, operating outside of the jurisdiction of any nation's government, that would process every single international adoption. The idea is that the paperwork would be more efficient and straightforward if adoptive families only have to communicate with one organization. I can see why that would be appealing, but we have other concerns about that plan of action. I won't go into detail here about my concerns, but I have questions regarding the oversight of such an NPO, the logistics of having staff from every nation in the world and the consequent size of the organization, the funding for its operations, and the propensity for large organizations—whether non-profit or for-profit—to become corrupt and inefficient, two of the very things that are being combatted by this effort. Craig admitted that that might be too far-reaching a goal.

All in all, even though we have a few reservations about what BEB would like to do in terms of changing the adoption landscape, there are a lot of things to like about what they are doing. They are working hard to make people aware of the needs of orphans around the world and to encourage people to consider adoption for themselves. The process could stand to be refined, at least in part, and it is good to hear others willing to point this out. We think that it is worth following their work and advocacy, and maybe God will use them to begin a movement that will eventually result in a better process for adoptive families and, therefore, fewer orphans in the world. Everyone is agreed that fewer orphans in the world would be a good thing. So, take two minutes to watch the STUCK trailer and consider these things yourself.

[1] <http://vimeo.com/59302895#>
[2] <http://vimeo.com/20804299#at=0>
[3] http://adoption.state.gov/about_us/statistics.php

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.



Danielle, in Kazakhstan



Danielle, at home in Florida



Kassidy, in Guatemala



Kassidy, at home in Texas



Luke, in Korea



Luke, at home in Ohio

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