

INTRODUCTION

This is the second message in my series "It's Time to Get Good and M.A.D." M.A.D. is an acronym for Make A Difference. Today I'm going to talk about how we should get good and M.A.D. for the children's sake.

Art Linkletter (who by the way was adopted as a child) used to say, "Kids say the darndest things." He had a successful television career simply interviewing children. Even when they're praying, kids can say funny things. A few years ago, some children were asked to write a prayer to God and here are some of their prayers.

"Thank you for the baby brother, but what I wanted was a puppy." *Joyce*

"I bet it is very hard for you to love all of everybody in the whole world. There are only four people in my family and I can never do it." *Nan*

"Dear God, I want to be just like my daddy when I get big but not with so much hair all over." *Sam*

"Dear God, did you mean for a giraffe to look like that or was it an accident?" *Norma*

"Dear God, Are you really invisible or is that just a trick?" *Lucy*

"Maybe Cain and Abel would not kill each other so much if they had their own rooms. It works with my brother." *Larry*

"Dear God, I think the stapler is one of your greatest inventions." *Ruth M.*

"Dear God, We read Thomas Edison made light. But in Sun. School they said you did it. So I bet he stole your idea." *Sincerely, Donna.*

These famous people all have one thing in common. See if you can guess what it is:

1. Cyrus the Great
2. Aristotle,
3. Alexander the Great
4. Julius Caesar
5. Johan Sebastian Bach
6. Charles Dickens
7. Rudyard Kipling
8. Leo Tolstoy
9. Nelson Mandela
10. John Hancock
11. Gerald Ford
12. Bill Clinton
13. John Lennon

- 14. Faith Hill
- 15. Tim McGraw
- 16. Halle Berry

If you guessed all of these famous people were adopted as children, then you are correct. At one time, each of these celebrities were children who needed a family and someone cared enough to adopt them and make a difference in their lives so they could make a difference in the world.

There are many ways that you can make a difference in a child's life. Good parents certainly make a difference in their children's lives. Those of you who work in our children's ministry are also making a difference in the lives of the children you teach. Teachers and coaches can have a powerful impact on children as well. But today, I want to talk about the need to make a difference in the lives of children who are orphans. The traditional definition of an orphan is a child whose parents have died, but actually an orphan may be a child whose birth parents are alive, but he or she has been abandoned or neglected.

Adoption or foster care is one the best ways to make a difference in a child's life. Today our church is officially launching what we are calling "Hope for 100." Over the next 12 months I'm going to challenge our congregation to make a difference in the lives of at least 100 children who are abused or neglect through adoption or foster care. Next week, we're going to hear from my friend, Jerome Milton, who is pastor of Greater New Pleasant Hill Missionary Baptist Church in North Tyler. He will share his amazing story of what it was like to grow up as an orphan and the difference adoption made in his life. Today, I want to educate you about the need and challenge you to start listening for God's voice. I want to encourage you to open your eyes, open your heart, and open your arms. To make a difference in an orphan's life you must:

1. OPEN YOUR EYES TO THE GREAT NEED

There's an old saying, "There is none so blind as he who will not see." It's not a pretty picture, but we need to open our eyes to the need for orphan care. The need is great. Contrary to what some people think, there are many more orphans than there are families who want to adopt. Here are the latest statistics about orphans. Worldwide there are 143 million orphans; many of them in third world countries where they are struggling to stay alive. In the United States there are 496,000 orphans. In Texas there are 26,749 orphans. And in East Texas there are 2,135 orphans—children in our vicinity who need a loving home.

The tragedy is that each year in America 22,000 teens "age out" of the system. That means they are no longer available for state aid. Of these 22,000 who never are adopted, statistics prove 40% of them will never finish high school, and 65% of them will end up homeless or in jail. Of those who age out of the system, they are twice as likely to become addicted to drugs and alcohol.

It's easy to throw around numbers, but we need to put a face and a name to each one of those children. These children are of all ages and all races. Many of them are Asian, African, or Latino. But one of the first songs we learned was, "Jesus loves the little children. All the children of the world; Red and yellow black and white; they are precious in His sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world." Jesus loves them, and He is wants us to love them too.

2. OPEN YOUR HEART TO GOD'S COMPASSION FOR ORPHANS

God doesn't play favorites. He loves everyone. But the scripture makes it clear that those who are fatherless, the orphans, occupy a special place in God's heart. There are many scriptures that reveal this, here are just a few: "For the Lord your God is mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow ..." (Deuteronomy 10:17-18) "His name is the Lord ... a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows ... God sets the lonely in families." (Psalm 68:4-6) "Say to him: 'Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously ... for in you the fatherless find compassion.'" (Hosea 14:2-3)

In Deuteronomy 24 God instructed the Israelites to always leave food for orphans and widows to collect. When they harvested their grain, they would leave the corners of the field for orphans and widows. When they shook the olives from the trees, God said, "Don't shake the trees twice - the olives that remain are for the widows and orphans." When they harvested grapes God said, "When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow."

Since we're talking about adoption today, in order to give glory to God, how many of you would stand up indicating you are an adopted child? You occupy a special place in God's heart. But actually most of us, or all of us should have stood. I'm adopted—and if you know the Lord, you're adopted too.

The Bible says in Ephesians 1:5 that God loves us so much He "predestined us to be ADOPTED as His sons through Jesus Christ." God only has one begotten Son, Jesus. But He has billions of children, and we have all been adopted into His forever family. So you are never more like God the Father than when you adopt a child! So open your eyes—there is a need. Open your heart—God loves orphans, and we should, too.

3. OPEN YOUR ARMS TO CARE FOR ORPHANS

The evangelical church has been vocal and active in its objection to abortion. We have marched and signed petitions, but we have generally fallen short in promoting adoption as an alternative to abortion. And while we may have promoted it, we might not have actually *done* it ourselves.

One of the most important verses in all of God's Word is found in James 1:27, "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." We throw the word "religion" around a lot, but the Bible doesn't use it much. It only appears six times in the Bible, and it most often refers to either false religion, or the Jewish religion. In this verse, James even has to qualify by calling it "religion that is pure and faultless." The truth of this verse shows us that God wants us to practice our religion by caring for widows and orphans. In the first century, widows were often left penniless when their husbands died, because women had few rights and couldn't own property. The church stepped in to care for these widows. Today, most of our widows have access to property and assets when their husbands die. But this verse is one of the reasons why we have our deacon-widow ministry. All our deacons are assigned a certain number of widows

to contact and let us know of any special needs they may have.

But this verse also says we should care for orphans in their distress. The best way to care for orphans is the blessing of adoption. I asked you before what those 16 famous people had in common. Now let me ask you to try to guess what these people in Green Acres have in common:

1. Charles and Linda Akin
2. Larry Anderson and Sasha Vukelja
3. Bob and Laura Bennett
4. Kaye Bryan
5. Kevin and Penny Burdette
6. Rocky and Carrie Gill
7. Bill and Jan Hommel
8. Nat and Scarlett Hughes
9. Jim and Barbara Kilkenny
10. Ernesto and Christine Leon
11. Todd and Debbie Martin
12. Jason and Lindsey Marshall
13. Paul and Zelia McGaha
14. Jeff and K'Lin Noble
15. Roddy and Shirley Sloan
16. Bennett and Carrie White

These are just some of the families in our church who have opened their arms to a child through adoption.

They have made a difference in the lives of children who weren't born into their family. Based upon their positive experience in adopting their daughter, God gave Rocky and Carrie Gill a burden to start a ministry to help others experience the blessing of adoption. As they talked about this and brought others on board, the vision for Hope for 100 was born. Simply stated: Hope for 100 exists to challenge and support Green Acres Baptist Church to obey God's Word by providing loving homes for 100 children through adoption or foster care.

But a vision must also have action for it to be realized. There is an old Asian proverb that says: A vision without action is only a daydream. Action without a vision is a nightmare. But vision and action together can change the world. Hope for 100 is going to change the lives of at least 100 children and 100 families as well.

Now don't worry, I'm not going to give an invitation in a minute where I ask those of you who will agree to adopt a child to come forward! This is an important decision. All I'm asking you to do at this point is to PRAY and ask God how He wants you to be involved in this. God is the One who puts the lonely into families. Will you ask Him how you can join Him in what He is doing in the lives of orphans?

There may be some of you who have objections or questions, and that's normal at this stage. I want to take a few minutes and address three questions. First, are we talking about adopting

children from overseas, or from here in Texas or the U.S.? The answer is that Hope for 100 wants to help you whether you are interested in international or domestic adoption or foster care. Hope for 100 will be sponsoring mission trips to visit orphanages overseas. And we are prepared to connect you with local and state agencies as well.

Second, doesn't it cost a lot of money to adopt a child? Adoption can be expensive, depending upon several factors. Don't feel alone if money is a concern for your family. The number one obstacle for families wanting to adopt is a lack of funding. If you consider the foster care to adoption route by working through Child Protective Services, it may only cost a few hundred dollars. The state of Texas bears much of the cost. Green Acres has established an Adoption Assistance Fund to support Christian families whom God is calling to adopt. We've partnered with an organization called the Abba Fund to administer interest free loans and grants to prospective adoptive parents. Even if you can't adopt a child now, you can contribute so others who want to adopt but can't afford it will be enabled to adopt. Third, can a single adult adopt a child? Ideally, any child benefits from having two parents, but several single adults in our congregation have adopted children, and we want to provide assistance and support for any single adult who will consider adoption. You may recall Hillary Clinton wrote a book a few years ago entitled, *It Takes a Village*, meaning it takes a village working together to raise a child. I think we can say, "It Takes a Church." Hope for 100 is designed to assist anyone who is considering adoption or foster care. You may not adopt, but someone in your SMBS group might, and you can rally around them and help them by providing an extended family for their child.

Every adoptive parent has a story to tell, and every adoption is a story of God's grace. Glenn and Carol Price have given me permission to share this story with you. A few months ago, they attended an adoption summit in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. While there, God spoke to their hearts that they should pursue adoption. Shortly afterwards Carol saw a picture of a four-year-old Ethiopian girl named Favor. This little girl had been abandoned at birth and was being raised by missionaries.

They started the long process of paperwork to adopt Favor. About that time, the economy started to sink, and they began to question whether or not they should proceed with the adoption. They sat down one afternoon to talk about it and pray about it. Carol felt strongly that it wouldn't be wise to pursue the adoption at this time. At this point, I'll read Glenn's own words: "I then left to attend WEBS, burdened by the realization my wife was questioning whether or not we should go ahead with the adoption. While Pastor Dykes was teaching, I was praying for God to show us in a clear manner which way we were to proceed, and/or to give Carol the confirmation she felt she needed. At that moment, my iPhone silencer buzzed me to alert me of an incoming text message. It was from a pastor in Kansas City we had visited two months earlier. While there, he expressed concern about the economy and asked my opinion on investments and the direction of the economy. I told him I felt tangible assets such as silver and gold were probably superior to investing in the uncertainties of the stock market. That was the last communication I had with him. Until that evening when I received the following text message from him: Proverbs 22:1b. That's it. That was the entire text message. Just a scripture verse! And only a PART of a verse at that! 1b! Not verse 1, but 1b! Well, being that I was in church at the time with my Bible in hand, it was very easy to look it up! I turned to Proverbs 22:1b and this is what it says: "Favor is better

than silver or gold." I was so amazed at God's ability to answer the specific prayer of a genuine seeker in such detail that I began to weep. Tears just streamed down my face. If anyone had looked, they would have thought I was really touched by the message Pastor Dykes was teaching—ha! I believe God delighted in answering our prayers because the plight of the orphan is especially close to His heart. Those who desire to practice true religion (James 1:27) can look forward to enjoying the benefits of an intimate relationship with Him." And after Glenn signed his name he wrote: "Attempt something dangerous!"

Are you ready to attempt something dangerous? Remember our starfish story. The young man was on the beach tossing starfish back into the ocean so they wouldn't dry out and die. The man watching him told him that with all thousands of starfish he had to feel like he wasn't making a difference. As the young man picked up a starfish he looked at the critic and said, "I'm making a difference for this one."

Your starfish may be a child who needs someone to love them. Think about a child somewhere who needs some loving arms around him or her. He or she needs a family. He or she needs to know how much Jesus loves them. I wrote my doctoral dissertation of evangelism in 1983, and I've even taught Evangelism at Beeson Divinity School, but I have come to believe that the single most effective evangelism strategy is adoption. In almost 100% of the cases where a Christian family adopts a child, that child becomes a follower of Jesus Christ.

So, my challenge to you is for us to provide a loving home for 100 children through adoption or foster care. If God is touching your heart to join Him in this work of grace, then you should make plans to attend a conference we're offering here on Saturday, January 31. It's called "If You Were Mine." If you're interested in attending, or if you have questions, stop by the Hope for 100 display in the foyer this morning.

CONCLUSION

If you think adopting 100 children is an unreachable goal, think again.

Bennett's Chapel Missionary Baptist Church is a small African-American congregation in Possum Trot, Texas, near the Texas/Louisiana border. A few years ago, their pastor W.C. Martin and his wife, Donna, had a burden for the children who were in the Texas Child Protection Service system, so they started an adoption/foster care ministry at their church. Since then, forty families in their church have adopted 70 children. The church only has 200 members and yet they are making a difference in the lives of 70 children. If we just considered the 5,000 members who often show up here at Green Acres, for us to do what that little church in Possum Trot, Texas has done, we would have to adopt almost 1,800 children!

Could it be that God is calling you to make a difference in a child's life? Are you ready for a new challenge? We all know children change our lives—maybe God isn't finished changing your life yet.

Maybe you've heard of the Arctic Explorer, Ernest Shackleton. On the first arctic journey, his ship, the *Endurance*, was crushed by ice and his party was stranded for 281 days. Shackleton had

to leave his party and sailed in a small ship to get aid. Four months later he returned and rescued his stranded crew without a single life lost. Who would ever want to go back on a mission like that? As he advertised for a crew for his second expedition, Shackleton placed this ad in the London Times, "Wanted for hazardous journey, small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant journey and safe return doubtful." He got 5,000 applications! There's just something about an adventure that brings out the best in us.

Raising kids can be compared to a dangerous expedition. Raising kids isn't easy. It takes time, patience, courage and money. But the reward is amazing. Some of you are thinking, "My kids are almost grown now, why would I want to start over?"

Kyle and Julie Hardy are members of our church who raised three wonderful children. About a year ago, God placed a burden on their hearts to make a difference in a child's life, so they went to Honduras and adopted a beautiful 13-year-old girl named Danellis. The Hardys are in their fifties and they are embarking on another adventure. Could God be leading you on a new adventure?

Remember Jesus said, "In as much as you've done it unto one of the least of these, you have done it unto me." Will you open your eyes to see the need? Will you open your heart to see God's love for orphans? Will you open your arms and open your home for a child who needs you? If you will, then you will certainly Make A Difference!

OUTLINE

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If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, I encourage you to simply preface your remarks by saying something like: ***“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”*** This simple citation may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you.

To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes