

This sermon is based on chapter eight of the “Someone Like You” book (pg. 117)

*This message is focused on God’s heart for children and family, particularly kids in foster care who need adoption. God adopted us into his family, and we in turn can help others in a variety of ways.*

Written by: Joe Boyd

## Introduction

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Today we’re going to be wrapping up our Someone Like You series, stories of ordinary people who have founded extraordinary ministries. And I believe that someone like you and someone like me are exactly the people that God uses to make a difference. And today we’re going to be talking about stories and how they impact not only culture, but they impact families, which is God’s answer to a lot of problems in our world.

**Stories can spark families and futures.** Now, Jesus knew that the greatest battle that you and I are going to face is actually the distance of 12 inches. 12 inches, roughly, is the distance from our **heads** to our **hearts**. Like, from my brain where I process what I see and what I hear, to my heart where it makes an impact on me.

And I believe that God wants to move this from a head issue to a heart issue. And Jesus knew the way that you cut through information and distraction was telling stories. He used stories again and again and again. And in fact, Hollywood has been using and leveraging that for years to tell stories and move people and change culture and create a whole industry.

But that industry is also taking on certain causes, and telling stories, even stories of adoption. For example, a few years ago there was a movie that Mark Wahlberg was in. It was called Instant Family.

**(Show the Instant Family graphic, “Slide4-Instant-Family.PNG”)**

Instant Family was a movie that was about foster care, specifically some of the challenges that went along with that. And when that movie came out, there was this awareness, this spotlight that was shined on foster care, and there was this huge uptick of people signing up, asking for information, services, and kids actually being fostered and adopted.

And it worked really, really well. But it's not the only story. How many of you are sports fans? How many of you remember this story? The Blind Side.

**(Show the graphic for The Blind Side, "Slide5-The-Blind-Side.PNG")**

The Blind Side, great movie. It was a story about a family that saw a teenage boy standing in the rain, and they said, "Man, he has some needs." And so they started to meet his needs. He needed a place to stay. He needed to get out of the rain. He needed clothes. He needed food. But what they ultimately discovered was that what he **really** needed was a **family**. And that's what we all need.

How many of you love musicals? Oh man. You'll probably remember this one. Annie!

**(Show the graphic for Annie, "Slide6-Annie.PNG")**

There are multiple iterations of Annie, right? Like the sun will come up tomorrow, right? I'm not going to sing it. I did that in the first service and people were like, stick to the stories. Stick to the stories.

Anyway, back to the point, Annie. Annie was this little girl who was adopted from an orphanage. It was written during a time when kids were still in orphanages. We didn't even have the foster care system. That's a relatively new thing that's been formed over decades. But there was this man, Daddy Warbucks. He was a billionaire. He's rich.

And here's the thing: he needed a family, probably more than the little girl did. And it was incredible how they came together in that story, and it changed a generation. And we sing these songs and we have awareness around adoption.

But there's another movie and of all the movies that mention this topic, this may be the one that I love the most.

**(Show the graphic for The Lego Batman Movie, "Slide7-Lego-Batman.PNG")**

The Lego Batman Movie. Yeah, man. Lego Batman, like it connects two of my favorite things: Legos and Batman. The only thing that beats that, the only combination, is Jesus and coffee. But just below that, it's Legos and Batman.

There's a story about a little boy who was living with a foster family. And his foster parents took him to see this movie right when it came out. And this little boy had a big tub of popcorn, about as big as his torso, time of his life.

When it was done, the dad asked this young boy, what was your favorite part of the movie? And he expected to hear about one of the jokes in the movie, or one of the action sequences, but this little boy said his favorite thing was Robin.

And the foster dad said, "Oh, you want to be like Robin and go fight crime with Batman?"

The boy said, "No, because Robin got adopted... and he got a forever family."

Does anyone here know... why is Robin with Batman? It's because Batman **adopted** Robin. Robin was an orphan, and that was part of their story, the explanation of why they're together.

And of course, the story of this boy has a happy ending as well, because that foster family did choose to adopt him, and just like Robin the hero, this boy got the forever family he was hoping for.

Stories matter. Stories matter, and stories move people.

And what I know is that the stories that Kaycee Stanley and her team at The Reel Hope Project are sharing are moving people. The Reel Hope Project is an organization that creates videos of kids in foster care with a goal of finding a forever family for every child. There are roughly 100,000 kids in the foster care system who are legal orphans, their parents have lost parental rights. And Kaycee along with her staff are working to connect these vulnerable kids with families that can adopt them, and they've been able to do that for hundreds of kids and teenagers across the country. And so I want you to hear a little bit about their experience and see if you could picture yourself in this story. Take a look.



Show the week eight sermon video here, available for streaming or download by following this QR code.  
Length: 4 minutes 35 seconds

What I love about this story and why I appreciate Kaycee stepping into this call is because it highlights that when the church sees kids in foster care and takes action, then the world sees hope.

That we can literally change people's minds and their hearts, one story at a time. And today, we're going to be talking very directly about what that looks like in adoption.

Some of us, I get it, we're here and we're like, "Pastor, I'm never going to do that." You may be struggling thinking, "I don't even know if I want to start a family. I'm digging single life." You might be sitting here and saying, "Hey, I don't know that this applies to me," but listen, if you're here in a church, this applies to every one of us, because at the very least it applies to us spiritually. And for many of us, very practically, because here's the point.

**No person is a part of God's family because they were born into it. Everyone is adopted into God's family,** and based on our backgrounds, we're all in systems where we're essentially like kids in foster care, just floating around with whatever worldviews. Yet God meets us where we are and adopts us into **his** family.

In a spiritual sense, this is deep. It's true. It's theological. It has application to influence why we do what we do. But there may be some of us in the room that need to be a part of God's original plan for humanity, which was illustrated in Genesis three, where he created family because it will change the world that we're living in, in a significant way.

I want us to all lean in and engage for these next few moments. And I want to talk to you about three ways God invites us into his adoption story.

### **Point Number One: See Kids in Foster Care as Family**

**See kids in foster care as family.** Like, they're not just "those kids." It's not somebody else's problem. Listen, there may be accidental parents in the world, but there are no accidental children.

They're here, and they need families. And the thing is, when we look at this, we go, man, somebody else needs to solve that problem. A lot of times we think that the government needs to solve this problem. We live in a world where the government gets shut down, but the church is still alive and the church has been and will be here after our current government is long gone. It's a promise.

God uses the church and we can be a part of that solution. But what does that look like? Well, interestingly, we actually have an answer from somebody who is in Jesus' biological family. Could you imagine the pressure of being one of like, the brothers of Jesus? Like, "Why don't you act more like your brother, Jesus?"

James was a biological brother of Jesus. Here's what he said, he had insider information on this deal. Look at what he says in James chapter one, verse 27.

*“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress.”* Whoa. If you want to know what you can do, that will not get criticism, but will get high praise from God himself, focus on that.

What do those two sets of people have in common? They need family. They've experienced a loss. They've experienced some trauma. They're in distress, and they need somebody to step into it. And God's saying, “Hey, do you think that's a problem that needs to be solved?” And we respond, “Yeah, who's going to do that?” Well, look in the mirror.

Because God's speaking to us as the church. He's speaking to us as individuals, and he's saying, “Listen, **people need family**. That's my plan for the world.” That is incredible to me.

So I want you to imagine your home right now. Think about the pictures that you have. We have pictures of all our kids. And in these frames are pictures of me and my wife when we were younger and had more energy.

Right? Remember those days? But I want you to imagine if you had a picture frame that was empty. That maybe out of these 100,000 kids that are adoptable in foster care right now, that maybe their picture should be forever in your frame because they're part of **your** family. There are 300,000-plus churches in America. If 1 in 3 churches had just one couple that heard from God, “Adopt a foster child,” that problem would be gone.

Like **gone** in our country. And I don't know about you, but I'd love to check the box, **done** on that one. We can do that. We could do that. It is possible. It's possible that it could happen. But it happens because of awareness. And most importantly, it happens when we discover this truth: **God's family includes kids in foster care**. We are part of God's **solution** to the brokenness in the world, and we can help people experience grace.

### **Point Number Two: Change Culture Through Storytelling**

**Change culture through storytelling.** When we tell stories, it moves people. Jesus told stories and people saw themselves in them, and then they saw the way forward.

In the very last book of the Bible, Revelation, there is this truth that is revealed. Revelation 12:11. It says “*They triumphed.*” If you don’t know how this story ends, being a Christ-follower, you’re on the winning team, okay? You’re on the winning team.

And it says “*They triumphed over him by the blood of the lamb,*” meaning Jesus died and paid the price on the cross for us. That is huge. But it’s not the whole story. That’s the greatest part of story. But it says “*...and by the word of their testimony.*”

Somebody told me recently they had to go to court and they were nervous. And I’m like, “Are you on trial?” They said, “No, I have to bear witness.” I said, “Just tell the truth. Just tell what you experienced. That’s all you have to do. Answer the questions.” That’s what sharing a testimony is. Put your hand on the Bible, right? Like, “I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”

Here’s the thing: nobody expects you and I, as Christ-followers, to tell people something we don’t know. When you share your testimony, your story, about how God moves in your life, you don’t have to have this theological education in seminary. You just have to share your real-life experience.

Here was my life before Jesus; here’s how Jesus entered my life, and here’s how my life is forever different. That’s it. That’s it. But what’s amazing is the word “testimony” here, somebody say “testimony.” It starts with a four-letter word that many of us don’t like: “test.” Some of you were like, “Oh, that four-letter word. Got it.”

But it’s a test. There’s going to be a challenge. And when there’s a challenge and God shows up and meets the need, we go, oh, God, really does what he says he’s going to do. And that’s what builds the hope and confidence.

There’s two things that I know about every kid that enters a foster home. One. they’ve experienced trauma. They’ve experienced a disruption in their life that has created a traumatic moment where they are no longer with the people and the environment that they were in before. It’s scary. Okay. Second thing is, they have needs. Sometimes they’re starving hungry. Sometimes they have holes in their shoes. Listen, kids don’t end up in foster care because all their needs are met. Neglect is a very real thing.

I’ll share another story about a little girl in foster care. When she first came to her foster family she was hungry. Really hungry. She’d gotten used to going without food.

And the parents, being loving and caring people, thought, “We need to do something about this.” So they took this little girl to maybe one of the best experiences she could possibly have.

They took her to Pizza Ranch.

They didn’t know what kind of food she liked, but they knew this much: if they don’t have it a pizza ranch, you don’t need it. They got everything. They got pizza. They got chicken, they got all kinds of stuff.

And so they get there, and this little girl, she was like, “I want some of that,” pointing at the mashed potatoes. “Want some gravy?” Yep, put some gravy on it. “You want some vegetables? You want some chicken?” “Yeah.” All this stuff. I mean, piled high. Parents are thinking, “Where’s she going to put all that?”

But she was like a magician. She made it disappear. So they go back up again and load up. And I mean, this happened multiple times. It was incredible. And finally it was time to go. Everybody was pretty happy. There’s ice cream running down her face, they got their money’s worth and now it’s time to leave.

And as they’re walking out the door, the foster dad looks at the little girl and notices something. She has a plate. She had the plate she was eating from, in her hand. And the man kneels down, and right away she took the plate and she grabbed ahold of it tightly like, “That’s my plate.”

And the foster dad says, “Why are you holding onto that plate?”

And the little girl says, “This plate is special. I can get as much food as I want with this plate.”

...And that was the day they stole a plate from Pizza Ranch.

Don’t worry. They gave Pizza Ranch more than enough money to buy additional plates. I promise you that.

But why do I share that story? It’s because **your story can spark someone’s “yes.”** I don’t know about you, but, man, don’t you want to be a part of giving a kid a plate that’s so special that you can get food on that plate whenever you want? We have an opportunity to help people experience abundance, and grace. And it makes a difference. It makes all the difference.

### **Point Number Three: Overcome Obstacles with Grace and Grit**

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Number three: **overcome obstacles with grace and grit**. Listen, people need grace because there's challenges that go along with it. Grace is what kind of makes the gears of life run a little smoother, and you're going to need patience, and you're going to meet challenges. And the person you're dealing with is not going to be the same person over time.

You know, there are challenges that are going to go along with this, but the thing is that we overcome obstacles with grace and grit. We all come from different experiences before we come to know Jesus. And Paul the Apostle wrote in Galatians to this area in the world where people were coming into the Christian faith with all these different worldviews and that requires some effort on your part to be patient, to answer questions, to keep people on the same page.

And until you have those conversations, you can't really get anywhere. Here's what Paul says in Galatians six verse two, *"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."* Part of the burden we carry is just the baggage people have. But we learned how to carry it by following Jesus.

Do you know that Jesus died? He paid the price for the world on a cross. And you know what's amazing is that the heaviest thing that Jesus carried the day that he died was not that cross. It was actually the **burdens** and the sin of every person who had lived, every person who was living at the time, and every person that was going to live in this world.

He was carrying that weight, and he paid the price for our sins so that we would be forgiven. And so when it says "carry each other's burdens," are we really going to tell Jesus, "Sorry, man, that might cost me something."

Because he's not asking you to give your life; maybe a little money, your time. We're following his example and his lead. And what I know is that if we create a ministry built around the heart of Jesus, if we can get past the logic of somebody else's problem, to caring about people the way that Jesus did, if it becomes a heart issue for us, this problem is going to go away. And a lot of problems in our community are going to go away.

And the church has to be the answer. Do you know that for every dollar a church uses, they're four times more effective than any government program in the world?

That's a fact. So the church has always been the answer, always will be the answer. And I just know that we have an opportunity.

I heard this story. There's this guy that ran a marathon, 26 miles and some change, and he did it in under two hours. Whoa, that is crazy, man. How do you do that? Well, what he did was he enlisted a team of people to run the race with him. Every mile, he'd have different people jump in at some point in the race and run with him, and they would say, "Hey, you got this. You're good, keep going."

And they were fresh and they were ready to go. And they ran that race. And he ran this thing at a world record time, although due to the conditions it wasn't an official world record.

But here's what I know, he didn't run it **alone**. And if we're going to face the challenges of the world, you and I **cannot** run the race alone.

He had people who encouraged him, but he had people who loved him that took the time and energy and effort to run that race with him. And we have an entire system of kids who don't know that God loves them. They don't know who is going to help them manage and navigate the challenges of life. But you and I get to be an answer to that, and we get to build a ministry that lasts, that runs on love.

Today, I want to talk to you about the spiritual part of this that you may not be aware of, and why this applies to every one of us, why we're so passionate about what we do as a church.

In reading through the Bible, I learned that adoption isn't really found in the Old Testament. You read Ruth, and in that story we see the concept of a kinsman-redeemer. A near relative who could take on the family's obligations, defend them, and provide for them. But it's not quite the same thing.

However, in the New Testament, you see this word "adoption." So I became interested in that. And I found out that the concept of adoption was actually invented in the Roman Empire.

And the reason why it was invented in the Roman Empire is because there was a Caesar who could not biologically have a son, and he needed a son to be the next Caesar. So he created a system of adoption so that he could pass his family lineage and legacy on to someone else.

And Paul talks about this, how it was always God's plan. He predestined to adopt every one of us into his family. So he's using this idea to show what it means. But then I did some more digging and found this out about adoption under the Roman Empire: there's a process. You go through a process to adopt. You don't just say, "I want a kid," and then they show up.

There was a process in the Roman Empire; you had to answer three questions. Question number one, "Will you assume the debt of this child that you're going to adopt?" Some of you, you're like, "What does that mean?" Well, some of these kids were slaves. Their families had debt and they couldn't move forward and be a part of your family until the debt was paid.

So for us, there was a debt that had to be paid for us spiritually. That's called sin. And every one of us has it.

Second question, "Do you accept this child as they presently are?" How many of you ever bought an open box item at like Best Buy or someplace like that? Right? Part of the condition is you buy it as-is. Maybe has a scratch on it, but it still works perfectly. The same thing is true in adoption. You accept this child the way they are with their medical challenges, with the fact that maybe they have trauma. You accept them for who they are. By the way, Jesus does that. He accepts every one of us right where we are.

So when you're trying to hide everything about you that you don't want people to know, he already knows. And he says, "I accept you anyway; I love you."

And then question number three, this is the most profound one. "Do you commit to secure their future?" Meaning if you adopt this child into for example, the Caesar's family, they have right to everything that comes with that the inheritance, including being part of the royal family.

And you can never write them out of the will. You know what's amazing? If you're in a biological family, your parents, if they got mad at you... and by the way, parents, I'm not giving you ideas here. If they get mad, they could write you out of the will. Those are facts.

But if you adopt a child, you can never write that child out of the will because you actively **chose** to take on that responsibility of that child.

All of this also applies to Jesus. What he did, what he secured for us, when he invited us to be a part of his family and we get adopted, you and I can never be written out of the will of eternity. It is secure.

And there are 100,000 kids right now, today, that are ready to be adopted. And we need to do something about that. But there are over 8 billion people on this planet, and over 5 billion of them need to be adopted into God's spiritual family. And that happens when we tell the story. That God accepted us and paid the penalty of our sin. God accepted us and loved us just as we were.

And God secures our future and we're never written out of the will. And by the way, here's the most important thing you'll tell them, "There's room for you in the family." Come be a part of our family. God loves you. So today I want to challenge our church to do one, maybe two things.

Every one of us can be a part of telling the story The Reel Hope Project tells. Share it. Just share it. That's easy. I can do that. You're like, "Well, I'm not going to adopt." But you know what would be wild? What if one of your friends that you're friends with on social media winds up adopting that child? Your small act of obedience could change somebody's eternity.

But secondly, I believe that there are people in this room that maybe you've never realized why we make this invitation every week. And by the way, I'm never going to back off of this, ever, because people need Jesus. People need Jesus. People need to be adopted into God's family. So I'm going to pray that we all take a step.

I'm going to give you a couple options. You can just pop your hand up whenever you hear the thing that applies to you. And then I'm going to pray for people to accept Christ, and I'm going to invite you at the count of three to respond. So let's close our eyes, bow our heads, and let's pray.

*As you close in prayer, with heads bowed and eyes closed, ask people to raise hands for whatever they'd be willing to commit to, one section at a time:*

- 1) *To share reels from The Reel Hope Project, or a similar organization.*
- 2) *To support financially The Reel Hope Project, or a similar organization.*
- 3) *To make room in your family to adopt a child from foster care.*