

CONSIDERING FOSTER CARE

Are you considering foster care?

There are almost 20,000 children in Illinois in the foster care system. The Department of Children and Family Services defines foster care as, "a temporary safe haven for children who are at risk of serious harm." We know that the Bible clearly tells us in the book of James that we are to care for orphans, but since foster kids still have parents do we have a call to provide care for them even if it is only temporary? As a follower of Jesus living in the United States, consider that caring for orphans and foster care may be the same thing. Proverbs 31:9 commands us to "defend the rights of the poor and needy." Children in foster care come with a variety of needs. Most kids are placed in foster care due to some type of neglect or abuse. Exploring foster care means weighing all the practical concerns in your head against the often inexplicable tugging in your heart. The questions you have often outweigh the answers

- "What types of abuse and neglect am I capable of dealing with?"
- "How will this foster child impact my children?"
- "Can I give a child back to a biological parent after I have formed a bond with them and fallen in love?"
- "How will this affect my family financially?"

Don't let fear of the unknown paralyze your decision. Jeremiah 32:27 reminds us, "Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me?" Step out in trust as you begin to prayerfully and realistically consider where God is leading you.

STEP ONE: Understand God's heart for foster kids

It's easy to grow anxious when you explore foster care in your own limited strength and understanding. There is peace, however, in seeking to know and reflect God's heart for the needy and oppressed. You can do that by reading and meditating on verses in the Bible about caring for the marginalized in our society (i.e. Isaiah 58:6-7; James 1:27; Leviticus 25:35; Philippians 2:4; 1 John 3:17; Isaiah 25:4; Psalm 82:4). As you read these scriptures, consider setting aside time for fasting and seeking the Lord's will for your home. As you pray, consider the possibility that part of God's plan for your home could be a child temporarily placed with you. Then consider the impact you could have in the life of a child who otherwise might not ever have a safe, stable home life. How might God be leading you to change the trajectory of their life even if they are only with you a short time? Seeking God's heart for foster children will stretch your perspective. It will change the kind of cost/benefit analysis you bring to your decisions. It also can give you peace and patience and can grow your trust in God's ability to provide for you in what he's calling you to. While seeking God's heart for foster children, you might discover different ways to become involved in orphan care. Not everyone is called to foster care or adoption, but all Christians are called to care for the orphan.

STEP TWO: Educate Yourself

There are several agencies in Illinois that offer foster care. DCFS, Children's Home and Aide, and The Baby Fold are local agencies. Contact all 3 agencies to get a feel for each. Register for PRIDE training (Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Training). PRIDE is a program to prepare and educate families that are interested in providing foster care. Ask questions: one of the best ways to increase your understanding of both the head and heart issues of foster care is to spend time with others who have fostered-to hear from them the joys and challenges of each step along the way. To learn from those who have been there before, contact Val Burcham: vburcham@eastview.church

RESOURCES:

- **Faith and Foster Care** by John Degarmo
- **This Means War** by Cheryl Sasai Ellicott
- **Just a Minute** by Wess Stafford
- **Grace Based Foster Parenting** video series on RightNowMedia by Tim Kimmel
- **"Foster Care as the Way of Christ"** at DesiringGod.com