

# Fathers, COME HOME



*A Wake-up Call for Busy Dads*

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## *Chapter 1*

# Would You Like a Little Boy?

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It was a typical Tuesday for late spring. Joe Baxter maneuvered his large bakery van down the winding drive, past the manicured lawns dotted with magnolia trees and well-maintained buildings. He stopped at the usual spot in front of the main structure, a beautifully restored remnant of Southern gentility. Stately and freshly painted white Ionic columns offset the aging brick of the elegant antebellum structure. For the past two years, Joe had made this weekly stop to deliver fresh bakery goods. It was one of his favorite stops, though he made little money from it. It was the kids. They made each visit special. Everybody else saw these children around town once or twice a year, but Joe visited them weekly and had begun to get attached to a few of them.

Today he was dropping off several trays of hamburger and hot dog buns and two dozen loaves of bread. “These kids don’t eat too bad,” Joe mumbled to himself as he unloaded the truck. Normally the chil-

dren would be in class, but today, he noted, several of them were playing around the grounds. Nicely dressed and well-mannered, they ranged in age from around five to 15. The boys and girls came from many different backgrounds but Joe knew they had one thing in common – they had no place to go, no family. The institution was their home.

This home for orphaned, abandoned and neglected children, in the heart of the Deep South, is a very special place. Staff treat the children with love and compassion. The Christian group that runs it does all within its

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*You* are my  
son; today I have  
become your father.

– PSALM 2:7

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power to recognize the personal needs of each child. They go to great lengths to make the children realize they are wanted, that they belong to a “family.” They show compassion through one-on-one counseling. They teach com-

munal values through various fun-filled group activities. They emphasize responsibility through meaningful work, assigned according to age and ability. Above all, the children learn about real love, the love of a heavenly Father who loves them unconditionally. An intimate knowledge of this unconditional, Fatherly love is a healing balm for these wounded lives.

A few of the children’s parents had died in tragic accidents. Most, however, were severely neglected,

abused or simply abandoned, left to fend for themselves in a cruel and chaotic world. One can't help but admire this compassionate effort to restore the souls and bodies of these young boys and girls. It is truly admirable. Yet, even with this excellent care, the children still have a longing, a yearning to be wanted on a more personal and permanent basis. This wasn't obvious in the shouts and laughter that pierced the morning air. No one could tell the depth of the emotional and spiritual wounds that accompanied their physical abandonment. Joe knew from personal experience that the yelling and running and laughing overlay a hurt deep inside.

All the kids certainly appeared to be having a good time that clear, sunny day. All but one, that is. He was a bright-eyed youngster, perhaps nine years old. Joe recognized him. He had seen him around the campus before. He was sitting on the top step at the entrance to the kitchen. The skinny, mop-haired lad looked so much like Opie that Joe felt like grabbing a fishing pole and whistling the theme song to *The Andy Griffith Show*.

Joe Baxter couldn't know of the tragic circumstances which had led to the little guy being there. Unwanted, he was shifted from distant relative to distant relative and then to several foster homes. He had been moved so many times in the past six years that he was convinced that no one wanted him. The thought haunted him night and day.

The lad's eyes followed every move of the delivery man as he shouldered his load and started up the steps. His little mind was working overtime. When Joe reached the kitchen, he realized he had been followed.

"What's up, kid?," he asked nonchalantly. The boy's expression brightened a little as he answered a barely audible, "Nothing."

Joe unloaded his tray and was about to leave when he felt a slight tug on his pants. "Hey, mister, you want to see something? Come on, let me show you where I stay." Joe, getting an OK nod from a nearby supervisor, reluctantly followed the eager lad down the hallway and into another wing. In a large room were 15 or so bunkbeds, all neatly made. Pointing to one in the middle of the small dormitory, the boy said, "This is my bed, it's mine all by myself. Nobody sleeps here but me. Look under here. This is where I keep my clothes. I got two new pairs of jeans and three shirts."

Sensing he had Joe's attention, he grabbed his hand and pulled him toward the large communal bathroom. There was a long row of toothbrushes with names above them identifying their owners. The youngster picked up the one below the label "Jimmy" and said, "This is my very own toothbrush. I picked it out all by myself. Red is my favorite color. Do you like red?"

Joe was on the verge of losing control. He pretended to blow his nose and quickly dabbed his eyes. Little kids always had this effect on him. Still fighting back the tears, Joe hurried to escape before he broke down in front of the nine-year-old child. Quickly, through the building, down the steps and out to the truck. Not to be denied, the tenacious little guy tagged along right behind his newfound friend. Just as Joe opened the door to the oversized van, the little boy grabbed the deliveryman's big hand, held it to his face, and asked, "Mister, how would you like a little boy?"

The above story is about a real little boy and a real institution. A few minor details have been changed to protect the identities of those involved, mainly the little boy. "Joe" told me about it a few weeks after it happened. Every time I see a neglected child, I think about that little boy.

How many little Jimmys are tucked away in institutions all over America? How can parents discard their children like yesterday's garbage?

Considering the pressures facing children today, life is challenging even for kids from relatively stable homes. How do these children function when their world has been turned upside down without parental support? I know there are families who want these kids. Why can't abandoned kids be placed more

quickly? Why must we have so much red tape between them and loving, permanent homes?

I suspected God was trying to tell me something through this incident but I couldn't figure it out. Lord, I thought, I have love, compassion and concern for homeless and neglected children. I've never failed to help when I'm asked. However, I was missing the message. An inner voice kept saying, "Bill, it's easy for you to see how these kids have gotten a raw deal. Their little lives lie open before the whole world. Your vision is less clear when it comes to other hurting children in your city, in your community, even in your own home. These are the kids I want you to speak out for."

After pondering this for some time, I realized the significance of the message. I realized that many children in seemingly normal homes are really no better off than children in orphanages. Children such as Jimmy get their three hot meals a day, they get a safe place to sleep and regular baths. They get books to read, and they occasionally get toys and other gifts. They get all this, but they have one very vital need. They want that very special bond between a child and parent. They want parents to want them near so badly that they yearn for them. They desperately need to be needed.

Similarly, in millions of homes across America, children are getting three meals a day and a roof over their heads. They have warm beds and a place to take baths.

They occasionally get toys and miscellaneous other gifts. Most are given proper medical attention and a good education. Yet they, too, are yearning for a special kind of love. They, too, need to be needed. These children are, in essence, searching for parents in the same way as those children in the orphanage. They cry out to have someone to spend personal time with them. As parents, we had better heed their cries before it is too late. With their eyes, hands and hearts they are desperately reaching out to their busy parents and saying, “Mister, would you like to have a little boy?” “Ma’am, would you like a little girl?”

There are more similarities than differences between these children and children in orphanages and foster homes. They, too, have been emotionally and spiritually abandoned by parents who are caught up trying to be successful. In reality, the houseparents in orphanages probably give more time and attention to the moral and spiritual well-being of their charges than do most parents in presumably healthy, normal homes.

Fathers and mothers have unique, individual responsibilities in the rearing and nurturing of children. Unfortunately, in today’s society, one parent is often left to handle them alone. The support, encouragement, training and discipline of children are challenging tasks for two. Think of how it must be for a single parent. Along with our prayers, we need to extend a helping hand to single-parent households. They represent a growing seg-

ment of our population. The children from such homes are going to be on their own in a few short years. Whether or not they become caring, contributing members of society may depend on what we do today.

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**One father is  
more than a  
hundred  
schoolmasters.**

— GEORGE HERBERT (1640)

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One of our most urgent and immediate responsibilities as parents is to nurture and encourage our own children. In some cases the results will soon be evident. In

others they may not be realized for years. Our family life should be an example for others. A caring, supportive, encouraging family can be a witness, a beacon for those who may be going through a dark time in their lives. Where do we start? Who does what?

The mother, of course, plays a crucial role in the life of the family, from bringing children into the world through years of her continual maternal care. Only a woman can provide that. We know the mother is indispensable, but the father also has a vital role. The husband and father is responsible in an overall way for the physical, moral and spiritual welfare of his family.

Fathers, your responsibility cannot be delegated. It cannot be ignored. Yet that is exactly what is happening in America today.

There are literally millions of fathers who are physically living with their children but who are light-years removed from them mentally, spiritually, and emotionally. They are so caught up in a self-imposed, hectic schedule that they have no real opportunities to relate to their children. It's always something: the demands of the profession, required social and civic functions, community events. All are good in themselves, but they can become excuses for mentally abandoning one's children. Children desperate for our love will do anything for attention. They want us to be an active part of their world. When these busy fathers do squeeze a few minutes in for their family, they are so preoccupied that the children can tell immediately, "Dad's mind is somewhere else."

Many fathers lose their children before they realize there's a problem. Some get a second chance. In unexpected ways, they can be jolted back to reality. That is what happened to me.