



Micah Network: Integral Mission and Shalom

How Loving Families Usher in Shalom for Orphans and Vulnerable Children

The story of the Bethany Global Foster-to-Adopt Program in Ethiopia

Three-year-old Ruth was languishing in an Ethiopian orphanage with no hope of being reunited with her biological family. Eleven-month-old Yabsera was found abandoned in a field outside of Hawassa, and all efforts to locate her family were unsuccessful. Unfortunately, for millions of children in the world today, these stories are not unusual.

In Ethiopia, children like Ruth and Yabsera often face a bleak future; Ethiopia is home to one of the largest populations of orphans in the world—close to 5.5 million. This statistic is devastating and poses the questions: what is the solution to an orphan crisis of this magnitude? What does *shalom* look like for these children? How can there be peace in the heart of a child—let alone a country—if this is their reality?

Today, Ruth and Yabsera have hope and a future because they have found loving forever families. Bethany's mission is to equip families to be the solution for children in need.

Transforming Lives

In 2009, Bethany Global began a foster-to-adopt program in the town of Adama, Ethiopia. It started with a partnership: Bethany Global, Adama Women and Children Affairs Office (a local NGO that provides institutional care to orphan and vulnerable children), and the Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Adama. These entities all banded together to respond to the needs of children in their community.

Bethany Global, along with these partners, introduced and implemented formal foster care in Ethiopia for the first time ever. There is no local term for "foster care," so even the language for this concept was a challenge. Although Ethiopian culture historically dictates community care for orphans, this has only applied to children within a kinship circle—children who have local extended family who can care for them. Orphaned relatives, however, are not yet considered equal to biological children; allegations of abuse abound in these often informal arrangements, and children in these circumstances have experienced profound trauma.

Scripture repeatedly refers to our call to care for orphans. Isaiah compels us to "defend the cause of the orphan" (1:17) and James defines pure religion as "caring for widows and orphans in their distress"

(1:27). Perhaps caring for orphans is one way we most closely embody the heart of God because He cared for us. We are often referred to as “God’s children.” It’s helpful to remember that we are God’s *adopted* children—“heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17).

How remarkable and unfathomable that God chooses us to be part of His family. Adoption, in this context—the epitome of a loving Father and a forever family—transforms every part of our lives. This biblical truth guides the way we think about the need for adoption and its potential to change the lives of children like Ruth and Yabsera. The ramifications are far-reaching for what is taking place today in Ethiopia’s foster-to-adopt program.

Transforming Cultures

Bethany Global’s partnerships are bringing positive, cultural change. In Ethiopia—where caring for children outside of family blood lines is “foreign”—Bethany staff taught the Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Adama about God’s heart for orphans and the biblical mandate to care for them. These leaders took this message to their 32 congregations. God moved, hearts were opened, and Ethiopian Christians expressed their desire to be peacemakers and restorers in their communities.

In Adama, several families stepped forward to become foster and adoptive parents to orphans like Ruth and Yabsera. They attended an informational meeting and had successful assessments and home studies. We also looked at their economic and marital stability, as well as their ability to care for a child once placed. Not every family who fosters children chooses to adopt, but since 2009, 25 children who were once abandoned have found love, security, and the permanence of a forever family.

While over 100 families have come forward to foster in Ethiopia, many others in the churches have committed to being a support network. From providing respite care to an evening meal, the body of Christ is encouraging and empowering each other. Together with foster and adoptive families, the Church is embodying community building, reconciliation, inclusion, and wholeness. This is the heart of *shalom*.

Interestingly enough, the orphans are not the only ones benefitting. This new way of life has ignited God’s people as agents of the Gospel—repairing and restoring families that were once broken. Adoptive parents Bunti and Adonage said, “We feel that God is coming to us through this program.”

Transforming the World

Today, Bethany Global is implementing a similar model in other Ethiopian cities. Partnerships with governmental and nongovernmental organizations have been established, and prospective foster families have been recruited, trained, and are fulfilling necessary program requirements. Children who have officially been matched with foster families are being placed in the presence of government officials, church pastors, program staff, and other invited guests. The number of placements will surpass 100 children by September, 2015.

The world’s orphans could perhaps be counted among the “least of these” (Matthew 25:40); but once they find families, they are given an opportunity to thrive. Ruth and Yabsera, and many other children,

have been legally placed into the care of a loving, Christian family. This is an astonishing vision of God's Kingdom coming to earth; those "out" are welcomed "in" with open arms.

This stunning story in Ethiopia is now being repeated in several countries around the globe. The need is so great that Bethany Global is now providing consulting to any entity wishing to learn how to place orphaned and vulnerable children into loving homes. Mission agencies, orphanages, church leaders, NGOs, and governments are recognizing the important role families play in bringing *shalom* to the world.

When the family is strong, the community benefits. When the family of God is strong, the world is changed. Ruth and Yabsera know this to be true; their world has been transformed.

Visit bethany.org/global-services to learn more about Bethany Global and its child welfare, family preservation, and global consulting services.