



Thornwell

FOSTER CARE

Spreading Awareness and Garnering
Community Support During
Foster Care Awareness Month

A Toolbox for Thornwell Foster Parents
May 2023



Foster parenting can be incredibly rewarding, but it is also incredibly challenging.

No one knows this better than foster parents. **Thank you for all that you do!** We honor and celebrate your commitments to children and families. You are cherished, beloved, valued partners with Thornwell in sharing the message with your community about the need for more foster parents. In fact, you are by far the best ambassadors in recruiting new foster parents. You are the experts! You are in the thick of it! You understand the need acutely and can welcome others to do this hard and holy work in partnership with you – whether as supporters of your family, advocates for children, or by becoming foster parents themselves!

This Foster Care Awareness Month, we ask you to consider the way that you can help us spread awareness and garner support for children and families in your community. We've created this guide to serve as a toolbox. You can see what pieces of this guide work for you and make it your own – post to social media, host an event in your home, speak at your church, pass out Thornwell contact cards, or just learn some new statistics to share. The best way to encourage prospective foster families (even if they don't know they are interested in fostering yet) is by connecting them with someone who is already walking the walk.

You don't have to have all the answers! Hopefully, we've given you a comprehensive resource here to find many answers to the most frequently asked questions, but certainly there are more out there that we haven't answered in full. Your personal story is far and above more powerful than any FAQ sheet. We want to share and celebrate your stories! Of course, if someone has technical questions, you can always direct questions to your Family Specialist, Foster Care Team, or the Foster Parent Recruiter.

we are here for you!



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Scan this QR Code to access the
Foster Care Awareness Month
Digital Toolbox!

Foster Care Tool Box

Social Media Content

Stories and Statistics

1

Social Media



Looking for a way to spread awareness through social media? Check out our pre-drafted captions and designed social media content ready for you to share!



Scan this QR Code to access the Foster Care Awareness Month Digital Toolbox!



Find more information about Foster Care Awareness month and social media content to share [National Foster Care Month - Child Welfare Information Gateway](#)

Statistics

The foster care statistics for youth who never get placed with a forever home or family are heartbreaking. **20%** of foster youth will become homeless the day they age out.

Approximately **20,000** age out every year. This means approximately **4,000** kids per year leave foster care into homelessness.

(Information obtained from Finally Family Homes)

As of April, **3,827** children and youth are in South Carolina foster care.



There are **407,493** kids
in foster care.

59% of kids in US foster
care have been in care for
over 12 months.

Average time spent in
foster care is
20.5 months

117,470 kids are waiting
to be adopted.

45% of children in foster care live with a non-relative foster parent;
34% with kin; and **4%** are in a group home.

Learn More

Find Current Data

[Foster Care Dashboard](#) from SC DSS shows all the foster care data numbers for the state and broken down by county. It is updated daily at 5:15am so the numbers are current – this can help you to see trends in your own county.

Similarly there is a [Family Preservation Dashboard](#) that shows the number of open cases for Family Preservation (early intervention). These are families at risk of child removal.

[“Estimated Need For Family-Like Settings for Children and Youth under 18”](#) on the DSS website is updated quarterly and shows the need for foster care placements (beds, not homes) in each county/region.

For national data, AFCARS is the premier report for foster care/ adoption from the [Children’s Bureau](#). You can find the most recent report #28 for [2020 here](#). In 2020, there was a total of 407,493 children and youth in foster care (US) on one day. A total of 216,838 kids entered foster care in 2020. This is down significantly from all other years because of Covid. These statistics are powerful. For example, 117,470 kids were waiting to be adopted in 2020. The mean time they have been waiting to be adopted is 20 months.



DID YOU KNOW?

99% of foster parents persist for at least two years with Thornwell.

3

Thornwell Blogs and Videos

Use these stories as inspiration to tell your own

Explore the Thornwell foster parent stories via our blog and Youtube channel. Share inspiring stories and articles with friends as family! Be inspired to share your own story.

Your story is powerful! It can be cathartic to share your story as a way of raising awareness and garnering support for children and families. It can also be intimidating. *Find resources for writing and sharing your story in the “Host a Foster Care Awareness Event” section of this toolkit.*



Scan this QR Code to access Thornwell's Youtube channel!

Scan this QR Code to access Thornwell's blog!

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Host a Foster Care Awareness Event

Thanks for thinking about hosting a foster care awareness event!

May is a great month to invite your friends to learn more about foster care in your community and how they can support you. They may hear or see other foster care stories on social media, in their local news, on the radio, etc. because it is Foster Care Awareness month and that will maximize the impact of your event. However, every month is a great month to share about the need to serve and support vulnerable children and families.

we are here to help!

The Thornwell Foster Care Team and the Thornwell Program Marketing and Recruitment Specialist are always here to help! We can help you build your event from the ground up, support your efforts, or join you to speak on behalf of Thornwell's programs and services. Events can be as large or as small as you want them to be - formal or informal. They may be hosted in your home, at your church, or maybe at your book club. They may be hosted in-person, live online, recorded, or anything else you can dream up. You might choose to host events alone, with friends, or in partnership with groups and organizations.

Remember, you don't have to know everything to host a great event and you don't have to teach everything in one night. **Your relationships and your testimony as a foster parent speaks volumes!** Relax, have fun, and speak from the heart. Not everyone will become a foster parent. That's okay! This is a great opportunity for your friends, family, and neighbors to learn about how they can better support you and your family in your journey. They may decide to find another way to serve, learn, or get involved as a volunteer. They may consider donating time, talent, or treasure. No matter what, you are planting seeds in the hearts of families to care for vulnerable children and families!

DID YOU KNOW?

Neglect is the primary reason children enter foster care (64%)

Here's what you'll want to consider in hosting a well-executed event of any size:

- The Audience
- The Location
- The Date and Time
- The Host/ Emcee

The Audience:

- **Who are you inviting to your event?** This is the most important part of an event – big or small. It will shape the rest of your event planning.
- **Is it an organized group?** Work colleagues, book club, small group, MOPs or other parenting group. Groups typically already have an agreed upon date, time, and location to meet. You'll want to get leaders' buy-in and support in advance so they know what to expect.
- **Is it an open invitation?** Church, organization, multiple groups, etc. Collaboration tends to pull a larger audience. You'll want to be flexible in planning the date, time, and location that will accommodate everyone.
- **Is it friends and family only?** With people you know and trust, you'll be most authentic, vulnerable, and comfortable. They are likely already supportive of your family's experience. You'll want to be considerate of what and how you share if children are present.
- **Is it virtual?** This works well because you can tap into your larger social network regardless of physical location. You'll want to consider your privacy and viewing settings. Make sure that all social media rules regarding children in foster care are respected.
- **Once you know your intended audience, think about how you'll invite them or spread the word.** Be clear about your goal and what they can expect. Frame your message to clearly present the problem, solution, and a call to action. For example, "There are # kids in foster care in our county and not nearly enough families to welcome them. We need more foster parents, advocates, and volunteers. Come and learn all the ways you can help."

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Location:

Where will you host your event? Will it be formal or informal? Do you want to serve snacks or a meal? Will you need access to technology or audio equipment? Your location will set the vibe for the event and may dictate what and how you share.

- At your home or a friend's home
- At a community space like a park, playground, picnic area
- At your church or a reserved classroom
- At a restaurant, coffee shop, or other public place

The Date and Time:

Think about the days and times that work best for you and your family.

Consider what type of event you'd like to host. Here are some ideas:

- Invite your best friends over for drinks and charcuterie after the kids go to bed – Consider Friday or Saturday at 8:00pm.
- Invite couples over for a casual dinner to talk about fostering. Invite your friend who is a GAL to share their experience. Set up the kids at a table with snacks and activities in the other room – Consider Sunday at 5:00pm.
- Host a special bible study or small group gathering focused on foster care – Consider Wednesday at 6:00pm.
- Ask your book club if you can share a little bit about your family's foster care story and the need for more foster parents at your meeting this month (Date and time already solved). Even better, ask if you can read a book connected to foster care in May.
- Plan an outing with your stay-at-home-parent friends or the kids' play group. Share your foster care story and suggest how they can learn more while the kids play – Consider weekday mornings.
- Think about how your homeschooling group or your kids' school might be willing to let you teach children, teachers, and parents about foster care – Consider weekdays during school hours.
- Ask your church to help you host an event after your weekly worship service. If that's not an option, ask if you can give a brief announcement or put something in the bulletin for Foster Care Awareness Month – Consider Sunday early afternoon.
- Partner with other foster parents, advocates, groups, etc. to host a larger community event – Consider Tuesday or Thursday at 7pm.

The Host/ Emcee:

Who is leading the event?

Stories are the key way to connect with your audience.. Here are some ideas:

- Simply share your personal foster care story and the impact of fostering on your family. This is powerful! Share some photos that represent your journey. Tell friends and family specifically how their support has impacted your ability to persist in fostering. Give specific ways that they can step in to support you in the future. They may not know how to help.
- Invite other foster parents to share their stories as part of a panel representing different experiences. Consider inviting Guardian Ad Litem and other supporters.
- Share statistics that represent the local need for more foster parents and advocates. This can also be done with a rolling slideshow
- Ask a pastor to pray for the group, the gathering, and the children and families impacted by foster care.
- If appropriate, ask your permanent children to share how foster care has impacted them. Please do not ask children in foster care to share publicly about their experiences to honor their privacy.
- Allow time for questions and answers or mingling afterwards to connect with people who want to learn more. Plan ahead where you will direct them for next steps. We would love for them to make Thornwell their home for fostering, volunteering, or donating.
- Think about how you want to follow up with everyone after the event. Thank them for coming and supporting you. Send them some links to information about foster care in your county or direct them to where they can learn more on their own about ways to get involved.

Serve with Thornwell

thornwell.org

Serve with GAL or CASA

nationalcasagal.org

Share Your Story

Consider Your Audience and Your Format

1. Social Media Posts
2. Blog, Vlog, or Podcast
3. Host an in-person event in your home or with a small group
4. Host a virtual event
5. Speak at your place of worship

How To Tell Your Own Fostering Story

Where do I start? You don't have to share all these things when telling your story. You probably don't want to. But it can be helpful to reflect on your story as a whole. Get everything down.

Use this space to brainstorm and write notes!



When did I start fostering? How long has it been?



What did my family look like when we were considering fostering? How have we changed? (Age, interests, health, school, work)



Why did I choose to foster with Thornwell?



Why did I start fostering? What was my motivation?



What was the first emotion I felt when I got the first call? When I said yes? When I met the child?



Who was the first child placed in my home? What do I remember most about them?

Use this space to brainstorm and write notes!



What would I want people to know about this child? And how do I protect their story as their own?



What were the biggest questions or fears I had before I started?



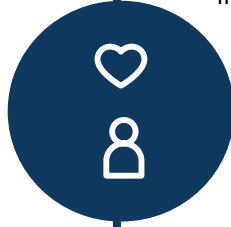
What feelings or doubts was I experiencing as we prepared our home?



What was the licensing process like? How long did it take?



What did I imagine foster care would be like before we started?



What did I learn about foster care in that first placement?



How have my motivations changed over time?

DID YOU KNOW?

50% of foster parents quit within the first year. **75%** of foster parents quit within the first two years.

Use this space to brainstorm and write notes!



What changes have I seen in myself and my family because of fostering (perspective, worldview, values)?



Who has surrounded us with support? How has our "village" made a difference?



What was a moment that I thought "Wow! This is worth it?"



What is a funny story that makes you laugh about your fostering experience?



What child has impacted me most?



What has been the hardest part of fostering?



What was a moment that I thought "I can't do this anymore" How did I overcome and persist?

Use this space to brainstorm and write notes!

What are your hopes for the future in your fostering journey?



Write Your Outline/ Make a Plan

1. Start with WHY:

“We/I believe...” _____

“We/I started fostering...”

2. Tell them HOW:

“We/I had to...”

“We/I couldn’t have done it without...” or “I wish we had...”

3. Now tell them WHAT:

“The first time the phone rang...” or “When the first child came into our home...”

“And then... I learned, I felt, I knew...”

4. Finally, Invite them In:

“Not everyone can foster, but everyone can do something” or “Here’s how you can be a part of what we are doing...”

“If you feel called to foster, it’s okay to feel...” or “I would encourage you to...”

Humanize your story. Add in funny stories, poignant moments, big challenges. The amount of vulnerability will depend on the audience and your comfort level. How well do they know you? Your family? How much have they interacted with the children in your home? If it is a small group, you can talk to them. Don’t be afraid to go off script... “Remember when you babysat...” or “You know my wife is a crier” or “You know Josh is always traveling during X,Y,Z season.”

Gather Some Mementos To Help Support Your Story

- Photos (remember confidentiality rules on children in care on social media)
- Artwork
- Gifts, Letters, Cards
- Screenshots/transcripts of special text messages, emails (respect confidentiality if applicable)



Example Stories

[Click Here for Digital Example Stories](#)

Event with Friends Example

I believe that God breaks your heart for the things that break His heart. When I learned about the 600 kids in foster care in my own county, my own backyard, that needed a warm bed and a loving parent, my heart broke. Sam wasn't totally on board at first – classic overthinker. He had a million questions and concerns. Can we afford it? How does medical insurance work? Where would they sleep? To be fair, those are questions that needed to be answered.

We agreed to wait until Josie started Kindergarten in the Fall. Classic Jess, I dropped her off at her classroom and called Thornwell from the car on the way home. By the time I picked her up from school I had sent in our application along with the dog's vaccination records. We had to do a lot to get the house ready and to get our license, but Thornwell helped us all along the way.

We did training, and had the fire marshal come check our smoke detectors and fire extinguisher. We bought another bed and car seat and I went shopping for lots of cute baby clothes because we had given Josie's away – which was all premature. If I've learned anything it's that foster care is unpredictable. We thought we would foster babies mostly, maybe a toddler. And definitely only one kid.

We were really lucky to have the support of our family and our church community. They threw us a "foster shower." Betsy, you were there. You know how incredibly generous everyone was with us. We were all just so excited. But honestly, I wish I focused a little bit more on learning and preparing my heart for what this was all about than preparing a cute nursery.

I had no idea what was about to come next. It took us about six months to get our license. Then on Valentine's Day while I was at Josie's school party, I missed a call from our case worker. Everyone needs a LaFawn! I mean our case worker is just amazing!

There was a message and I saved it. I can play it for you now. I don't think I'll ever delete it. There were twin six-year-old girls that needed a home in our county. I sobbed as I listened to it in the car in the school parking lot. I texted Sam. I thought for sure he would say "no way." This wasn't the plan. One kid. Younger than Josie. But, we immediately texted back "YES."

So I called LaFawn, sure she would say they already had a home, but they didn't. And that's where our story starts. I felt every emotion. I can't even explain it. Nervous. Scared. Excited. Uncertain. But also weirdly at peace. Most of you know the girls. They are energetic and loud and fun. But there have been some really hard moments. There have definitely been nights where I go to bed feeling like I've failed. There have been days where I feel so angry at everyone – the "system," their parents, attorneys and judges, and everyone. Angry at myself. Angry at the girls. I know that is hard to admit, but it's true. Foster care isn't easy. Sometimes it feels like you've turned your life over to someone else. Everything is out of your control. But it is still your job to care for these kids who have experienced some really hard things.

I've learned so much about grace, compassion, empathy. When the girls go home, I will be devastated. We are approaching some big decisions and parents are doing everything they need to do to get these girls home safe. I'm proud of them and I want them to get to go home. But selfishly, I also want them to stay. But I know that when they go home, there will be another child that needs us. Maybe for a day, a week, or a month. Maybe a year. Or maybe forever. I don't know. I'm learning that God's plan is not my plan. It's so much better.

Not everyone will foster, but everyone can do something. You all have been a huge part of our story. You've brought meals, and babysat, and celebrated birthdays and holidays with us. That is just as meaningful. Just as worthwhile. But maybe, you're thinking. Gosh, if Jess and Sam could do this, then we definitely could do it. You've seen how dirty our car is and how messy the girls' hair is most days.

If we can do it, so can you. And you have us. We want to be your village. We want to be on your team. So if you ever think, maybe I could foster – do it. Jump in! May is Foster Care Awareness Month. This is the perfect time to consider what role you can play.

Short Church Announcement

Hi, My name is Taylor. We have been going to this Church for five years now. You might recognize my family as the last ones rushing in the doors every week with a bunch of kids. We love this church because of the way you love our kids. May is Foster Care Awareness Month and I want to tell you why this month is special to us. We believe that caring for children and families is gospel work.

We started fostering in 2017 and we have welcomed many beautiful children into our home. Some just for a short time. Some for a few months. One for a year. And now our forever daughter through adoption. Foster care is not easy, but it is worth it. Jesus makes clear that he cares about children. He cares about families. And we should too.

We believe that it is our life's ministry to champion families, to stand in the gap when they need a little help. We couldn't do it without our church – without all of you. Not everyone will foster, but everyone can do something. You can tutor, mentor, pray, give, babysit, bring a meal. You can become an advocate. We'll be in the back to chat after church if you want to learn more.

Photo taken by: Beth Yarbrough - *Beth Yarbrough's Southern Voice*



Share Your Story with Thornwell

We love hearing the stories you share about how the Lord is working in your heart and home. We love hearing you brag on other Thornwell foster parents as they do the hard and holy work of caring from children and families. As you partner with us during Foster Care Awareness month especially, we'd love to stay in touch. Please share your stories with us using the QR code below or by emailing us. We are here to celebrate, support, and encourage you.



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Thank you so much for being a Thornwell foster parent!

We value your family's commitment to serving children and families. You are a valued member of the Thornwell team - providing pathways for children to feel safe and loved.

We know that investing your heart and giving of your home is rarely easy, but we hear you say time and again that it is worth it! Today, there are nearly 4,000 children and youth in foster care and not nearly as many homes to welcome them in. **We are on a mission to change that!**

You are a part of that change - along with many amazing partners across the state. We will support you as you keep saying "yes" to serving children and youth in need of a safe, loving, supportive home. Thank you for all you do! We are thrilled to walk alongside you on this journey. We can't wait to hear about the amazing work the Lord does in and through you in this next year.



Have any fun, inspiring, or heart-warming stories to share? Scan this QR code to share your journey with us!



5

Top Questions and Answers (+ Resources) about Fostering

Have you ever had someone ask you a question you weren't sure how to answer? Or wish you had something to send them instead of trying to explain/justify/convince them yourself? Now you have a guide to answering the most frequently asked questions that may arise during Foster Care Awareness Month. Your own experience and story are always most powerful! Hopefully this helps you prepare thoughtful responses for those "on the spot" questions!

1. [How will foster care impact my children?](#)
2. [Can I foster if my spouse is not on board?](#)
3. [How can I love a child and then let them go?](#)
4. [Will I be able to afford fostering?](#)
5. [Can I foster if I work full-time?](#)
6. [Can I foster if I am single?](#)
7. [How do I know if my home/apartment will be approved for fostering? What do I need?](#)
8. [Can I give an age-range or gender preference for the children that come into my home?](#)
9. [Can I say "no" to a placement? What if a child is placed in my home and it isn't working out?](#)
10. [How much will I have to interact with the child's parents? Will I be safe?](#)



How will foster care impact my children?

“Start children off in the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.” Proverbs 22:6

We care about our children more than anything else in the world. What we bring into our home impacts them – good and bad. Foster care holds many unknowns and that can be scary. Bringing children into your home who have experienced trauma will bring challenges. But many foster parents share that overcoming these challenges as a family not only brings them closer together, helps them to communicate, and teaches them new skills, but it is life-changing for their children in largely positive ways. Children learn important lessons about empathy and caring for others. They see first-hand faith and values played out in their home. They develop admirable character traits and dream of changing the world for the better, seeing the world as much bigger than themselves.



Of course, all these positives are part of the big picture. In the day-to-day there may be bickering over sharing toys and the television remote. There may be jealousy for their parents’ attention. There may be initial frustration and confusion in transition and changes to routine. These challenges can often be overcome with time, care, and age-appropriate conversations.

At Thornwell, we want to help you make the best decision for your family – the whole family. As you decide what fostering will look like for your family, we encourage you to have conversations with your children all along the way. Listen to their doubts, concerns, questions, and expectations. Validate the challenges of being a foster sibling. And together decide what is needed. Your safety is our priority. If a child in the home is a safety concern, we will work with you to mediate the situation. That may mean finding resources, services, support, or respite. That may mean an emergency removal from the home depending on the situation. Consider your children’s needs and listen to their opinions.

Here are some resources that may be helpful for prospective or new foster parents with children in the home.

For adults:

- [Foster the Family: Encouragement, Hope, and Practical Help for the Christian Foster Parent](#), by Jamie Finn
- [Foster Care and What I Feared Most for My Own Kids](#), by Jason Johnson
- [Understanding the Impact of Foster Care and Adoption on Children Already in the Home](#), by Jayne Schooler

For young kids (0-5):

- [The Joy of Avery Series](#), by Rhonda Wagner
- [Your Parents' Love](#), by Abbie Mabary
- [Kids Need to Be Safe](#), by Julie Nelson
- [The Stuffed Giraffe: A Foster Care Story](#), Kimber Daley



For older kids (6+):

- [Pavi Sharma's Guide to Going Home](#), by Bridget Farr
- [The Great Gilly Hopkins](#), by Katherine Paterson
- [Everybody, Always for Kids](#), by Bob Goff and Lindsey Goff Viducich



Can I foster if my spouse is not on board?

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Just as foster care will impact your children, it will impact your marriage. In fact, even if you are not married, foster care will impact all your most important relationships. Foster care is rarely easy. It will bring new stresses and challenges into your life. It will disrupt (at least for a time) your regular schedule and routines. That’s why it is so important for everyone in the home to be on board when you commit to fostering. It takes an “all hands on deck” approach to help a child who has experienced trauma adjust to their new life in your home.



Couples who foster as a team – respecting each other’s boundaries, listening to each other, and communicating their needs - often find that their marriage is strengthened. They grow closer in their shared mission and ministry.

At Thornwell, we encourage couples to commit to foster care as a team. If one person is not completely on board, we recommend not moving forward yet. You might spend time to gather more information, address perceived barriers, assess your current capacity, and seek support and counsel of friends and current foster parents.

You may find that with time, information, and support, you can enter foster parenting wisely together.

If you find that you cannot get on the same page, we encourage you to find other ways to support children and families impacted by foster care with your time, talent, or treasure. You might become a Guardian Ad Litem or wrap-around a current foster family. You might donate to ministries that serve kids and families like Thornwell.

Here are some resources that may be helpful for prospective or new foster parent couples.

- [Marriage and Foster Care](#), by The Foster Journal
- [The Best Thing You Can Do For Your Marriage in Foster Care](#), by Jason Johnson
- [Fostering or Adopting: For the Husband That's Not Sure](#), by Jason Johnson
- [On Husbands + Therapy + Girl Scout Cookies](#), by Real Mom Podcast
- [Resources for Your Marriage in Foster Care](#), by The Forgotten Initiative
- [Instagram Post](#), by @foster.parenting



How can I love a child and then let them go?

“The Lord Himself goes before you; He will be with you. He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid or discouraged.” Deuteronomy 31:8

The fear of getting “too attached” is often one of the greatest barriers to fostering. It is normal to try to avoid pain, loss, and uncertainty. However, saying goodbye is the goal of foster care - foster care is meant to be temporary. It is the role of the foster parent to temporarily stand in the gap for a family as they work towards reunification. It is important for those considering foster care to consider if they can champion reunification efforts – champion the family. There is rarely an understanding of the timeline for a child staying in your home at the time of placement. Permanency efforts may take days, months, or years to complete. This uncertainty is undeniably hard to navigate at times.

You may feel the need to guard your heart to avoid getting “too attached.” Kids deserve your love and attachment! They may not have experienced safe and healthy attachments before. You are building a foundation for all their future relationships.

At Thornwell, we believe in the power of family – and that families belong together. We will offer foster parents gentle care and counsel as they develop healthy relationships with families whenever safe and appropriate.

We'll equip you, walk alongside you, and help you to navigate all the emotions, decisions, and transitions that come with being a foster parent. Goodbye may not be easy, but as an adult you have the support, the coping skills, and the emotional complexity to work through your feelings and fears.



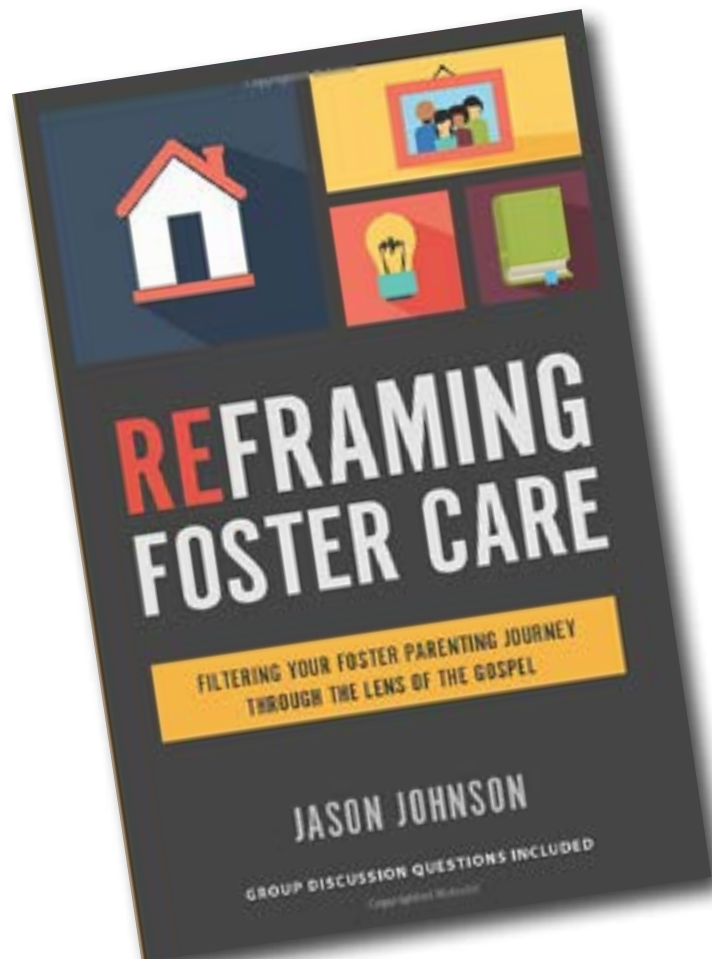
Here are some resources that may be helpful for prospective or new foster parents.

For adults:

- [Reframing Foster Care](#), by Jason Johnson
- [On Staying Guarded + Packing up and Saying Goodbye + Talking Adoption with Your Kids](#), by Real Mom Podcast
- [Saying Goodbye: Navigating Reunification as a Foster Parent](#), by The Forgotten Podcast
- [Love and Loss in Foster Care: What I Learned When We Said Goodbye](#), by Fostering Great Ideas

For kids:

- [Love You From Right Here: A Keepsake Book for Children in Foster Care](#), by Jamie Sandefer
- [Invisible String](#), by Patrice Karst



Will I be able to afford fostering?

“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!” –

Matthew 25:23

The answer is most likely yes. Most foster parents are normal people with an average income – they often do not have a large disposable income to raise additional children. While there is no minimum income requirement to foster, you need to be able to cover your family’s current living expenses without assistance.

At Thornwell, it is our hope that there is no cost associated with becoming a foster parent. The cost of the licensing process is covered by Thornwell. There may be some families that need to purchase new fire extinguishers or smoke detectors to pass the fire inspection. We do offer some financial support to ensure these requirements can be met if there is an extenuating need.

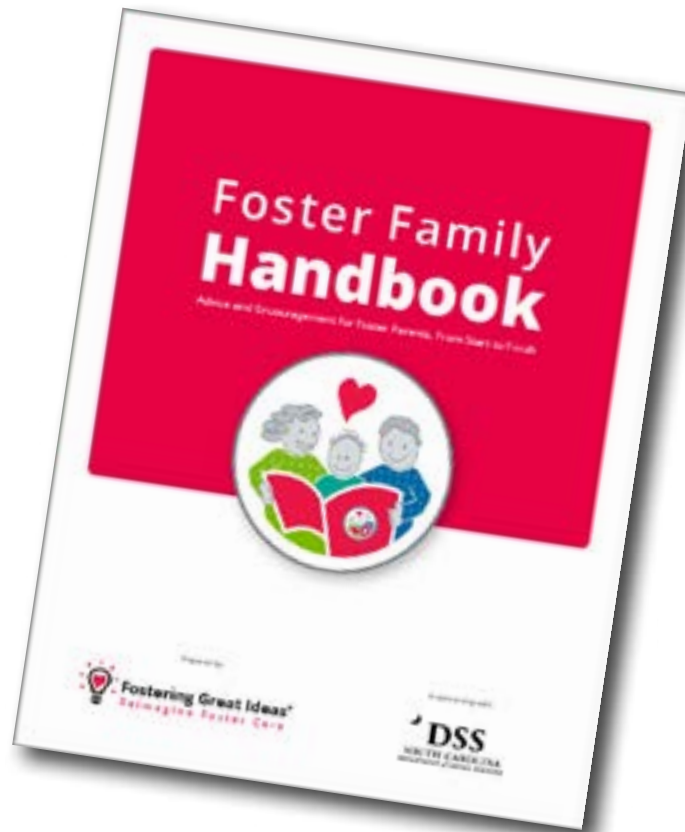
Foster parents receive financial support for the children they foster. This will come in the form of a monthly “board payment” or stipend. The amount is based on the age of the child and the total number of days in that month that the child was in your home. You’ll also receive a quarterly clothing allowance for each child placed in your home. This money should be used to cover the cost of essentials for the children in your care - food, clothing, school supplies, etc. Some foster parents may choose to spend more than the allotted board payment to provide meaningful experiences for the children they care for such as extracurriculars, vacations with the family, etc.

Children in foster care automatically receive Medicaid and will not need to be enrolled in your family’s medical insurance plan. All doctor, dentist, and mental health appointments should be covered. They are also eligible for WIC (under age 3) and SC Vouchers which pay for some or all the cost of child-care at approved facilities (see abcquality.org)

Medicaid.gov
Keeping America Healthy

Here are some resources that may be helpful for prospective or new foster parents.

- [Current SC Foster Parent Board Payment Rates](#), SC DSS
- [Foster Family Handbook](#), by SC DSS
- [How much do foster parents get paid?](#) Mousy Leigh Youtube Video (2020)



Can I foster if I work full time?

“May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us; establish the work of our hands for us – yes, establish the work of our hands.” Psalms 90:17

Foster parents are not required to stay at home with children. Every individual and family gets to decide what is best for their family and their home. There are foster parents that have one adult stay home with children, some foster parents work part-time, some work-from-home, some are dual career couples who work outside the home, and some are single working parents. All are welcome! Many families don't have the option for either parent to stay home or for another family member to stay in the home during the day with children. And that's okay!

Children in foster care can go to school, daycare, or another childcare provider just like any other child in your home.

Whether you are working in the home, out of the home, part-time, or full-time, we encourage you to consider your flexibility and your capacity in adding an additional child to your home. There will be times that you must adjust your work schedule to meet the needs of the child in your home. You will have support from Thornwell, DSS, and your family, friends, and other foster parents. Cultivate that community of support. Make a solid plan and backup plan for childcare before any children arrive in your home.



Children in foster care are automatically eligible for SC vouchers which cover some or all the cost of childcare or afterschool care at approved facilities. These vouchers are available to foster parents regardless of if they work, go to school, or stay home full time. It is important to note that immediate openings at approved daycares are often hard to find. Some foster parents confirm that their childcare facility of choice has an opening prior to accepting a placement. Some foster parents foster school age children so that there is guaranteed care during most daytime work hours.

There are many types of foster care. If you aren't sure if your work schedule will allow you the flexibility to manage the additional care and appointments of children in foster care long-term, you might consider starting with respite care or short-term emergency foster care. Short-term foster care means that you are welcoming a child or youth for a pre-determined amount of time. Respite care means that you are caring for the child placed in another licensed foster home. This may be for a night, weekend, or longer – typically no longer than two weeks depending on the reason that respite care is needed. Emergency foster care is typically for a child/youth that comes into foster care and no immediate long-term placement can be confirmed. You agree to care for the child or youth for an agreed upon amount of time, typically one night. DSS would be responsible for picking up the child or youth at the agreed upon time (typically before you must leave for work) unless you make arrangements to transport to school or the DSS office.

Here are some resources that may be helpful for prospective or new foster parents.

- [SC Voucher program](#)
- [The Truth About Being a Full-Time Working Foster Parent and Overcoming the Challenges](#), by Fostering Great Ideas
- [Being a Working Foster Parent...](#), by Laura – Foster Parent Partner Youtube Video
- Follow [@FosterTheTeens](#) on Instagram for more tips

Can I foster if I'm single?

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace.” – 1 Peter 4:10



Absolutely, YES! At Thornwell, we welcome single individuals to foster with us. We have foster families in all shapes and sizes.

All types of parents – married parents, co-parents, stepparents, single parents, foster parents - experience the joys and challenges of caring for kids. Your situation may look different from your friends who are parenting, but that isn't a bad thing. In fact, it's a great thing. We need different parent and home types to support the diverse and unique needs of children entering foster care. You can offer a child something special – you! Just as you are. Single foster parents are rockstars – especially when they are well supported!

All foster parents need a community of support. This is just as true, if not truer, for single foster parents. You'll need friends and family and neighbors to wrap around you in a variety of ways as you welcome children into your home. Every foster parent may need different support at different times. Generally, you'll want emotional, mental, and spiritual support from people who love you so that you aren't carrying all the burdens of foster parenting alone. You'll want physical and tangible support from people in your community – this may be help with transportation, childcare or babysitting, gathering supplies for a new placement, meals or groceries on hectic days, help with errands, etc. We cannot thrive in isolation! Don't be afraid to ask for help.

At Thornwell, we want to be a part of your community of support. We will be there for you every step of the way! And you'll be connected to a larger community of foster parents as well.

Here are some resources that may be helpful for prospective or new foster parents.

- [Single + Foster Parenting: You are Needed](#), by The Forgotten Podcast
- [Single Foster Parenting: Real Strategies from Real Moms](#), by The Forgotten Podcast
- [Single Foster Mom and Lawyer Extraordinaire](#), by The Archibald Project Podcast
- [Your Guide to Single Foster Parenting](#), by The Forgotten Initiative

How do I know if my home/apartment will be approved for fostering? What do I need?

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.” Matthew 7:24-25

You do not have to own a home to be able to foster. There are foster parents that foster successfully in all types of homes – owned homes, rented homes, town homes, condos, and apartments. No matter where you live, you will need to meet the requirements that Thornwell sets for all licensed foster homes in addition to the requirements set by South Carolina Department of Social Services.

Each foster home must have space for an additional child. Everyone living in the home must have a bed in a designated bedroom with a door that closes. Children may not share a bedroom with an adult (over 18). Children may share a bedroom with other children – either children in foster care regardless of relation or the children permanently in your home. There are requirements regarding which children can share a bedroom based on age and gender.

At Thornwell, we will support you as you prepare your home for foster care licensing. We will walk with you through every step of the process, helping you to understand what is required. Basic home requirements include fire, health, and safety regulations. You may need to purchase a new fire extinguisher or smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. If you do not own your home and you need to make updates to meet foster home licensing requirements, you’ll need to talk to the landlord or homeowner to see if those changes are permissible. You will likely have to cover the cost of these changes out-of-pocket. However, Thornwell never wants cost to be the only factor that stops you from being able to pursue licensure. We do have home readiness assistance available on an as-needed basis.



Here are some resources that may be helpful for prospective or new foster parents.

- [Code Enforcement for SC Foster Homes](#), by State Fire Marshal
- [10 Items Every Foster Home Needs Before the First Placement](#), by Fostering Great Ideas
- [8 Must Haves Before Your First Foster Placement](#), by Iris Kelly



Follow [@foster.parenting](#) on Instagram for more tips

Can I give an age-range or gender preference for the children that come into my home?

“May He equip you with all you need for doing His will. May He produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ, every good thing that is pleasing to him. All glory to him forever and ever! Amen.” – Hebrews 13:21

Yes! You are in control of who you bring into your home. There are many things to consider when deciding what ages, genders, and behaviors your family has the capacity to care for well. Be discerning and realistic, but keep an open mind! Remember that foster care is not about finding a child for your family but finding a family for a child. Children come into foster care at every age (0-18) and every child deserves a loving caring home.

The greatest need for more foster parents in South Carolina is for families who will enthusiastically welcome teens, sibling groups, and youth who identify as LGBTQ+. If you can consider fostering these children and youth, you are greatly needed! While there are young children who enter foster care, there are already many foster families who want to foster young children. This means that there are waiting families, not waiting young children. That’s a great thing!



At Thornwell, we are on a mission to find a home for every child and youth in foster care in South Carolina. We will support you as you find the need that you can meet. Not everyone has room for multiple children. That’s okay. There are ways to foster sibling connections even if the children aren’t all under your roof. Not every child or youth will be a good fit for your home, and that’s okay. You always have the right to say “no” to a placement when called. You’ll also have the opportunity to say “yes” even if it is outside your typical age range, gender, number of children, etc. We will help you say “yes” whenever it is a good fit with encouragement, support, resources and community.

Here are some resources that may be helpful for prospective or new foster parents.

- [Pros and Cons of Fostering Teens](#), by TeenWire
- [Foster Teens](#), by Foster Futures
- [Foster Dad of Teens](#), by Sam Mercer
- [Teens Need Families](#), by AdoptUSKids
- [Teens and Siblings Need Foster Parents](#), by Forever Family
- [Fostering Teens](#), by Laura Foster
- [Fostering Sibling Sets](#), by Laura Foster
- [How one couple helps foster siblings stay together](#), Good Morning America

Follow [**@fostertheteens**](#) on Instagram for more tips

Can I say “no” to a placement? What if a child is placed in my home and it isn’t working out?

Foster parents are always in control of who is in their home. You can say “no” to any placement call for any reason without consequence. We want you to feel comfortable to make the decisions that are best for your family because ultimately those decisions protect the health and safety of children as well. You do not have to say “yes” every time that your Family Specialist calls you with a child that needs a foster home. We want you to thoughtfully consider. For example, if everyone in the house has strep throat then it may not be good timing. If your daycare doesn’t have any openings and you require immediate access to childcare, it may not be a good fit.

Here are some general questions we hope you’ll consider when answering a placement call:

- Do we have the mental, emotional, and time capacity to care for an additional child in this season?
- Do we have the ability and willingness to support the anticipated needs of this particular child?
- Do we have the support required to welcome this child – daycare, afterschool care, bedspace, etc.?

While we certainly encourage you to be discerning in the children you welcome, we hope that you will keep an open mind when considering your ability to care for children and youth of all ages in need of a safe, stable, loving temporary home.

All children deserve to be safe and loved. There may be times when a child or youth is placed in your home and you discover that their needs are more significant than you anticipated. We encourage you to seek the support, resources, and services available to you as a foster parent. Your Family Specialist and the Foster Care team along with the DSS case manager will support you as you serve the child. However, there may be times where the child’s needs are truly more (or different) than your family is realistically able to meet at this time. You are in control of who is in your home.

You can request a 10-day removal notice for the child to be placed in another foster home. You may also be able to submit an emergency removal notice if there is an immediate safety risk. The child may be better served in a different foster home or they may need a higher level of therapeutic care. We want the child to get the care they need and deserve.

Here are some resources that may be helpful for prospective or new foster parents.

- [Can I say “no” to a foster care placement](#), by Fostering Great Ideas
- [\(Example\) Saying No to a Placement Call](#), by @foster.parenting on Instagram
- [I Say No to Placements All the Time](#), by Foster the Family
- [Disrupting a Placement](#), by Suzanne Hines
- [What if a child is placed in my home and it isn't working out?](#) by Fostering Great Ideas

Do I have to interact with the child's parents? Will I be safe?

Foster parents are always in control of when, how, and what personal information (if any) is shared with a child's parents or family members. You can choose to have as little or as much interaction with the child's parents and/or family members as you feel comfortable with as long as the child and family team advises that it is safe and appropriate. Our goal is that you are always safe, comfortable, and feel protected.

At Thornwell, we believe that families belong together and so our foster care focus remains on reunification. We encourage families to build thoughtful relationships with a child's family. We offer gentle care and counsel to all our foster parents as they champion family reunification through healthy relationships whenever safe and appropriate. We'll equip you, walk alongside you, and help you to navigate all the emotions, decisions, and transitions that come with being a foster parent.

Supportive relationships between a foster parent and a child's parent can be beneficial to all involved – most importantly to the child. Children love their parents and often want more than anything to be with them – regardless of the abuse, neglect, or abandonment they experienced. When children enter foster care, they are separated from everything they've ever known. Foster parents provide a safe, stable temporary home for them to heal and thrive. They can also help build, mend, or strengthen important relationships in healthy, safe, and meaningful ways with parents or other family. Reunification may take days, months, or even years to occur. That is precious time lost if a child cannot nurture those connections.

Interaction may start as an introduction and telling parents their children are safe at a family visit or the first court date. Communication may first look like updates through a shared journal or notes sent to family visits. Consider including school work, art projects, and photos of the child. It may grow to include emails, phone calls or texts, or video calls. Eventually with approval from the case manager, foster parents may consider inviting parents to school, extracurricular, or important events like birthday parties. This is a progression of interaction that feels comfortable and safe for you as the foster parent.

Here are some resources that may be helpful for prospective or new foster parents.

- [Co-Parenting or Shared Parenting](#), by North American Council on Adoptable Children
- [What is Shared Parenting for Children in Foster Care?](#) by Family and Children's Resource Program
- [What Shared Parenting Actually Looks Like and How to Hold on To Hope](#), by Fostering Great Ideas
- [Sharing Memories with Parents Makes Childhood Milestones That Much Sweeter](#), by Fostering Great Ideas
- [Stepping Forward with Compassion, Rather than Standing Back in Judgement](#), by Fostering Great Ideas
- [A Letter to Foster Parents From a Mom After Reunification](#), by Fostering Great Ideas



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Book Suggestions for Book Clubs, Bible Studies, and Children

Adults – Foster/Adopt and Trauma Parenting Guides

- [The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma](#) by Bessel van der Kolk, MD
- [The Connected Child: Bring Hope and Healing to Your Adoptive Family](#) by Karyn B. Purvis, David R. Cross, and Wendy Lyons Sunshine
- [The Connected Parent: Real-Life Strategies for Building Trust and Attachment](#) by Karyn B. Purvis and Lisa Qualls
- [The Whole Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind](#) by Daniel J. Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson
- [The Grown-Up's Guide to Teenage Humans: How to Decode Their Behavior, Develop Trust, and Raise a Respectable Adult](#) by Josh Shipp (former foster youth)

Adults- Foster Parent Encouragement and Stories

- [Foster the Family: Encouragement, Hope, and Practical Help for the Christian Foster Parent](#) by Jamie Finn
- [Keep the Doors Open: Lessons Learned from a Year of Foster Parenting](#) by Kristin Berry
- [Fostered: One Woman's Powerful Story of Finding Faith and Family Through Foster Care](#) by ToriHope Petersen
- [Reframing Foster Care: Filtering Your Foster Parenting Journey Through the Lens of the Gospel](#) by Jason Johnson
- [Another Place at the Table](#) by Kathy Harrison
- [A Forever Family: Fostering Change One Child at a Time](#) by Rob Scheer
- [Recipes for Risk: Finding Purpose and Passion in Foster Care](#) by Julie Mavis



Adults- Book Club books to consider reading with a group (Fiction and Memoire)

- [Three Little Words](#) and [Three More Words](#) by Ashley Rhodes-Courter (Memoire)
- [Redefining Normal: How Two Foster Kids Beat the Odds and Discovered Healing, Happiness, and Love](#) by Justin and Alexis Black (Memoire) **Trigger Warning: This story contains mentions of domestic violence, trauma, sexual assault, and other difficult issues faced on the road to healing*
- [Before We Were Yours](#) by Lisa Wingate (Fiction)
- [Spilled Milk: based on a true story](#) by K.L Randis (Fiction)
- [The Language of Flowers by Vanessa Diffenbaugh](#) (Fiction)

Adults – Bible Studies

- [Fostering Prayer: A 40 Day Guide for Foster Parents](#) by Jessica Mathisen
- [The Gift: Unwrapping God’s Design for Foster Care and Adoption](#) by Pam Parish
- [Faith to Foster](#) by Fostering Great Ideas
- [Second Mother: A Bible Study Experience for Foster and Adoptive Moms](#) by Jodi Jackson Turner
- [Thornwell’s Foster Care Bible Study](#) (see Section 8) by Thornwell

Kids – About Foster Care

- [No Matter What: A Foster Care Tale](#) by Josh Shipp
- [The Invisible String](#) by Patrice Karst
- [Love You From Right Here: A Keepsake Book for Children in Foster Care](#) by Jamie Sandefer
- [Your Parents’ Love](#) by Abbie Mabary
- [What Makes a Family?](#) By Hannah Bruner
- [The Joy of Avery series](#) by Rhonda Wagner
- [The Stuffed Giraffe: A Foster Care Story](#) by Kimber Kaye Daley
- [Home for A While](#) by Lauren H Kerstein
- [Maybe Days: A Book for Children in Foster Care](#) by Jennifer Wilgocki
- [Families Change: A Book for Children Experiencing Termination of Parental Rights](#) by Julie Nelson
- [Kids Need to Be Safe: A Book for Children in Foster Care](#) by Julie Nelson
- [Murphy’s Three Homes: A Story for Children in Foster Care](#) by Jan Levinson Gilman



Thornwell's Foster Care Bible Study

For Individuals, Families, and Small Groups

**WEEK ONE:
Faith and Fear**

Living Out God's Call on Our Lives

**WEEK TWO:
Beauty and Brokenness**

Serving the Least of These

**WEEK THREE:
Sinners and Saints**

Finding Our Identity in God Alone

**WEEK FOUR:
Grief and Gift**

Persisting With Hope Despite Pain

**WEEK FIVE:
Hope and Healing**

*What Is God's Dream for
Children and Families*



WEEK ONE:

Faith and Fear

Living Out God's Call on Our Lives (Motivations to Foster)

Living out God's call on our lives isn't as easy as studying a rule book and then playing by the rules. In fact, the bible is less a rule book and more a love letter. God's purpose unfolds in our daily life – C.S. Lewis writes that discovering God's purpose for us requires “wholehearted surrender and active faith.” But we know what God asks of all of us.

“You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important. “Love your neighbor as yourself. The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments – Matthew 22:37-40

How can we love God and love our neighbors? God commands us to protect and care for orphans and widows (**Psalm 82:3**). Communities are only as strong as the weakest and most vulnerable members. We are called to care for all people – especially the marginalized, the vulnerable, the least of these. Who are these people in your neighborhood? Who struggles to access resources due to real or perceived barriers? Who is often unheard or unbelieved? Who is unseen or unnoticed? Who is left out?

Service to the vulnerable always invites us into broken and burdened stories. Foster care- really, any time we advocate for children - is surely an example of this.

It takes faith to step into another person's trauma and pain. It is scary to walk into the mess and carry someone else's burden. Certainly, it is tempting to stay in our safe, warm, comfortable bubble rather than brave the unknown. But it is often in trials and trouble that we find our faith strengthened. It is in relationship with other people that we feel the most connected with God and with people.

This Week's Reflection

Journal, pray, or reflect on your personal thoughts and experiences:

- Who is easiest for me to love? What is the easiest way for me to serve those I love? *List some examples (cooking dinner for my family, encouraging my co-workers, buying thoughtful gifts)*
- Who is hardest for me to love and to serve? Why? (Perhaps if you are a foster parent there are members of your child's team like parents, case workers, judges, therapists, teachers, etc. that you feel have let you and/or the child down).
- What is my greatest fear when opening myself up to someone new? How has God proven faithful despite my fear?

Discuss, pray, and learn as a family:

- What are the things that scare us the most?
- Are there things that used to be scary that aren't any more? What changed?
- What are God's promises to us that we can remember when we do feel afraid?
- How has God made us special? What are our special gifts that we use to help others?
- Who is someone that our family can help? How will we help them?

Share, engage, and consider as a small group:

- Do you view the bible as more of a rule book or a love letter? Does your faith reflect that?
- What do you believe is your purpose or God's calling on your life?
- Has God ever called you to do something that you were scared to do? How was God faithful to you through that circumstance?
- What do you believe are the most important missions for modern day Christians – at home and abroad? How can you be involved? (Set realistic expectations and boundaries for what you can and can't do in this season of life. Dream big for future seasons that may allow more flexibility.)
- Foster care is an all-encompassing mission to serve children and families – vulnerable children and families. It makes foster families vulnerable too – to criticism and critique, to allegations, to secondhand trauma, burnout. How do families in crisis or trauma experience shelter from the storms of life in your small group/church? How do foster families find support and community in your small group/church? What can or should change to better serve these children and families?

Want More?

- [Listen](#) to Fear is a Liar by Zach Williams
- [Watch](#) Jason Johnson talk about Fearing Foster Care on Faith Backstage
- [Read](#) this short blog Fear and Foster Care from Tennessee Kids Belong by Kristin Miller

WEEK TWO:

Beauty and Brokenness

Serving the Least of These (Why it Matters)

Theologian Frederick Buechner tells us that as Christians our life's purpose lies where "our greatest passion meets the world's greatest need." We have the capacity, each of us, to live out our passion and purpose in a way that serves others – ultimately for God's glory. Love for God + Our Unique Gifting leads us to loving and serving "the least of these" (Matthew 25) in meaningful ways. It doesn't mean that it will be easy.

Saying "yes" to serving others – especially service that requires you to go "all in" like foster care does – is often exhausting and isolating. You may be in the trenches asking yourself, "why are we doing this?" or even "is it all worth it?" You are faced daily with the tragic reality that we live in a broken and burdened world. Those burdens may feel like they fall on your shoulders alone.

But remember – in service to God and to others we do not only experience stories of brokenness. We get to see glimpses of the incredible power of God's love in action. A child learning love and trust. A family restored. A family made. We see miracles in our own lives as well, our own hearts being transformed.

God is close to you as you advocate for children. Lives dedicated to the service of "the least of these" does not make an easy life. There will be times of good fruit and times of barrenness. It is said that "if a man's castle is his home, a foster home is a hospital."

God brings beauty out of brokenness, in fact beauty from ashes (Isaiah 61:3). And He asks you to partner with him in that incredible miracle. That's why this matters. Families are worth it! That's why you do this hard and holy work. But thankfully He never asks you to do it alone.

Beauty and brokenness in your own life, in foster care, in the world may never feel like it balances itself out. It doesn't feel fair. It feels unjust. And it is. In service to God's beloved children, as advocates for families, as ambassadors of God's love, we are fighting against injustice. We will experience the weariness of the world, and we will experience the beauty of God's redemption. We must strive to see the hope for healing in our own hearts first, in our homes, and in the world. Hopefully we have others that will remind us of the hope that is in Jesus when we lose sight of His promises.

This Week's Reflection

Journal, pray, or reflect on your personal thoughts and experiences:

- What parts of your daily life feel exhausting? Isolating?
- Where do you see God working in your own heart right now?
- Do you see more beauty today? Or more brokenness?

Discuss, pray, and learn as a family:

- What do we love to do together as a family?
- How do we serve God together as a family? How do we serve others as a family?
- What do you think a miracle is? Have you ever seen God do a miracle for our family?
- What are the things that you have to do that are really hard for you? (Kids may say math, sharing, or chores. Grown-ups can share things that are hard for them too like “keeping my voice calm when I’m upset” to show that it is okay to be honest and vulnerable with people you love.)
- What does it mean to have hope? What are some things that you hope God does in the world?

Share, engage, and consider as a small group:

- When have you most felt that you were living out God’s true calling for your life?
- What does justice mean to you? What is injustice?
- Is there a situation in your own life where you have seen God make beauty from ashes?
- Why do you think that service, missions, and ministry – even parenting - can feel so exhausting and isolating? How can we support each other in persisting with hope?
- How is God speaking to you today about the brokenness in your own life and in the world? Is he calling you to something?

Want More?

- [Listen](#) to “Break Every Chain” by Tasha Cobbs Leonard performed by Justin Aaron
- [Watch](#) Jamie Finn talk about Embracing the Brokenness of Foster Care on Focus on the Family
- [Read](#) The Beauty and Brokenness of Foster Care blog post by Jason Johnson

WEEK THREE:

Sinners and Saints

Finding Our Identity in God Alone (Grace for the Whole Team)

Our worth comes from being created by God – just like every person on the planet. Loved. Chosen. Forgiven. Redeemed. We must hold fast to our core identity as beloved children of God. We live in a world that calls for our attention. We are bombarded with messages about who we should be, what we should do, and what we should have. These aren't always bad or sinful messages, but they can be distracting.

We love our families deeply and fiercely. We want to be the best child, partner, parent, and friend we can be. And we can internalize messages about how this should look – often from others' highlight reels on social media. We get overwhelmed with our own expectations of being able to excel in all these relationships plus balance the demands of real life. Sometimes the way we see ourselves thriving (or not thriving) and how we think others see us becomes our primary obsession – are we the “sinner” or the “saint” in their eyes? Sometimes the way we see others managing life and relationships well (or not) becomes our primary measuring stick for their worth – not their createdness by God.

In foster care, we live in a reality where people make mistakes - sometimes with traumatic consequences. Parents have not protected their children the way they needed to. Overburdened case managers have not had the attention to serve a child's needs in the way we want them to. Judges have made decisions that ultimately end in pain. Foster parents make mistakes too – big and small - every day just like any other parent. We are quick to judge others' choices. And we feel judged ourselves - making us feel defeated, vulnerable.

We label ourselves based on how we think we are measuring up each day. But God rewards our faithfulness, not our success. He says, **“well done, my good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:23)** not “my good and successful servant.” As Jamie Finn says in Foster the Family, “He does not ask us to produce anything, change anything, or heal anything, and it's not our job to save...We are not saviors” (pg. 119).

We will always strive to be our best selves and to love people well – this is honoring to God. But when we focus on our worth as beloved children of God, we can cling to His promises that He is the author and perfecter (Hebrews 12:2) of our story, not us. And when others make mistakes, we can offer grace upon grace (John 1:16) because we see them as the beloved, worthy, created-in-God’s-image child that they are.

This Week's Reflection

Journal, pray, or reflect on your personal thoughts and experiences:

- If you are being honest with yourself, what are the identities that are most important to you?
- What identities (images of yourself) are you holding on to that may be harmful or unhelpful?
- What images of others (children, parents, case managers, etc.) are you holding on to that are preventing you from seeing them as beloved children of God?

Discuss, pray, and learn as a family:

- What is your favorite thing about yourself?
- How does it feel when someone says something about you that is untrue?
- What do you think God says about you?
- Who is easy for you to love?
- Is there someone that is sometimes hard to love? What is something you can do to show them love?

Share, engage, and consider as a small group:

- What are the messages that you grew up believing about yourself? How have you embraced or deconstructed these messages over time?
- Do you find yourself easily judging others? What are the things that you are quickest to judge?
- Has there ever been a circumstance where you received grace and mercy when you didn't deserve it? How did that make you feel?
- Do you feel tempted to play the role of savior in your children's lives - trying to fix things that are beyond your control and ultimately are only in God's hands? What is at the root of this temptation? And how can you surrender control to God?
- What role does social media play in all this? Has it helped or hurt us in authentically connecting with other people – seeing them as God's beloved?

Want More?

- [Listen](#) to “You Say” by Lauren Daigle
- [Watch](#) Paul David Tripp on Feeling Judged As a Foster Parent on The Connecting Podcast
- [Read](#) the classic book Life of the Beloved by Henri Nouwen or this short blog post Your Identity is in Christ and Not in Your Mistakes, Daily She Pursues

WEEK FOUR:

Grief and Gift

Persisting with Hope Despite Pain (Reminders When Foster Care is Hard)

“One of the biggest things I have been transformed by is realizing I don’t get hope unless I’ve fully grieved. Hope is admitting that things are not all as they should be, as you want them to be, or as you long for them to be. That requires grieving well and giving yourself permission to grieve well, to fully feel it.” – Christian Author, Sarah Bessey

God does not promise us a life without pain – often when we follow Him, He invites us deeper into the brokenness of the world.

“The Lord is my shepherd. I have all I need. He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams. He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to His name. Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me.” Psalm 23:1-4

Our lives will not always be green meadows and peaceful streams. We will walk through dark valleys. As we keep moving through the changing landscapes of our lives – especially when we live lives in service to others - we are led to a place where God will be closer to us than ever before. The green meadows, peaceful waters, and dark valleys co-exist. In days (or moments) where we are experiencing the peace and rest of God’s love, we still live in the reality of sin and pain. And on the days where we feel acutely the grief and burden of life, God still invites us to rest in His goodness.

Foster care means choosing hard and uncomfortable things for our family. There will be dark days full of grief. We will grieve and mourn for ourselves, the children, their parents, and the system. We will experience defeat and despair. We choose to experience heartbreak so that a child can know the love, safety, and comfort of a family – we do it as a sacrificial gift. And it is so often a gift to us in return – knowing the love of a child we did not birth.

Jesus invites us to walk with Him into the darkness as bringers of light. But a constant battle against the darkness wears us down and we can walk no longer. Jesus also invites us to rest and let Him renew us. God is present with us in the goodness and the grief. He is what sustains us in the valley. We will grow weary and that is our humanity. A shepherd who is not well fed will end up eating their sheep. Take moments to pause, feed yourself, and reflect. Embrace opportunities to refuel and be renewed. There may be seasons where your mission field looks different than you expect it to; that's okay. Walk closely with the Lord and He will direct your path.

This Week's Reflection

Journal, pray, or reflect on your personal thoughts and experiences:

- Are you weary? What might God be calling you to today?
- What is the greatest grief that you have experienced in service to God? How was He faithful to you through that grief?
- What is the greatest gift that you have received in service to God? How has that surprised you?

Discuss, pray, and learn as a family:

- What are the things that make you sad?
- What are the things that make you happy?
- How can we ask God to help us when we are sad? How can we thank God when we are happy?
- What does our family look like, sound like, feel like when we are at our best?
- What are things that you'd like to do as a family to feel closer to each other and closer to God?

Share, engage, and consider as a small group:

- When is a time that you were truly grieving? How did you experience God in that time?
- What does it look like for you to hope in the Lord despite the pain of the world?
- Where can you make more space in your life to experience rest and renewal? What is keeping you from making these changes?
- How do you make healthy decisions for yourself and your family? Have you ever had to make hard decisions to close some doors for the benefit of your family's wellbeing?
- Do you feel God calling (or maybe whispering) you towards a particular mission field as a family? Is this scary for you?

Want More?

- [Listen](#) to Zach Williams and Dolly Parton's There Was Jesus
- [Watch](#) 4KIDSUS Coping with The Grief of Foster Care Transitions and this reel on [Reunification Feelings as a Foster Parent](#) from @foster.parenting
- **Read** Chapter 13 "Self-Care Isn't Selfish" in Foster the Family book by Jamie Finn

WEEK FIVE:

Hope and Healing

What is God's Dream for Children and Families (Rethinking Foster Care)

God cares deeply about children. That's why He places them in families. To be cared for. In Jesus' life we see His abundant love and welcome to children.

“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” - Mark 10:13

The Bible tells us about God's dream for family – a family that is unified with each other and connected to Him. The gospel is His love letter to us – proving what the Father is willing to sacrifice for a relationship with his children – everything (John 3:16). And He invites all of us to be a part of His dream - part of His big, diverse, beloved family.

Pope Francis describes family as “God's dream for His beloved creation” entrusted with carrying out the mission of God's redemptive plan. But we live in an imperfect world – a world where vulnerable children experience abuse, neglect, exploitation, and abandonment – sometimes within the family created to protect them. Families are broken apart – by choice or by circumstance.

It becomes the responsibility of Christians, co-laborers with Christ (1 Corinthians 3:9), to come alongside the vulnerable, the marginalized, the suffering to bring peace, to work towards restoration. God appoints us to care for children and for families. He also empowers us – even in our own weakness – to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly (Micah 6:8).

We know that systems will inevitably fail because they are imperfect, designed and run by imperfect people. But God will not fail – even in the enormity of the challenges children and families face today. He is the way maker, miracle worker. We, His people, will act with the hope of His word, for the hope of His dream. We all have a role to play in ushering in healing for the hurting.

This Week's Reflection

Journal, pray, or reflect on your personal thoughts and experiences:

- How have your view of God, yourself, and the world, changed through foster care service?
- In what areas of your own life do you see great hope?
- In what areas of your own life do you long to see healing?

Discuss, pray, and learn as a couple or family:

- Why did God create people to live in families?
- What is something that children do better than grown-ups?
- What is something that all grown-ups should do to keep children safe?
- Does it make you sad to know that not all children are able to live with their parents?
- How can our family be a part of making God's dream for children and families happen on earth?

Share, engage, and consider as a small group:

- What are your greatest hopes for yourself and your family as you serve God and serve others?
- What is God's dream for children and families?
- What is your role in serving children and families? Do you think you are fully living out this calling? (Everyone's calling is different. You may be called to serve in your home, your job, your church, or community. You may be called to raise biological, foster, and/or adoptive children, or no children at all.)
- What is the Church's responsibility in caring for vulnerable children and families? Is your church effectively living out this call to serve? If not, what would need to change?
- What do you wish was different about the way we see the needs of the most vulnerable being met in our community?

Want More?

- [Listen](#) to Darlene Zschech and William McDowell "Way Maker"
- [Watch](#) Katy Nichole "In Jesus Name (God Of Possible)"
- [Read](#) Talking to Kids About Suffering: Five Steps for Creating Understanding, Empathy, and Action by Amanda DeWitt, Unto: A Cru Ministry

DID YOU KNOW?

May is Foster Care Awareness Month!

Thank you for partnering with Thornwell to make an impact within communities, homes, and hearts.

