

A full-page photograph of a woman and a young child walking away from the camera through a vast field of tall, green grass. The woman is on the left, wearing a white sleeveless dress, and the child is on the right, wearing a floral dress and holding a bundle of dried grass. The sky is bright blue with scattered white clouds.

A clarion call to *Foster*

by *Vivienne Ng*

It took seven years. In 2005, my husband and I celebrated our 10th wedding anniversary. Sitting on the front porch of a wooden cabin in the Canadian Rockies and reading the book *Half Time*, I asked God what I could do in the second part of my life which would count for Him. I felt God telling me to foster a child. At that time I dismissed it. I am a psychologist, and not a foster parent. In my work, I might see a foster child for therapy once a fortnight, then hand them back to their foster parents after that. As much as I cared about the child I was working with, it wasn't my job to do the daily caregiving or to raise this child, nor did I think I had the emotional capacity. I didn't think any more of it and re-immersed myself back at work, taking over as the Deputy Director of my branch the next year.

But God was not done with me. In 2007, unhappy with my work situation, I went on my knees to seek God's direction about going into private practice. Before this, I had successfully managed to compartmentalize my life into work and home/Christian life, in order to be professional. A small group of us started praying at work together, initially for ourselves, but later God led us to pray for transformation at my workplace and in the social sector. As I prayed for God's kingdom to come into my workplace, God gave me such a burden for the families and children I was working with. God was breaking my heart with the things that broke His heart and I felt His deep compassion for these little ones and their families. For about a year, I would wake up in the middle of the night and just weep for these abused or needy children in our care, interceding on their behalf.

When I shared what I thought was on God's heart with my Senior Director, Jason Wong, he said this: if every church just fosters one child, we can empty half the children's homes in Singapore. This reverberated in my heart, and I remembered what God had impressed upon me in 2005, but I continued to struggle with the decision.

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After all, I had enough on my plate: my eldest son who was then 10 years old was going through a period of chronic dysthymia (*low grade depression*), likely triggered by pre-pubertal changes. My second son is a spirited child who was highly oppositional and hyperactive at that time as well. My youngest son had a sickly constitution and was an incredibly fussy eater. I was wondering how I would be able to be a foster mom when I couldn't even get my household in order.

On 22 October 2007, I prayed to God, seeking His direction. I gave God five conditions which had to be met before I fostered: 1) my husband must agree, 2) our kids must agree, 3) our maid must agree, 4) I must be able to go part-time and 5) my eldest son's depressive moods must lift. That very night I read my daily devotions for the day from *My Utmost* for His Highest, and was soundly rebuked. In the daily devotional, Oswald Chambers had written words that seemed to be meant just for me: “We are in danger of getting into a bargaining spirit with God when we come to Him—we

want the witness of the Spirit before we have done what God tells us to do. Why doesn't God reveal Himself to you? He cannot. It is not that He will not, but He cannot, because you are in the way as long as you won't abandon yourself to Him in total surrender.

As soon as you abandon your own reasoning and arguing, God witnesses to

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what He has done, and you are amazed at your total disrespect in having kept Him waiting.

With that, I signed up with a Volunteer Welfare Organisation (VWO) to be a short-term foster parent to babies who were being put up for adoption. I looked after two babies in 2008, for about two weeks each. And guess what? When the first baby came in March 2008, my son's depression lifted and it has not returned; he was in P6 at that time.

At the end of 2011, I felt God prompting me to do longer term fostering, so I got assessed as a Ministry approved foster-carer in 2012. In February 2013, we were asked to care for Emma, a four-year-old girl of mixed race, who was physically abused, and whose foster placement was breaking down. She has been a delight to us. She is a resilient child despite having gone through a lot, including multiple carers. My children and husband adapted better than I ever expected, and my kids have really grown from the experience of including someone else into our family. I guess God had also prepared me through experiences with my own kids – she was supposed to have emotional, behavioural and eating problems, and I had been through that with my sons before.

Since Emma came to live with us on 23 February 2013, there have been difficult moments – like when she beat my dog, whom she loves, very hard, just because it wouldn't listen to her instructions. I asked her if she was beaten too when she didn't listen, and she said “yes”. I told her she wouldn't get beaten in our family, but she was not to hurt my dog Muffy or I would have to protect it and she wouldn't get to touch him anymore.



There are sad moments, when she misses her family and wants to go back home – it is so sad to see her struggle with her emotions. I asked her what she would do if she was hurt again, and she said, “Next time, I won’t cry.” When my small group friend’s mother passed away, Emma asked me if my friend would get now a new mom – because that was the story in her life. There was one occasion in which the near loss of her handbag at church suddenly triggered sadness at the loss of the father whom she had not seen in a year. She started crying and couldn’t stop, telling me that she felt sad because she suddenly missed her father. I ended up sitting outside the restaurant where my friends and our family were having lunch, holding and comforting her while she sobbed for very long time in my arms.

But there are so many more happy moments, like when I swing her around and let her ride on my shoulders as her father did; when she experiences something new for the first time and is delighted. I have a video-recording of her dancing to music and laughing away. She is generally a happy and grateful child. When people visit me with beautiful hand-me down dresses and toys for her, she thanks God in her prayers at night, naming each gift she has received. She loves to worship God at children’s ministry, and I have told her that no matter where she is, God will always love her and so will we. Sometimes, she keeps asking me, “Why do you love me? Why does God love me?”, as if she cannot quite believe she could be loved by us. But when she throws her arms around my neck, hugs me and says, “I love you, Auntie Vi!”, it makes it all worthwhile.

As you can see, it was a seven-year journey before I finally became a ministry-approved foster carer, and took in a child who needed more stability and commitment. What took so long?

When my kids were young, I was busy sending them to tuition, getting them through their PSLE.

When they were older, I valued having time to spare and going out with friends.

I was going around asking people to foster, but not wanting to commit myself to doing it. But I felt the dissonance.

I struggled with God but eventually I had to face reality and answer some hard questions about my priorities: Is going around talking about fostering good enough, or do I need to do something? Am I ready to get my hands dirty like Jesus was? In James, it says, “If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?”

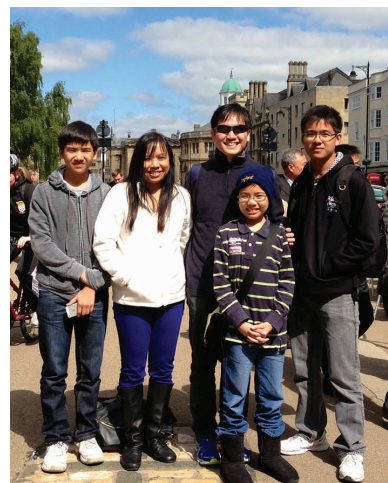
What would Jesus want me to do? He said, suffer the little children to come unto me.

If I really feel that is where God’s heart is and what He wants His people to do, what is stopping me from doing it?

Which is more important – my time for personal and social events, or the life of a child that we could touch as a family?

Am I willing to sacrifice time and energy to invest into the life of one of God’s children?

That is my personal journey and I am not sure where God might lead you. It is not always easy for us to step out in faith, but I encourage you to pray and take this adventure with God. Every life counts and a godly and loving family can help undo hurts, and open a child up to experiencing God for himself or herself because they now have a model of a godly parent and an image of our Heavenly Father here on earth.



Vivienne Ng and her family worship at Wesley Methodist Church. She is the Chief Psychologist in the Ministry of Social and Family Development.