

# *Olives for Breakfast*

A BOOK FOR  
PROSPECTIVE  
FOSTER/  
ADOPTIVE  
PARENTS



*Valeria Woods*

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*A book for prospective  
foster/adoptive parents*

By  
*Valeria Woods*



Eloquent Books

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*To God be the glory for the great things he has done! This book is dedicated to God our Father in heaven and his son Jesus, who started the first foster care program on the cross. "And when Jesus saw his mother there standing nearby, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Dear woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.'" (John 10:26-27)*

*I would also like to dedicate it to Joseph, son of Jacob in the Old Testament, whose story is the first I personally identified with, and one which brought me great comfort. Additionally, I would like to dedicate this book to the hard-working people at Agape Child and Family Services in Memphis, Tennessee without whom I would not have become a Christian. In particular I would like to dedicate this book to Michelle Miller of Agape, who has been of great help to me.*

*This book is also dedicated to Ralph and Kay Richardson and their children Vivian and Ryan, one of the four families that took me in when I had no other place to live. And finally, to my daughter Ashley and all of my former foster children, may God richly bless them all!*

*This book is written in memory of my student Jarvis, in order that his brief life was not in vain.*

*"Though my father and mother forsake me the Lord will receive me." (Psalms 27:10)*



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# Chapter One

Why should I become a foster parent? What does the Bible say about foster care/adoption?

Then the king will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you took me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and in prison and you came to visit me. Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?” Then the King will reply. I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me. (Matthew 25:34-40)

Many years ago I sat in a juvenile court’s detention center waiting for a decision to be made regarding my future. A group of Christians from an unknown church came to visit the girls there. They told us about some of the miracles that were happening in their lives. One lady in particular told about how God had healed her broken arm, yet she still had a cast on it. Other people also witnessed, however since I was being raised in an atheist home at the time I couldn’t help but think *You expect us to believe that since you are still wearing a cast?* After their testimonies, they had us sing a song from a song book that delivered a message to me—Jesus loved me! It was all I could do to hold back the tears. I had been taught not to cry in public. They then asked if anyone there would like for them to pray for us. I watched in horror at what looked like a scene from an old black and white scary movie that I think was titled *Snake*



*Pit* as the people prayed over these teenagers who were raising their arms up and down. I had never seen anything like it and to this day I still haven't, although I remember it clearly.

I remember silently praying at the time by myself for God to send me to the right people to teach me about God and his son, and his love for me that the song talked about. Despite my parents' declaration of atheism, I had had some early experiences with a variety of churches before the accident that had my father declaring there was no God. I had also had one other prayer that I had recited regarding the birth of my cousin that God answered, giving me everything that I asked for. I had not been taught to pray or how to pray but somehow instinctively knew that it could be done.

I did not allow these people to pray over me as they had with the other girls who were present. I was glad they asked and I am grateful they came to visit us. Without their visit I would never have thought to pray and certainly not that prayer in particular. The one that I prayed that day was answered, and their visit to juvenile court started a chain reaction of events that changed my life for the better. They were truly doing what God would have them to do according to Matthew 25. May God bless them, whoever they were. I have a feeling that they later prayed for the one who would not allow them to pray over her. I'm sure they would be happy to know their prayers were answered.

For a long time I was very embarrassed about the time I spent in Juvenile Court and the events that led to my being there. I did run away from home and as result I was considered a juvenile offender. I had a record and was treated like a prisoner. Later, after becoming a Christian and by reading my Bible, I learned that being in prison was not such an uncommon occurrence for Christians. One Old Testament character—Joseph, the son of Israel—in the interpreter and dreamer of dreams story, brought me much comfort. I learned through him that people can be jailed unjustly, yet God will use the bad situations in people's lives to His Glory. In the end, all worked out well not only for Joseph but for his family as well. "But Joseph said to them, 'Don't be afraid. You intended to harm

me but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” (Genesis 50:19-20)

It was during my stay in Juvenile Court that I first became interested in helping other children. One night while I was there, a small child of about four years old was brought in. She was crying hysterically. I asked why and was told that she had just been taken away from her parents, due to abuse. A man was holding her, trying to convince her to go to the lady with the outstretched arms. My heart went out to her and I wanted to help her. But since there was a man present I was afraid I would only get yelled at for my efforts, so I refrained.

After an extensive hospital stay and many unsuccessful attempts by psychologists to uncover the reasons behind my decision to leave home, I was placed in foster care through Agape Child and Family Services. This newly formed organization, run by the Churches of Christ in Memphis, ended up not only being a life saver for me but a soul saver as well. Without their agency and the many different Christian homes I had the privilege to live in, I would not be the Christian woman I am today. I am not perfect by any means and I still have a lot of emotional scars to overcome, but because I have accepted Jesus Christ as my savior, I am saved.

For foster and adoptive children entering Christian homes, there exists a perfect opportunity for not only saving a child's life, but for saving his or her soul. You might just change the whole future of their family tree. “Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from Him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth.” (Psalms 127:3-4)

As Christians, is it our responsibility to adopt or keep foster children? According to James 1:27, the Bible says to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. According to scripture it is our responsibility! I cannot stress the importance of this ministry enough.

I once had a student named Jarvis in my first-grade classroom, when I taught in the inner city of Memphis. He was a sweet child and he had a talent for drawing dinosaurs. He was

never a minute's trouble for me. His mother was in jail, and he started out living with his elderly maternal grandparents until they regretfully decided that they could no longer care for him or his little sister. They were then placed with an elderly cousin. This woman was given custody of Jarvis and his sister simply because no one else wanted them. In early December of that same year, Jarvis' guardian transferred him out of my classroom. I remember her saying, "I'm going to have to take him away from you, Ms. Woods." She knew he was one of my favorites. She also knew that at the time I had foster children of my own. We had discussed this one time when she picked Jarvis up from school. I hated to see him go and I thought at the time that it was a strange remark she had made. She had to take him away from me? I had a bad feeling about that comment and I had an even worse feeling about her having custody of Jarvis to begin with. I remember thinking at the time the Department of Human Services (DHS) must be crazy or desperate to place any child in this woman's custody. However, I had nothing substantial to base my feelings on and, regrettably, did not call DHS to express them. She moved to a house in another part of the city.

About a week before Christmas I had a dream that one of my students needed my help and was calling my name. I told my daughter about it at the time and said that I wasn't sure which one it was, but I was sure it was someone who had transferred out recently.

Shortly after my dream I received a call from a fellow teacher asking me where I had been, and had I been watching the news. I was very busy at the time with two foster children of my own trying to get ready for Christmas, and no, I had not been watching the news. She told me to sit down and prepare for the worst. I did as I was told and asked her what had happened. She asked me if I had Jarvis in my classroom. I told her I did but that he had transferred out about three weeks before. She then informed me that his guardian had beaten him to death with a beer bottle and had hidden him under a pile of dirty clothes and had declared him missing. She told me that

that was where the police found him. She wanted to know if I could attend the funeral.

I hung up the phone and cried my eyes out. That funeral was, without a doubt, the worst funeral I had ever attended. The mother had been let out of jail so that she could attend it. She screamed throughout the whole event. The casket was open. Jarvis looked nothing like the child he once was. I could not even recognize him because he had been beaten so badly. True to my nature and what I had been taught, I held those tears in, not wanting to cry in public. It was torture, but not as much torture as Jarvis had endured. Thankfully, I have no doubt that he is in Heaven now. "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." (Mark 10:14)

Recently, I heard on Christian radio that a gauntlet or challenge had been laid down for Evangelical Christians by the pro-choice movement. They see Christians picketing abortion clinics, yet they claim that they do not see us becoming foster parents or adopting children. If you are considering answering that challenge by adopting or becoming a foster parent, please read on. If you know of someone this book might encourage, please recommend it. In many ways, they are right. I do see Christians picketing abortion clinics and standing in lines holding signs against abortion. My daughter and I have participated in such activities and while I do see several Christians keeping foster children and adopting, I don't find as many as I would like to see. Evidently, Christians are not doing enough to make an adequate impression on the pro-choice movement. However, it is not the pro-choice movement that we need to answer to, but to God himself. I do not want to see Christians opening their homes for the wrong reasons, but if God has laid it on your heart to take in foster children or adopt, please let me help encourage you to do so.

Nothing has ever made me as upset as the well-intentioned comment from fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, "I could never do something like that; it would hurt me too much to give them back." Believe me, I am not immune, nor is my

daughter immune, to the sorrow of having to give back a child we have loved and cared for. A piece of my heart walked out of my life each time one of my children left home. I still pray for all of them and cherish the good memories I have. These precious memories far outweigh any grief I have suffered. Keeping foster children truly enriched both my life and the life of my daughter. If foster care is not for you, keep reading; I have a chapter in mind just for you. There are other much needed, yet less painful, ways to help. As to the comment, "I could never do something like that; it would hurt me too much to give them back," I have cried more tears over Jarvis' death than any of the foster children I know that I did my best for. I would have given anything to have known how to prevent what happened to him. I am so thankful to God that each of my foster families was willing to endure the grief of losing a child on my behalf. In particular I am grateful to Kay and Ralph Richardson, who have kept giving over the years. The day I left Ralph and Kay's home to return to my biological parents, I saw Kay and her daughter Vivian crying in the rear view mirror as we drove off. My heart reached out to them at the time and I truly felt bad for them. Yet somehow I knew that it was not the end of our relationship. Kay's tears made me realize that it would be alright to go back and visit from time to time. However, I know that her grief did not end that day. Later, she told me that every time she would sweep up or find one of the small rubber bands that I used for my braces, she would get sad all over again.

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