



# The Orphans

by  
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**H**e couldn't have been more than five. His eyes were shy, as if seeking an invitation. When I extended my hand, inviting him to take it, a smile spread across his face, revealing a toothless grin. He scurried across the dusty road and took my outstretched hand. As his hand slipped into mine, I looked down at his beautiful little brown hand, tightly squeezing mine. He looked up at me as if he had just won the lottery.

We were walking among the orphans in Ethiopia. Dust kicked up as we walked. The streets were full of noise and yet, we walked in silence, not having a language to share. Still, I could feel a bond between us.

He held on tightly, not wanting to relinquish my hand to another child who attempted to get close. There were so many children scampering along beside us. I doubted any of them had a home to call their own, perhaps not even a mama or daddy to watch over them.

As I surveyed him, I noticed he wasn't wearing shoes, just like most of the children in the streets. I stooped to get at his level. His face was smudged with dirt, but his smile was as big as the sunshine.

Looking around, my heart felt full. A thought crossed my mind: "Who does this? Who gets this amazing opportunity to walk among these beautiful people who have nothing to give but their smile?" The answer came quickly. "You do, not because you're special, but because when you were called, you came."

I couldn't help but smile. I was the last person on the face of the earth who ever expected to travel across the globe, especially to Africa. I loved being at home, a homebody, not a missionary. I liked the safety of familiarity, not the unknown of a strange culture, yet here I was. I was overwhelmed with the privilege.

As we reached our hotel, I let go of the hand of the little lad who had accompanied me down the street. I leaned down to give him a kiss on his dirty little face. "Jesus loves you," I told him, even though I knew he didn't understand. Perhaps God, in his grace, allowed my words to be heard in his own language. With that, he ran off, a beaming smile across his face.

I never knew his name. I will never see him again, but my heart remains full of love for him, just as it is for many of the people I met in Ethiopia. Walking on a dusty road in Ethiopia among the orphans was nothing short of a gift from God, and I will forever be changed.

**"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."**

James 1:27 (NIV)