

*Book Review**The Connected Child: Bring Hope and Healing to Your Adoptive Family*

Karyn Purvis, David Cross, and Wendy Lyons Sunshine
(New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2007), 264 pages



Reviewed by BRIAN LIECHTY

The orphan care and adoption movement is strong in the United States. Over the past decade numerous books, conferences, and resources have created awareness of and information about the need. *The Connected Child* is one book that has had a considerable impact. It addresses the topic of adopted children with histories of trauma, abuse, and neglect.

According to its lead author, Karyn Purvis, *The Connected Child* is not a Christian book per se.¹ It was not published by a Christian publisher and does not specifically address Christian concepts relative to parenting or adoption. Yet Purvis has stated that the “principles of *The Connected Child* are consistent with Scripture.” Her organization’s website describes it as a book that has helped “countless adoptive and foster parents better connect with their children as they seek to love and care for them in way that honors God.”² She also worked with two other associates to develop additional resources known as “Empowered to Connect” to help Christians integrate the book’s principles

¹ See page 2 of *Created to Connect: A Christian’s Guide to The Connected Child*, a companion study to *The Connected Child* developed by Karyn Purvis and Michael and Amy Monroe as part of the Empowered to Connect initiative. This can be found online and downloaded for free at <http://empoweredtoconnect.org/created-to-connect-study-guide/>.

² See: <http://empoweredtoconnect.org/book/>.

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more directly into their parenting. From all appearances, both the book and these related materials have been well received. Along with endorsements from organizations such as Christian Alliance for Orphans, Show Hope, and Focus on the Family, they are utilized by a growing number of Christians and churches.³

But before people fully embrace these resources, it is important that Purvis's claims are considered. Are the principles found in *The Connected Child* consistent with Scripture and true to life? Do they fit with a Christian worldview and bring honor to God? Should families integrate these principles into their approach to parenting their adopted children? This review is intended to bring some clarity to these questions.

Overview of the Book

Like her co-author David Cross, Karyn Purvis was a research psychologist⁴ who specialized in child development. The two joined with journalist Wendy Lyons Sunshine to write *The Connected Child*. The book shares an approach they created to help children whose early years have been marked by deprivation and trauma.⁵ Unlike other approaches that address at-risk children in a piecemeal and disconnected fashion, their book seeks to address the whole child and all of his or her interrelated needs. As a result, their approach teaches parents and caregivers to:

- Disarm your child's fear response.
- Establish clear, sensitive parental authority.
- Provide a sensory-rich environment.
- Teach appropriate social skills.
- Support healthy brain chemistry.
- Help your child connect with his or her own feelings.

³ In fact, a recent Empowered to Connect conference in April 2016 was simulcast to over 150 churches. See <http://showhope.org/be-hope/equipping-families/etc/etc-simulcast/#map> accessed 4/9/2016.

⁴ Purvis passed away earlier this year.

⁵ The principles and concepts recommended in *The Connected Child* have since been developed into a therapeutic model known as trust-based relational intervention. See Karyn Purvis, David Cross, Donald Dansereau, and Sheri Parris's "Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI): A Systemic Approach to Complex Developmental Trauma," *Child and Youth Services* 34:4 (2013): 360-386.

- Forge a strong emotional bond between you and your child. (pp.3-4)

Though the authors recognize this approach may take years and will often involve setbacks, they testify it “has benefited an enormous range of youngsters—from a three-year-old who was adopted at birth with cocaine and alcohol in her system to a violent sixteen-year-old who spent her first twelve years in a brutal orphanage environment” (pp.4–5). In fact, they believe this approach helps children regardless of age, developmental level, or severity of impairment. Essentially, no matter how at risk the child is, there is hope. By consistently applying the tools offered in *The Connected Child*, the authors claim children can reach the goal of being “connected” to self, to their families, and the world. As a result, these children can both experience joy and reach their full potential.

Consistencies with Scripture

In reading *The Connected Child* I found at least three principles that align well with Scripture.

1. *The book reflects a commitment to help children from “hard places.”* *The Connected Child* is clear in its commitment to addressing the problems of children who have been abused, neglected, and victimized. This comes across in the book’s premise and in the numerous case studies and testimonies.⁶ Such a commitment both mirrors and images God’s character. There is no one more passionate and intentional about ministering to children from hard places than God. That’s why the prophet Isaiah challenges Israel to “learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, and plead the widow’s cause” (Isa 1:17).

I commend Purvis, Cross, and Sunshine for raising the concern and issuing the call to help children in need. The church needs to make that same commitment and be active in exploring and promoting opportunities to foster or adopt. Likewise, we should equip our counseling and care ministries to skillfully come alongside of families involved in helping such children.

2. *The book champions increased parental involvement.* Most families these days live at a breakneck speed, constantly hurried by a flurry of competing responsibilities, activities, and priorities. As a result, parents and children are

⁶ pp. 19-20, 22, 47-48, 73-74, 128-29

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