
+ CHAPTER I +

ADOPTION IS IMPORTANT
TO THE HEART OF GOD

IN JANUARY 2004, I GRIPPED THE HAND OF MY adopted 4-year-old as we stared at the open casket containing the lifeless body of my husband. I attempted to sort through the many questions my son expressed about his father's sudden and untimely death. The questions were justified, yet I could not provide a good answer for: "Why did Jesus want Daddy in heaven instead of being with me?" I had known this man for almost 14 years, but my son had known him only two and a half years. So many questions were left unanswered, his and my own.

If it were not for my strong faith and trust in God, I may have faltered in my faith during this sudden change of season in my life. In those early days of widowhood I knew great grief, but I also knew that God was with me and He had not failed me. I believed without a doubt that God continued to hold a plan and a purpose for my life. He had always been there working, teaching, and encouraging me along the way no matter how difficult life had become. However, this new turn of events was peculiar and unexpected, and with greater and more severe consequences. It

was no longer just me; I now had a young son depending on me for his every need.

Weeks after the funeral, my mind began racing with thoughts: *Did God really want us to adopt this child that is now, once again, without a father? Did I really hear God's voice when He said to me, "This is your son"?*

However, when I reflected back to the months before the adoption, I was reminded of the spectacular promise God made to me.

For years our marriage was filled with infertility treatments, turmoil, and indecision as my husband and I struggled with the ability to have a child. A few weeks after we finally submitted an application to an adoption agency, I felt an unusual presence of the Lord's Spirit as if a warm blanket were being wrapped around me. The date was February 14, 2000. The details of that day are written in my journal as I described the growing impression that somehow February 14 would be significant in the life of our baby. God spoke to me quietly and clearly, even providing a scripture that I declared in writing as "God's promise to our baby":

"But Zion said, 'The LORD has forsaken me, and the Lord has forgotten me.' Can a woman forget her nursing child, and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget; but, I will not forget you. Behold I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands" (Isa. 49:14-16).

Seven months later I received a phone call from the social worker at our adoption agency. My husband and I had been matched with a baby boy in Romania. She described photos of a child with fat, chubby little legs and a charming smile. Eager to give me as much information as possible, she began to describe the baby's medical history and background.

"But what about February 14?" I asked. "Is there any pertinent information that relates to February 14?"

"No . . . no, I don't see anything here," she said.

"Well then, what is his name?" I asked.

Because the records were hard to read and written entirely in Romanian, the social worker began to spell out the baby's name: "V-A-L-E-N-T-I-N."

We both gasped. The baby's name was Valentin. God had confirmed His promise. He had not forgotten us—not me, and not Valentin.

The changing face of adoption

As few as 30 years ago, stating that you were adopting a child was a phrase uttered in the privacy of family, and not words prospective parents proudly proclaimed to a public audience. There existed a negative stigma associated with adoption; some people believed children being adopted were "bad seeds" having been rejected and abandoned by someone "bad" who did something "bad." These false judgments drove the element of secrecy prevalent among the closed adoptions of the past. Thankfully, attitudes to-

ward adoption are changing and becoming more positive, possibly because of more awareness and personal exposure. A survey performed in 1997 found that six in ten Americans have experienced adoption personally, meaning that they, family members, or close friends either were adopted, had adopted a child, or had placed a child for adoption.¹

It is comforting to know God's heart has a special place for adopted children. Did you know, as Christians, we are God's adopted children? God actually gives His children the wealth and rights of royalty! In Galatians and in John, we are identified as children of the King with rights to God's inheritance.

“In order that He might redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:5).

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name” (John 1:12).

Adoption inheritance

In the Roman Empire, adoption was a cultural custom for a man (or couple) without children to provide him with an heir. The adopted child's relationship to the new family was, for all intents and purposes, the same as what existed between a father and natural child. Also, if a relative died leaving orphaned children, a family member usually

adopted the children. Today we would call this a “related adoption.” The 2000 U.S. census recorded that related adoptions, initiated mainly by stepparents, make up about 40 percent of all domestic adoptions.²

As with the Romans, the formal process of adoption in our culture assumes there will be a transfer of inheritance to the adopted child. For us as Christians, not only a monetary transfer but also a spiritual transfer of inheritance takes place. My son, Valentin, will have the opportunity to benefit from the many blessings of his new family’s heritage. Christians experience this same type of benefit when we are adopted into God’s kingdom. We have access to the mind of Christ for godly wisdom. We can count on God’s character and integrity to strengthen us and help us make the right choices. We trust in God’s protection. The following verses in Romans reflect our adoption inheritance as Christians:

“For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Rom. 8:15).

“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom. 8:16).

“And if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him” (Rom. 8:17).

“And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:23).

Transfer to new life

When God adopts us, we move from hopelessness into a future filled with hope. This is exactly what an orphan encounters with human parents. My son was living in a country with an ungodly heritage and economic poverty. He had no parents to claim him and to help him grow in truth and righteousness. His future was full of dead ends and despair. He owned nothing as an orphan, neither the clothes on his back, nor a comb or brush; he was destitute.

Valentin discovered many unique challenges during his transfer to a new life. He had to learn not only a new language but also things we take for granted, such as the requirement of sitting securely in a highchair or car seat. In the early months of adjustment, he believed these new contraptions were confining, keeping him from experiencing his new world to the fullest. He rebelled greatly against his new culture and principles for safe living. As he adjusted and matured, he was more able to understand that the contraptions he at first believed were confining actually provided him safety and security in a harsh and unfamiliar world. Likewise, as we embark on our Christian journeys, we experience similar adjustments. When we start to understand God’s character and His desire to protect us, we begin to

soften and accept His principles for living. Little by little, we let go of our old rebellious nature and learn to obey Him.

Our God and Creator knows what it means to take on the challenges of adopted children with a hopeless past. He chose to take on that challenge to save us from our previous life set toward destruction. Despite our disobedience, our Lord demonstrates His love for us. And daily, our Blessed Father models His love through His gifts of grace and forgiveness so that we can share in the eternal rewards of heaven, our inheritance.

Grafting and adoption unions

“But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in” (Rom. 11:17-19).

Comparing the horticultural technique of grafting with adoption provides an interesting perspective for adoptive parenting. The rootstock (or family) and the scion (or adopted child) both inherit value and diversity when a successful union is formed.

One interesting person, grafted into the lineage of Jesus Christ, is the biblical woman Ruth. She was born in a for-

eign land and taught to worship idols, but she and her sister-in-law married into a Jewish family living in her native country of Moab. When she became a widow at a young age, Ruth left Moab and followed her mother-in-law, Naomi, out of loyalty and love for Naomi and her God.

“Then she said, ‘Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law.’ But Ruth said, ‘Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me.’ When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her” (Ruth 1:15-18).

Because of her obedience to God, Ruth found favor with Boaz, an Israelite, and married him. Their family line extended to Joseph, the husband of Mary and father of Jesus. As unusual as it may seem, an idol-worshipping Moabitess was grafted into the lineage of Christ, providing a rich and diverse heritage for our Lord.

On farms, grafting is commonly used to repair existing fruit trees. During a drought or a bad storm, a lemon tree may become damaged and in need of restoration. A trained farmer can take a pruned, young, healthy branch from a different tree (such as an orange or grapefruit tree) and

create a grafted union on the healthy rootstock of the lemon tree.

Adoption brings new life to both sides of the union. It not only provides a desperate and disconnected child with a family but also provides a family with a child to nurture and care for. Like the lemon tree in need of repair, the new adoption union provides the opportunity for the couple to be fruitful for the first time or once again. And it gives new life and hope for the child to develop and mature into the man or woman that God intended.

God's amazing love transcends race, bloodlines, and cultural differences. He places more emphasis on creating loving families that will worship and serve Him than on maintaining perfect bloodlines. He made that clear when He removed His chosen race (the Jews) from the rootstock, and grafted the Gentiles in their place. Romans 9:8 tells us, "It is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants."

Ensure an adoption success

As I pursued adoption, I began to understand that not all children experience permanence in their initial placements with a family. Well-meaning parents attempt to commit to their newly adopted child, but something goes wrong during the initial bonding period, causing them to reach a hopeless state of dissolution with the child. I do not want to judge these parents because I do not know their hearts or personal struggles and, statistically, the older the

child at the time of adoption, the higher the probability for disruption to occur.

What is disruption? According to the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse (NAIC), the term “disruption” is used to describe an adoption process that halts before legalization, resulting in the child returning to foster care and/or to another set of adoptive parent(s).³ It also is reported that disruption and dissolution can occur after adoption; however, the probability rate for occurrence is low.⁴ And reports reflect that with proper education and preparation, the potential for disruption or dissolution is greatly minimized. According to the NAIC:

- + Most adoptions do not disrupt before legalization; more than 80 percent remain intact.⁵
- + Most adoptions do not dissolve; more than 98 percent are not terminated after legalization.⁶
- + Less than 0.1 percent of adoptions are contested each year.⁷
- + Adoption disruption and dissolution rates have remained relatively consistent over the past fifteen years, ranging between 10 and 20 percent depending on the type of adoption.⁸
- + Less than 1 percent of infant adoptions disrupt.⁹
- + 10 to 12 percent of adoptions of children ages three and older disrupt.¹⁰
- + For children placed for adoption between ages six and twelve, the disruption rate is 9.7 percent.¹¹

- + For children placed for adoption between ages twelve and eighteen, the disruption rate is 13.5 percent.¹²
- + For children of any age with special needs placed for adoption, the disruption rate is 14.3 percent.¹³
- + Placements of older children and children with histories of previous placements and longer stays in the foster care system are more likely to disrupt.¹⁴

Like the strong root system necessary for grafting, an adoption should begin with a couple deeply rooted in their faith. During growing season, the farmer must prepare the rootstock, used to support the graft, with substantial cultivation, watering, and nurturing in order for the transplant to be successful. It is equally important for a couple to prepare for adoption through cultivating knowledge, understanding, and wisdom with which to raise an adopted child. This preparation and planning will help to ensure a permanent placement.

In the same way, an unsuccessful graft is similar to an interrupted or failed adoption. Unsuccessful tree grafts primarily occur when the rootstock does not quickly form a strong union with the grafted branch. This failed graft most likely resulted from poor preparation for the union, or it might have been a result of not having the adequate physical support needed to bond the two entities together. In addition, it might not have been carefully nurtured and protected against natural enemies during the early days and weeks while the union was forming. When a successful

union is prevented or disruption occurs, the branch is forced to create its own energy to produce growth rather than benefiting from the rootstock's plentiful nutrients. Without the proper flow of water and nutrients, the grafted branch will eventually wither and die.

In adoption, there also are enemies hiding and waiting to pounce on the vulnerable new relationship. Preconceived notions from outside skeptics with a "doom and gloom" prognosis can initiate adoption failure. Also, the child's own experience with abandonment and isolation will no doubt generate feelings of fear and confusion during this delicate time. A good bond or union in an adoptive family depends greatly on the emotional and spiritual sturdiness of the family and extended family to demonstrate their acceptance of the new child. Just as with a fragile grafting, for a child to thrive and grow emotionally and spiritually, he must receive a constant flow of love, faith, prayer, and loving understanding.

The power of the family to heal or wound, to include or exclude, to build up or destroy, has a critical and lasting effect on an adopted child. Before that child can say, as Ruth did, "Your people are my people," the family members must demonstrate that she is their child forever. It is critical that a strong family support system provides unconditional love to reinforce the new union with the adopted child. This provides the feeling of security the child needs to believe she is in a safe and secure place.

Parental responsibility

Even though an adopted child will inherit many positive attributes from his new family, including a Christian heritage, this does not automatically translate to the child inheriting salvation. As the book of Romans tells us, we inherit our standing as children of God through believing in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Our birthrights and adoption certificates only sanctify us. It is the obligation and responsibility of the husband and wife to raise their children in a community of believers and teach them God's Word in order to establish a foundation for a relationship with Jesus Christ.

I also have met wonderful single Christian men and women who have sacrificially and successfully adopted and fostered children in need from around the world. These men and women are pouring their lives into these children and teaching them about Jesus Christ. After all, isn't this God's desire for the orphaned?

“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world” (James 1:27).

Though single parents do not have the support of a spouse, they have a tremendous support through their covenant relationship with Christ and through the body of Christ, or fellowship with other believers in the church.

Because of this community, there is no need to fear or feel hopeless as difficulties manifest within the lives of our adopted children. One of the great blessings of our Christianity is that our adopted children will benefit from the blessings of our covenant relationship with God. With God working through us as parents, these children can transcend their difficult beginnings and walk in the abundant life God intended.

I Was Not There

I was not there
When you were knitted by His hands,
When He shielded you
And protected you from the world's plan.
When you groped for your first breath,
I didn't hear your cry.

I was not there
To know your hunger,
To wipe your tears
Or squeeze you tight.
And what about those long nights
As you listened for the footsteps
And the turn of the knob,
Waiting for the next nurse to spot your eyes.

I was not there
For your first dimply smile,
Or your first steps that made you fall.
Or your first tooth
When it pained through your gums.
Who was there to praise you
Or hand you a ball?
No, I was not there, but God was.
He captured those moments
For all of eternity
And whispered to you sweet love.

No, I was not there
To love and boast
Of God's beautiful gift.
But God was there! The One we trust
And the One who loves you the most!
—Kimberley Raunika Taylor