

# HEIRS

A Celebration of Adoption and Foster Care

*A Publication by Summitview Church*







- FOSTER CARE -  
FOSTER LOVE



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Orientation offered monthly!

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*But when the fullness of time had  
come, God sent forth his Son, born of  
woman, born under the law, to redeem  
those who were under the law, so that  
we might receive adoption as sons.*

**GALATIONS 4:4-5**

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# WE'RE ALL ADOPTED

A theology of adoption ✿ **By Aaron Ritter, Pastor**

*For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*  
**ROMANS 8:15-17**

What happens when someone believes in Jesus Christ? What truly changes? How exactly is that person a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17)?

The Bible uses lots of different words to describe what happens at that moment. Salvation. Justification. Atonement. Redemption. Forgiveness. Regeneration. Each helps us to understand an important aspect of what occurs when somebody comes to faith.



But there's one word that captures the essence of this change in an especially meaningful way: adoption. When somebody comes to Christ, he or she is adopted by God and becomes his child. That may sound simple and even obvious to those familiar with the Bible, but it's one of the most profound truths you will ever know and one of the gospel's greatest treasures. It's also easily overlooked. J.I. Packer explains this well:

*Our first point about adoption is that is the highest privilege that the gospel offers: higher even than justification. This may cause raising of eyebrows, for justification is the gift of God on which since Luther evangelicals have laid the greatest stress, and we are accustomed to say, almost without thinking, that free justification is God's supreme blessing to us sinners. Nonetheless, careful thought will show the truth of the statement we have just made.*

*Regularly Paul speaks of righteousness, remission of sins, and justification as the first and immediate consequence for us of Jesus' death. And as justification is the primary blessing, so it is the fundamental blessing, in the sense that everything else in our salvation assumes it, and rests on it – adoption included. But this is not to say that justification is the highest blessing of the gospel. Adoption is higher, because of the richer relationship with God that it involves.*

*Adoption is a family idea, conceived in terms of love, and viewing God as father. In adoption, God takes us into his family and fellowship—he established us as his children and heirs. Closeness, affection and generosity are at the heart of the relationship. To be right with God the Judge is a great thing, but to be loved and cared for by God the Father is a greater.*



WE HOPE THAT  
YOU WILL SEE  
THE INTENSITY  
OF HIS LOVE  
AND UNDER-  
STAND FRESHLY  
THE LENGTHS HE  
WENT TO IN ORDER  
TO MAKE YOU HIS OWN.

There's a reason God so frequently uses the title of Father. There's also a reason that from the beginning of time, humans were designed to exist within the structure of a family. God wanted to communicate the substance of his desired relationship with us through a picture that would be known to all people in every generation. Adoption, then, is such a powerful idea because it's so relatable. An important spiritual reality can be understood through a clear physical parallel. When we see or experience adoption, our eyes are opened to the realities of our faith in a new and powerful way.

The following pages are real stories of Summitview families. There is joy and there is pain, and through it all, we hope that you will get a glimpse of God. We hope that you will see the intensity of his love and understand freshly the lengths he went to in order to make you his own.

*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.*  
(John 1:12) ❁



# ADOPTION & FOSTER CARE STATISTICS

*National and Local Information* ❁

*“Caring well for kids and youth in foster care may be preventative and help break generational cycles of poverty and homelessness, addiction, crisis pregnancy, mental illness, and crime within our community.”* [aecf.org](http://aecf.org)

*“We are daunted by the giant number of kids in care (over 400,000 in the U.S.) and yet in most every state in the country, the number of churches is very close to the number of kids in care. Considering the average church attendance in the U.S. is around 186, we’ve got the kids outnumbered . . .”* Jason Weber, *The Foster Roster*

*“We need foster families for kids of all ages but, by far, the greatest needs are for families who will consider older kids and teens, sibling groups, and kids with special needs.”* Larimer County Department of Human Services

*“Our goal is to have more families waiting for kids than kids waiting for families so we can strategically place kids in families, based on needs & family resources, resulting in less disruption and trauma for both kids and foster families.”* Larimer County Department of Human Services

## National Information:

**400,000** children are in the US Foster Care System as a result of abuse, neglect and/or abandonment.

**100,000** of them are legally free for adoption and are waiting for a family.

**300,000** have the goal to be reunited with their birth family and need a loving foster family while they wait.

**26,000** age out of the system at 18 (or 21 in some states) without a family, every year.

source: [acf.hhs.gov](http://acf.hhs.gov)

## AGING OUT



= Child Who Ages Out of Foster Care Without Family Support

Less than half will graduate high school.



One in four will be in trouble with the law within two years.



Two in three girls will be pregnant by age 21.



One in four will experience post-traumatic stress disorder (more than twice the rate of U.S. Veterans.)



One in five will become homeless.



All have a high risk of becoming a victim of human trafficking.



source: [casaforchildren.org](http://casaforchildren.org)

## Larimer County Information:

**350** abused or neglected children will be assessed by the Larimer Child Welfare Division each year.

**300** youth are in foster care annually. The majority will be reunited with their family of origin; some will need permanency through adoption.

**45** youth are in group homes because there are not enough equipped foster families in Larimer County.

**40** kids are moved to foster homes outside the County, causing them further disruption.

Source: Larimer County Statistics from the Department of Human Services



# HOPE DEFERRED

Trusting in God's goodness despite unexplained infertility

✿ *By Mark Saunders*

When Steph and I got married, we assumed that we would start trying to have kids relatively soon after getting married. Steph would stop work

and be a stay-at-home mom, and we would have three to five kids.

After two years of trying, we were worried. It was a hard time. People asked innocently if we ever thought about having kids. Our families made jokes that we should get on with it, and my wife would burst into tears. "Hope deferred makes the heart sick" (Proverbs 13:12a). Our faith grew a lot as we steadily worked to keep our hearts

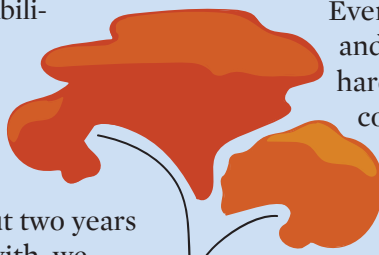
soft toward God and worked toward vulnerability in relationships with others.

Eventually we started meeting with doctors. There is a continuum of processes and options in fertility treatment, and we slowly walked through that. After about two years of trying everything we felt comfortable with, we finally became pregnant. We drove three-plus hours to surprise Steph's parents and mine with the news. They all cried. We were ecstatic and telling everyone; it felt like all our prayers and hopes were finally being answered. "A desire fulfilled is a tree of life" (Proverbs 13:12b).

Six weeks into the pregnancy, we went in for an ultrasound to hear the heartbeat, but they could not find it. The doctor said that sometimes it just takes a little longer, and that we would try again the next week, but you could see on the faces of the nurses that something bad was happening. Two weeks later we miscarried. We locked ourselves in our house for a week and did not go to work or small group or really talk to anyone. We mourned and tried to figure out how to deal. Our friends piled flowers and presents and treats at our doorstep and filled our mailbox with letters.

A year later with no further signs of progress and nothing really more to try at the fertility clinic, we were at the end of a road. As we were considering adoption, I think all of the stress and emotion from trying to get pregnant made the decision kind of hard to approach. We had seen adoption and liked it, but we struggled with wondering if God didn't want us to have children, if maybe we would be horrible parents. If there is a calling to childlessness? How do you know you are worthy to adopt?

As we wrestled with some of those things, we decided to sit down with our friends the Youslings and talk through our story and hear their story. Jay was a pastor, and their family had adopted, so we thought it would be helpful to get their thoughts. It was great to hear them talk about how to deal with some of the thoughts that were running through our heads. No one is ready to be a parent, no one is perfect, God asked us to be fruitful and multiply, and medical issues do not make that command any less real. We thought and prayed through these things and after a few months we felt comfortable pursuing adoption. I think we were still emotionally raw but also hopeful and we felt like we could pursue adoption in faith.



Even after adopting two kids whom we love and are amazingly thankful for, it can still be hard. I know why there are women who don't come to church on Mother's Day. This last year we got pregnant again and saw the heartbeat for the first time and were over the moon. Two weeks later we miscarried. At times I still don't know what to do with that.

We have grown in faith a ton through this process. You learn to pick yourself up off the mat and trust God again. You reflect on the fact that he gave his Son and suffered, as well. You think of your friends and all the love and care that they have shown for you, that you would not have seen without the trials. You are thankful for all the blessings you do have in life. But there are definitely days when it is hard.

### YOU LEARN TO PICK YOURSELF UP OFF THE MAT AND TRUST GOD AGAIN.

It is still true that hope deferred does makes the heart sick, but there are other bigger truths. It has been invaluable for our faith to work on our relationship with God through the hard things. God is good and has good for us, and the process of choosing to hope and trust and be vulnerable has been an amazingly growing. At the end of the day we would not be who we are, or have the family we do, without the trials that God has brought into our life. At times we are still confused and sad about infertility, but most of the time we try to be thankful and in faith. That is not always easy to do, but it is definitely possible and the process of getting there has been a tremendous blessing in our lives. ✨

*The Saunders' story continues on Page 44.*



# PULLED CLOSE

God used the pain of infertility to draw the Vissers nearer to him.

✿ *By Amanda Visser*

The summer of 2002, Ryan and I were married at the age of 20, and we were in no rush to start our family.

Five years later we felt like we were ready. As the daughter of a couple who had trouble conceiving, it was always a thought in the back of my mind that this might be a struggle for me, too. My parents had several years of “unexplained infertility,” followed by the adoption of my twin brothers, then four pregnancies, only one of which turned into a child: me.

My fears became reality when several months passed with no pregnancy. After 12 months went by, we started talking about infertility testing, and then suddenly I was pregnant with our precious daughter, Abby Joy. When Abby was about a year old, we decided we were ready for number two, and again, month after month I wasn’t pregnant. This time it was 13 months when the pregnancy test finally came back positive. However, at 10 weeks, our first ultrasound showed no heartbeat, so we suffered through the excruciating process of inducing a miscarriage.

I never got pregnant again.

Over the next several years, I went on thyroid medica-

tion, changed my diet several times, took a plethora of supplements, tried acupuncture, took Clomid, had several diagnostic tests, and had hundreds of people praying for us. Everyone has an opinion about what worked for someone they knew. And I tried it all. There is nothing physically wrong with either of us, therefore we received the “unexplained infertility” diagnosis. Possible steps included expensive and invasive fertility treatments that may or may not help us conceive again. Despite my longing for another biological child, Ryan directed our family toward adoption instead.

Infertility is an excruciating cycle of hope, waiting and disappointment. Every single month. For us, it has been nearly 100 of these cycles of hope, waiting, and disappointment. When you’re 20- and 30-something, people all around are getting pregnant. Baby showers are painful, being asked to provide a meal for a new mom is painful, all the questions about when you’re going to have another one are painful, everyone’s well-meaning advice is painful and your monthly reminder that you again aren’t pregnant is painful.

INFERTILITY IS AN EXCRUCIATING  
CYCLE OF HOPE, WAITING AND  
DISAPPOINTMENT.

I’m an ER nurse, so I see all kinds of people who shouldn’t be having babies getting pregnant. I’ve seen a girl in preterm labor at 26 weeks due to meth use, a girl punching herself in the stomach because she was mad that we wouldn’t give her narcotics because she was pregnant, and a 12-year-old girl in labor. When you so badly want a baby, all this hurts so much.

*Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world. —CS Lewis*

The Lord draws us closer to Him in our pain. Though the pain and disappointment have seemed unbearable at times, it is the single greatest tool the Lord has used to refine me the last decade. Though I still struggle to be thankful for this trial, I see good and am trusting the Lord for my family. The Lord is teaching us to wait well. Our trial isn’t over; we continue to wait and experience the cycle of hope and disappointment each month, but the Lord is close. ✿

*The Vissers’ story continues on page 32.*

# THREE HOURS

God called the Martines to make a life-altering decision in one afternoon.

✿ *By Melissa Martine*

It all started when a few people from Summitview received an email from Larimer County Department of Human Services (DHS) asking if we knew anybody who could take in a young mom and her 16-month-old boy, Jax.

My husband and I didn't do much about it at first but asked around to see if empty nesters or people with bigger homes than ours would be interested. After not finding anyone interested in hosting this family, we decided to call DHS to see what the story was.

We wanted to be the church and actively live out what we believe. We have hosted other people in our home, so it was not beyond our capacity to host this family. We found basic information from DHS about the mom and son but found out a lot more the following day from the caseworker. The mom had lost parental rights for two children through social services before and was in danger of losing the third. She was nice and respectful, but also homeless, low cognitive and pregnant with her fourth child. In order to main-

tain custody of her son, she needed mentorship and a chance to get on her feet. If she lived with us, we would automatically gain 50 percent custody, and if she left our home, we would become legal guardians of her son. We also found out the caseworker was going to court in three hours to remove the baby from the mom's custody if housing was not secured.

We were not looking to do foster care. We were hoping to provide a safe place where the mom could grow, regain focus and care for her baby. In those three hours, my husband, Ryan, and I independently sought counsel from trusted friends, including a pastor. We had the safety of our home and our own children to consider, as well as their feelings about having strangers in our home. In those three hours, trying to figure out how this could work realistically and if the potential dangers were too significant in relationship to the potential good, I remember being overcome with emotion and not understanding why. I realize now, that the real, raw reality was that God was calling us to take this step of faith. In calling us into faith, God does not ask us to know how things will work or all the details, but he asks us to trust that he will be with us. I was overcome with emotion because God knew that this would rock our world and it would cause all of us to cling to him in ways we never have before.

IN CALLING US INTO FAITH, GOD DOES NOT ASK US TO KNOW HOW THINGS WILL WORK OR ALL THE DETAILS, BUT HE ASKS US TO TRUST THAT HE WILL BE WITH US.

The counsel that Ryan received was to not do it out of obligation or expectation, but to decide in freedom. We both remembered James 1:27, which says, "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." When Christ was on earth, he gave special attention to the weak, the poor, the downtrodden and the rejected. We want to do the same and model this for our children. In a whirlwind of three hours, we agreed to step off the ledge of our comfortable, functional life and trust that God could take our risk and turn it into great good. ✿

*The Martines' story continues on page 46.*



# THEY WERE IN OUR HEARTS BEFORE THEY WERE IN OUR HOME

✿ *By Trevor Sides*

Our family grew from two to five between February and June of 2016. By October, we were down to three. In the happiest and hardest year of our life, my wife and I got a crash course in fostering and what it means to trust in the goodness and sovereignty of God.

After five years of battling the ambiguity of infertility, Lindsey and I were ready to start down the traditional adoption route. An agency, a waiting list, thousands of dollars and, at some point, a little bundle of joy to call our own.

On a Wednesday in late January, God sent us on a different path. A case manager at the Larimer County Department of Human Services (DHS) emailed Summitview Church to see if anyone in our congregation would be interested in being a long-term placement for a 2-year-old boy. Debbie Campbell forwarded that email to myself and one of our Benevolence deacons, and when I saw it, I sensed that our life was about to change.

I shared the email with Lindsey. She was ecstatic. I emailed the DHS case manager, Vicki, to tell her we were interested. That Friday, we got her reply. She wanted to talk with us and the boy's court-appointed attorney the following day.

I honestly can't remember if Vicki came over and we called Cassandra, the attorney, or if it was just one big conference call. But we shared our story and why we wanted to welcome this little boy into our home. We also learned more about the situation and the prospects



of how permanent this placement could be. After that phone call, we knew that James Lee would be coming to live with us on Tuesday. Three days.

## IN A WORLD COVERED IN SNOW, JAMES LEE CAME TO LIVE WITH US.

That Sunday, a handful of friends from church helped us rearrange our house. On Monday, we went to the Sheriff's Office and submitted background paperwork and got fingerprinted. On Monday night, I put together the crib while outside it snowed 16 inches. On Tuesday, the day we thought James would arrive, we learned that the Sheriff's Office was unable to process our background check because the storm closed all county offices. On Wednesday, sometime in the early afternoon, in a world covered in snow, James Lee came to live with us.

He was in our hearts before he was in our home. This was the boy we had been praying for. This was God's provision after long years of doubt and pain and frustration.

I'd like to tell you that everything went swimmingly and it was attachment at first sight and everyone adjusted well. But that first night, I don't think I've ever been as scared in all my life. Almost out of nowhere, there was a 2-year-old boy in our home. A boy who had been neglected and placed with five different family members in the last eight months. A boy who came from an abusive and violent home. We had no time to read parenting books or get babywise. We barely had enough time to get his room ready.

But God provided. We learned as we went. We adjusted. He started to attach. We started to bond. A little over a month into the placement, on our way back from a ski trip with my family, we started calling ourselves "Mom" and "Dad," because that's what we were and that's what he needed. That's what he wanted.

As if that wasn't enough change, in late May, James's attorney asked us to consider being an emergency placement for a sibling pair of sisters, 4- and 2-years-old, respectively. She needed an answer by mid June so that placement could happen by the end of the month. Even though this was longer than three day's notice, the enormity of the ask made two weeks feel like a split-second decision. Then a few days later she said that their current situation was deteriorating rapidly and they

needed to be placed in a new home by June 16. She needed an answer immediately.

I was hesitant. Lindsey was ecstatic. We prayed as much as we could in a few days' time. Something about the date—June 16—stuck in my mind. That date was significant. I looked through a filled-up journal to try to find out why. My memory was confirmed. June 16, 2015, was the day that Lindsey and I learned that we were miscarrying the only child we've ever conceived.

Because nothing ever goes as planned in the foster/court system, the girls came a day early. On June 15, 2016, we welcomed Annahli and Willow. They were in our hearts before they were in our home.

We had three kids—all 4-years-old or younger—for five months. I'd like to tell you that everything was great and we were model "non-traditional kinship providers." I'd like to tell you that we never doubted what God was doing. Our hearts experienced the fullness of joy and pain in those five months. I made a home in Psalms. Where else could I go in such uncertainty, in such a swirl of chaos and love and hardship and laughter and meltdowns and beauty and disappointment? Those five months were everything, a lifetime of change, growth, love and loss shoved into what felt like a moment.

The girls' mom continued to make progress, and by early August we knew that they would be returning to her sometime in mid October. We still bring Annahli and Willow to church with us a couple times a month and are building a relationship with their mom. They have a difficult life ahead of them but we are hopeful that God can change lives and end cycles of poverty and sin.

James's biological parents had their parental rights terminated in January of this year. What was supposed to be a two-day, back-to-back termination hearing turned into a five-day hearing that transpired over four months. I've never known such stress. I've also never known such relief. Currently, we're waiting out the appeals process but expect to formally adopt James into his forever home sometime around April 2018. The last several months have been healing and restful. We are not sure what God has in store for our family. But we are sure that God is here and that he brings unexpected blessings and hardships to not only test our faith but to prove his faithfulness.

And that is enough. ❁



# MEANT TO BE

How a dream united the  
Hunts' hearts in adoption.

✿ *By DeeDee Hunt*

They used to claim that  
the United States Peace  
Corps was the toughest  
job you'd ever love.

John and I served in the Peace Corps for over two years in Malawi, Africa when we were a young married couple. It was challenging, but it was the long haul of parenting that has been the toughest job we will ever love, and the process of adoption tops the jobs to which tough love is required.

By 2005, we had three wonderful children. Why would I keep dreaming of adopting another one? It was causing friction in our marriage because my husband, John, heard no such calling. We were involved with outreach to international students at Colorado State University and learned about numerous little girls in China who needed homes because of China's one child policy. John was considering how expensive adopting can be, followed by the cost of raising another child. If I asked God to help me forget the idea, five minutes later I'd be thinking of how God has adopted us and how my mom was adopted after her parents died, and how much I'd like to show my pro-life ideals by raising just one of the world's needy children. John was afraid of the impact on our peaceful family. Once before, in 1994, John had a dream, which readied him for the arrival of our first daughter. Now I prayed God would give him another dream. And God did!

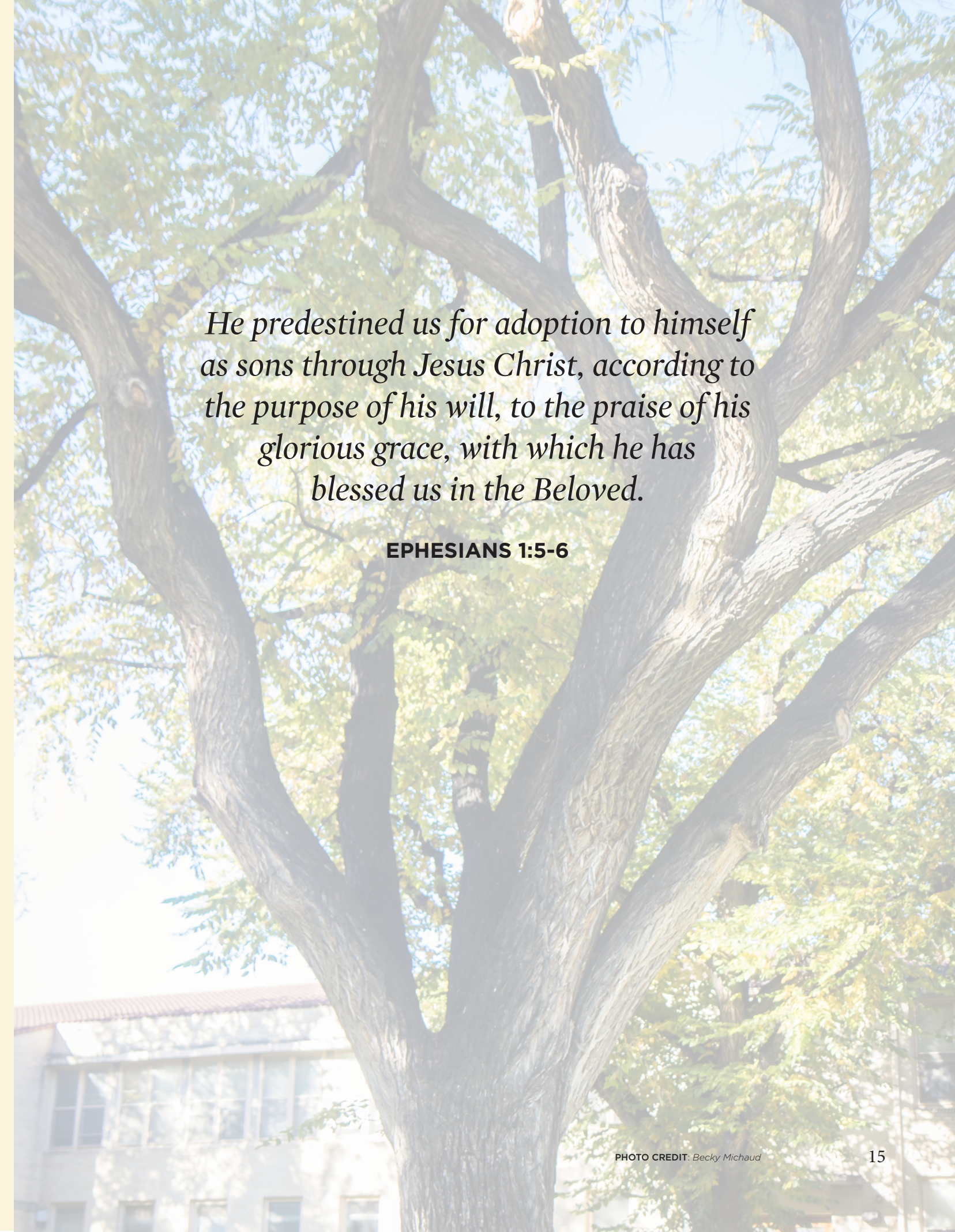
After John's vivid dream in which we were handed a sweet baby girl in a foreign country, he decided that it was God who had planted the idea of adoption in my heart. We didn't know how we were going to pay for the \$20,000 for adoption expenses, but decided to sell some Arizona desert land we had purchased for \$4,000 17 years prior to this. Amazingly, our realtor informed us we could list the land for \$20,000. This was the first of many miracles we saw as God demonstrated his love for one little baby girl in the Hunan province of China who was not even born yet.

Gathering information for our dossier to send to China was no small task. A dossier is a collection of documents that is required for international adoption, which included: originals of birth certificates from Washington D.C. (since John and I were both born overseas); marriage certificate from California, references from three different sources; notarized letters stating why we wanted to adopt, why I was a stay-at-home mom, from my doctor explaining that I had a hearing loss but my hearing aid enabled me to function normally, and from the police department explaining that my husband had a DUI when he was in college but he has been a good boy since then; financial statements; five page autobiography questionnaires; home study with three visits from a social worker who probes into your most private life to determine whether you will be good parents or not; fingerprints at two separate locations; physical exams for the whole family; and of course, writing sizable checks at every turn!

During our 20 hours of adoption training, we were told Chinese adoptions required about a year. The wait was agonizing. The government of China slowed the process down. As one year turned into two, I was depressed. After having to re-do our paperwork because of how long it was taking, God knew we needed confirmation to hang in there with this process. I opened the mail one day to find a generous check from some Christian friends who felt God urging them to encourage us with our adoption! I started to understand that God's special plan for this one little girl in China was not in my control. "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion." (Philippians 1:6). In September 2007, suddenly and surprisingly (as God likes to), he started to make things move. ✿

*The Hunts' story continues on page on Page 40.*





*He predestined us for adoption to himself  
as sons through Jesus Christ, according to  
the purpose of his will, to the praise of his  
glorious grace, with which he has  
blessed us in the Beloved.*

**EPHESIANS 1:5-6**



# DISCOVERING GOD'S PLAN

How a Greeley family adopted two special-needs  
children from China ✿ *By Laura Polk*

Our adoption story began over 13 years ago. At the time we had two boys, ages two and one, and I had just gone through a miscarriage.





With a grieving heart, I felt like God was stirring my heart toward adoption, but I wondered if it was just my emotional state. When I mentioned it to Travis, he said, “I’ve always thought we’d adopt some day!” I wondered how I had missed such a significant conversation!

As the years clicked by, God continued to add to our family biologically—a third little boy, then a fourth, a fifth, and finally a sixth child, our first little girl. Through those years we prayed on and off about the possibility of adoption, but I wondered with each addition if God would still have that for us someday.

After the delivery of our little Addie, I had some complications and we came to the heartbreaking realization that it would be dangerous to conceive again. We were so grateful for the many blessings that God had given us, but still saddened at the thought of being “done.” Little did we know that God was just beginning to orchestrate something much bigger than either of us dreamed.

Months later we attended a conference where once again God began to speak to us about adoption. Once home, we began to prayerfully research different options and realized that we had two major obstacles—our family size and no money. As in zero. Travis had taken a different job the year before that was more accommodating to our family, and with it, a significant pay cut. As the sole provider for our family, he wasn’t even sure it was financially wise that we embark on this journey, as we were more tapped financially than we’d ever been. And although we

were blessed with wonderfully supportive friends, we didn’t even know anyone who had adopted. Were we being irresponsible? And even though it sounded a bit crazy, we both felt confident that God was calling us.

In regards to our family size, we were disqualified from just about every international option, so that helped to quickly narrow our choices. In America we seemed to hit a dead end with almost every phone call as well. As one large agency told us, “No birth mother would EVER choose a family your size.” And yet we still had a confident peace that God had a plan; we were determined to discover it!

As time passed we found a wonderful agency in Florida, who was happy to work with us and who shared a strong gospel-centered vision. About the same time, we received a call from the conference we’d attended. They were sending \$250 in the mail as a door prize we had won—the exact amount we needed for our agency application fee. At last it was settled and we were elated—we began to pray for our (hopefully healthy) newborn girl.

Thus, my new hobby began. After the children were tucked into bed, I would spend my evenings filling out adoption paperwork and applying for grants that we desperately needed. Months later we got our first response back. Show Hope wanted to give us \$5,000. We were stunned. We cried. Then we heard back from a second, and a third. All in all, God had given us \$25,000 in grants. We wept and rejoiced. God was providing every penny we needed to bring home our







little girl. And yet there was a bit of uncertainty in the back of my mind. Was He planning something even bigger? One thing we were certain of: God's provision and grace in this journey were becoming more and more evident with every passing day.

As we continued through the adoption process, we began to learn more about the plight of orphans. About the children that are least likely to be adopted in America, and those overseas with special needs. We learned about the rampant abortions in Asia and

shocking facts about abandoned children in their culture. God began to challenge our thinking, and we both grew increasingly uncomfortable with adopting a child that would be considered a highly desirable choice by most people. We had always strived to be good stewards of our resources, and yet didn't have the money to help an orphan with a life-changing surgery. And yet we had been blessed with health insurance that was enviable by most American standards. Could God be calling us to use our resources for a special-needs child? Surely not! With six kiddos





in tow already, I wasn't even sure how well I could do with another healthy child in the mix.

GOD'S PROVISION AND GRACE IN THIS JOURNEY WERE BECOMING MORE AND MORE EVIDENT WITH EVERY PASSING DAY.

And yet that was the very direction God was leading us. A special needs *child* (not the baby we'd been pray-

ing for!) from China! Some people thought we were crazy. My family would hardly speak to me. And yet we were thrilled! Only a few more minor obstacles. We didn't meet China's requirements to adopt from their country. We'd also need significantly more money for the adoption itself. We began to fervently pray that God would give us our hearts' desire and provide what we needed.

And he did. Seamlessly. But the surprises weren't over yet. Travis came to me one morning and told me he thought God was calling us to bring home not only a little girl, but a little boy too. I was speechless. There was no way. Three of my children were already under age 4. People would really think we were crazy. We already had five energetic boys! Some people could do this, but I wasn't nearly a good enough mother for two more children. I wanted to crawl back in bed and go back to sleep. Instead I agreed to pray about it over the weekend.

I hardly slept that weekend. I confided in a friend who wasn't sure what to say. It wasn't exactly a vote of confidence. And yet by the end of the weekend I had a simple peace that could only come from the Lord. If God was leading us this way, then of course he would provide.

After waiting for months to be "matched" with our children, God hand picked two special little blessings with identical needs, cleft lip and palate. Lastly, he provided every penny we needed of the \$48,000 to get our precious babies home, plus extra, to take our two oldest boys to China with us.

We now have two beautiful treasures—Reed and Grace. Reed means "blessed" (which we are praying his life will be!) and Grace, because of God's abundant grace through this journey. They have been home almost two-and-a-half years and we can't imagine life without either of them. It grieves me deeply to think how close I could have come to saying "no." As challenging as it has been at times, our whole family is thriving and we consider ourselves incredibly blessed that God chose this path for us. We are so thankful he has allowed us a front row seat to see his transformation of Reed and Grace's lives, and for the transformation he has done in our own. It's been a privilege to experience the gospel in this way, and it's been absolutely exhilarating. ❀





# BLESSING THROUGH TRIAL

Behind each heartbreaking experience, God has a beautiful plan

✿ *By Connie Lindholm*

Struggling with infertility was difficult, and the onset of every period was heartbreaking. Seeing families with their small children became only a reminder of what we were missing, and Mother's Day services at our church were almost

unbearable. Meanwhile we decided to pursue adoption.

We signed with an agency in Colorado Springs called Hand in Hand, which was active in foreign adoptions from the Philippines. They were placing babies in homes as young as five months. Most other agencies we contacted would not work with us because we had been married less than two years and our combined age was above their limit. We filled out forms, wrote our biographies, contacted references, signed the financial forms, were fingerprinted, had background checks and underwent the home study process. We thought it ironic we were asked questions about how we would handle various situations about child-rearing with the expectation (probably more in our minds than the agency) that we knew







everything in advance. But we did whatever we had to do. The very week we submitted our dossiers, the Philippine Adoption Program was shut down due to political unrest. Hand in Hand was working with some other countries as well so they shifted our files to their Thailand program, which had a much longer wait time.

## THEN GOD REVEALED PART OF HIS PLAN FOR US.

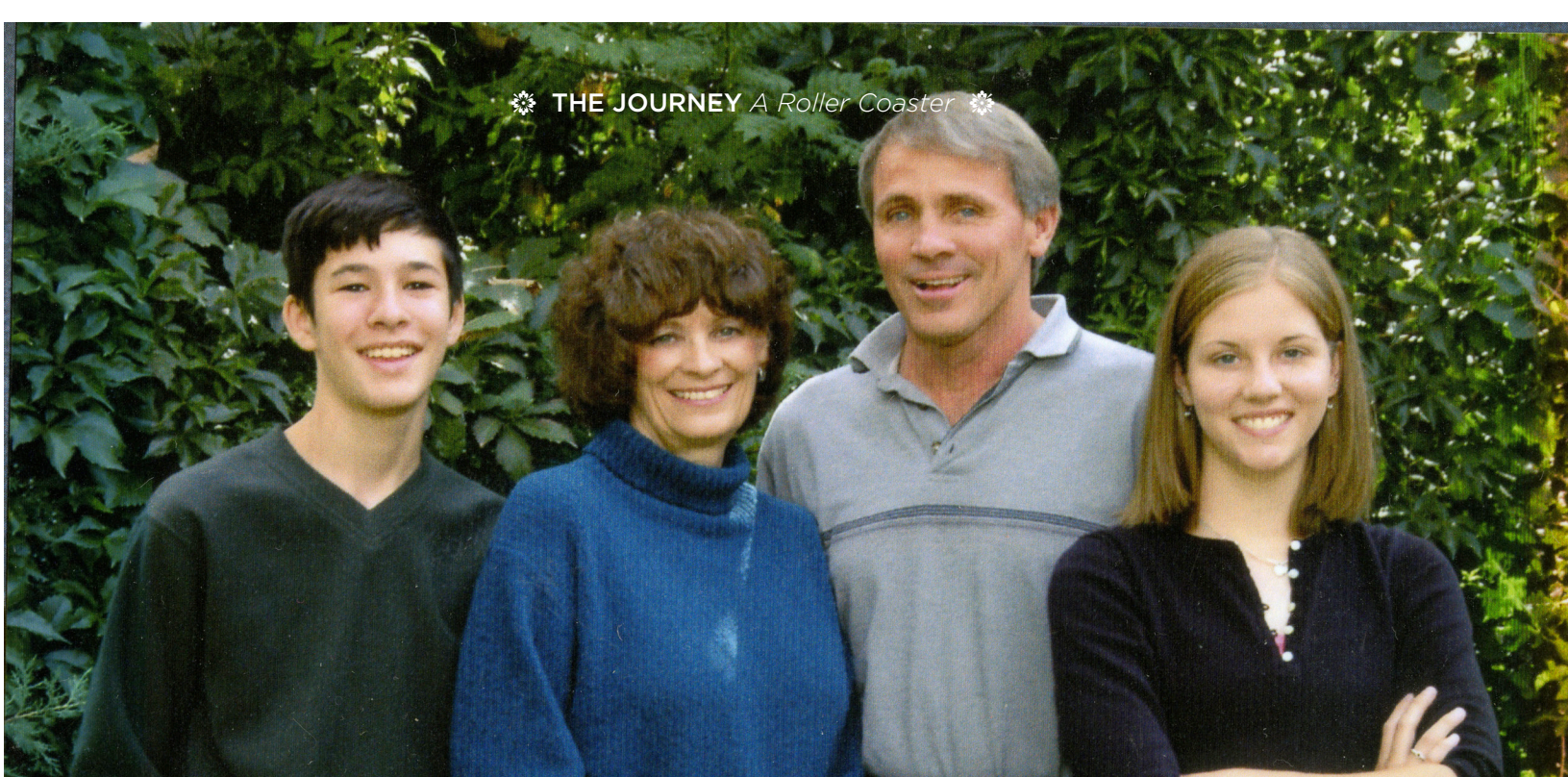
Up to this point we were working on our own plan. In the middle of January, we were contacted by Joy, a neighbor of Dale's brother in Greeley. She worked for Birthright and had received a call from a mom who was looking for information about adoption because she had just discovered that her daughter, Shayla, was eight months pregnant. Joy said, "I know a couple who are wanting to adopt."

That conversation eventually led us to our precious daughter, Shelby. Shayla began working with Adoption Connection in Denver and ultimately selected us to parent her baby. Hand in Hand graciously agreed to give Adoption Connection our home study, so we were able to expedite the paperwork. On January 31, 1988 we received a call that Shayla had given birth to a baby girl and wanted to meet us. We visited her, her mom and sister at the hospital the following evening. We got to know a little more about each other and we left the meeting feeling fairly optimistic.

We received a call early the next morning telling us to be at the hospital later that afternoon to pick up our daughter. We were on top of the world, but totally unprepared for a baby. During the day, a friend loaned us a car seat, clothes, a cradle, blankets and various immediate necessities, which we dropped in the middle of our living room. We figured we would buy diapers and bottles on the way home from the hospital. Early in the afternoon, Dale received a call telling us not to come because the baby's birth father was not willing to relinquish parental rights. Shelby went into foster care until decisions could be made. Our world fell out from under us again and we went home to a living room full of baby stuff and no baby.

Later on, the birth father underwent counseling and signed relinquishment papers and we picked Shelby up at the agency when she was 28 days old. It was love at first sight. We went through the next month full of joy with our new baby, while also worrying that Shayla had not yet signed relinquishment papers. She canceled her first court date because she was very shy and afraid of facing a judge. By now we could not imagine life without Shelby but had to face the reality we could still lose her. We met with Shayla twice that month to assure her that we wanted to stay in touch following the adoption and that Shelby was adjusting to her new family. About a month later, we received a call telling us all the papers had been





signed and Shelby finally really did belong with us.

While we adjusted to and relished our new life as parents, we unsuccessfully continued our quest for a pregnancy and also recognized we should pursue another child through adoption. We remained in Hand in Hand's Thailand program and when Shelby was about 2-years-old, we received our placement call. We had been matched with a 2-year-old Thai boy, but were also informed he had medical problems, including a cleft palate that would require immediate surgery upon his arrival in the U.S.

We were conflicted, because our health insurance had added a pre-existing clause that meant the very expensive surgery and the extensive speech therapy that he would need would not be covered. Since Dale is self-employed, all of our health insurance came through my job, and the extensiveness of the speech therapy meant I would probably have to quit my job, which was not an option. Our savings had already been depleted by fertility treatments and Shelby's adoption, and we had decided to cash out our IRAs to pay for our second adoption. We agonized over the decision, feeling like we were abandoning a child, but financially and insurance-wise seeing no other option.

Once we made that call, we were sure that Hand in Hand would not consider us for another placement, so we began considering a private adoption. We researched a toll-free number, hired a lawyer and

advertised on college campuses. We located one birth mom through a relative in Kansas, but she changed her mind after her baby was born.

### "THAT'S MY NEW BABY BROTHER."

Then once again, God stepped in and we received a call from Hand in Hand on August 16, 1990, asking us to be in Colorado Springs at 11 a.m. the next day to pick up our new five-day-old son. His birth parents were in Hand in Hand's local program and had selected us from the agency's files. We met Reece and his birth parents after they had finished signing the relinquishment papers. Shelby's first response was, "That's my new baby brother."

Our adoption journey was filled with ups and downs, but in hindsight we see God's hand in every step of the way, particularly the most heartbreaking events. If I hadn't miscarried, we would not have Shelby. If we had not turned down the Thai adoption or if the Kansas birth mom had not changed her mind, we would not have Reece. We believe with all our hearts that Shelby and Reece were created to be our children and our lives have been infinitely blessed by them. ✿





# ADOPTION RESOURCES

## **SUMMITVIEW RESOURCES:**

For information on the Summitview adoption fund,  
visit [summitview.com/ministries/adoption](http://summitview.com/ministries/adoption).

From Summitview's blog, All Things New:

*We're All Adopted* by Aaron Ritter

*Heirs: A Theology and Celebration of Adoption* by Aaron Ritter

*Advent Is about Adoption* by Trevor Sides

## **RECOMMENDED READINGS:**

*Adopted for Life*, by Russell Moore

*Orphanology*, by Tony Merida and Rick Morton

*The Connected Child*, by Karyn Purvis

*Horace*, by Holly Keller (children's book)

*Fields of the Fatherless*, by Tom Davis

*Dear Mr. Knightley: A Novel*, by Katherine Reay

## **MEDIA:**

*October Baby* (DVD, 2011)

*Bella* (DVD by Eduardo Verástegui, 2006)

*The Doctrine of Adoption* by Voddie Baucham (YouTube)

## **AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS:**

AAC: [aacadoption.com](http://aacadoption.com)

A Helping Hand

American World Adoption

Bethany: [bethany.org](http://bethany.org)

CCAI: [ccaifamily.org](http://ccaifamily.org)

Colorado Adoption Center: [coloradoadoptioncenter.org](http://coloradoadoptioncenter.org)

Hope's Promise: [hopespromise.com](http://hopespromise.com)

Nightlight: [nightlight.org](http://nightlight.org)

# THE RIGHT FAMILY

When our plans go wrong, God's plans go right

❁ *By Aaron Ritter*





To be honest, the waiting is agonizing. It's not easy to hope so intensely for an outcome you have absolutely no power to influence.



We began our adoption process in December 2012. Our local adoption agency had a partnership with an agency in Georgia, and due to a supposedly desperate need for adoptive families in Georgia, we expected to be flying to Atlanta to pick up our new baby within the year. Nevertheless, 2013 came and went, and we heard nothing.

It wasn't until June 2014 that we finally heard the news we had been waiting for. A birth mother in Georgia, who had just given birth, had chosen us! In the state of Georgia, there's a 10-day period after the birth mother signs surrender forms, during which she can change her mind and keep the baby. We made reservations to fly out to Georgia at the end of those 10 days to pick up our new daughter. However, a few days in, the birth mother did indeed change her mind. That's not necessarily uncommon, but it was still a loss for us. Once you've seen pictures and expect to hold your baby daughter within days, your heart can't help but attach. And detaching hurts.

We began to wait again but also moved on with life. Anticipating a growing family, we started looking for a new, slightly larger house. After a long search, we found a house that seemed perfect for us. By July 2014, we were under contract and hoping to move in by the end of August. The contract was contingent on us selling our home, but that wasn't going to be a problem in a ridiculously hot housing market. We put our house on the market and began to wait for the offers to roll in. But there was no rolling. In fact, we received exactly zero offers. We lowered our asking price, and still no offers.

That was disappointing, but soon it didn't matter because we were distracted by something else. We got

another call from Georgia! Another young woman had chosen us for her baby that was due to be born in just a matter of days. Again, we intended to fly to Georgia at the end of the 10-day waiting period, but after speaking with our adoption agency, we decided to fly down for the actual birth. Sometimes that can be the recommendation when things are moving really positively. This woman had previously given up a baby for adoption and she was giving every indication that she was ready to do so again. It can also be reassuring for a birth mother when the adoptive parents are there for the birth.

GOD DESIGNED THE HEART OF  
A PARENT TO WRAP ITSELF  
AROUND A CHILD, REGARDLESS  
OF THE AGE OF THE CHILD. TO  
LOSE A CHILD YOU HAVE  
ACCEPTED AS YOUR OWN IS  
EXCRUCIATINGLY PAINFUL.

We arrived in Atlanta the day of the birth and drove immediately to the hospital to meet our little girl. She remained in the hospital the next couple days, but we visited and enjoyed a growing relationship with the birth mother. She had been told of our previous disappointment, so she assured us that she was committed to going through with this adoption. When it was time for the baby to leave the hospital, she left in our arms. We still had to wait out the 10 days, but we now had the little girl we had been waiting so long for. Three days later, however, the birth mother changed her mind. Again, it's difficult to describe that kind of pain. God designed the heart of a parent to wrap itself around a child, regardless of the age of the child. To lose a child you have accepted as your own is excruciatingly painful.

We returned to Fort Collins and tried to get back into life. An added disappointment, though, was that we had lost our new house. Since we couldn't sell our old house for the price we needed to sell it for, we let go of the contract. The house wasn't that important, but it was an added blow to already hurting hearts.

Very little happened in the next six months. We dropped the house hunt, and although we were still technically waiting for a baby, we had little expectation. In the Spring of 2015, though, life began to

change. It began when we spotted a “For Sale” sign on the corner of a street we had never driven down. After looking up the house online, we called our realtor to arrange a showing. He told us that there was already an offer on it, so we needed to go see it right away. We went and loved it, but knew there was no chance because we would have to make another contingent offer, which the owners would have no reason to accept. Still, our realtor called theirs and simply asked if there was any chance. Surprisingly, she said there might be. Apparently, the owners were eager to sell their house “to the right family,” and she also mentioned that the owner was a retired pastor. That seemed hopeful, so we wrote them a letter introducing ourselves and explaining why we would love to buy their house. After reading our letter, they decided to drop their other offer and sell to us.

That was good, but we still needed to sell our own house, which hadn’t worked only eight months prior. We quickly readied our house, and to our surprise, the first day on the market yielded nearly 20 showings and multiple offers. After a few days, we had 13 offers and ended up selling for well over our asking price. We were excited, but not fully. A house was great, but we really wanted a baby.

Two weeks later, though, we got a phone call...from Georgia! Not only was a baby girl waiting for us, but the 10 days were over. Because of our previous disappointments, the agency hadn’t told us about this little girl until the 10 days were completed. All we had to do was come pick her up. We packed up our family and flew out the next day, and on the evening of May 6, 2015, we met our beautiful daughter, Abigail Violet.

After spending a week in Georgia, we returned to Fort Collins. Upon our return, I discovered a voicemail on my office phone from LeRoy Grimm, the retired pastor who was selling us his house. We had not yet met or talked to LeRoy, but we had found out a little more about him. He was the former pastor at Faith Evangelical Free Church, the very church that had sold its building to Summitview in 2003. He had left a message for me over a week ago, so I quickly called him, apologizing for not returning his call earlier but explaining that we had unexpectedly traveled to Georgia to pick up our newly adopted daughter. LeRoy then said something that still brings tears to my eyes. He explained that when he and his family had built their house nearly 40 years ago, they had three young boys and a recently adopted girl—just as we did. He



then explained that for the last year, as they had been anticipating placing their house on the market, they had been praying that they would be able to sell their house to the right family. We were that family.

There are a thousand other details to our story, details that show the sovereign hand of God revealing his fatherly kindness to us throughout the roller-coaster ride that is adoption, including one final chapter that was especially meaningful to us several weeks after bringing Abby home. ✿

For the full story, watch here: [summitview.com/teachings/media/m/2519/t/fathers-joy-romans-81417](https://summitview.com/teachings/media/m/2519/t/fathers-joy-romans-81417)







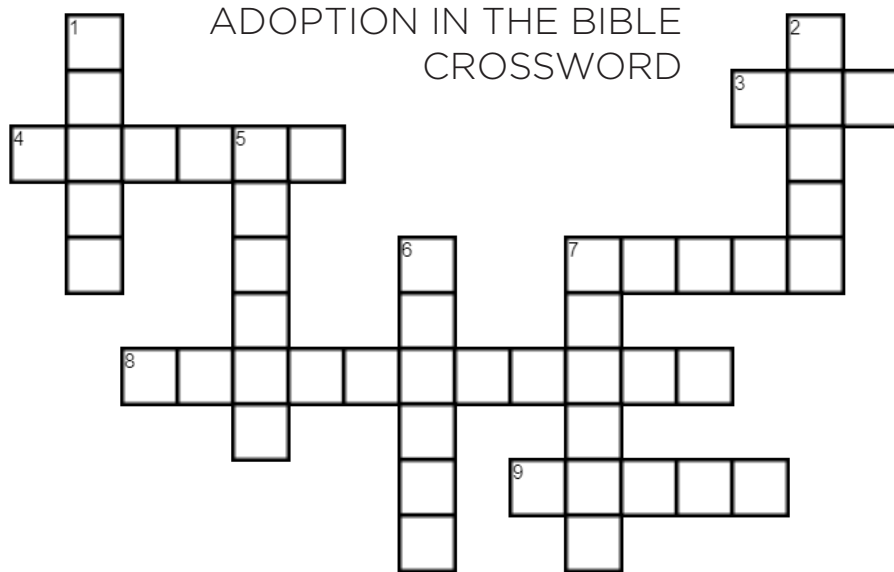
## ADOPTION WORD SEARCH

### Word List

Holy Spirit	Care
Adoption	God
Belong	Love
Foster	Home
Family	Ours
Redeem	Mom
Jesus	Dad
Heirs	

Y M H E I R S G O D  
D W O C A R E S U V  
P H L M D A D J R V  
B L Y L O V E E S D  
E F S I P R O S L F  
L O P F T E L U T A  
O S I S I D M S O M  
N T R G O E V M L I  
G E I J N E K B V L  
T R T H O M E N F Y

## ADOPTION IN THE BIBLE CROSSWORD



### ACROSS

3. Was Jesus adopted? (Yes or No)
4. What nation did God adopt in the Old Testament? (Romans 9:4)
7. Fill in the blank from Romans 8:16-17: "... and if children, then \_\_\_\_\_"
8. Fill in the blank from Ephesians 1:5: "he \_\_\_\_\_ us for adoption to himself"
9. How can you be adopted by God? Clue: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:26)

### DOWN

1. An Egyptian found and adopted this baby boy
2. Who had to die so that we could become children of God?
5. A young girl adopted by her cousin Mordecai after her parents' death
6. What was Jesus' earthly father's name?
7. A woman who gave up her baby boy so that he could serve in the temple



*“Later, when the boy was older, his mother brought him back to Pharaoh’s daughter, who adopted him as her own son. The princess named him Moses, for she explained, “I lifted him out of the water.”*

**Exodus 2:10**

Enjoy bringing color to the adoption of Moses.  
Read more about his story and adoption in *Exodus 2:1-10*.



# A TALE OF TWO ADOPTIONS

❁ By Karen Hanawalt

We had made the incredibly difficult decision to move to Colorado and began our adoption process. We did our adoptions through Bethany Christian Services in Denver, which is a national organization.

Getting all of our paper work, home studies and everything else lasted about five months. We were approved and ready to go. Three months later we were parents.

We had a “storybook,” “like-clock-work” experience with our first adoption for Abigail in 1995. It was an open adoption and we have had a wonderful relationship with Abbie’s maternal birth family (and still do). We met Abbie’s birth mother and had an immediate connection: she was also from the San Francisco Bay Area. She was due three weeks later and was going to

deliver in Aspen, Colorado. We got a call that she was going to be induced on her due date, and we didn’t know if it was a girl or boy. The whole drive to Aspen, we were trying to settle on a boy’s name. We didn’t have to worry about it....our daughter was born. We had to wait an extra day in Aspen due to the birth mother’s medical problems during delivery.

That was an incredibly difficult waiting experience. Here we were in the beautiful mountain city of Aspen and all we could do is walk, wait and pray that our birth mother would not change her mind. We had originally agreed to pay for medical expenses, and since there were difficulties during her delivery, we were about to be hit with a really high fee to pay. Because Abbie was our first, we just had to say “yes.” After all, we had already held her! (One of my prayers was that I would hold our baby within two hours of her being born. When I held her, I looked at the clock and it was exactly two hours! God has a wonderful way about him.)

To help us get out of debt from our first adoption, especially with the costly adoption expenses and the medical expenses, we rented our house and moved to a small mobile home for two years. It was a good solution for us and there were some incredible blessings even though it was tough.

We were approved for baby No. 2 in the spring of 1998. We were connected with a birth mother, age 16, and





father, age 17, for five weeks, going down to Colorado Springs every weekend. A baby boy was born May 30, 1998. We brought him home and 11 days later the birth mother changed her mind and we had to give him back. It was a very difficult time, especially with an almost 3-year-old that wanted to know where her baby brother went. We had just explained to Abbie that she was adopted, so we didn't want her to think she could be taken back, too.

Five months later we were connected with a birth mother who had a supportive birth father but they were no longer together. We loved the birth mother so much. We were very protective of our daughter and kept everything very quiet to make sure everything was going to work out. We were guarded but hopeful. The birth mother went into labor a little early and she and the birth father chose to not tell us because they were beginning to question their adoption plans. We found out that the baby had been born two days earlier.

### I WASN'T SURE I COULD CARRY ON AND TRUST OTHER BIRTH PARENTS.

I had an entire weekend of feeling uneasy—almost an intuition that something was going wrong. By the time they decided to tell us the baby was born, they had put the baby girl in cradle care while they were making a decision. We found out on Christmas Eve that they were going to keep the baby, and the birth mother and

father got married on New Year's Eve. It was a weird turn of events and we were yet again without a baby. At this point, the grief of losing two babies was very overwhelming. I wasn't sure I could carry on and trust other birth parents.

May 1999 was the month of our son's birth. The birth grandmother had prayed that her daughter would not follow through with an abortion. His birth mom went to have an abortion and was sedated for the procedure, but when the doctor came in, he said he couldn't perform the abortion and he didn't know why. Angels in the room, maybe? Our son was rescued! She then carried him to term with the support of her strong Christian mom. Her mom told us this whole story in the hospital when we received our son, Jack.

The birth mother chose to leave the hospital before we got there; we could feel the incredible emotions in the air. I truly felt like God had put us through everything before so that we could be Jack's parents. He had his hand on the whole deal. Waiting was tough but God was in the waiting. ✿

# A PRIVILEGE TO LOVE

Foster care is challenging but worth it.

✿ *By Amanda Visser*

After several years of struggling with secondary infertility, Ryan and I began entertaining the idea of adoption. We had one precious biological daughter, but I was longing for more children. After lots of prayer and counsel, we decided to proceed down the foster care road with the hope of adopting a child or two.





The process of getting licensed for foster care is extensive: a lengthy application, background checks, 30 hours of training, interviews and evaluations, inspections of home and vehicles, all with a mountain of paperwork. It's a lot of work to prove you are capable of caring for children. The training is sobering and scary. Children in foster care come from trauma, brokenness, abuse and hardship that most of us can't imagine enduring. The fairytale of adopting a perfectly healthy newborn baby is not possible when adopting from the system.

### IT'S A LOT OF WORK TO PROVE YOU ARE CAPABLE OF CARING FOR CHILDREN.

During the application, you must decide what kinds of children you are willing to accept. Are you willing

to take a child from another race? Sibling groups? Teenagers? Fetal drug exposure? Sexual behavior? Bed wetting? Destructive behavior? Pathological lying? Medically fragile? It's excruciating to make these decisions, especially when you have another child's safety to think about. In addition, the goal of the Department of Human Services (DHS) is to reunite families, *not* to provide adoptive homes to children. We were advised by some that if our goal was to adopt, that we should just go adopt rather than foster. Two years of experience and heartache later, and I would tend to agree with that advice. It's wise to have your heart in a place that can love a child and say goodbye, rather than be yearning to adopt as you enter foster care.

Financially, foster care is a very economical way to adopt. DHS pays a daily stipend, which varies depending upon the acuity of the child, amounting to \$600 to \$900 per month for an average child. At times, this stipend might partially continue after adoption if the child has high medical needs (ours did not). All foster children receive Medicaid, even

after adoption. Adoption expenses are paid by DHS. Children adopted through foster care in Colorado are deemed “special needs,” and thus qualify for the adoption tax credit, which is nearly \$14,000 for 2017. There are a variety of other small perks and occasional gifts that help with Christmas presents, school supplies, clothing, or other needs. We are also told that there are many college scholarships and grants available for children from foster care.

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We received our first placement in September of 2015. We were told it was a drug exposed newborn who would very likely become adoptable. I was on a girls’ trip to Florida when he was born so Ryan and my dad picked him up from the hospital. After having this baby four days, we received word that he was ordered to go back to live with mom in drug rehab; he was gone a few hours later. I never met him.

In October 2015, we received a phone call about a 3-year-old boy who needed a potentially adoptive home. Three hours later, William came walking through our door. We were initially told termination and adoption should happen “quickly” since he was under 5 and had been in the system nearly two years. Everything moves so slowly in foster care. Each step took many months. Seemingly, everything they told us would not happen, did happen. Twenty-two months later, we were finally able to finalize the adoption. Our sweet son finally had the permanency of a forever family after four years!

In March 2017, we got a 4-month-old baby boy whose parents were inquiring about relinquishing their rights to an open adoption. Our whole family was attached to this sweetie from day one. After several months of us bonding with this little one, new biological family members were introduced into the case and suddenly adoption became very unlikely. As of the time of this writing, we have said goodbye to our sweet baby. He was with us for seven months and is going to an aunt he barely knows. We are heartbroken, but trusting the Lord to heal us.

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The older the child is, the longer it takes for attachment to complete. With William, attachment began quickly but definitely took time, and even today is still progressing. It did not start out as strong and

natural as when your newborn baby is placed in your arms. He was very lovable and affectionate from the start, but also very defiant and difficult. As a foster parent, you are given only a very small selection of discipline and training tools, most of which they admit don’t even work. Nothing we had used with Abby was allowed prior to adoption, and there was enormous frustration over feeling like our hands were tied and we didn’t have the ability to enforce rules.

## AT THE END OF THE DAY, YOU HAVE CHILDREN WHO NEED YOU TO KEEP THEM SAFE AND LOVE THEM.

As a foster parent, you are expected to love a child like they are staying forever, yet say goodbye if the biological family becomes minimally adequate. You are rarely given reliable information. You are expected to drive all over the county, sometimes multiple times per day, for appointments, visits with biological family, screenings and meetings. You are expected to be in support of reunification with the biological family, even if you are fully convinced this would not be best for the child. You never know what’s coming, how long each step might take, or how your life might change with each court hearing. You are sometimes treated like a superhero. You are sometimes looked down upon because your neglected, abused, or traumatized children are poorly behaved. You are sometimes accused of doing it “just for the money.” And yet somehow, at the end of the day, you have a children who need you to keep them safe and love them. Despite being at the mercy of this inconvenient, maddening, heart-wrenching system, it is a privilege to serve, love and practically live out the gospel as a family in this way.

After all this, we have one thing to say: consider being a foster family. It’s so hard, but it’s so worth it. The need is enormous and the number of Christian foster families is decreasing. Open your doors instead. These children need homes that will introduce them to their Savior. I promise it’s worth the sacrifice. ✨





# LOVE WITHOUT BORDERS

Two girls were destined to be loved by the Carneys,  
and international borders or state lines weren't  
about to get in the way

✿ *By Shaun and Stephanie Carney*

*Stephanie:*

We've walked through an international and a domestic adoption. Early in marriage, we thought we'd have a couple kids and then begin adopting. After

our son was born, I received a cancer diagnosis: a melanoma that was accelerated by my pregnancy. With this, we began to pursue an international adoption.





We have always had “international hearts” with a love for cultures, languages and travel, and a heart for missions. We looked at many countries, evaluating the cost and time required to travel and stay in a country since we had a son under the age of 2 who we did not want to be separated from for a long period of time. For different reasons, each country was eliminated except for Guatemala.

**Shaun:**

Finances were a big question mark. I was in graduate school when we had our son. Our savings hit zero as I graduated and began working again as a civil engineer. We began to save, but the cost of an adoption far exceeded what we could save over multiple years.

We believed we were supposed to forge ahead, though Steph was more convinced than me. I battled questions: What does it mean to provide for our family? Is incurring debt to cover expenses legitimate or wise? Do we begin a process of undetermined length, trusting God to provide? A pastor shared with me that whatever we decide, to move forward in faith.

During this time of uncertainty, God made it clear that he could provide in big ways. Beginning in early 2005, we encountered a bunch of odd “circumstances”:

- When renewing our apartment lease, the leasing office discovered they had overcharged us our first month and refunded us more than \$100
- We received more than \$900 at Christmas (we have generous families, but this was not the norm)
- My company had given raises at the end of the previous year; two months later, accounting realized they had not put my raise into the system, and my backpay was over \$500.
- Our car insurance coverage changed, saving several hundred dollars.
- Our tax return was over \$1,000

WE QUICKLY DISCOVERED THAT  
GOD WAS GOING TO PROVIDE  
HIS WAY.

We moved forward, saving, praying and trusting God’s provision. It’s worth noting that we lived simply but not minimalistically. We took a trip with friends. We put a down payment down on a house

(which in 2006 required only \$2,000). We went out to eat and did normal, everyday things. The point is that we weren’t able to cover the cost of our adoption because of perfect saving habits. We had our plans and ideas for paying for this adoption. We applied for an interest-free loan of \$10,000. The loan was our plan to finish off the adoption, but we didn’t get it. We had family we thought might help us due to their financial situation, but they didn’t. We quickly discovered that God was going to provide *his* way.

We received an adoption grant for \$2,000. We had friends who wrote checks and covered our international travel expenses. We thought we’d have some credit card debt in the end, but paid less than \$20 in interest. The cost of our adoption was more than I made that whole year (after taxes). It doesn’t add up apart from God’s provision.

Looking back, we say with confidence that God provided, rather than any single person or organization. In another sweet coincidence, we met our daughter on Easter Sunday.

IT’S ABSOLUTELY CLEAR THAT  
HOPE IS IN GOD ALONE.

**Stephanie:**

For our second adoption, we began pursuing an adoption from Ethiopia. Our agency called the day before we submitted our application saying there was a baby boy in Chicago to be born in one week. I managed to complete the paperwork in six days. This mother chose to keep her baby, but we had made the switch from international to domestic. We walked this way trusting God’s leading. In the next 10 months, we walked through seven different situations that fell through. The eighth time, we were chosen and matched.

Domestic adoption was a whole different animal. It feels as if you have more control because you can see the people involved. But you can also see the people that seem to be thwarting your hopes and plans. With international, every interaction is behind the scenes. God must be bigger than foreign, unstable, often corrupt governments—it’s absolutely clear that hope is in God alone. Really, they are the same. Both require faith and perseverance and a hope that in spite of every hurdle or setback, God is in it. He will

not be thwarted, his timing is perfect. He displayed this brilliantly to us.

With our international adoption, I prayed for a “sign” in the name that the birth mom gave the baby girl we were matched with. This is not something I would normally do. We had just returned home from Florida when I turned on my cell phone and saw a message was waiting. I called our agency immediately. Our case worker joyfully informed us that there was a baby girl waiting. Did we want her? Then she said, “And this is kind of strange, but the birth mom named her Stephanie.” *Stephanie*. A young girl in Central America who in faith was choosing a different life for her daughter chose that name. Spelled exactly like mine. Not a Spanish name, not a Mayan name, with no knowledge whatsoever where and with whom this baby girl would be going. Stephanie.



## IN THAT MOMENT, WE KNEW THAT GOD HAD THIS GIRL FOR OUR FAMILY.

With our domestic adoption we were open to a boy or a girl. We were matched with a birth mom who was having a boy. (In the adoption world, girls are highly requested, with longer wait lists.) Several weeks before the birth of our baby, we received a call from our birth mom saying that she had had another ultrasound, and discovered that the baby was actually a girl. In that moment, we knew that God had this girl for our family. Had the agency known it was a girl, we would not have even been presented to our birth mom. God hid this baby girl, using something as simple as an erroneous ultrasound to chart a course for her life. It was her own woven basket in the reeds. ✿

*The Carneys' story continues on Page 42.*









# HURDLES

Attachment requires grace upon grace ✿

By DeeDee Hunt

What a whirlwind trip to China! With 10 other families, we all met our darling daughters for the first time in the city of Changsha at the provincial office on November 22, 2007. Baby Melissa happily jumped into our arms and didn't look back.

This sounds like a good thing but she also could not look us in the eye for more than a few seconds. We were about to discover the world of attachment disorder.

Our dark-eyed beauty was 11-months-old, but she was thin and wearing 6-month sized clothes. Her wobbly noodle legs could not support her weight and my training as a pediatric occupational therapist told me she was delayed in many areas of development. Melissa loved her bottle of formula thickened with rice cereal, but she needed to learn to chew pureed food. I began giving her vitamin drops with extra iron immediately, but a full year later she still tested anemic. We noticed a scar on the back of her head and wondered if it was from banging her head in her crib or from falling straight back when she tried to sit or stand. We were in love though, and knew that lots of love and hugs could change everything.

It's true that love conquers all, as Jesus proves. But God doesn't promise us a life of ease if we follow Him, and the life of Jesus demonstrates this. All John's fears for our peaceful family began to materialize. Our sweet





smiling Melissa transformed into a sick, unhappy, fearful, frantic child within our home. She regressed from sleeping through the night to crying off and on all day and night and would not play or talk. Most frustrating was that in public she was cheerful and appeared to be searching for a new caretaker. She would reach out for strangers in stores. We had to refuse outside offers of babysitting and quit attending international student events because the Asian people were especially confusing to her. They would grab her from our arms and declare, "I'm going to take you home with me!" Our three biological children were torn between fascination with their cute new sister and extreme frustration as she rejected them in favor of others.

My older sister, who has adopted five children, warned me that I needed to address these problems immediately. She referred me to Nancy Thomas, who lives in Colorado and specializes in attachment disorders. As I listened to Nancy's description of a child who has not attached in the first year of life, tears streaming down my face, I felt like she knew my toddler. Although we already had four different in-home therapists addressing Melissa's delays, she was not making much progress. She

turned three and transitioned into a special education class for those with delayed speech. I read everything I could on what happens if a child's needs are not adequately met in their first year of life. My research told me that abnormal neural pathways in a child's brain are more easily re-routed at earlier ages.

## UNSETTLED LITTLE MELISSA SEEMED TO TENTATIVELY RELAX INTO BEING LOVED.

In the Hunt home, we began implementing a rigorous attachment program, which included carrying Melissa close for up to four hours a day and bottle feeding her again as we attempted to increase eye-contact. Throughout the summer, we worked with her and were slowly rewarded with speech and improved behaviors. She stopped scratching at family members who held her close and gazed into our eyes. Unsettled little Melissa seemed to tentatively relax into being loved. ❁

*The Hunts' story continues on Page 47.*

# A LITTLE TASTE OF HEAVEN

Rejoicing in God's creativity through diversity.

✿ *By Stephanie Carney*

When we brought our first daughter home, our son was 2-years-old. Starting with a six-month-old sister was simply normal. He was the first person she

truly smiled at. When they turned 5 and 3, we welcomed our second daughter. Our 3-year-old princess thought her baby sister was a gift especially for her. Our son



would ask us to leave  
the room so he could  
have “alone time” with  
his baby sister.

THE SHADE OF SKIN BECAME  
SECONDARY TO THE LITTLE  
GIRL WHO HAD HIM WRAPPED  
AROUND HER FINGER.

Our families and community celebrated with us, loved on us and doted on our kids. We also saw healing. When we began our second adoption, my grandpa, whom I loved dearly, said, “Aren’t there any white babies you could adopt?” He already adored our other daughter, our Mayan princess, but adopting a black baby was a stretch from the world he grew up in. When we brought our girl home, he was smitten. The shade of skin became secondary to the little girl who had him wrapped around her finger.

As a multi-ethnic family, we stand out everywhere we go. I remember being conscious of it as I took all three kids out on errands or to the park. I could see curiosity on people’s faces. We would get questions and comments. Some were very encouraging and others were intrusive and in bad taste. For example, I was questioned about my kids by an elderly German woman — I explained without details that they were mine. She chuckled, patted me on the shoulder and said, “Ahhh, good for you, you have tried many men.” And she walked on her way. After the initial shock, I literally laughed. This by far was the most offensive comment I’d ever received, yet it didn’t rile me up or hurt me. I’m confident in what the Lord has done.

CHRIST IN US AND CHRIST IN OUR  
HOME IS THE ONLY SOURCE OF  
LASTING, SOUL-SHAPING BEAUTY.

I believe most comments are an attempt to show acceptance. More often, people have gone out of their way to tell me how beautiful my family is — to the point where they are heralding our choice as beyond saintly. As if we have contributed something

greater to society; that we have bigger hearts or more love. We appreciate the acceptance shown and the safe sphere we were given to raise our family, but we know that diversity in itself does not equate to beauty. Christ in us and Christ in our home is the only source of lasting, soul-shaping beauty.

Yes, we’ve had challenges and yes, we know more will come. Our girls have been singled out because they stand out and are recognizable. The injustices thus far have been minor but hard. While the color of our girls’ skin or the texture of their hair are defining physical features for each, these are only a small part of who they are. We pray more than anything else that they will find their identity in Christ alone — that the God who knows them intimately will be their rock.

This summer, we walked into our pool and I nearly started crying. Happily splashing in the aquamarine waters were around 20 children. Only one had cream-colored skin. The array spanned from dark chocolate tones to caramel to olive—ethnicities represented from around the globe. My girls cannon-balled into the pool and I could hardly pick them out. It was a blissful experience. It felt like a slice of heaven.

On so many occasions I have looked at the faces in our family—chocolate, caramel, vanilla (and peach... Shaun was given this descriptive title years ago and it stuck). God did this—I feel like he created a little taste of heaven in our family. ✨



# A CHANCE TO KNOW FOR THEMSELVES

Giving an adopted child the opportunity to know their birth mom  
will shape their lives forever ✿ *By Mark and Stephanie Saunders*

Going into an adoption plan after years of infertility was relieving, exciting and slightly overwhelming. There are so many decisions to make. Domestic or international? Infant or toddler? Are we ok with prenatal drug abuse? Contesting birth fathers? One of the first questions that we had to figure out was: did we want an open or closed adoption?

Honestly, a closed adoption seemed so much easier. We didn't want to have to deal with extra commitments, messiness, and troubled family members interfering with our life. Going into our first adoption agency training, we basically wanted to have an adoption, and then live a life as much as possible like we had not had an adoption. It is easy to simply want to have the adoption done and not have any ongoing commitments or responsibilities related to adoption.

WE CAN TELL THEM OVER AND OVER AGAIN THAT THEIR BIRTH PARENTS LOVED THEM AND HAD A PLAN FOR THEM, BUT TO HEAR IT FROM THE ACTUAL PERSON IS PRICELESS.

During this training we learned a lot about the importance of an adopted child having a relationship with their birth family. As they get older and think about harder questions, they have direct access to the person they really want answers from. We can tell them over and over again that their birth parents loved them and had a plan for them, but to hear it from the actual person is priceless.





That day the agency separated us into three groups based on what type of adoption we would prefer: open, semi-open, or closed. We of course were standing squarely in the closed group, as were the majority of the rest of the families. When the leader asked us to move to the group we thought the birth mother would prefer, most of us moved over to semi-open. Finally, when the leader asked us to move to the group we thought our adopted child would prefer, most of us moved over to open. Getting to our adoption decision was a long and painful journey, and we were thinking about adoption mostly in terms of ourselves; the training was great to get us to think about what our kids would someday want.

We learned that even in an open adoption, we still maintained all of the parental rights. If our birth families are doing things that we do not want our kids exposed to, we could sever all contact. We have all the rights and power. It is not a co-parenting arrangement, but a friendly agreement to keep up contact and maintain a relationship between the child and birth family.

Convinced and comfortable with an open adoption plan, we went on to adopt two amazing girls as infants, Eryn (currently 6) and Rylee (currently 3).

In both cases, our experience with their birth parents has been very positive. We send out pictures regularly, and we visit with them a few times a year. Because of the open adoption plan, Eryn and Rylee have relationships with their birth mothers, grandparents and half-siblings. They enjoy those visits immensely and really look forward to them.

During our last visit to Eryn's birth family, Eryn stopped in the middle of playing and asked her birth mom, "Why did you give me away?" After she had her question answered she went back to playing like nothing had happened. Because to her this is normal. She can ask her birth mother what she wants to know whenever she wants, and Rylee can too. We hope that will be a huge blessing as they grow up. ❁

# LOVE AND TRAUMA

We love because he first loved us.

✿ *By Melissa Martine*

Jax had a strong lack of affect. Part of the reason was that he was deprived of sleep and good nutrition. We also saw effects of him having trouble attaching to us; he would go to anyone.

Undoing trauma, even at 16 months of age, was very challenging. Survival techniques were already ingrained into Jax's existence. He was conditioned to be comforted by a bottle. When his mom was in our home, she did not know how to comfort him in any other way. We began the task of slowly taking away the bottle and trying to replace it with less liquid and to use a sippy cup at night or train him into being comforted by blankets, or even by cuddling while

reading a book. The hardest time with him was before bed when he would have nothing to do with us, cuddling or books, especially if he saw his bottle or a sippy cup. He would scream at us, as if he were saying, "Get away! I don't need you! I want my bottle!" He was with us for four weeks without his mom until he went to permanent foster care. We had just started the beginning of teaching him to attach to healthy things.

As adults, we saw that he was going to a home with a sibling and a family that really wanted him. We cared for him, but did not feel like our home was where he should be for long term. Our kids, on the other hand, really struggled with seeing him go. They identified with him being their baby brother. They received a lot of joy watching him interact with the world and loved helping to care for him. We dropped Jax off to his new home right before spring break. As we left the foster care house, safely seeing Jax in his new home, the tears poured down our kids' faces. We strategically planned our drop off with a road trip to Texas as a distraction. We also processed with our kids that their sorrow and emotion, while difficult and painful, was a sign that they had truly loved Jax like Jesus. This was a challenging time for them, and a good time to bond as a family in the messiness of having vulnerable, loving relationships. ✿





# THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

After heartache comes healing, because God promises to care for his flock

✿ *By DeeDee Hunt*

Melissa is now a terrific 10-year-old. She is integrated into our family and community.

While we still encounter insecurities and residual effects of her uncertain start in life, we also see amazing growth. Our family would not be complete without her and we are excited to watch God's plan for her life unfold. One of the numerous baby gifts we got for Melissa was a blanket with the seventh verse of Psalm 121 embroidered on it: "The Lord will keep you from all harm; he will watch over your life."

I love to remind Melissa that she is God's precious lamb; he planted her in our hearts before she was even born, and he watches over her all the time. I think it helps her when her abandonment issues want to scare her into thinking she will be alone in life. We also have a dozen stuffed lambs decorating Melissa's room, which were given to us by various friends when they heard of our adoption. Was that just a coincidence? I could hear God assuring us through those gifts, as Isaiah 40:11 (NIV) states: "He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young."

Sometimes I need to picture Jesus carrying me close as I did for Melissa when she felt uncomfortable accepting love with all its implications. I think she must have felt smothered, like I feel when God's Word lovingly corrects me. Melissa and I both get impatient over her math, or I lose my temper at having to repeat myself so much because she has a hearing-processing problem. My older children are usually loving and tolerant of an extremely

energetic, needy younger sibling, but they have their limits too. John had to work through his anger over how challenging our adoption journey has been.

Peacekeeping can be more complex with an insecure attachment in the house. Time-outs might have to be time-ins so that

rejection  
re-en-  
Melissa  
happy  
engaging,  
and helpful,



the feeling of  
doesn't get  
forced.  
is usually  
and  
creative

but she feels left out easily. She must fight her feelings of panic when friends and family leave her for any reason.

I hoped our compassion for others would be contagious to our children, but did we unintentionally let their needs go unmet as we put out fires elsewhere in the house? We wanted to love all our kids equally but is that the message they received? God, our adoptive father, is faithful through it all.

As our children grow into adulthood, we see them processing and healing in their own ways. Any parent should do their best and then allow their birds freedom from the nest. I've always prayed they will find their core identity in Christ where they have the best chance of soaring. In Melissa's case, her identity as an Asian American will be complex. I've started attending Chinese Heritage Camp with her once a year. I watch how she gains confidence when surrounded by those with similar features. I listen to the panel of adult adoptees and wonder if Melissa will experience prejudice or if when she's a teenager she will agonize over not knowing her birth parents. They say the best we can do for her as her family is to be there for her, encourage her to talk through her feelings, and listen. Of course we will do our best, and God will be there for the journey. ✿



# WE BELONG TOGETHER

The bond between mother and son cannot be broken,

❁ *By Becky Michaud*



When we were beginning the adoption process, a friend who had already adopted two children told us “I want to tell you the thing that I tell everyone I meet who is thinking about adopting: I was worried that I might not bond with my daughter, or feel like she was “mine,” since she wasn’t biologically related to me.

“But I promise, when you hold that baby in your arms—it’s amazing! I knew she was meant to be ours the minute I laid eyes on her!”

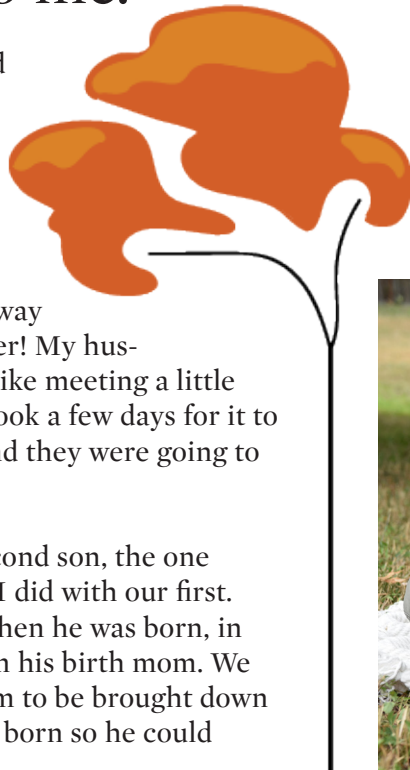
Honestly, it wasn’t quite like that for us—but it wasn’t that way with our biological child, either! My husband says both boys felt a lot like meeting a little stranger for the first time. It took a few days for it to sink in that they were ours, and they were going to stay ours forever.

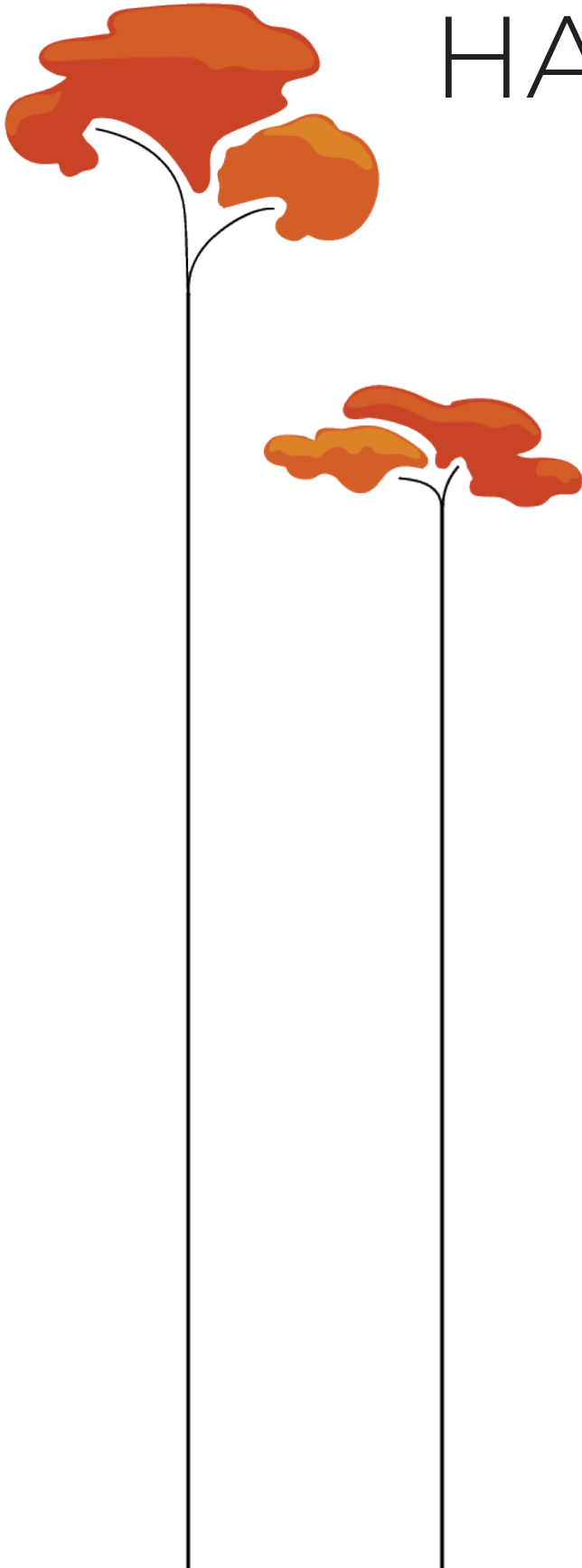
I actually bonded with our second son, the one who was adopted, faster than I did with our first. We got to be in the hospital when he was born, in a room just down the hall from his birth mom. We knew that her plan was for him to be brought down to our room as soon as he was born so he could

begin bonding with us. He came in the middle of the night. We tried to sleep while she labored, but who can sleep at a time like that? Soon a baby (our baby!) was brought to our room.

THE BABY WHO JUST MOMENTS BEFORE HAD BEEN SAFE AND WARM IN ANOTHER WOMAN’S WOMB, WAS NOW THE BABY WHO WOULD LEARN TO BE COMFORTED BY MY HEARTBEAT AND MY STEADY BREATHS.

We woke up our older son so he could meet his brother and we all watched the baby take in his surroundings, wide-eyed and alert, everything new and foreign to him. Soon both little boys were fighting to keep their heavy eyelids open, so my husband went back to the bed he was sharing with our older son and I kept our new baby snuggled close. The baby who just moments before had been safe and warm in another woman’s womb, was now the baby who would learn to be comforted by my heartbeat and my steady breaths. With tears streaming down my face, I prayed for him, I prayed for her and I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that we belonged together. ✨





# HAND-PICKED FOR GOD'S STORY

Reflections on the blessings of  
being adopted ✿ *By Abbie Hanawalt*

“So, tell me about your  
family.”

Whenever I meet someone new and they ask this question, a smile always spreads across my face.

If I showed you a picture of my family, you probably wouldn't think twice. We look like we belong together. But we are different. I was adopted at birth, and it is something that I cherish. It makes me feel special. It's a large part of my identity, and the story is one that I love to share time and time again. My younger brother is also adopted.

Growing up, I never felt different because I was adopted, but I felt very special. When I was about 5, my parents sat me down and explained to me the story of my adoption and what it means. My mom made me a scrapbook with photos from the time they started the process of adoption leading up to my birth. I understood what adoption meant at a young age, but a lot of people didn't. When I talked



about my family to them, they would say things like, “Oh so your real mom and your fake mom...” No. That’s not how it works at all.

Your mom is the woman who raises you. She’s the one who teaches you how to measure flour in a measuring cup. She teaches you how to braid your hair. She teaches you that the stove top is hot, and despite her warning, you put your hand on the burner anyway, but then she’s right there to hold you as you cry and help you feel better. She talks with you about what you want to do with your life and how you can get there. She inspires your passions and encourages you in your dreams. She’s your mom.

I love my mom and dad, but I also love my birth mom equally. My birth mom taught me, even before I was born, what it means to be selfless. When she found out she was pregnant with me, she was working at a pizza shop in Boulder, Colorado. She realized that there was no way she could take care of a child and give them the life they deserved with the life she had. She called my birth dad, but he wanted nothing to do with me. She had a tough choice to make.

I don’t know how hard it would be to give up a child that you have been creating for nine months. They are a part of you (literally), so how can you just give them up? I have never resented my birth mother for the choice she made. I highly admire her bravery to allow me to have the best life possible. She wouldn’t be the one to teach me how to braid my hair, and she wouldn’t be the one to hold me when I would cry. She knew what she was giving up, but she did it for me. As I have grown up, I have always tried to embrace the selfless love that she possessed. We keep in touch. She is still a very active part of my life, and I am so grateful for that. I have made a lot of friends who are adopted who I have watched struggle with the fact that they have no knowledge or relationship with their biological parents. I am thankful that I have open communication and close relationship with at least one of them.

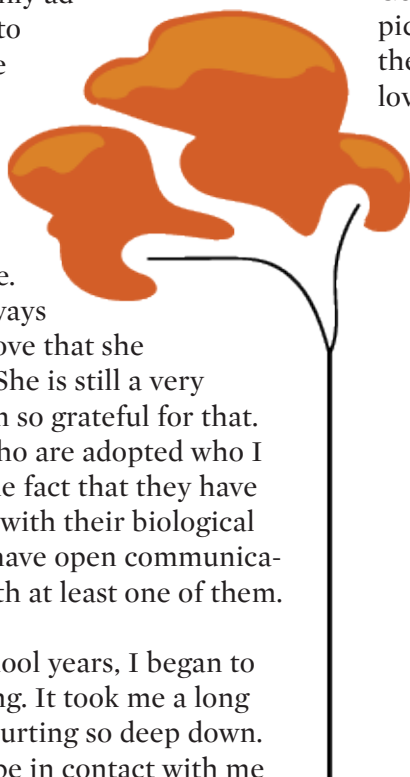
As I was entering my high school years, I began to feel like something was missing. It took me a long time to figure out why I was hurting so deep down. My birth dad did not want to be in contact with me

when I was born. He wasn’t “ready.” People have their reasons for doing things, but most likely it was because he didn’t want to pay child support. My sophomore year of high school, I really began to resent and even hate him. I was so angry that someone didn’t even want to give me a chance. He didn’t want to get to know me. I was very bitter for a long time. He said I could find him when I turned 18, and all I wanted to do was find him and yell in his face. God has changed my heart since then, and I thank him for that.

I have come a long way since then. Of course, it still hurts sometimes that someone didn’t want me, but I have a wonderful father who has been there for everything in my life. He has taught me so much, and I will always admire my dad’s wisdom, advice and bad jokes.

HE LITERALLY HAND-PICKED  
MY PARENTS FOR ME BECAUSE  
HE KNEW THAT THEY WERE  
THE BEST ONES TO TEACH ME  
ABOUT HIM, HIS LOVE, AND ALL  
THE RICHES THAT COME FROM A  
LIFE WITH CHRIST.

God has given me a beautiful life. He literally hand-picked my parents for me because he knew that they were the best ones to teach me about him, his love, and all the riches that come from a life with Christ. I feel very special. I could not ask for a better life, a better family, and a better story to share with others. ❁





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