



Adoption *Done Right*

Important things to consider before adopting

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Introduction

Has God given you a heart for children? Is He calling you to help children in need? There are over 135,000 children available for adoption in the U.S. foster care system. Africa has 5.5 million orphans, and Asia has 3.5 million. There are 1.5 million orphans in Eastern Europe, and Latin America has 400,000.¹

What will happen to these children? Some will remain in foster care and orphanages till they reach adulthood. Some will be placed into good homes where they will thrive, others will be placed in good homes but they will not do well. Far too many of these children will end up in homes where they are abused and neglected.

You must be willing to open your heart to a child in need without expecting any of your own needs to be met in return.

Are you ready to hop a plane to Haiti or run down to your nearest adoption agency to rescue the first child you come across? – wait! It's important for you to go into a decision like this with your eyes wide open.

There are many reasons why people adopt. For most it is because they are infertile. Others want a companion for a birth child. Some are about to have empty nests but they love children and decide that they want one more. Families may want a child of a specific gender. Perhaps they already have three girls but dad wants a son. Occasionally adoption is chosen because one of the parents has a genetic disease that they do not want to pass on to their children. Some people adopt to “replace” a child who has died, while others feel called to help children in need of a family.

Do you have a red flag going up in your mind about some of these reasons to adopt? Hopefully you do. People often adopt to fulfill their needs but the first concern should be what is best for the child, then, usually the birth parents, especially in infant adoption situations, and finally the adoptive parents interests should be considered. Adoptive parents must be willing to sacrifice themselves. They must be willing to open their hearts to a child in need without expecting any of their own needs to be met in return.

We will take a close look at the pros and cons of the various motivations for adoption. Then we will look at how to determine which child might be a good match for you. Finally we will consider what you should be prepared for when you adopt a child.

Barren

Many childless couples have wrestled with Psalm 37:4, "Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." Their hearts ache for a child but God seems to be withholding this blessing.

If you are unable to conceive a child you have undoubtedly wondered if God is trying to teach you something or perhaps you may feel that He is punishing you. The possible reasons God has not given you a child yet are as numerous as the amount of childless couples in the world. Don't try to fulfill your need till God gives you clear direction. Otherwise you may end up like Abraham in Genesis 16. Whatever your choice, remember that it will also impact a child.

Every adoption has loss and pain that go along with it. For the birth parents it is the loss of a child. The child loses his parents and heritage. Every parent who chooses to adopt can also expect losses and pain.

Be careful not to go into adoption with the attitude that Dorrie had when she found a baby jellyfish in the movie, Finding Nemo. "I shall call him Squishy and he shall be mine, and he shall be my Squishy. Ouch, bad Squishy, bad Squishy." If you adopt, you will get stung.



Suggested Resources:

- *Empty Womb, Aching Heart* by Marlo Schalesky
- Snowflakes Embryo Adoption
http://www.nightlight.org/snowflakes_description.asp
- *Finding God's Will in Spiritually Deceptive Times* by Neil Anderson

Birth mothers

Eighty percent of couples that adopt are not able to bear children. These couples usually adopt newborns. Most of the birth mothers that place these children struggle with their decision. Let's look at adoption from the perspective of many of these birth mothers.

Many young women grieve when they find out that they are pregnant because they feel that they are too young to raise a child. Often their parents, friends, or boyfriend echo the concern. They may feel that it is important for the baby to have a mother and a father. Some mothers don't want their baby to be trapped in their current lifestyle. The mother may be addicted to drugs or battling

with alcoholism. She may have an abusive husband or boyfriend and fear for the child's life.

Often she feels like she could not support a child. Many are in the midst of getting an education. I remember one young lady who wept because she had two years of nursing school left. "Why couldn't the baby have come after I finished school?" she questioned. Hear as another birthmother recounts her dilemma:

I was 21 years old and had just finalized a divorce to my first husband. I had a 20 month old son, Quinn and I was living with my mother, my sister and her 2 teenage children in a three bedroom trailer...

*Finally, *N* made her way into the world. When the doctor shouted "It's a girl!", I thought my heart was going to break in two. I was asked if I wanted to hold her and I said, "No, let her parents hold her first." I was sobbing uncontrollably. My mom was at my side and she said to me "You know you can change your mind." And looking down, as the doctor stitched me up, I saw that family cradling the baby and I knew I could not change my mind. How could I do that to them?*

I had decided to take the baby home for a week. I wanted everyone in my life to know her and to say good-bye. I spent every night holding her and crying. I wanted to keep her so much. I was so angry at the hand life had dealt me.

I spent at least the rest of the week crying. I felt as if the pain would never end. I was angry. I was filled with hate. When would these feelings end? I had given up a part of myself. It was like waking up from a dream, hearing cries that were not there, smelling and feeling a baby that was not there.

*A month after I placed my daughter, I received a letter in the mail. The housing assistance I had applied for came through. Before I had become pregnant, I was finishing up Certified Nursing Assistant classes and two months after I placed my baby I was in my own apartment and had a job. Three months later *N*'s birth father contacted me through our mutual friends. He wanted to meet with me and talk.*

*And now here I am. *N* just turned 7 in February. I married her birth father, it will be 6 years on April 1st and we had another daughter who is 4 now. We have a nice apartment and we both have good jobs and our kids are happy.²*

Some people seem to feel that birthmothers either don't want their children or can't take care of them and that in the best interests of all, the adoptive parents are very willing and eager to help them out. John Condon, in his article "Psychological Disability in Women who Relinquish a Baby for Adoption" written for the *Medical Journal of Australia* said that relinquishing a child puts a birth mother at a high risk for psychological and physical disability that continues throughout the birth mother's life. These women said that they had intense feelings of sadness, depression, guilt, and anger. Only 33% said that those feelings decreased over time. Half of the ladies said that their anger increased. Most of these birth mothers coped with their intense feelings by suppressing them and withdrawing from others.³

Sometimes infant adoption is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. What if a loving family offered to care for this baby for a time, until conditions improved for the mother? Usually within a year or two the birth mother's situation will completely change and she will be in a situation where she is ready and able to parent.

Adoption used to be about finding homes for children, but now it's about finding children to fill the homes of infertile couples.
~ Roman Espejo ⁴

Some birth mothers fully understand the consequences of the choice they are making. Adoption agencies are doing much better in providing support and counseling to these women. There is no shortage of families wanting to adopt these infants. So why pursue the adoption of an infant unless it is to meet the needs of the parents?

The Child

Some people feel that if a child is adopted when he is young, he will develop as if he was born into the adoptive home. However children who were adopted as infants often go through feelings of rejection even when they are surrounded by a loving adoptive family.

Adoption loss is the only trauma in the world where the victims are expected by the whole of society to be grateful.
~Anonymous

It is likely that they will feel like they don't belong, at least for a time, even though they are assured that they are just as much a part of the family as every other member. It might initially seem that keeping the fact that the child is adopted a secret might be the loving thing to do but most people prefer honesty even if the information is hard to hear.

Almost all adoptive parents are optimists. They have the hope and often the expectation that any child will blossom in their new stable, loving family. It's natural to imagine what it will be like to hold the child, rock her to sleep, snuggle with her, and take her for walks. They want to tell bedtime stories. They want to take him to the park, build sand castles with him, and watch their little angel in the Christmas play. The expectation for many adoptive parents is that their love will overcome the child's loss and pain.

Most adoptive parents expect reciprocation. They anticipate that the child will love them. They may feel like they are saving this child from a life of poverty, neglect, or abuse. They assume that the child will be grateful for his new loving and secure home. They want the child to turn his heart away from his former family toward theirs.

When a child is adopted with the purpose of meeting the needs of the parents, it is a setup for failure. First of all, the parents are placing expectations on this child that she will never be able to meet. When the child fails to fit into the parent's picture of what she should be it will create friction.

Often in these situations the parents either consciously or unconsciously threaten the child with rejection if she doesn't conform to their ideal. This creates feelings of rejection that often lead to one of two things – either a rebellion that rejects the parents' expectations or else an ungodly compliance because they fear rejection. In both cases, the child is not free to figure out for himself where he stands on things. The former compels him to push away from his parent's standards without carefully considering why. The latter causes him to comply without learning to hear God for himself.

Open or Closed?

Your answer may give some insight into your motive for wanting to adopt. In the past adoptions were closed and records sealed to protect young birth mothers who conceived out of wedlock. Today it doesn't carry the same stigma it did thirty years ago. In fact, one survey found that ninety-eight percent of birth mothers were in favor of opening adoption records.⁵

It is difficult to face the fact that by definition every adopted child is an abandoned child, who has suffered a devastating loss. No matter that the adoptive parents call it relinquishment and the birth mother calls it surrender, the child experiences it as abandonment.⁶

The predominant reason for closed adoptions today is fear on the part of the adoptive parents. It may be a fear that one or both of the birth parents would interfere with their raising of the child, or that a birth parent may try to get the

child back, or that if a birth parent is in the picture the child won't bond to or love the adoptive parents. Probably the most common fear is that the child will want to return to her birth home when things get difficult in the adoptive home.

The Family Toll

It is important to go into adoption with your eyes wide open. Don't expect it to be a fairy tale where everything works out. Expect it to be a battle, a battle for the life of a child. If even one member of the family, even the extended family is not supportive of the adoption, he can cause the child to feel rejected.

Some of the family related issues you will need to consider are:

Incest

When I worked in a placement for juvenile delinquents and troubled youth I saw a disproportionately large number of adopted children who had been either the victims or the perpetrators of incest in their adoptive homes. One survey of adult adoptees found that for those who had been sexually abused after they were adopted forty percent were abused by their adoptive father and twenty percent by a sibling.⁷

Parents need to take into account that even though there is a strong commitment to purity, when a child is brought into the home it is more likely that they may have sexual feelings for that child than a child that is born into the home. That does not mean that adoption should be ruled out but if a parent does start feeling a sexual attraction for an adopted child it needs to be understood and dealt with.

There is also a high rate of sibling incest in adoptions. Bringing children who are not blood relatives together in a home, even if the child was adopted at birth can cause problems. It can especially be a problem if the child has had sexual experiences before placement into your home. While we want to believe that they will see each other as true siblings, this is not always what happens. I have been involved in many counseling sessions where the adopted child abused the birth child and others where the birth child abused the adopted child. There is also a high incidence of adopted children falsely reporting abuse.

Birth Children

Consider the influence this new child will have on your other children. They may be excited about an adoption now, but what about when it starts to cost them something? Will they get jealous when you are paying extra attention to the adopted child because he is sick or misbehaving? What will happen when the

adopted child breaks something that belongs to your biological child? Will he become angry and hurtful? Will he say things to the adopted child that will cause further wounding?

If the adoptee has spent time in the foster care system or an orphanage, it is likely that he has learned more about the darker side of life than you want your children exposed to. He may have also developed some behaviors like masturbation or raging that you would not want your other children to learn. Even children adopted as infants may become angry and bitter, and take their frustration out on the other children.

Older children need adoptive homes with mature, experienced parents, parents that don't feel the pressure to look like they have it all together in church. The kind that can be flexible and patient with a hurting child because they are not building their identity on the behavior of this child. For those considering adopting an older child, it is often best that all their birth children are grown or nearly grown and out on their own.

Comparing

Struggling children are often compared to other, better behaved children. When this happens the child feels like a failure. The turmoil does not bring efforts to do better but instead cause the child to spiral downward into more emotional and behavioral problems. Before adoption parents must purpose to see each child as an individual with their own unique needs.

Which Child?

Determining the child God has for you is a matter of prayer but there are also important factors to consider. Things like the level of emotional trauma, and physical problems that you will be able to handle. You can count on unexpected problems, but if God is calling you to adopt a particular child, He will give you the grace to work through those problems.

Orphans

Based on surveys that I have done, children who are true orphans, (both parents have died) tend to do the best in a new adoptive home. These children will likely be interested in their birth heritage and culture but they don't usually struggle with the feelings of rejection and abandonment that most other adopted children face.

They may have some problems with attachment because of a fear that you might also die. They will also probably grieve the loss of the birth parents

throughout most of their growing up years and at difficult times they may compare their birth home to your home, seeing their birth home through rose colored glasses.

Foreign Children

Most children in the United States whose parents die are adopted by relatives. Orphaned and abandoned children are more common in third world countries. There are many countries like Haiti, Colombia, Uganda, and Ethiopia where parentless children wander the streets in a continuous search for food. The governments of these countries are seldom able to invest the time and money that would be necessary to ensure that these children are available for adoption. Some countries consider them to be “throw away” children.

Many of these street children do have at least one living parent but they have been abandoned. The children who don't end up in orphanages survive by stealing and prostitution. One third of the children who do make it into orphanages in third world countries will die before they reach adulthood and another ten percent will commit suicide.

In many of these cases, especially the ones where the parents want and love the child but just cannot provide for the child, the better option might be to sponsor these children instead of taking them from their families and homeland. There are several reputable charities that make it possible to donate a few dollars a month to help these needy children. Or you might locate a missionary who works with street children and find out how you can help.

There are about fifty-five countries that allow adoption:

<u>Europe</u>	<u>Asia</u>	<u>Africa</u>	<u>North America</u>	<u>Central America</u>	<u>South America</u>
Azerbaijan	China	Ethiopia	Canada	Belize	Bolivia
Belarus	Taiwan	Gambia	Mexico	Costa Rica	Brazil
Bulgaria	Hong Kong	Liberia	Dominican Rep.	El Salvador	Chili
Estonia	India	Sierra Leone	Haiti	Guatemala	Colombia
Georgia	Japan	South Africa	Jamaica	Honduras	Ecuador
Hungary	Korea	Tanzania	United States	Nicaragua	Guatemala
Kazakhstan	Nepal	Uganda		Panama	Paraguay
Latvia	Philippines	Zimbabwe		Saint Vincent	Peru
Lithuania	Sri Lanka				
Moldova	South Korea				
Marshall Islands	Thailand				
Poland	Vietnam				
Romania					
Russia					
Ukraine					

Few people are aware that the United States sends hundreds of its children to foreign countries to be adopted every year. Most, but not all, are private adoptions to Canada. How does it make you feel to know that U.S. babies are being sent abroad? People from other countries probably have those same feelings toward the United States adopting *their* children.



Suggested Resources:

- Compassion www.compassion.com
- Grace International Children's Foundation www.ugandaorphans.org
- Christian Children's Fund www.christianchildrensfund.org

Africa

Some countries are in desperate need of help with their orphans. Africa for example, is being ravaged by the AIDS virus. It is estimated that by the year 2010 there will be 18 million children left as orphans in sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁰ In some countries over, half of the population has AIDS. Relatives and grandparents of the children who have been left orphaned are doing their best to care for these children but many of these caretakers are also dying. These children are not easy to adopt and most will bring a lot of the baggage of trauma with them but many of them will die unless they receive help.

Most countries in Africa do not currently allow their children to be adopted to foreign countries. Muslim countries are especially hesitant to allow their children to be adopted to non-Muslim countries. The AIDS crisis may cause more African countries to permit foreign adoptions soon.



Suggested Resources:

- Children in Africa with experiences of massive trauma
http://www.multietn.uu.se/staff/pers_homepages/kaplan_SIDA4629en_Children_in_Africa_w.pdf

China

In the past ten years Americans have adopted about fifty thousand baby girls from mainland China.¹¹ Boys are considered to be more desirable than girls and with China's one child per family policy many little girls are being abandoned. If these little girls are not adopted by families in the United States and Canada they will probably spend their whole childhood in orphanages.

Consider, however, the problem this policy is causing, not just for the little

girls that are placed for foreign adoption from China but also for the little girls who are not. Currently boys outnumber girls seven to one.¹² China is already beginning to see a rise in rape and the kidnapping of young women who are taken to other provinces and sold as wives. In ten years, if China continues to reject her little girls, no woman in China will be safe. Soon China will be forced to reverse its policy on inter-country adoption.

Suggested Resources:

- *China's Lost Girls* – DVD Produced by National Geographic Television & Film. Producer and writer, Scott Bronstein.

Baby Trafficking

Many people have found adoption is a good business. Baby trafficking is on the rise in part because the demand for healthy babies is greater than the supply. A mother might be told that her baby died at birth but the babies' records are falsified and the baby is placed for adoption with hefty adoption fees. In Cambodia the corruption in adoptions is so bad that the United States issued a moratorium on adoptions until they develop better policies to ensure that their children are not being sold. Romania, Mexico, Paraguay, Malaysia, China and Guatemala also have rampant corruption in their adoption industries.

Baby trafficking is on the rise in part because the demand for healthy babies is greater than the supply.

In Guatemala the adoption laws require little more than a birthmother appearing before a judge and stating that she wants to place the child for adoption. A kidnapped infant may be brought before a judge by a woman pretending to be the birthmother. What do the baby brokers get out of this? Some pretty significant finders fees. This scheme is so common that the Canadian government now requires DNA testing of the birthmother and child.¹³

In Rio de Janeiro there were a hundred and fifty babies reported stolen from hospital nurseries in one month.¹⁴ In Beijing the police found twenty-eight baby girls hidden in suitcases. They were being smuggled so they could be adopted (sold).¹⁵ In Malaysia women are forced into prostitution by gangs and when they get pregnant the gangs sell these infants to baby-brokers.

Baby selling often works this way: A baby is stolen or purchased from a mother. Then the baby is placed in an orphanage and made available for adoption. A foreign family agrees to adopt the baby thinking that it is a genuinely orphaned or abandoned child. Part of the agreement that is almost universal in

foreign adoptions is that the adopting family makes a donation to the orphanage to help provide for the other children still in the orphanage. The amount of the donation is usually set by the orphanage and is sometimes ten thousand dollars or more. When this is done by a baby ring the donation along with other adoption fees are divided up between the corrupt orphanage workers and those who acquired the baby.¹⁶

Prevention

There are several things you can do to avoid getting a baby from a child-trafficking ring. First, be sure that the adoption agency you are working with is reputable. Often adoption agencies do not realize that the babies they are placing have been sold or stolen. They may have a file with a birth certificate and lots of history and information on a baby but all of that can be forged before it is given to the agency. Be sure to ask them how the child came to be at the orphanage and how they know their information is correct.

If the child was placed at the orphanage because she came from a poor family, she may develop deep resentments toward you, feeling that you have stolen her from her true parents. Children seldom care that they are raised in poverty. They would usually prefer to suffer with the rest of their family. As we have already mentioned, if you find a child in this situation you might consider giving a yearly donation to the family so that they can keep the child and provide for her.

If you are adopting a child from an orphanage it is best to travel to that country and talk to the birthparents or relatives. It would also be wise to have DNA testing done to ensure that the one you are meeting really is this child's parent. The safest option may be to contact a missionary in the country you are interested in to find out if he or she knows of any children who have a genuine need for a home.

Special Concerns

Many of the children who are adopted from foreign countries will bring problems with them that are a result of the care they received in their birth-country. For some of these kids sub-normal brain development may result from the birth mother's malnutrition, use of alcohol or drugs, or the lack of nurturing in the orphanage.

A study of children who were adopted from orphanages in Romania, Bulgaria and Russia who had been living in stable homes in the United States for at least three years, found that the children had normal IQs but they had problems with attention, manual dexterity, learning, socialization and attachment.

Some of the children continued to have elevated levels of stress hormones years after they had been adopted.¹⁷

Transracial Adoption

The best option for most children is to be placed with a family of similar ethnic heritage. But the number of African American and Hispanic American children stuck in the foster care system compared to the number of similar families willing to adopt is staggering. The ideal is to adopt children into families of the same ethnic background but if these children have to wait for the ideal they may never get adopted.

However, several studies have been done that show there is no appreciable difference in the success of transracial adoptions when compared to same race adoptions.¹⁸ Other studies found that while parents had to make special efforts to expose the children to their native heritage, these children were for the most part well adjusted and aware of their ethnic heritage.¹⁹

In the Simon-Altstein Longitudinal Survey, adult transracial adoptees were asked “Was being of a different race from your adoptive family easier or harder during various stages of your life?” Forty percent said that they rarely found it difficult; eight percent said they had a difficult time throughout their childhood and adolescence. Twenty-nine percent said that people of the same racial background as their own reacted “very negatively” or “negatively” toward them during their adolescence.²⁰

Children who have been transracially adopted are likely to have extra struggles with their identity when they reach adolescence.

Children who have been transracially adopted are likely to have extra struggles with their identity when they reach adolescence. Also, transracial adoption will almost certainly make the child and often the parents somewhat of a spectacle. When you are Korean and your parents are caucasian there is no hiding the fact that you are adopted. That lack of privacy can be pretty troublesome for a child sometimes. As Sherrie Eldridge put it, “All kids long to be just like the other kids. In their minds, being ‘weird’ is the kiss of death.”²¹

It is easy for white American parents to forget how important race and culture can be to someone of another ethnic heritage. While transracial adoption, or any adoption, is not the ideal we would want for a child, in most cases it is a far better choice than for the child to continue being bounced around in foster care or in an orphanage until adulthood.

Foster Children

Placing a child into a new home is traumatic for everyone involved. Fear of the unknown can feel worse to a child than staying in an abusive home. There are more than 1.1 million documented cases of child abuse each year in the United States.²² There are about 134,000 children in foster care waiting to be adopted.²³

Twenty-five percent of children waiting to be adopted have been waiting for five years or more.²⁴

Many of these children will grow up being bounced around from one foster home to another. An eight year old child is more likely to remain in foster care than they are likely to be adopted.²⁵ The majority of these kids will either end up with unskilled labor jobs their whole lives or else end up on public assistance.²⁶

Thirty to forty percent of children in the child welfare system have physical health problems.²⁷

Parents who adopt foster children must proceed with a mindset of ministering to the child. These children should have a chance to see what a Christian family looks like instead of being adopted into an abusive family or a homosexual partnership.

If you adopt one of these children, your home would never be the same again. It certainly would not be one where the child slides right into place as if he or she were born into your family. Christ has called us to lay down our lives for others. Not everyone is called to serve by adopting a foster child but for those who are called, the blessing of God goes along with the early gray hair.

You may find it helpful to foster parent with the intention of adopting so that you can see what the child is really like and decide if this child's needs and challenges are something you can handle. Parents adopting children from the foster care system should be prepared for the full gamut of problems, from bitterness to extreme violence. While a child with these issues is hard to work with, they still need

Age of Children adopted from Foster Care, FY 1998²⁸

Under 1 year old	2%
1-5 years old	46%
6-10 years old	37%
11-15 years old	14%
16-18 years old	2%

Percentage of Children in Foster Care by age

Less than 1 year	3%
1-5 years	34%
6-10 years	35%
11-15 years	23%
16-18 years	3%

Racial Percentages of Foster Children

32% White
42% Black
15% Hispanic
10% Other

someone. All children should have a chance at a safe, secure childhood, even if they do not respond to it the way you would like.



Suggested Resources:

- For those adopting children who are past their infancy reading, *Adopting the Hurt Child: Hope for Families with Special-Needs Kids* by Gregory Keck, is almost a necessity (before you adopt)
- *My Flesh and Blood* by Jonathan Karsh, a documentary about a lady who has adopted and is raising thirteen handicapped children.

After You Adopt

Children who are adopted face a variety of issues that most other children do not have to deal with. Some of these problems will seem overwhelming. They will require the giving of your life as a living sacrifice for a child. Few children will have all these problems or have them as intensely as some of the examples we will be looking at.

I was surprised to find that about a quarter of the young people in the placement for troubled youth where I worked had been adopted. It would be understandable if most of the adopted troubled children spent years in the foster care system. But a large number of children who were adopted at birth have not done well either. Sometimes it is because of the home they were placed into but not always.

Expectations

“One of the most sacrificial acts of love adoptive parents can do is to give up their preconceptions and agendas about what their child’s views ‘should’ be and be open to hear the conflicting emotions and thoughts of their child.”²⁹

The preceding statement can make a conservative Christian parent cringe. What about the Biblical command to “Train up a child in the way he should go”? (Proverbs 22:6) With careful study of that passage along with others on this issue, you will find that God never forces our hearts, neither does He expect us to try to force a heart change on others.

There are two extremes that are often seen in adopted children. The first is the overly compliant people-pleasing child. These children often behave this way out of a fear of abuse or abandonment or rejection. They tend to embrace the rules and structure of a home because it gives them security. Many of these children will continue on in what they have been taught throughout their

adult lives but they keep those commandments out of a fear of God instead of keeping them because they love Him.

The rebellious child is at the other end of the spectrum. They are far more common and it is easy to see why. It does not matter how much reassurance they are given that they are a part of the family, they are still very aware that they are different. There is a sense of independence and self-protection that causes them to go their own way instead of following the direction of their adopted family. For these children, the more you try to force them into the family mold the more they will resist.

A better option for these young people might be to help them understand the choices they will need to make in their life, the principles behind those choices and the consequences of whatever choices they make. They need to be guided to find their answers, not just hear all of yours. It is also important that you do not reject them for the choices they make.

Adoption cannot be about making the child into what you want him or her to be. It's fine to have hopes and desires for your child but she must never be forced to fulfill your dreams. Help the child figure out what he likes and dislikes. Help him figure out where he stands on the issues of life. Guide but don't force.

To Tell or not to Tell

One of the most important decisions you will need to make is whether you will tell the child that she is adopted. It may seem easier and better for all those involved to keep the truth from the adopted child but God does not bless lies, half truths, and deceptions. A lie like this is just the kind of thing the enemy loves to use to destroy relationships. The truth may be painful for both you and your child. But with the hundreds of adoptees I have talked to, all of them wanted to know the truth even though it was hard for them to hear.

Children are not things to plan and arrange and manipulate. Children are pain; They are beauty and spite in the same breath; they are willful and needy; they are our life and our death, but they are never ours.

~Susan Wadia-Ells³⁰

...Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offense.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants to tear it down...
~ Robert Frost, "The Mending Wall"

Obviously it is not necessary or appropriate to sit little four-year-old Susie down and tell her that her birth mother was gang raped. Children should be given the amount of information they are ready to handle. It is wise for parents to begin

introducing the concept of adoption even as young as toddlerhood so that it will not come as a surprise.

There are many children's books that can help you tell your child about adoption. You might read a story like, *The Day We Met You*, by Phoebe Koehler, and then tell him about his adoption story. You might also tell him about the heroes God used that did not grow up with their birth parents – people like Moses, Daniel, Esther, and Samuel.

Try to get a letter from the birth mother explaining why she placed the child for adoption. He needs to see a reason why the adoption had to happen. Even knowing that the birth parents are irresponsible drug addicts is more helpful than being left to wonder why he was rejected.

Children often begin to be troubled by their adoption at about eight years of age. Your child may try to hide his struggles from you because he doesn't want

How can we say we have the best interests of a child at heart when we tell her she has no right to her original identity?
~Roman Espejo³¹

to hurt you or because he fears that you might also reject him. If he expresses sadness about the losses in his young life it is normal to want to reassure him and try to make him feel better. But she needs to know that his loss of birth parents is something to feel sad about. He needs you to validate her feeling that something is missing. He needs you to grieve with him about his birth parents without feeling threatened.

While you do not want to force a child to talk about his adoption, it is good for him to know that he *can* talk to you openly about it when he wants to. He will probably need to talk about it several times during his childhood. It may be helpful to open things up with a question like, "If you could ask me anything, what would it be?" Look for the right times to open the door. Here are some ideas from Sherrie Eldridge's, *Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew*.

- The child's birthday. "I wonder if your birth mom/dad are thinking about you."
- Mothers Day/Fathers Day. "I wonder what your birth mom/dad is doing today."
- Nighttime prayers. "Let's remember your birth family in our prayers."
- Accomplishments. "Your birth parents would be proud of you just as we are."
- Physical features. "I wonder if your birth mom has curly hair like you."³²

Help your child express his feelings whether it is by talking to you, by drawing pictures or by writing a story. Help him to know that you are not rejecting

his birth family and that it is all right for him to have an attachment with them at the same time he is attached to you.

You will have to be the bad guy, saying “no,” making the rules and setting limits. If a birth parent comes into the picture, eager to make up for the guilt she feels, she may shower the child with love and gifts. It would be natural for the child to be drawn toward the birth parent. During the difficult teen years there may also be a temptation for him to escape the pressures of the adoptive family by returning to the birth parent.

Most adoptees are not looking to replace their adoptive parents. Instead they are usually looking for some completion and resolution. They are looking for answers that adoptive parents usually cannot give. They want to hear for themselves why they were given up and about where they come from. Whether or not the reunion ends up being positive, it usually brings resolution.



Suggested Resources:

- *Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew.* By Sherrie Eldridge (New York: Random House, Inc. 1999)

Generational Issues

When your adopted child arrives he or she will bring along not only genetic attributes from birth parents and ancestors but also generational spiritual issues. The iniquities of previous generations can have significant impact on children. If the biological parents or ancestors were involved in immorality, drugs, alcoholism, witchcraft or a myriad of other things, it can cause a vulnerability to these sins in your child. Your child is not guilty of those iniquities just because his birth parents or grandparents committed them.

Some children, many from foreign countries, are dedicated to Satan as a result of superstitious beliefs or pagan religions when they are born. Find out about the religion of the birth parents and the orphanage where the child was placed. You may need to do some research to discover any type of ceremony or baby dedication commonly practiced in that religion.

When you adopt a child, you take spiritual responsibility for that child. It would be wise to pray the following prayer for any new child that comes into your care:

Prayer for Ancestral Spiritual Problems for Foster or Adopted Children

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I praise my heavenly Father that He has entrusted to me my adopted child _____. I accept all responsibility that God places upon me to be a parent and a priest of God in _____'s life. As a priest of God in my child's life, and purchased by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, I here and now renounce and repudiate all the sins of _____'s blood ancestors. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I cancel out all demonic working that would want to be passed on to _____ from his blood ancestors. I aggressively announce against Satan and all his forces that I cover _____ with the protection of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. As one who has authority over all powers of darkness through my union with the Lord Jesus Christ, and since I am seated with Him in heavenly places, I renounce any and every way in which Satan may claim ownership of _____. I pull down all blindness which Satan would put on _____'s eyes to keep him from understanding spiritual truth and growing to love and serve my Lord and Savior. As the legal parent in the eyes of God and as a priest of God in _____'s life, I completely sign him over to the keeping and saving power of the Lord Jesus Christ. As a priest of God in _____'s life, I cancel and take back all ground given to Satan by his ancestors. I claim that ground through the victory over Satan achieved by the Lord Jesus Christ in His redemptive work and cover all ground with His precious blood that Satan may have no claim against _____. All of this I do in the name and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ and will accept in my child's life only that which comes by the way of the cross and through God's grace. ³³

Developmental Problems

Young children who are adopted can have problems that range from fussiness to severe harm like fetal alcohol syndrome or AIDS. There are no guarantees and although you may think you are getting a healthy infant, many problems do not present themselves immediately.


As a result of an underdeveloped nervous system, kids who did not receive proper stimulation and bonding may be hyper-responsive to light, sound, touch, or pain. They may feel discomfort or pain when they are in a room with normal lighting. The tags and seams of their clothing may cause them continuous irritation.

Children who were traumatized before two years of age sometimes develop attachment disorders and borderline personality disorder. Those who were extensively traumatized between two and seven years old may develop dissociative disorders.

Attachment

Eighty percent of adopted children will have some trouble bonding with their new families.³⁴ The bond that is suppose to be the strongest on earth has been broken. Nothing in the world of these children feels safe and secure. This is especially true for children who have experienced multiple placements before being adopted.

Many of these children learn to associate loving someone with losing them. Therefore loving you, the adoptive parent, becomes very dangerous. These children often attempt to sabotage relationships. For them, it is not testing the waters to see how bad they can be before you send them away. Instead it is often because they feel an attachment to you and to them attachment means pain and loss. Therefore it feels safer to them to push you away or to erect a barrier than to risk being hurt again.



**To the child,
attachment can
mean pain and
loss.**

Children with attachment problems often have an amazing ability to charm strangers and they have a lack of inhibition with strangers but strong reactions to those who care for them, especially mothers. They cannot allow anyone to get close emotionally. They feel the need to be in control of every situation. They accomplish this by choosing who they will like and who they will reject. They often talk incessantly or use anger to try to stay in control.

An adoptive child should be given every opportunity to attach to his new family but ultimately the choice must be his. Trying to force a child to attach is

often more to help the parents feel better than for the sake of the child. Some children will be able to overcome these difficulties but others will struggle through the rest of their lives. But all of these children deserve a stable home and a chance.

Suggested Resources:

- If your child shows signs of an attachment disorder, I highly recommend Nancy L. Thomas' resources, *When love is not enough : a guide to parenting children with reactive attachment disorder-RAD* [book] and *Healing Trust* [sound recording].

Dissociation

Most children who have been in the foster care system will tend to dissociate. Dr. Duane Miller, an adoption specialist, says that about eighty percent of children in the foster care system are dissociative. ³⁶

Dissociation is the voluntary or involuntary separating of the mind from what is occurring. All of us dissociate to some degree. It's what happens when you drive to work but have no recollection of what you saw on the way or when you lose your keys and cannot remember where you put them. Those are normal instances of dissociation, but for these children, their dissociation is usually a result of trauma was beyond what they could deal with.

There are two types of trauma. Type B traumas are things like car accidents, incest, and physical abuse. Type A traumas are the absence of necessary things. It is the emotional impact of a child who is not given enough to eat or one who is not given love or physical contact. Both types of trauma can cause a child to dissociate.

There is a wide spectrum of dissociation from simple daydreaming all the way to Dissociative Identity Disorder, formerly called Multiple Personality Disorder. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is in the middle of that spectrum.

Gina's story may help to explain dissociation: Every Saturday evening when little Gina's mother went to choir practice her daddy would put her to bed. Each time he put her to bed he also molested her. He told her that if anyone found out about their secret he would hurt her mother. All the rest of the week she lived in the ideal Christian home.

Gina would not be able to act normal toward her father if she remembered what happened. In order to survive, Gina's brain had to separate off from her memory of Saturday nights. Her mind created another personality that would be

present on those Saturday nights. For the rest of the week she was completely unaware of the abuse.

This protective ability of the brain has preserved the lives and sanity of many children. The problem is that the subconscious mind is still aware of the abuse that took place. Therefore, the child is still traumatized even though she does not remember the trauma. These children often have a sense that something is wrong but they do not know what is causing their distress.

These children who have learned to dissociate when they are in a crisis often carry this coping mechanism into their every day life. When things get tense they just go away in their minds. It can become an unhealthy way to escape from reality. When a dissociative child gets into a difficult situation in the new adoptive home, he will involuntarily go away in his mind. He will not learn to deal with difficult situations in a right way until he can stop dissociating.



Suggested Resources:

- *How Can I Help?* Available from Lydia Press www.lydiapress.com

Conclusion

We have looked at several issues you should prayerfully consider before making the choice to adopt. All adoptions must be for the sake of the child. It should only be pursued if God has called you to take care of that child. "The One who called you is completely dependable. If he said it, he'll do it!" 1 Thessalonians 5:24³⁷

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Get help with three important issues every family should consider before they adopt:

Consider your reason for wanting to adopt
Determine the type of child that is right for you
Learn about what you should be prepared for after you adopt

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