

Closer to the Fire: Images of a Vibrant Community

ADOPTED

Luke 15, Romans 8:16, 23, Ephesians 1:5, 2-10, 1 John 3:1

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Life has Value

Sue and I always believed that life has value. Not because of someone's persuasive arguments; not because of a political stance or a moral posture; not even because of a biblical worldview or any specific scripture. Really, just from listening to our hearts and the natural law that's coursing through the human soul, we've always believed that life has sacred value.

So we've hoped for the privilege of helping children born into the complex situations and mothers faced with complex choices. We've watched people we love and respect adopt children and place children for adoption, and we always believed that we would be part of this experience.

Something is Askew

The miracle of relationship, loyalty, sexuality and the birth of children within committed relationships is one of the richest pleasures of life. But, the pull toward one element (sexuality) is so strong, and human reticence about another element (loyalty) is so weak, that crises of every kind pile up. Even among Christians, the notions of self-control and patience are losing traction, while people experiment and *jump the gun* sexually. People are exposing themselves to an intimate act of bonding out of context and people are taking the pieces of relationship and exercising them out of order.

It's a pretty simple formula, really. Wait until we're married so that sexuality only bonds spiritually and emotionally connected people. Wait until we're married so that children are born into committed marriages. Then pour our hearts and lives into that marriage, and secondarily into the children.

But even some Christians aren't reinforcing this with their own children. And even when these values are reinforced, people exercise their own impulses and live in their own freedom. All of us have moments, days, seasons of rebellion or vulnerability. Things happen. Sad things, hard things.

And yet...there's mystery. Again, life has value, and the divine hand certainly participates in the creation and conception of new life – however out of context or out of order. Beautiful life. Redeemable situations. Extraordinary opportunities. Somehow, God is still in this.

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Agents Play Their Parts

In our case, so many agents played redemptive roles in the life and birth of our daughter. A radio broadcast gave hope to a young expectant mother, a broadcast that we also heard hundreds of miles away. An attorney applied his skills and his life to choreographing miracles. Families and friends, churches and prayer advocates stood beside a young woman and a similar cast stood beside us.

Ultimately, a generous birth mother decided that her child should be born into the benefits of a united household with a father and mother. At great personal cost, she placed her baby in a home that was ready, eager and stable. It's one of the most selfless acts I've ever witnessed.

A Parents' Love

Meanwhile, we had a philosophy of openness. Life in ministry and among the community of faith has taught us to view family in broad terms. When Jesus asked, "Who are my mother and my brother?" he was redefining the bounds of family.

And that's what we hungered for...more family. We looked at foster parenting and realized, "We already have a ministry. We want a family." So we pursued adoption. Through one horrific failed adoption, we healed and kept pursuing.

Then came the miracle. We received a lovely little girl into our arms. Having birthed one child naturally, please hear me when I affirm the age-old premise: Once the baby is in your arms, there is a quick affection. The judge's words at the adoption hearing ring through my mind, eleven years later, because they are true. The judge pounded a gavel and declared, "It is as if she were your biological child."

A Child's Response

So what about the child? What is her response? Hold me, feed me, love me. Like any other child. And when we did and do, the child's response is to love us back.

I'm even suggesting that there is a wider concept of love and family born out of the experience.

[Interview with Erin Potter]

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Adopting as a Way of Life

So this is what we do. We adopt. We adopted Erin, and Erin's entire birth family. They adopted us and now we have three extended families. Sue returns the sacrifice of our birth mother by allowing her to co-mother. So God sends us another miracle seven years later, and we adopt Luke, and Luke's entire birth family, and they graciously adopted us and ours, so now we have four extended families.

Another generous cast of players (you included.) Another courageous birth mother. All of our hearts expanded. Another life preserved. Now, this little boy animates our household. I can't say enough.

Now the application – the broader adoption story of God's faith family.

Again...Life has Value

We are God's workmanship; beloved objects of God's creative genius. All of life is a treasure, but something about human life, created in God's image, makes us unique. God knows us in our mother's wombs. Our days are numbered. Our hairs are numbered. God cares about the grass of the field and the birds of the air. How much more does God care for us?

Again...Something is Askew

We get things out of context and out of order – our priorities, our appetites, our affections. We sin and a curse falls over all humanity. We walk out from under the umbrella of God's promised protection and exercise our precious freedom by being impetuous.

And yet...a mystery. God's love for us never wanes and we are pronounced redeemable. Tainted, yes, and mired in complex scenarios of self-inflicted woe. But altogether worth saving.

Again...Agents Play Their Parts

So God sends agents into our lives. People who know God want us to know God. People who have been adopted by God realize how badly we need adoption, and they tell us about a Father who wants more children, and a Brother who came to bring us home.

Friends play their parts. Angels sneak around choreographing divine meetings and critical discoveries.

Jesus lays down his life and sacrifices his own body and self-interest to give us a future in the household of God.

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Again...A Parent's Love

God has a philosophy of openness. He would like all of the created objects of his workmanship to be his children, but he won't force us. His arms are always open, but he's not grabby or controlling. Forcing love is the formula for disingenuous love.

So he only pleads and expresses and offers and provides glimpses of how good it could be to call him daddy.

The judge has his gavel ready everyday. He's ready to give the edict, "It is as if you were my biological child."

Again...A Child's Response

Please hold me, feed me, love me. And when we find our voice, "Call me your own. I love you back. I will not live as an orphan or without my heavenly Father. I want to be part of your family – your great and wide family."

Again...A Wide Embrace

Then adopting becomes our way of life. Adopting the poor who would be rich. Adopting the rich who finally realize they've been so poor. Adopting the lost and adopting the least. Adopting the young so they won't have to be spiritual orphans all their lives, and adopting the elderly so that they don't have to be transported to an everlasting place where the proprietor is a stranger.

We live wide and we live large, helping everyone around us know that they have value and a place waiting for them at the table.