

Now, I want it clearly understood that these feelings did not come from my adoptive parents: from them I received love and affection and everything I could want or need. But away from the nuclear family, I felt alienated. Never part of the popular crowd, I always felt like an outsider. A severe introvert, I pursued solitary activities, like playing the piano, which further isolated me from others. More comfortable with adults, I avoided my peers. My life always seemed slightly off track from the world around me.

Then, after college, I finally found a place to belong: the church. A co-worker invited me to attend worship with her family at their small Congregational Church in rural Massachusetts. There I found a supportive group of Christians who accepted me as a fellow child of God.

It was also during these years that I began seriously to consider my call to the ministry. But one thing held me back: I didn't think I was good enough or smart enough or worthy enough to serve God in the church. I still labored under the misperception that I had to be perfect, had to be successful, had to be respected in order to serve God. After all, if I couldn't accept myself for who I was, how could God ever accept me? If I couldn't fit in, why would God want me?

Then a wise pastor-mentor took me aside and told me something that changed my outlook on everything. He said to me, "This isn't about you; it's about God. It's about what God wants, not what you want. It's about God choosing you, not the other way around."

Wow! I'm not usually at a loss for words, but that brought me up short. I had never considered that God might be calling the shots, not me. I have a bad tendency to think that the universe revolves around me, you see. And my family has a gesture that they use to snap me back into place when I get too high and mighty: they rotate one pointer finger around the other to symbolize the universe rotating about me!

So, with my new frame of mind, that God might choose me instead of me choosing God, I turned to the scriptures for guidance. My mentor pointed me to Ephesians 1 and Galatians 4, because they talk about each of us being adopted sons and daughters of God. He correctly surmised that my being adopted made me feel inferior. These and other scriptures that talk about adoption by God have become vitally important to my walk of faith. Imagine feeling unworthy all your life, only to be told that the God of the Universe thinks you are worth everything! It's life changing. Thus, I consider myself to be adopted for a second time for I am chosen by God and included as part of the family of faith.

From this blessed position in the family of God flow five grace-supplied privileges. The first, and most important, is that as children of God **we are saved**. We are delivered from the penalty of the law because God sent Jesus to be our Savior. He died on the cross for our sins, so that we might live for him. God did not do this for me because we are worthy or important, but because we are loved beyond measure, beloved children of a just and compassionate God. (Galatians 4:4-7)

As beloved children of God, **we receive the Holy Spirit as a pledge of our inheritance**. Ephesians teaches us that at the moment we believed the gospel we were sealed in Christ *with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of God's glory* (1:13-14). The Holy Spirit, who right now indwells in us, is God's down-payment on God's own promise. As adopted sons and daughters we are the rightful heirs, in Christ, of an incredible inheritance: the Kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit's presence is proof of our inclusion in that glorious future.

We are placed into a family where we do not naturally belong. Scripture also teaches that before we were regenerated by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:3), before faith came from hearing the gospel (Romans 10:17), we were "children of wrath." Now, we are "children of God" (1 John 3:2), fully accepted and adopted sons and daughters of the King of Kings. We belong to God. We belong in God's family. Where before we were outsiders, we are now the ultimate insiders, privy to the wondrous truth of God's grace. As children of God, we know the family secret: in Christ Jesus we are all made one family.

We have an intimate father-child relationship with God. We don't come to God as king or judge, although God clearly is that, but through adoption we are allowed to come to God as Father. *See what great love the Father has given us, that we should be called the children of God; and so we are* (1 John 3:1) – we hear these words at our baptism, when we are grafted onto the family of faith. And this grafting binds us to the Christian family; we belong to one another as sisters and brothers in the faith.

As a parent, we receive guidance from God through the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:14). God disciplines us as children (Hebrews 12:5-6). At first blush this may not seem a privilege, but certainly every parent understands that loving discipline toward a child is clearly a blessing and a privilege. That discipline unites us, giving us common cause and mutual guidelines for living faithfully.

We have the privilege of being members of one family with other Christians. We are not related by our blood, but by our faith. Our belief in the sovereignty of God, our belief in the saving grace of Jesus, and our belief in the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in and through our lives joins us in a shared purpose and outlook. Since we are all adopted sons and daughters, no one of us is better than any other, and no one of us may claim greater privilege than any other. God loves us all equally, and calls us according to the gifts given. Those gifts, given for the good of all, are to be used to build up the family of faith. Gifts withheld are useless. Gifts misused are destructive. Gifts truly shared are priceless. When we look at each other, we are to see brothers and sisters, not strangers or enemies; and as brothers and sisters, we are moved to care for one another in a deeper, more meaningful way.

At the House of Hope (*Casa de Esperanza*) in Zacapa, Guatemala, the kids and house parents are a family. Not a family related by blood, but a family joined together by God's Spirit through faith. They live and eat and work and learn together. They worship together and pray together. They cry and laugh together. The success of one is the success of all, and the pain of one is the pain of all. They argue and fight, just like any other family does. But underlying it all is the sense that they are a family.

I love visiting the House of Hope. It's a reminder to me that being adopted is a very special thing. When I'm with those kids, I am one of them both by virtue of my being an adopted child and by my position as an adopted child of God. It's a special thing to have that double bond with the kids, and to be able to call them my brothers and sisters because of my Heavenly Father.

At the Mission Dinner today, you will hear more stories about life at the House of Hope. Our goal this year is to raise the fees for the nineteen kids who attend school. I hope you will be moved to contribute to the welfare of your brothers and sisters in Christ at the House of Hope.

I Was Adopted – Twice!

November 9, 2014

The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Galatians 4:1-7 and Ephesians 1:3-14

I was adopted. Twice. The first time I was just six weeks old. I was born February 14, 1969 in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. My birth parents were unwed teenagers from the area. They made the difficult and courageous decision to place me with an adoptive family, rather than try to raise me on their own. The adoption agency, rather unimaginatively, named me Baby Chad. You see, I was the third baby boy placed with the agency that year, and like the hurricanes, we were given names with succeeding letters of the alphabet.

Anyway, I was quickly matched with a couple who had tried unsuccessfully for years to have children. And so it was, that on a cold, March day I was taken to court as a ward of the state and given into the custody of Bob and Judy Dent. (The family legend claims that my adoptive mother, feeling unwell during the week of my adoption, was unknowingly pregnant with my sister who was born later that same year!) My parents were loving and supportive; I was given every opportunity to succeed. I had a happy childhood.

But somewhere along the way, I got the foolish notion that I didn't fit in; or more accurately, that I didn't belong. There was the occasional taunt by a schoolmate about being "unwanted" or "abandoned." And there is the fact that I do not look like anyone in my family. Not knowing my family tree gave me a sense of rootlessness. Not knowing my medical history has become a concern over the years. But more than any of that, I lacked a sense of who I was, where I was going, or where I fit in to the scheme of things.