

What Is Adoption?

What is adoption? Adoption is voluntarily accepting a child into your family as your own. It involves a legal process which gives your adopted son or daughter identical rights and privileges as if they had been born to you. But most importantly, adoption is a matter of the heart. “*Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD*” (Psalm 127:3). That is true, whether children have come into our Christian homes through biological birth or adoption. Love is what makes a family.

Many couples contemplate adoption because they are physically unable to become birth parents. But adoption should not be pursued until a couple keenly senses God’s leading and truly feels it is His best for them. Adoption should never feel “second best” to us. Adoption is the result of the wonderful love God showed to us when He chose us to be His sons and daughters. *We are not second-best, but have become His children and are joint-heirs with Jesus Christ* (Ephesians 1:3-6). Grafting usually improves a plant, so the love in adoption, along with biological bloodlines, can strengthen families and churches and help them thrive and grow. Adoption is a commitment of love. Traveling through infertility to a successful adoption is a long, difficult process. It is lonely; emotionally, physically, and financially draining; and lined with much loss and grief. But if it is God’s will for you, and you allow God to carry you one step at a time, it is well worth it. Someday you will actually thank God for taking you down that path.

Most adoptions follow three steps: (1) the legal separation of the child from the birth parents, (2) transfer of custody,

and (3) the transfer of parental rights and responsibilities to the adoptive parents. The actual adoption process itself has many variables that depend on whether you choose domestic or international adoptions, licensed agency, foster care, private or facilitator adoptions. All adoptions require a home study to begin with and an attorney to finalize.

A home study is a journey in itself! It will vary in cost from several hundred to several thousand dollars. It requires an autobiography from each spouse, fingerprints, police record checks, physicals, financial statements, reference letters, and sometimes, attending parenting classes. A resume type of letter to be shown to birthmothers also needs to be written. In this you need to include a description of your home, extended family, church, neighborhood, reasons for adopting, hobbies, educational goals, and parenting and discipline ideals.

Adoptions average from \$10,000-20,000. The birth-mother receives no money for relinquishing her rights, but she may receive some help with rent, medical expense, clothing, etc., related to her pregnancy. How much help she may receive varies greatly from state to state.

Before proceeding with an adoption, there are some important factors to consider. Both spouses must clearly feel the Lord's direction. Both must feel comfortable with building their family by adoption. Frequently the wife is ready to proceed before the husband because of her strong, God-given motherly instinct. The undertaking is much more successful if she can patiently submit and wait until her husband is also ready to move forward. It is good to ask counsel from parents and ministry. Quite often couples discover, to their dismay, that one set of parents is very supportive and the other side strongly anti-adoption. This complicates matters, but they need to make their own decision based on much prayer and seeking God's will. It is a real blessing

when couples feel support from both extended families.

Couples dealing with infertility and endeavoring to discern God's will must realize adoption is not for everyone. A large variety of reasons could and should prevent a couple from pursuing adoption. A childless couple can be in the Lord's will and more effectively serve Him in some areas than a family would be able to.

As adoptive parents, we must be prepared to meet the needs of our children. All Christian parents need to provide their children with love and security. It is imperative that we are open and honest with them concerning their roots. In most cases the birthmother has not rejected her child, but put a lot of thought, love, and tears into her adoption plan. Approximately 90% of birthmothers change their mind shortly before or after the birth of the baby. They need much counseling "support." Choosing adoption is a very difficult decision for them to make. Only after seeing both the pain and the gratitude in a birthmother's face as she places her baby into your arms, can you humbly realize how great this gift really is. She is trusting you to provide the stability and love of a two-parent family. She is choosing you as a couple to parent this child. Being a parent is not merely being pregnant for nine months, but it is the nurturing, caring, teaching, and training that will continue the remainder of the child's life.

After you've decided this is really what you want to do, you can then weigh your options. There are several ways to proceed—through foster parenting, licensed agencies, networking, or private agencies.

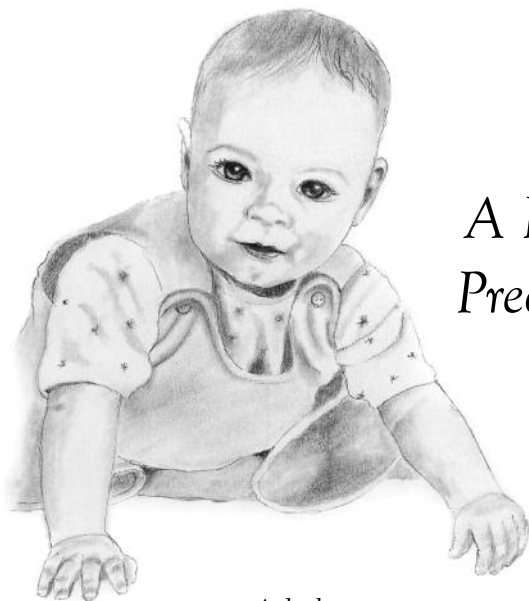
Agencies typically have waiting lists of 6-8 years, but they do all the legwork for you. Whether networking or private, you hear about prospects, but you're on your own to follow through. Private is not for the fainthearted; you are more liable to "get burned." We worked with about 25 birthmothers and got three children.

You must remember, if God wants you to have a particular child, He will overcome all odds, and if not, even seemingly wide-open doors will close. Continually pray for His clear leading. Desperately wanting a baby in your arms sometimes distorts your vision. Decide if you are open to other nationalities, biracial, fetal alcohol syndrome, drug-affected infants, etc. Are you prepared to cope with special challenges? Cute babies do grow up. Also you must decide on how open an adoption you are comfortable with. An adoption support group is beneficial. Our group meets bimonthly. It gives us an opportunity to share encouragement, advice, and enjoy each other's positive experiences.

Our family was not born *to* us but *for* us. Like all children, they were born for a purpose. They may never do a special work as Moses and Esther did or as Samuel and the captive maiden who were not with their birthparents, but God has a plan and a special purpose for their lives. May God's blessing be on all adopted families, and we also wish His blessing and direction to those of you who are seriously contemplating adoption. The pain of empty arms goes to great physical and emotional depth. As you cry to the Lord, He will carry you through dealing with God-given desires for a family, difficult medical testing and treatment, and perhaps disparaging remarks from well-meaning people. He will strengthen you as you learn to rest and wait patiently to find His purpose for you as a couple.

One thing that often bothers us is when people say, "Oh, we just wouldn't adopt if it is so expensive and difficult." The same people work hard for other interests and readily borrow money for businesses, farms, vehicles, etc. These are temporal things. Why not borrow money for adoption? Our children are the only possessions we can take to heaven with us—what better eternal investment?

Thomas and Rhoda Bontrager



A Baby Is a Precious Gift

*A baby is a precious gift,
A gift from God above,
And through the blessing of adoption
Is sent to earth to love.*

*A baby is a precious gift,
Unique in every way.
Created in God's image,
His glory to portray.*

*A baby is a precious gift,
The greatest gift on earth.
A chosen child and wanted one.
God's treasure of greatest worth!*

Written by Mary Jane Proft.
Reprinted with permission of *Mary Sue Originals*.