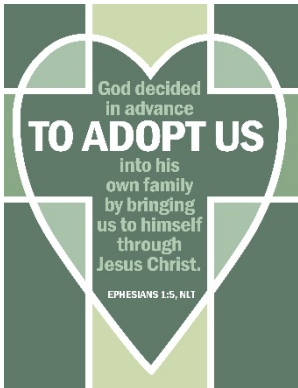


AT HOME IN YOUR ADOPTION



I hope that as you pondered the question, “What would you do if you found out you were adopted?” that you formulated a number of questions that you would want to ask. **I had them all.** I questioned everything in my mind. I read through the articles to the point of memorization. Still, I had no answers. My parents were foster parents. Children came into our home - I was told they were my sisters and brothers - and these same children left our home. I stayed. That seemed a little weird. But I never asked why - mostly because I never cared to go anywhere else - and now I hoped that my impending conversation when dad came home didn’t mean the inevitable - this was my time to go! Needless to say, I was one terrified young man.

When dad arrived home (obviously prior to cell phones, texts and emails), Mom and Dad had their private conversation before coming to my room for “THE TALK.” Dad started the conversation with “I need to share something important with you.” This couldn’t be the “birds and bees” talk that my friends talked about at school. I purposely never talked about girls at home in fear of “THAT TALK.” And what could that have to do with “Baby Boy Doe?” And yet, the next words from dad’s mouth were, “You know how a man and woman get married and have a baby?” “Oh, here we go,” I nervously garnered from his tone.

Dad must have read my blushing face and twitching nervousness so he redirected his conversation. “Your mother didn’t give birth to you. You were the “Baby Boy Doe” discovered in the newspaper articles you read. We hoped you would find them one day and ask us about them. **Today is the day.** You were brought to our home. We took care of you just like all the other brothers and sisters who have come into our home. Other families chose them to be their children. **We chose you.** You were not born into our family. You were adopted into our family. You were loved into our family. You were once “Baby Boy Doe” but now you are John Diener. You belong to us.”

My parents walked me through the articles and explained the circumstances of my arrival into their home. They were a bit shocked that I didn’t have more questions, concerns or even anger. My parents always treated me as their own and this “moment of truth” didn’t change anything for me. They were my mom and dad. **I was at home in my adoption.** What defined me was that I was chosen, loved and I belonged.

Sure, as an adult I had some questions like - Are there any illnesses from my birth parents that I would inherit? What were the real circumstances of my abandonment? The funny thing is, through Ancestry DNA, I have now discovered some details about my birth parents. But while my adopted parents were alive, I never pursued information about my birth circumstances. The articles clearly revealed that the investigations at the time never discovered the person who left me in the front seat of a car.

How about you? No matter how you were brought into this world or who raised you - we all have the exact same circumstances. And so does everyone we know. We are all conceived as sinful creatures. We are by nature sinful and unclean. Enemies of God. Dead in sin. Hostile toward our Creator. But by the grace of God, we are adopted in Christ. **Are you at home in your adoption? Are you at home enough to share your story of adoption?** That's called evangelism: sharing the Gospel story that changed your future and now defines you for eternity. You were dead in sin but now are alive in Christ. You were enemies of God but now are children and heirs of His heavenly riches. You were abandoned and separated from God by sin but now are redeemed (purchased) from the consequences of sin, death and the grave and given the rich future of salvation in Christ. In God's Kingdom, there are no grandchildren, no stepchildren, there are no illegitimate children, because a believer is a child of God "in Christ"! We are set free. We are chosen. Let that be a truth that defines you. There is great joy in a feeling of "chosenness."

The words "in Christ" appears ten times in the book of Ephesians. Paul wants us to realize that Jesus did all the work for us. We don't have to earn it. We can't. We don't have to be "good enough" to deserve it. Out of His love for us, Jesus sacrificed His own life to guarantee all believers all the spiritual blessings that flow from His relationship with God. So when we read that "in Christ" we become children of God, it means that our identity and inheritance are sealed by the sacrificial, unconditional love of Jesus. As Paul put it, God "destined us for adoption as His children through Jesus Christ."

So what does it mean that we are chosen in Christ? If you are chosen, that means you are valued. You are loved. It means that God has a purpose for you. Now consider that God chose you and destined you for adoption as His child before the creation of the world. Once we understand this truth, we finally are at home in our adoption. **And confident of this Gospel, we share with the world the story we have in common - our sin and God's adopting grace.**

There is a story of a young man who was getting ready to graduate from college. For many months he had admired a beautiful sports car in a dealer's showroom, and knowing that his father could well afford it, he told him that this one car was all he wanted. As graduation day approached, the young man awaited signs that his father had purchased that car. But he saw nothing. Finally, on the morning of his graduation, his father called him into his private study. His father told him how proud he was to have such a fine son and told him how much he loved him. He told him that he knew God had great plans in mind for him. And then he handed his son a finely gift-wrapped box. Curious, but somewhat disappointed, the young man opened the box and found a leather-bound Bible with the young man's name embossed in gold. Angrily, he raised his voice to his father and said, "With all your wealth and resources, you give me a Bible?!" He stormed out of the house, leaving the Bible in his father's office. The young man never really talked to his father again. Years passed by and the young man became very

successful. He often thought of calling his father, but never did. Then one day he received word that his father had suddenly passed away. When he arrived at his father's home, sadness and regret filled his heart. As he looked through his father's things, he saw the new Bible, just as he had left it years ago. With tears, he opened the Bible and began to turn the pages. His father had carefully underlined a verse, Matthew 7:11, "And if ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give to those who ask Him?" As he read these words, a check fell out from the Bible. It was made out to the dealership. In the memo line it said, "Only the very best sports car for my son – Paid in full."

How many times have we missed God's blessings because they are not packaged as we expected? In other words, "if only I had recognized the package for what it was when I first received it." I am hard-pressed to think of another portion of Scripture where there is such a concentration of foundational doctrines of our faith - spiritual blessings, predestination, adoption as children of God, lavished grace, guaranteed hope, inherited riches, God's will, salvation, and the seal of the Holy Spirit. The Lord inspired Paul to "package" these blessings in such a way that we dare not miss them - as the young man missed the blessing his father sought to give him. The Gospel shared by every believer is a life-changing package.

The theology within the first 14 verses of Ephesians can be placed against all the other religious writings of every major faith in the world, and the theologies of "those writings" will crumble in comparison because they are insufficient for salvation. Why? How can we be so sure? Because all these writings ultimately leave salvation up to you. "*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12).

We all know the benefits of material blessings - we know what money can provide us, we know what health can do for us, we know what popularity will afford us - but what can spiritual blessings do? Spiritual blessings are of the Holy Spirit as they abide in us through faith. They allow the believer to rise above the circumstances of life that many times are defeating in nature. These are the blessings of God found in Christ that allow loneliness, alienation and purposelessness to be replaced with the presence, power and peace of God. Spiritual blessings sustain us for the eternal and lasting blessings that only God gives and the only blessings which can never be taken away.

Having revealed IN WHOM all spiritual blessings reside and flow, **Paul names the blessings we have received "one by one."** Spiritual blessings are packaged in heavenly terms to make a world of difference now. God has chosen us to be holy and blameless. This spiritual blessing speaks a continuous assurance into a believer's heart and mind. The word, "chosen" means that it's by "God's design" from the foundation of the world that we should be made holy and perfect, not in and of ourselves which would be impossible, but by His hand through the blood of His Son, our Savior, making it possible and true. The last verses of Jude remind us of this blessing: "*To Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious*

presence without fault and with great joy - to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore.” We come to God - as filthy rags because of our sinful nature and sinful acts of thought, word and deed – and Jesus, who lived in perfect righteousness and shed His blood for our forgiveness and the promise of eternal life, presents us before His Father as holy and blameless.

God has adopted us to be His children. The word “adopt” is not found anywhere in the Old Testament. You won’t find it on the lips of Jesus or practiced by Old or New Testament Jews. But Paul shares it from his Roman background. Adoption of male children was practiced by wealthy, childless Roman parents to pass on the family name and share an inheritance (only boys could receive an inheritance). It was a common phrase among the Roman adoptive parents to their adopted sons: **“We give you what your parents could not - a certain future with a rich inheritance.”** That’s exactly what we receive ONLY in Christ!

We have the blessing of redemption. Redemption conveys the truth of being set free by the paying of a ransom. We cannot redeem ourselves. We would remain in bondage to the sinful flesh forever without God, who paid the ransom, not with silver or gold, but with Christ’s holy, precious blood and His innocent, suffering and death. Redemption and the forgiveness of sin are mentioned together. *“For there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”* (Romans 8:1).

God has marked us to receive His heavenly inheritance. The word, “predestined” which causes so much upheaval because it is translated according to worldly terms, is such a gracious blessing in God’s terms. It means to be “marked off.” As believers, we may suffer and struggle living in this sinful world as sinful people, we become discouraged and down-hearted; but no thing or no one can realign the boundary lines that have been “marked off” claiming us as God’s own children and guaranteed heirs through the work of the Holy Spirit to all His rich, heavenly blessings - for we have been “marked off” in Christ alone by grace alone through faith alone as revealed in Scripture alone.

Paul has also given us a witness of how to package the truth of God: only in Christ. There is a song we should commit to memory: “I could wish you joy and peace to last a whole life long; I could wish you sunshine or a cheerful little song or wish you all the happiness that this life could bring; I could wish you leaves of gold or that your path be smooth; I could wish you treasures or that all your dreams come true; and I could wish you paradise that every day be spring; But I wish you Jesus more than anything; Because when I wish you Jesus, I’ve wished you everything.” Paul begins the letter to the church family at Ephesus telling them: **You want it all? You have it all – in Christ;** for you have every spiritual blessing joining you to Him.

We have been marked to tell others the truth: WE ARE AT HOME IN OUR ADOPTION! Every day we are bombarded with stories like the sudden collapse of a condo and violent shootings while celebrating our nation’s freedom? Of tropical storms and terrorism of all kinds;

of increases in crime, failing schools, unemployment, poverty, injustice, racism, moral decline, global warming - is there any good news anywhere? **Paul packages the Good News in 14 verses: the world cannot give it ALL to you and the world cannot take it ALL away - because the world cannot give you eternity and in Christ you have every spiritual blessing.** You are rich beyond measure with the certain blessings that are yours in the Person of Christ who is with you always. As we go out into the world "at home in our own adoption," leave a mark - the one that tells the simple story of who you were in sin but then who you are in Christ. Being at home in my adoption - both from my adoptive parents and from my Heavenly Father in Christ - define who I am now and for eternity.

As you pondered the question, "What would you do if you found out you were adopted?", I pray that you came to the truth: Thanks be to God for this life-changing and eternity-altering message. Can we dare keep this truth to ourselves? Be at home in your adoption and share the truth of the blessings found only in Christ. Please take advantage of every opportunity to grow in confidence in sharing the Gospel story. Knowing your own adoption story gives you the peace and confidence to tell it to all the world. God has blessed our District and Synod with great resources to help us know our adoption story and how it relates to the world around us, including a new, commendable book entitled: "*Connected to Christ: Witnessing in Everyday Life*," by Rev Dr. Mark Wood. Your pastor is a great encourager that your story as a believer has value to you and the world around you. Your Evangelization Team would love to hear your adoption story knowing that as you share it with us, you will be further equipped to share it with the world. Send your story to this email: evangelizationteam@englishdistrict.org We look forward to hearing from you. Praise God for every spiritual blessing including the truth that we belong to God as adopted children and heirs in Christ.

In Christ Alone,
Pastor John Diener
Galatians 2:20

Evangelization Team