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Study guide

The grace of adoption

By Robert C. Blezard

Opening your heart and family to welcome a child who needs a home is an incredible act of generosity and love. Thousands of children are adopted every year, but thousands more are looking for good, permanent homes. What does it take to adopt a child? Are you willing and able to accept such a gift of grace?

Exercise 1: Fear and grace

Fear caused Karen Beattie to question whether to go ahead with the adoption of her daughter, but she worked it out: "How many times had a fearful 'no' stopped the gust of grace from entering my life? How many times had I let my anxiety keep me from the good things that God might have for me?" Discuss:

- Describe a time when you have been in a situation like Beattie's—torn between fear and grace?
- How would you describe grace as Beattie experienced it? When have you experienced grace?
- Why is it that fear often accompanies opportunity for grace? Can you share a time when you were fearful of something that held potential for grace and goodness?
- Under what circumstances can fear be our friend? Can you share an experience to illustrate?
- Under what circumstances can fear be our foe? Can you share?
- Can you share an experience of working through fear to make the right decision?

Exercise 2: Family and home

Begin by asking each one in your group to share a memory of "home." Brainstorm together, with someone keeping a list on whiteboard, chalkboard or paper. What words come to mind when you think of "home"? When the list is complete, discuss:

- What jumps out at you? What thoughts?
- What's the difference between a house and a home? Which is easier to provide, and why?
- What are the 10 most essential elements of a home? Narrow the list down to seven elements. Now five. Now three. Now two. Finally, what is the *most* essential element of a home? Why?



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- What does it mean to grow up in a home? A house?

Next, invite everyone to share a favorite memory of “family.” Similar to the exercise above, make a list of words that come to mind when you think of “family.” When complete, discuss:

- What jumps out at you? What do you think?
- What are the 10 most essential elements of family? Narrow the list down to seven elements, then five, then three, then two, then one. Finally, what is the *most* essential element of a family? Why?
- What does it mean to grow up in a family?

Look at your lists side-by-side and discuss:

- What elements of “family” and “home” are in common? Which go together? Which elements are not in common?
- Why are family and home important for people? Why are they especially important for children?

Exercise 3: Jesus’ “family”

Read this passage several times: “While he was still speaking to the crowds, *his mother and his brothers* were standing outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, ‘*Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.*’ But to the one who had told him this, Jesus replied, ‘Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?’ *And pointing to his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers!* For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother’” (Matthew 12:46-50. Discuss:

- Of what relation to Jesus are the “mother and brothers” waiting to talk to him in verse 46, and to whom the speaker in verse 47 was referring?
- What does Jesus’ response mean? Why do you think he says it?
- What are the implications for the disciples to whom Jesus refers in verse 49? For Jesus?
- We appropriately think of Jesus as our Lord and Savior. How do things change if we also think of him as family?
- If through Jesus we are all brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, uncles, aunts, cousins, how are we related to one another? How ought we relate to one another?
- Perhaps using the “family” list you generated in the previous exercise, explore how concepts of family relate to the Christian community.
- Given Jesus’ instruction, why is it entirely appropriate for us to adopt a child who needs a family and home?



About the study guide author:



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Exercise 4: Scripture about orphans

The Bible doesn't give us many stories about adoption, but teachings about God's care and concern for those without parents is quite extensive. Using an online Bible study tool (such as gateway.com), look up Scripture verses containing the word "orphan." Share them with your study group and discuss:

- How are God's people instructed to treat orphans?
- In what specific ways are God's people expected to care for orphans?
- Why are orphans often mentioned in the same context as widows and foreigners? What do all three groups have in common?
- What would it mean to be an orphan in biblical times?
- What does it mean today?
- How is adoption consistent with God's command to treat orphans well?

Exercise 5: Children awaiting adoption

Typically, more than 100,000 adoptions take place every year, according to the National Council for Adoptions, which calculated 110,373 in 2014. Of those, 41,023 were adoptions of related children, and 69,350 unrelated to the adopting family.

Even with so many adoptions, tens of thousands of children await adoption. In 2012 there were 101,666 children living in foster care who were eligible for adoption, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The average age of a child awaiting adoption is 9.

Think of a city in your state or county with a population of about 100,000. Got it? Now imagine that the city consisted entirely of the children, average age of 9, who are awaiting adoption into permanent homes.

Discuss:

- What thoughts come to mind? What feelings?
- Think about your children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews or children of friends. What would you want for them if they were left without family? What kind of family would you hope for?
- Would you and your family have the resources to adopt a child? Would you have the will?
- What would hold you back? Can you give voice to your concerns or your fears?
- How can your congregation and our denomination help promote adoption to provide homes for these children?

The grace of adoption

By Karen Beattie



The author, Karen Beattie, with her husband, David, and daughter, Desta, when she was 3.

All I saw was my fear, not the joy that could be found on the other side of “yes.”

Grace blows into my life as unpredictably as the wind. Sometimes I feel it on my cheeks as softly as a whisper. At other times it's a gust as powerful as the wind that topples trees in my Chicago neighborhood during summer thunderstorms.

When we adopted our daughter, it was like a gust, and I was afraid that the wind of grace would topple me too.

I was at work when I got the call from our adoption caseworker. A 2-year-old girl needed to be placed in a foster-to-adopt home. “Permanent placement,” the caseworker said. That meant the parental rights were likely going to be terminated and the child needed to be placed in a home that was willing to adopt her.

That was us.

My husband and I had been waiting for this call. After seven long, painful years of trying to

become parents, it seemed as if it was finally going to happen.

We were exhausted from the pursuit of parenthood: the infertility treatments, adoption classes, foster-parenting training and truckloads of paperwork. Most difficult of all was the relentless roller-coaster of soaring hope followed by crashing disappointment and grief. Now we were just numb.

“We need to know within the next few days,” our caseworker said on the other end of the line.

“Of course,” I croaked. “I’ll have to talk with my husband. But we’ll let you know as soon as possible.”

Courage to embrace the unknown

I’m embarrassed to say that “yes” didn’t come easily. My husband, David, and I had gotten to the point where we thought it might be time to let the dream of parenthood die. In fact, in my head I had started

constructing scenarios of what our lives would look like as a childless couple. We would travel. I would write books.

Parenthood was suddenly within my grasp, and instead of jumping for joy, I got a pit in my stomach and started hyperventilating.

David and I had both been single for a while, and then a married couple with no children for many years. Adding a toddler to the mix would be a drastic change.

I was also afraid of dealing with the foster care system. Before the adoption would be finalized, we would be required to have monthly visits with a caseworker, continue visits with the birth parents and attend court hearings. It would be a lot of work on top of being first-time parents.

I didn't sleep. I felt sick to my stomach. My two sisters came to visit from Ohio to help me think through the decision (they are both adoptive parents). David tried to calm my fears. He was already convinced that we should accept the placement and couldn't understand my hesitation. But I was in turmoil.

While talking with a friend about the decision, she asked, "What would it be like to say 'yes?'" She went on to tell me how she and her husband had made an agreement to not let fear be the basis of any of their decisions.

I realized then that my fear of the unknown, of what I would have to leave behind, was guiding my decision.

How many times had a fearful "no" stopped the gust of grace from entering my life? How many times had I let my anxiety keep me from the good things that God might have for me?

David and I talked about it at length. I told him about my fears; his steadiness calmed my anxiety. Whatever struggles the adoption might bring, we would deal with them—together.

Finally, with shaking hands and a pounding heart, I called up the agency and said, "Yes."

Making room for Desta

A month later, Desta moved into our house like a college coed moving into her first dorm room. She had a toy box; an impressive collection of dolls; a pink suitcase filled with tiny pink skirts, skinny jeans and pink socks; enough books to fill the Library of Congress; and the personality of a sorority house president.

We had to rearrange every piece of furniture in our small condo to make room for her and her stuff. We had to rearrange our entire existence.

The first year was hard. We were working full time, learning to parent a toddler, and juggling the

many visits and appointments adoption required. We endured every virus known to mankind that Desta was exposed to in day care and passed on to us—I thought we would never make it through the winter of 2013.

But then spring came and we turned a corner. We went to Michigan in May for a short vacation. It was still chilly, but we walked along the beach, played in the waves, and Desta and I hunted for sea glass in the sand. We were becoming a family, and I cringed at the thought that I'd almost let my fear stand in the way of the chance to mother a beautiful, funny, spunky little girl.

Adoption is never without pain and loss. Desta had been separated from her birth family and her first foster family. David and I had to mourn the years we spent dealing with miscarriages and failed fertility treatments. But together, we were healing from the trauma.


Adoption has taught me that faith requires us to trust God when we are afraid of the unknown. Even if our fears are realized, something beautiful and good will come out of our willingness to say "yes."

A few months after Desta came to live with us, we were eating lunch when she stopped, looked at me and asked, "Where is my home?"

"Your home is here," I told her, pointing to her bedroom. "You belong here." She looked at me and smiled. It took her awhile to understand that she wasn't leaving, that she would be with us forever. But slowly she started calling us "Mommy" and "Daddy."

Desta is now 7 and in second grade. She loves the color pink, dancing, reading and playing with her friends and her American Girl dolls (preferably at the same time).

"I'm so happy," Desta told me recently.

"I am too," I told her as I kissed her dimples. "I am too." 

November is adoption awareness month.

Learn about foster-to-adopt programs by connecting with your local Lutheran Services in America agency. Visit lutheranservices.org, click on the "services" tab and search for adoption/foster services in your area.

Download a study guide by clicking on the "Spiritual practices & resources" tab at livinglutheran.org.



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