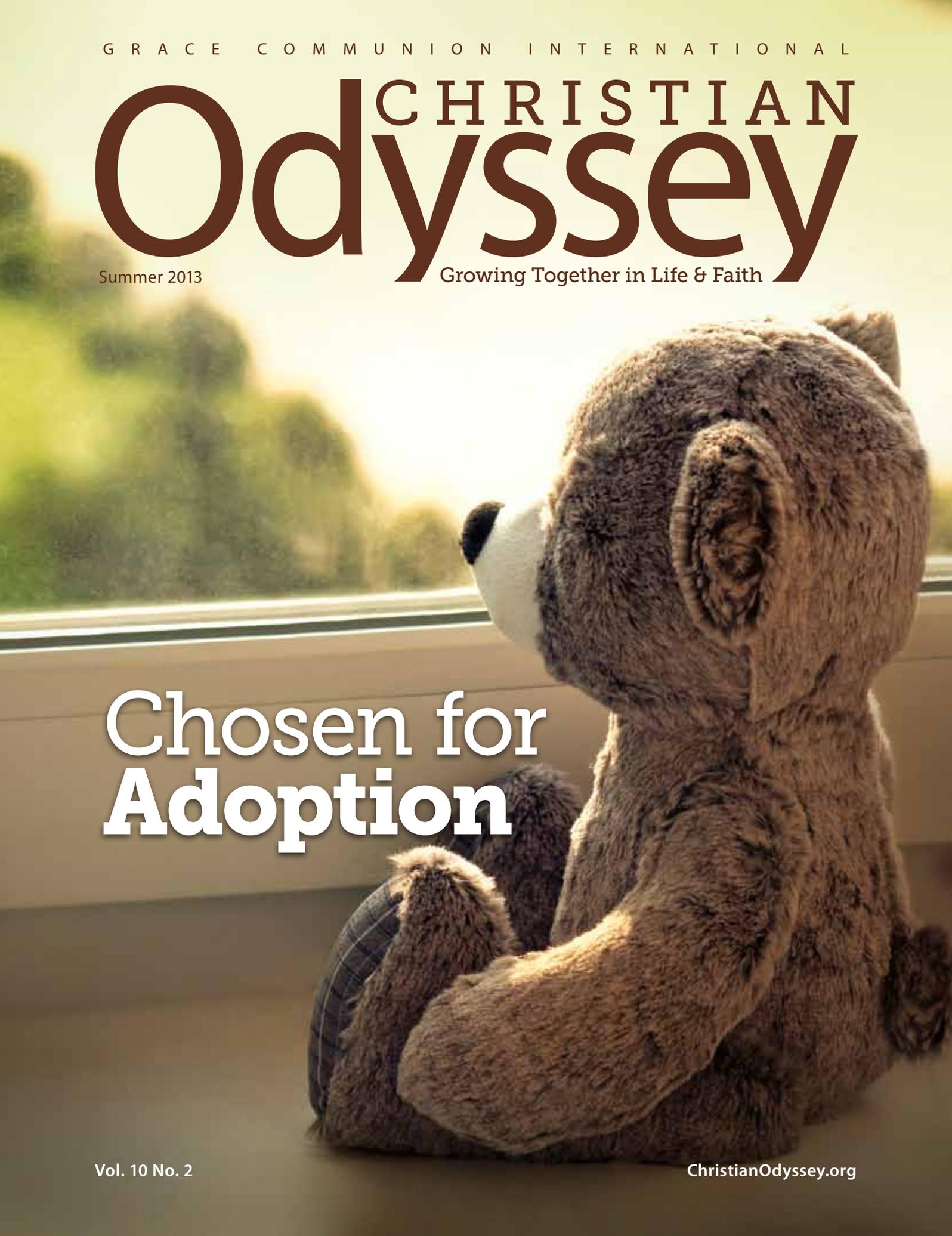


GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL

CHRISTIAN Odyssey

Summer 2013

Growing Together in Life & Faith



Chosen for
Adoption



My wife’s father died this past month, and I was honored to speak at his memorial service. One of my favorite things to do at a funeral service is to read Ephesians 1:3-14 and insert the person’s name wherever the Scripture says “we” or “us.” In particular, I love to pause and reflect on verses 4-6, which say, “In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved” (ESV).

As I prepared Dad’s funeral message, I was tremendously comforted by that truth. “In love, he predestined Charles Campbell for adoption...” Read the scripture and put your name there. How does that make you feel, knowing God predestined you for adoption through Jesus Christ? Paul is reminding us that God has made you his child.

To really grasp the significance of this, we should note once a child was adopted in Paul’s day, everything from his or her past was erased. Though a child still had blood connection with his former parents, the legal and familial ties to those parents were severed. The child was to be completely accepted by the adopting family and was endowed with all of the rights, privileges and responsibilities of his new family just as though he was a natural-born son.

So when God says he predestined us for adoption, he is saying he predestined us to be completely accepted, to have our past erased and to be given all the rights, privileges and responsibilities of being a son of God. In other words, he is saying we are predestined to be joint heirs with Christ. “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory” (Romans 8:17).

These scriptures fascinate me and pique my interest in the topic of adoption. God adopts us so he can bring us into relationship with himself. He makes it clear from the beginning of that relationship that we are accepted just as we are and our past is not an issue. He lets us know we don’t have to prove ourselves to win his grace; our adoption gives us all the rights and privileges of being one of his beloved. We are adopted for relationship.

This issue of *Christian Odyssey* is focused on this topic of adoptions and relationships. Our cover story shares Eric and Diane’s story of adopting three young girls from Ethiopia. You can also read Tim Poe’s experience of being adopted and looking for his birth mother. Nan Kuhlman’s article shares how she would often forget that her brothers were adopted.

We also offer you several shorter pieces on the broader concept of adoption with regard to relationship. We include an article on adopting a community; another on adopting an elderly person as a friend and a third on being adopted as an intern.

This issue also introduces a couple of new series. We are beginning a series of articles on the topic of spiritual formation, and we are introducing a new series, “From the Field” written by Regional Pastor Greg Williams. And you will continue to see columns by familiar authors Tammy Tkach and Barbara Dahlgren.

I’m looking forward to serving as your editor. Please let me know your thoughts and ideas on how we can better serve you. Our transition to an online publication has gone fairly smoothly. *Christian Odyssey* can now be downloaded on most smart phones, tablets and pads. Check out the back cover for more information.

PS. Special thanks to John Halford, who has edited *Christian Odyssey* for the past seven years. John will continue to serve as an advisor, but most importantly, John is my friend and my mentor. We’ve shared ministry together in Cincinnati, Ohio, for the past 10 years. I’m thankful for what John has done with *Odyssey* and I’m grateful for his support and encouragement. May God continue to bless you, John.

Blessings... Rick

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Our Adoption Story

By Diane Frantz

Eric and I always wanted a big family. We already had two boys when our third child, Stuart, was born prematurely and spent 10 weeks in the hospital. He was diagnosed with spastic quadriplegia cerebral palsy. The doctors couldn't tell us what caused his early birth, so another biological child was out of the question.

Although we wanted more children, we did not dare risk my health or the health of another child, so we quickly got caught up in the business of raising our three sons, schooling them at home and providing a loving and nurturing family for Stuart, where he was included in everything we did.

The idea of adoption, however, was always in the back of our minds. Then, in 2007, I met Patty. Patty shared a picture of three siblings from Ethiopia whom she and her husband hoped to add to their family. She explained that they were waiting for the call to go and pick them up, and they weren't sure how soon it would

be. She was an inspiration to me, but little did I know that she, her husband and their whole family (now 21 kids—8 biological and 13 adopted, including several with special needs) would become our adoption mentors and good friends when we started our own journey toward adoption.

Eric and I were attending a concert in Cleveland in 2009 when one of the performers promoted an international and domestic adoption agency. During the breaks in the music, we

We had thought about adoption many times, but it was never the right time. Then we wondered, **“Well, what about now?”**



Eric, Diane, Serkie (their Ethiopian mom), Lydia, Katelyn and Makayla—first family photo soon after passing court.

heard moving stories about adoption and sponsoring children in need. I looked at Eric and we both communicated in that “one look” that we needed to sign up to sponsor a child. Later, we were talking about the sponsorship with our boys when Morgan, our oldest, asked us if we had ever thought about adoption. Eric and I replied, “Why, yes, we have, many times, but the time was never right.” “Well, what about now?” Further discussion ensued and we decided to consider it seriously.

After many family discussions, prayers, research, conversations with our mentors, friends, adoption agencies and other

We prayed as a family for God’s direction and at every turn we felt God was leading us towards **Ethiopia**.

adoptive parents, our journey to make a difference in the life of a child began in earnest. With each step of the process, we prayed as a family for God’s direction—which agency to use, which country to adopt from, what we needed to do and what sacrifices we were willing to make. At every turn, we felt we God was leading us toward Ethiopia.

By June 12, 2009, less than six months after we started planning, we were “paper ready,” which included a home study, fingerprinting and background checks with USCIS, having documents and signatures notarized, obtaining copies of birth certificates, our marriage license, financial records, passports updated and many other documents gathered and processed with our local, state and federal governments. These documents now fill a 5” 3-ring adoption binder and several other binders.

We chose to adopt from our agency’s list of “waiting children”—children who are older and harder to place. We first reviewed the list on June 15, but no children “jumped out” at us. We hoped to adopt one or two girls younger than Stuart, ideally sisters. Two weeks later we called for an updated list and our agency said a file with three girls (siblings) had just come in and asked if we wanted to look at it. Looking at a child’s file is an intense and personal experience, and we wanted to make sure we were serious before we reviewed it. I called Eric and we discussed it before saying yes. When we reviewed their file, we just knew these three little girls were the answer to our prayers. We discussed it some more and prayed about our decision, and within 24 hours we had verbally committed ourselves to them and then signed the paperwork to make it official. This was the beginning of the real wait—a process that took 18 months from the time of commitment to bringing them home.

During this wait, I asked God to help me understand the thought processes of their mother—a mother who had come to the point where she was willing to give up her three precious daughters. I knew if I were in her situation with my boys, it would be the hardest moment I would ever experience. It was then I felt God move me to remember the story of two women who went before King Solomon arguing over a baby (1 Kings 3). The true mother told the king it wasn’t her baby so he wouldn’t cut the baby in half for them to share. She was willing to sacrifice



her right to her baby in order to save his life. Here was the peace I needed. I didn't know the mother's circumstances, but she was willing to make an enormous personal sacrifice to give her children a better future. I had my "King Solomon" moment on August 2, 2010, when she appeared before an Ethiopian judge, relinquished her rights and gave her three daughters the opportunity to join our family.

The adoption process took much longer than we expected. There was corruption in some adoption agencies, and all adoptions in the region stopped for a while. Our agency asked us several times if we wanted to change our commitment, but we stood firm and told them we would wait for our new daughters no matter how long it took. We believed these three girls were supposed

The huge stack of adoption paperwork - commonly referred to as the "paper pregnancy."

Adoption: A Forgetting and a Remembering

By Nan Kuhlman

I was four years old when my first brother was adopted. Given my understanding of "the birds and the bees" at that time, I thought that this was how a family grew. Four years after that, my second brother was adopted, and I grew into my role as the "bossy big sister."

When each brother came home, I remember a sense of anticipation and joy that is still vivid to this day. Granted, they were a lot of work, but being my mother's "best helper," I was delighted to get into the thick of babies and diapers and looking after my little brothers.

The years have passed, and they aren't so little anymore. One of them has even sprouted some gray hairs (I need to refer him to my hairdresser). I tend to forget how they became my brothers; they just are and always will be.

I recently read in the newspaper supplement Parade a short article by 13-year-old Grace Knobler, whose family adopted a little boy from Ethiopia when she was around six or seven. She recounts that occasionally others would stare at her family, and she didn't know why: "I would forget sometimes that Nati's skin was a different color, that his eyes were brown and not blue and that his hair was black and not blond." For her, Nati was one of her brothers, and when someone commented one

time that she resembled her brother, her question was, "Which one?" Grace forgot Nati's differences, as if they were of no consequence, and saw him as a brother equal to her biological brother.

It's this forgetting that intrigues me, and it makes me think that maybe it's less a forgetting and more a remembering. By this, I mean forgetting what might separate us (biological roots and genetics) and instead remembering that what matters is relationship.

As we rest in the knowledge of our adoption and acceptance by God, we are better able to see the interconnection among all people and creatures.

I think the Father, Son and Spirit take this view in their adoption of humankind. They forget what we might think could separate us (sin, errors in beliefs or even lack of belief), and they remember their plan from the foundation of the world, which is to share the joy and love of their relationship with creation. The love of the Triune God flows through all creation, revealing the beauty of relationship through the connections we see in nature and in our interactions with others. As we rest in the knowledge of our adoption and ac-

ceptance by God, we are better able to see the interconnection among all people and creatures.

This recognition of our interconnection is the remembering that I think takes place when families adopt. We forget any feelings of separateness, and instead, we choose to remember, perhaps just intuitively, that we all participate in one Big Adoption that was



planned from the beginning of the world.

Even though my brothers are grown, with spouses and families of their own, I am still "a bossy big sister." It comes with the territory, I guess. I often forget that they were adopted; it seems as if I've always had them with me. But in this forgetting, I remember that we are all interconnected and never alone. **co**

We formed a bond through our many letters and photos that we were able to send to them every month or so.

to be in our family, and we wouldn't even consider starting over.

Soon after our commitment to them, we put together a small "welcome to the family" bag, and our agency delivered it to the girls. We formed a bond with them through letters and photos that were carried back and forth by other adoptive parents going to Ethiopia to pick up their children. Then came the biggest surprise of all.

My friend and mentor, Patty, offered to pay my way to Ethiopia so I could meet the girls in person. I had less than two weeks to prepare, but on January 15, 2010, I boarded a plane bound for Ethiopia. Not only did this trip change my life, but I was able to go back with Patty again two months later in March 2010. This time Morgan, our oldest, was able to come along. It was a wonderful opportunity for him to meet and get to know his sisters-to-be and see the world from a different perspective. Morgan had many opportunities to serve others on that trip, and those memories will last a lifetime for all of us.

As the adoption process dragged on, we'd started asking others to pray. We called it our P.U.S.H. (Pray Until Something Happens) campaign. We kept sending letters and photos to the girls, and we kept believing that someday soon, even though we didn't know when, all the necessary paperwork would be signed and processed.

On June 30, we received the good news that all the paperwork was complete except for their birth certificates. Their birth certificates were ready a few days later, and at last our case was submitted to the court. Our court date was set for August 2, and Eric and I were both required to appear in court in Ethiopia. We had less than two weeks to make all the arrangements, but we were getting close!

Finally, on August 2, after many months of delay and uncertainty, we came before the judge, and he decreed the girls were now ours. They had become our daughters, but we couldn't take them home yet. There was still one more hurdle to clear: final approval from the Embassy. We returned to the U.S. and waited. About a month later, Trevor, our middle son, and I jubilantly traveled back to Ethiopia again.

Our family has three important celebrations each September:



Top: This is the first picture of the three girls in Ethiopia given to the Frantz family. **Above:** Eric meeting the girls for the first time in Ethiopia three days before our court date.

September 7 is Gotcha Day—the day I was able to pick up the girls and take them to our guest house. September 8 is the day we celebrate Passed Embassy Day, when the U.S. government declared the girls were officially ours and we could take them home. Finally, on September 14, we celebrate the day Makayla, Katelyn and Lydia Frantz first set foot on American soil, becoming U.S. citizens and coming to their "Forever Home." **co**

Adopted: Specially Chosen

By Tim Poe

From my first memories, I have known I was adopted. Momma and Daddy had told me since I can remember that I was specially picked from all the other babies when I was three months old in 1965. I didn't understand genetics, DNA and human reproduction, so the ramifications of the word "adopted" didn't mean anything to me. I simply knew Momma and Daddy loved me.

By the time I was older and understood a bit about reproduction, the context of not being a part of the family because I wasn't born into it still didn't mean anything. Kids in school sometimes told me, "You're just someone's trash and were thrown away." That never gained any traction with me emotionally because I knew to my core that I had been specially chosen, I was loved and I was wanted.

When I hit puberty and began to better understand human reproduction, I began to wonder what my biological mother and father were like, what they did, were they still alive and where they were. There were many questions but no answers, as my adoption was sealed by court order. Was my biological mother a prostitute, was she rich, was she a pregnant teenager who couldn't handle a child? On and on my mind wandered. I became more and more curious.

The questions followed me into adulthood, and with the advent of the internet I began to look up adoption-related topics online. I never really believed I would find the answers, and I almost convinced myself it didn't really matter, but I kept looking. During one internet search, a particular site grabbed my attention as it shared stories of women who had given up their children for adoption and how painful it was for them. Many women had written letters to their unknown children. Many ached for a shred of information about the children

they had lost. I decided then and there I would make the best attempt I could to find my biological mother. She was likely in pain.

I went to the adoption agency and paid a fee to have non-identifying information given to me. The social worker on duty wanted me to read through the papers in her presence. I'm not sure why except perhaps to help me process what I read. It turns out Mother was a college graduate with a successful military career and was in her early 20s. She came from a prominent political family. I was stunned as I read. The "non-identifying" information included was rather robust and had the age of Mother's parents, her siblings and their children, her



I read letters from women who ached for a shred of information about the children they had given up for adoption. I decided I would attempt to find my Mother—she was likely in pain.

grandparents' death dates, and even great-grandparents' dates. I was from a big family.

I asked about next steps, and the social worker explained that unless the biological mother and I mutually consented to unseal the documents, the documents would remain sealed.

We would need to first do a search to see if they could find her, then they would contact her discreetly to determine if there was interest in moving forward. I paid the fee for the private investigator to track Mother down and left with the cache of “non-identifying documents.”

When I arrived home and began showing the documents to my wife, I realized the documents had been improperly redacted and that the underlying type could be read under the black marker. I knew my birth surname! Over the next several months of meticulous scrutiny of the documents, I realized that one document had Mother’s full name unredacted. Meanwhile, I waited patiently for the adoption agency to respond to the progress of their search. The answer finally came that Mother could not be located. Women frequently take new names, and if you don’t have a social security number, it can be nearly impossible to find them. I chalked it up to God’s will that I would not find Mother and went on with life.

In 2000, I was watching the History Channel, and they were running commercials from a genealogy research database. It struck me during one of those commercials that I had a good



Top: Back, left to right—Susie Poe, Jimmy Poe (Daddy). Front, left to right—Tim Poe, Katie Poe, Frankie Poe (Momma)
Bottom: Back, left to right—Mother, Tim Poe, Susie Poe. Front, left to right—Tim’s Neice, Katie Poe.

More Than a Free Meal

By Linda Rex

The doors to Community Café open every Sunday after worship services at Good News Fellowship in Nashville, Tennessee. Community members from all walks of life come together to eat lunch and fellowship. This free meal is open to the public, and we have served many homeless people, persons escaping abusive relationships, addicts finishing rehab and people from the neighborhood who simply want a free lunch. It is rare for visitors to make the effort to come upstairs to worship.

We soon realized we were spending more time and effort serving lunch than serving the greater needs, so we are now encouraging our leadership and members to begin to “adopt” those who come through the doors by intentionally spending time with one or two and taking a personal interest in their well-being. The purpose for “adopting” these visitors is to build

relationships with them, giving us opportunity to pray with and for them and share the life and love of God with them.

We know we cannot rescue most people from their struggles in life, but we can direct them toward resources that may help them through those struggles. Our pastoral team is equipping itself to know what resources are available in the community.

Associate pastor Jan Taylor facilitates the Community Café ministry by selecting the menus, recruiting and coordinating volunteers and ensuring that there will be enough food. When someone comes in for a meal or to pick one up for a friend or family member, Jan and her volunteers take their name and any prayer requests, stopping to pray for their needs if they are urgent. This brings a personal Christ-like touch to the ministry so that it is more than just a free meal handed out impersonally.

Jan recently showed me her most recent effort in ministering to our neighbors. She had posted pictures and names of regular “clients” on the kitchen wall. “This will help us get to know them individually,” she said with a smile.

This practical, hands-on approach to ministering the adopted life of God to others is beginning to bear fruit. Relationships are being built. As those relationships have grown, the members have invited their new friends upstairs, and some of them have come to worship. Everyone gets to experience the blessings of sharing in the adopted life of Father, Son and Spirit in the community of shared meals and prayer, and almost all leave smiling. Whether they worship with us or not, the ministry of Christ to the needy, homeless and hurting is bearing fruit and growing, and people’s lives are being blessed. This is the family of God in action. ☪

"I don't know what you've told your family, but if you call me back and say that you never want to hear from me again, **I am fine with that.**"

bit of genealogical information, about Mother. I went to their online site and put in Mother's name. 10 hits. The first one I picked showed a woman of the right age, her husband's name and other information. The number of siblings, dates and sexes were right. I could hardly believe it.

As I went up and down the genealogy information I was floored that everything matched prior to 1965. I asked my wife, Susie, to look at the information and she said, "Tim, this has got to be her." I called Momma and Daddy, who lived just down the street, and while explaining the find to Daddy, Susie said, "Hey Tim, they're in the phone book."

Susie and I went to my parents' house and showed them what we had. "Timmy, this has got to be her," Daddy said. "What are you going to do?" Susie asked. "Well, it's too late to call tonight, so I guess I'll call her tomorrow."

I called the next morning. I wanted to come off as non-threatening as possible when I introduced myself, so I thought I'd state a church affiliation.

"Hello?"

"Genevieve Halvorsen?"

"This is she."

"Mrs. Halvorsen, I'm Tim Poe, a deacon with the local Worldwide Church of God, and I would like to ask you some questions."

"OK."

"Did you have a child on August 15, 1965?"

Dead air for about 20 seconds.

Finally, "Yes, I did."

"Mrs. Halvorsen, I am that child."

Stunned silence.

"I don't know what you have told your family or not told them, and I don't want to hurt you or your family in any way. But I have an 18-month-old daughter. Every time I take her to the doctor and they ask me about my family's medical history, I have to say I don't know because I'm adopted."

"I don't know if I can open that can of worms right now," a breaking voice said.

"I don't know what level of contact you're willing to have, but let me just give you my name and phone number. Please think about it for a couple of weeks and call me back. Then, if you say you never want to hear from me again, I am fine with

Lopsided Grace



It's been said there are only about seven stories in the whole world, and the storyline of every book or movie is simply a variation of one of them. The most common storyline is the battle between good and evil and usually features a savior figure.

One familiar story is that of King Arthur, Guinevere and Camelot. It's a utopian setting until a bit of evil enters the scene in the form of temptation. The queen is seduced by Lancelot, the king's best knight. When the king discovers their infidelity, he is faced with a painful choice: abandoning the law or the death of his beloved Guinevere. But he knows her death is the only action that will satisfy the law and serve justice.

The tale of Arthur and his queen comes in many versions, but parts of it remain constant: just as Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden, Guinevere gave in to temptation, messed up and needed to be saved.

But here's where Camelot diverges from the original story and the truth. While Arthur agonized over the decision to let the love of his life die and serve justice or let her go and negate the law, God's decision and plan were clear from the beginning. Unlike Arthur, God is not subject to the law, rather he created it. He in no way agonized over balancing the scales of justice because he himself is justice. His plan to die in our place wasn't about fulfilling any requirements of the law.

Some look at grace and see a great balancing act, with mercy on one side and God's holiness on the other, as if he has set limits on how much he can forgive. What Jesus did is sometimes called the Great Exchange, which makes it sound like a business transaction instead of the greatest act of love ever performed.

Humanly speaking, we think everything has to work out evenly and be fair. Remember the parable of the workers in the vineyard who began at dawn? They received the same pay as those who showed up at the end of the workday. To us, this seems quite unfair and even a bit extravagant. But God doesn't use scales of justice like humanity does. God's love and grace are outrageously unfair. When Jesus went to the cross, everyone was forgiven. Everyone was invited to the eternal banquet with the Father, Son and Spirit. No sin is too great to be wiped out. No one is beyond help. No one is out of his reach and no one must be punished as a way of balancing grace and justice.

If God were to use scales, one side would be up in the air and the other resting on the table. How can grace be so lopsided? His love and grace far outweigh even his own laws to the point of seeming like the ultimate lack of balance. Lucky for us and unlike King Arthur, God is more powerful than the law. He uses a different scale, a scale of mercy balanced only with more love and grace. **co**

She said, “I wish it had never happened.” I quipped “well, my family and I have a different perspective on that.”
We all laughed.

that. I would like to get some medical information, but even if you are not willing to part with it, I understand. I don't want to hurt you or your family in any way.”

She took down my number and said a terse goodbye. I turned to Susie and told her I was at peace. Even if she never called back, at least I had found her. I was pretty sure that chapter of my life was closed. It was really a new beginning.

The phone rang at 9 a.m. the next morning. It was Mother. The resulting phone call was a conversation filled with questions of, “How did you find me?” “Where do you live?” “When can we schedule a meeting?” Then she said, “I don't have detailed medical information about your father.”

We met a month later. Mother came to our home, and the awkwardness quickly wore off as we pelted each other with questions. It turns out we had never lived more than a mile apart during my childhood. She was active in the local Catholic church, and so was my adoptive family, but the parish dividing line ran between our homes, so we were in different parishes. She had become close to a number of the Benedictine priests and monks at the high school I attended. She told me I was taken away from her so that she didn't even know what sex I was. She told me that she had prayed for me every day of my life, and that since she didn't know the sex she prayed for Tommy. I went by Timmy as a child. At one point, while telling the story of the pain she had gone through, she said, “I wish it had never happened.” I quipped, “Well, my family and I have a different perspective on that.” We all laughed.

Mother told of her two other children and how her daughter had graduated from Armstrong State College in Savannah with a degree in mathematics.

“I was there in the math program at that time, but I can't put a face to her name.”

As Mother looked, she realized she hadn't brought a picture of her children. Then a more serious subject came up. “You need to get some cancer screenings. Cancer runs in our family,” Mother warned.

Goodbyes were said. A tentative promise of a dinner meeting was made.

I was floored by the possibility of being acquainted with my



Top: Susie and Tim at Freedom Church in 2009. Above: Tim and Susie's wedding, August 2, 1992

sister and not knowing she was my sister.

A few weeks later Susie and I were waiting in the foyer of a Japanese steakhouse with Mother and Stepfather. Mother mentioned that my name rang a bell with her daughter, but she couldn't put a face with it. My brother and his fiancée walked in, and we met them for the first time. The door opened again, and in a glance my sister and I simultaneously burst out laughing, immediately recognizing each other. My sister was the cute preppy blonde with whom I had shared several math and engineering classes. We had studied together at school and not infrequently shared down time between classes in the cafeteria as campus friends. “We could end up on *Jerry Springer*,” my sister laughed.

Momma and Daddy became friends with Mother and Stepfather. Stepfather died a few years ago, but not before we all became close. After about our third dinner together, Stepfather took me aside and said, “Thank you for finding her. You'll never know what a difference you have made.” My mind immediately went back to the stories from the adoption websites. There is peace where there had not been peace. In the words of my daughter Katie, when she was 8, “You're lucky, you have two mommas and daddies.” I am indeed a lucky man. **co**

Chosen for Internship Relationship

By Carrie Smith

The Greek definition for adoption comes from two words meaning “to place as a descendant.” This means a person not originally from a family is placed into that family and included as a descendant, forever a part of the generations to come. This adoption is a choice made by the parents or head of the household. The English definition, “to take by choice into a relationship,” fits well with the Greek. I have come to appreciate this understanding of adoption, as explained in God’s Word and as it applies to my life in Christ and recently, as it applies to my pastoral internship.

In many ways, my experience with the Grace Communion International Pastoral Internship Program was like an adoption process. I was “put into the system” and did not know the outcome—where I would go or exactly what I would do. I did know God was running the system, so I trusted his guidance and direction to lead me where he wanted me to go.

His direction was west, and I ended up in Lemon Grove, near San Diego, California. Mark and Anne Stapleton of Cornerstone Community Church were asked to give me a home, and they said yes; choosing to build a relationship with me. I immediately felt included and accepted by Mark and Anne, but I was not so sure how the congregation would feel about me. I quickly found there was no need to worry. The members (family) of Cornerstone were quick to show their agreement with Mark and Anne’s decision to choose me and adopt me as their own. I became a part of their family because they chose to open their hearts and homes to me.

I hadn’t even been in town for 24 hours before I joined in as “one of their own” at a Women2Women, Girls’ Night Out event. I remember walking toward the house and being embraced by every woman I met along the way—there were 14 ladies there! Their joy and excitement in being together and in welcoming me was contagious, and I can’t stop smiling as I treasure the memory in my heart! It was an incredible welcome and a forecast of the joy we would share in the coming months together.

To further welcome me, Mark and Anne’s daughter, Megan, gave me her bed until I had a more permanent home. I was looking for a nice, small apartment, but God had more in store. He gave me George and Marguerite Casey. They opened their home to me and made me part of their family. More than just a place to call my own, they became a family of my own. We

“adopted” each other and began an amazing journey together.

In the months that followed, I made the most of every occasion to get to know my Cornerstone family. Each visit, conversation and event gave me an opportunity to learn something more about each family member. As they shared with me, I also began to open up and share my life, including my quirks, with them. Although life was always changing, and each week brought new adventures and challenges, we got into a rhythm of being and doing; coming together to encourage one another, for discipleship, learning and fun. Our passion for sharing God’s love became a shining light in Lemon Grove as we worked together in the community, at SEP SoCal (summer camp) and transitioning into a new and different weekly worship gathering.

Mark, Anne and my Cornerstone family adopted me “as I was” and probably weren’t quite sure what to expect when I arrived. But, just as God encourages us to grow in him and wants to see our hearts change, Cornerstone helped me grow into

God wants us to experience an adopted relationship with him so we can share the good news of that relationship with others.

more of who God’s created me to be. They worked with me; they allowed me to try new things, to mess up and try again, and they spoke words of encouragement as they saw God working in me. There aren’t enough words to express my gratitude for all they did during our time together.

I see strong parallels with God’s plan of adoption for each and every one of us. He works with us, he allows us to try new things, to mess up and try again, and he is constantly speaking words of encouragement to us. He wants us to experience being in an adoptive relationship with him so we can then share the good news of that inclusive relationship with others.

Although my internship is complete and I am no longer in California, I praise God whenever I think about my internship “adoption” experience. Just like I know I will always have a home and family in California, I also know I always have a home with God, who adopted me to be his beloved and precious daughter. ☪

My Most Unforgettable Senior

By Neil Earle

Adoption comes in many forms and guises. While used almost as shorthand for the Christian experience with God (Ephesians 1:5), it also has a practical application flowing from that great Christian virtue of friendship.

Four years ago I met a 90-year-old man who was still running his one-man business enterprise that he had started in 1946. A superb photographer, he had supplied wholesome, photogenic talent for the advertising, entertainment and Christian journalism industries on both coasts, from *Life* magazine to *Seventeen*.

If there is any one word that describes Jim (not his real name), it is “entrepreneur.” He started his business at the recommendation of Cecil B. de Mille’s brother after working on a movie with John Wayne and ace director John Ford at the end of World War II. A great judge of character and a fine photographer, Jim has helped train three Miss USAs, a Miss America and six Miss Californias, along with 10 Rose Queens and 57 Rose Princesses for the annual Pasadena, California, New Year’s gala.

I met Jim when a mutual friend asked me to help him write his autobiography. That was in 2009, and the book has been duly written. Along the way I developed a productive, beneficial friendship with one of the most interesting people I have met. It hasn’t always been smooth sailing, but the relationship has settled into twice-monthly meetings over lunch in some of our favorite eateries in Hollywood and Burbank, Jim’s old stomping ground.

There have been a couple of times when Jim’s injuries from falling or a lack of proper nutrition have put his health at risk. But he keeps bouncing back. I have derived great moral and morale benefits from seeing that this 94-year-old is interested—genuinely interested—in me, my wife, our life’s experiences and especially my 41 years as a minister.

There’s a good reason for Jim’s interest in ministry. He has been Head Usher at his local Roman Catholic church for 37 years and shows up at 9:15 each Sunday morning come rain or shine, even with the occasional cracked rib.

In spite of serving as Head Usher all those years, Jim rarely

got the chance to sit down and talk with his parish priest, so we have regular conversations about the “process” of church, how ministers think, what they are really like in private, how they feel “called.” I often say to him, “Jim, you are asking questions no one else seems interested in or has the time for,” as I proceed to give him my take on life in the goldfish bowl known as ministry.

Over many forays with my older friend to restaurants, banks and Auto Club offices, Jim has taught me the art of patience. I have had to learn to slow down and live in the moment. “This is where we’re all headed if we’re lucky enough to live so long,” I think to myself as I help Jim navigate leaving the car, climbing the steps to a diner, finding a seat without a long wait—a situation that often sets off his fiery temper. I pity the poor hostess when that happens, but his temper reminds me he is still actively engaged in life. And what a life it has been!

Being a history teacher in addition to a pastor, I am impressed that this is a man whose life has spanned most of the 20th century. His experiences during the Great Depression and tales of how his mother scrimped and scrounged to keep food on the table breathe life into what could be a dull chapter out

His life’s career of helping shape, mold and motivate almost 1000 young women may be his greatest life achievement.

of a history textbook. I encourage him that his written account can help people struggling with today’s uncertain economy. But it is his life’s career of helping shape, mold and motivate almost 1000 young women without a hint or whisper of scandal along the way that may be his greatest life achievement. The esteem they have for him is perhaps best shown by the many poems and letters they have sent him over the years.

Jim is clearly from another era, another time, but his searching questions about life in the ministry have helped me reflect more deeply on my own calling and life with God. I’ve learned a lot from this 94-year-old devout Catholic who has become a steady friend and who is certainly my most unforgettable senior citizen. ☪

The Good Samaritan Revealed



One of the best parts of my job as a Regional Pastor with Grace Communion International is to visit our churches. Church visits are vital for me to see firsthand what is happening in the lives of our pastors and members, and I gain an enormous amount of encouragement and inspiration from these visits.

Once in a while a pastor asks me to give the sermon. Lately, I have been giving an interactive message from Luke 10:25-37 about the story of the Good Samaritan. We read through the story from three different translations, and on the third reading the members are asked to consider which character in the story they relate to the most; which character reflects their personality and life experiences. Then we break into five groups representing the five players in the story.

The Good Samaritan is much like a paramedic who moves into danger to rescue others and doesn't bother with issues of gender or race or what sin was committed.

Before we continue, think for a moment about the concept of heroes and villains. In our western culture we are preconditioned to think in terms of good guys and bad guys—we want to honor and celebrate the heroes, and we long to catch and punish the villains. Jesus turns the Jewish world upside down by portraying a despised non-Jew as the “heroish” example of a good neighbor. (As much as this is an important factor in the story, stay tuned for a twist at the end.)

The people who identify with the lawyer who asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” are brave enough to confess that they are detail people who want to know the requirements. They are wired to need clarity and are not shy about asking hard questions.

I lump the priest and Levite together as they represent the religious order of Judaism. The church members who see themselves in this light admit they are reluctant to get involved—sometimes out of fear or caution, and sometimes because they are focused on their destination and don't want to become distracted.

Some church members identify with the victim because of various degrees of abuse they have suffered in their lives.

One member said he liked identifying with the victim because of the rescue and nurturing restoration outcome.

I have been surprised how many members relate to the obscure innkeeper. They are open to help when a situation is brought to their attention, and they are happy to serve beyond first aid to provide long-term convalescent care. The groups liken this example to the mother's role in the family and to the pastoral care received in church.

Many identify with the Good Samaritan. Their hearts are moved by the love of God to reach out with compassion to others in need or peril. The Good Samaritan is much like a paramedic who moves into danger to rescue others and doesn't bother with issues of gender or race or even the matter of “What sin did this person commit to land in such a predicament?”

It would be easy to stop here and surmise that the religious people are heartless bad guys, and the wandering Samaritan who has a heart to do the right thing is the good guy to emulate. However, the story goes much deeper.

Each character has something worthy of consideration and validation. Is it okay to be a detailed

person who desires clarity? Is it acceptable to be cautious and focused on what is in front of you? Is it okay to be a person who engages only after being invited to do so? Is there any one of us who has not needed rescuing? It takes all types of personalities to make up the family of God, and we are all in this human experience together.

The real twist to the story is that the Good Samaritan is a Jesus figure. This is the deeper lesson. Who is the great rescuer? Who can effectually disinfect and heal humanity? Who provides an open account for the provision for our needs? The Good Samaritan, Jesus is “the who” we all need—whether we are the victims, the religious folks, the cautious people, the daring people or the nurturing people. For us to join in the good work of the Good Samaritan, we must first be joined to the Good Samaritan—then it is our pleasure to participate with him!

It is Jesus who saves us and it is Jesus I continue to discover as I visit GCI churches and interact with the wonderful church members who teach me.

This is Greg Williams reporting from the field! 



Experiencing Spiritual Direction

By Dustin Lampe

God's love is real, yet the Christian walk is both a roller coaster and a lazy river, thrilling and peaceful. It is both a wild ride and quiet rest. "If God is for us, who can be against us? ... Christ Jesus ... is interceding for us" (Romans 8:31bb, 34a, c. English Standard Version throughout). These words of promise are written to remind us that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-39). Yet the man who said this, Paul, also said, "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing" (Romans 7:19).

Paul was in Christ, but was nevertheless a man who still had "sin that dwells within" (Romans 7:20). His life confirms what all of us experience in our personal walks with Christ.

We relate to Paul and have no problem saying, "I hear you, brother." We groan with frustration and we shout with triumph as followers of Christ on this earth. Christians realize that every bit of triumph comes from the grace freely given by Christ. The faithfulness of the Son works faith in us. The faith we receive from the Son involves what we like to call "a spiritual journey."

I have found a place where we as believers can articulate and share both of these movements in our lives. It is a way that we can get in touch with God and with what he is doing through prayerful encounter with a person who is mature in the faith. Spiritual direction is a practice that helps us experience renewal and learn to be more aware of God's activity in our lives. It helps us get in touch with God.

Far from being a dull work of introspection or examination, spiritual direction helps bring about renewal and awareness. Some of what we discover hurts a little and some of it feels good, but all of spiritual direction is designed to encourage the faithful

to press on in their walk with God.

I have been in spiritual direction for more than a year. I currently meet with a wise older Christian (who is trained in spiritual direction) once a month, and during that time I sense God's Holy Spirit moving powerfully. We anticipate God, and he shows up. Through the process, I come in touch with much of what God is doing and much of what I am doing to hinder God. My eyes are often opened to things that I was simply unaware of. It sounds a little funny, but recently I discovered why I was so impressed with the hippie movement (or what it stood for to me). I discovered that I love freedom and I love stepping out of the mainstream, and this has a personal and intimate connection with many of my childhood relationships and experiences. I delighted in this revelation because it showed me how God had wired me, and had been working in me from early on in life to be for "the down and outs in the world." This delight went far beyond words! Does not the most ecstatic intimacy go beyond words? This was my most recent "charismatic encounter."

Spiritual direction is not just for those beginning the Christian life. It is also helpful for those who are mature, those

Spiritual direction is a practice that helps us experience renewal and learn to be more aware of God's activity in our lives.

who have a solid foundation and are hoping to build on that foundation. Spiritual direction can play a vital role for those in spiritual leadership. As a spiritual leader, one is confronted with many temptations, pride, vanity, envy, anger, sloth and similar struggles with the flesh. As we seek to share the deep love of God with people in multiple ways, we need to have a deep experience of God moving in and through us. Spiritual direction facilitates and encourages this life-flow from God in ourselves so we are better prepared to share God's love with others. **co**

Hungry for More?

Have you ever come to a point in your Christian life when prayer and study were no longer satisfying? They used to work well for you, but they no longer seem as meaningful. Many Christians experience that and hunger and thirst for more. They are not quite sure what they want, except a deeper more personal relationship with God. The good news is there are ways to revitalize our relationship with God. There are ways to create sacred spaces for the Lord to enter and help us to abide with him in more intimate ways. Welcome to our series on spiritual formation.

When was the last time you felt hungry? I mean really hungry and you couldn't wait to get a bite to eat. We all know what that mind-body sensation is like. If we don't eat or drink for a long period of time, we are likely to experience serious health consequences.

In Scripture, food is often associated with spiritual values in life. The central observance of the Christian faith is Holy Communion, in which simple food items such as wine and bread carry profound spiritual meaning. John 6:56-57 records Jesus making this amazing statement: "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just



centuries of church history, spiritual rhythms have been employed to sustain and deepen our life-giving relationship with God. Many of them are being "re-discovered" today, and Christians

very nature is communal as Father, Son and Spirit. One time-honored method that has helped many people is the practice of Spiritual Direction. This approach to spiritual formation enables Christians to accompany one another in learning to discern God's present-moment activity in their lives and to articulate ways of appropriately responding to what God is saying and doing. (See the accompanying article, "Experiencing Spiritual Direction," by Dustin Lampe. It provides personal testimony to the value of entering into this kind of relationship with a spiritual director.)

Ruth Haley Barton, in *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*, says that the truest thing about us is our desire for God. Are you in touch with your deepest desire? Are you hungry for more of God in your life? This series of articles in *Christian Odyssey* on spiritual formation and spiritual direction will help you appease your spiritual appetite. Articles will include such topics as: living in the present moment with God, prayer that transforms, spiritual reading of Scripture, embracing and surrendering to the love of God, the gift of being yourself in Christ, and many others.

We hope to not only stimulate a hunger for more of God in your life, but also to satisfy that hunger as we journey together in this series. I believe this is God's desire for all of us. His invitation is to "Open your mouth and taste, open your eyes and see—how good God is. Blessed are you who run to him" (Psalm 34:8, *The Message*). **co**

"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me."

as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me."

What does it mean to "feed" on Jesus? He gives us an indication as he addresses the church in Revelation 3:20, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me." We can feed on Jesus by responding to his offer of entering into intimate fellowship with him. And he tells us that if we remain (abide) in him, we will bear much fruit, for without him we can do nothing of significant spiritual value (John 15:4-5).

So how do we open the door for Jesus to come in so that we can dine with him and he with us? Down through

who know and practice them are able to experience the presence of Jesus in new (to them) and spiritually transforming ways. Spiritual disciplines are not another item to check off on our Christian "to do" list. When practiced properly, they flow from the heart of God within us, drawing us ever closer to him. That is why Jesus said, "You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat (Matthew 5:6, *The Message*). This appetite leads us to spiritual formation.

Authentic spiritual formation does not happen in a vacuum. It is in the context of community that we develop and mature to the fullest extent. This is reflective of the triune God, whose

Rejection



When I was a kid, one of the cruelest school practices was choosing teams. Whether it was softball, debate, or whatever, captains were selected. Teachers would then have students stand against the wall while captains took turns choosing who would be on their teams. So everyone knew who was chosen first, second and so on. And everyone knew who was chosen last. To be chosen last was humiliating—a sign of rejection. To feel unwanted is devastating.

We live in a world of rejection. All of us have experienced it in one way or another. Maybe as a shy boy you were turned down for a date. Maybe you applied but didn't get the scholarship for college. Maybe you interviewed but didn't get the job. Maybe you got the job but the company president laughed at your ideas. Maybe your father walked out on your family. Maybe your mother constantly berated you. Maybe you were always the last one chosen for the team. Even worse, maybe they wouldn't even let you play on the team. We can go through life feeling like losers.

Enough rejection can lead to personality disorders like unwarranted fear, feelings of inferiority, anxiety or depression. Rejection can make us feel unwanted, unappreciated, and unloved. It causes us to focus on the negative instead of the positive, impute motives and overreact to simple comments. If someone says, "My, doesn't your hair look nice today," we might think, "What did she mean by that? Is she saying my hair usually looks lousy?"

It can even lead to perceived rejection in other areas of our lives. In other words, we think people are rejecting us when they aren't. This perception becomes our reality—if we think we're losers, we act like losers.

If we have ever felt rejected, we are not alone. Jesus was rejected—by those in his hometown (Matthew 13:54-58), by many of his disciples (John 6:66) and by those he came to save (Isaiah 53:3). Even before Jesus walked among us, God was rejected. After everything God had done for the Israelites, they wanted to be ruled by a king instead of by him (1 Samuel 10:19). Rejection is nothing new.

God, however, created us for acceptance, not rejection. That's why he will never reject us. We might reject God, but he won't reject us. He wants us. Jesus loves us so much he died for us before we even acknowledged him (Romans 5:8). He came not to condemn us but to save us (John 3:17). He will never leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). All we have to do is embrace the God who seeks to embrace us.

The good news is that God has chosen us to be on his team and even part of his family (Acts 10:34-35, Galatians 4:5-7). And it doesn't matter what our skill level is, because if we let Jesus live in us, he'll take care of all that. We are winners, not losers! All we have to do is accept this truth, show up and be ready to participate. So let's join in the game of life. We are valuable members of the winning team. **co**

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