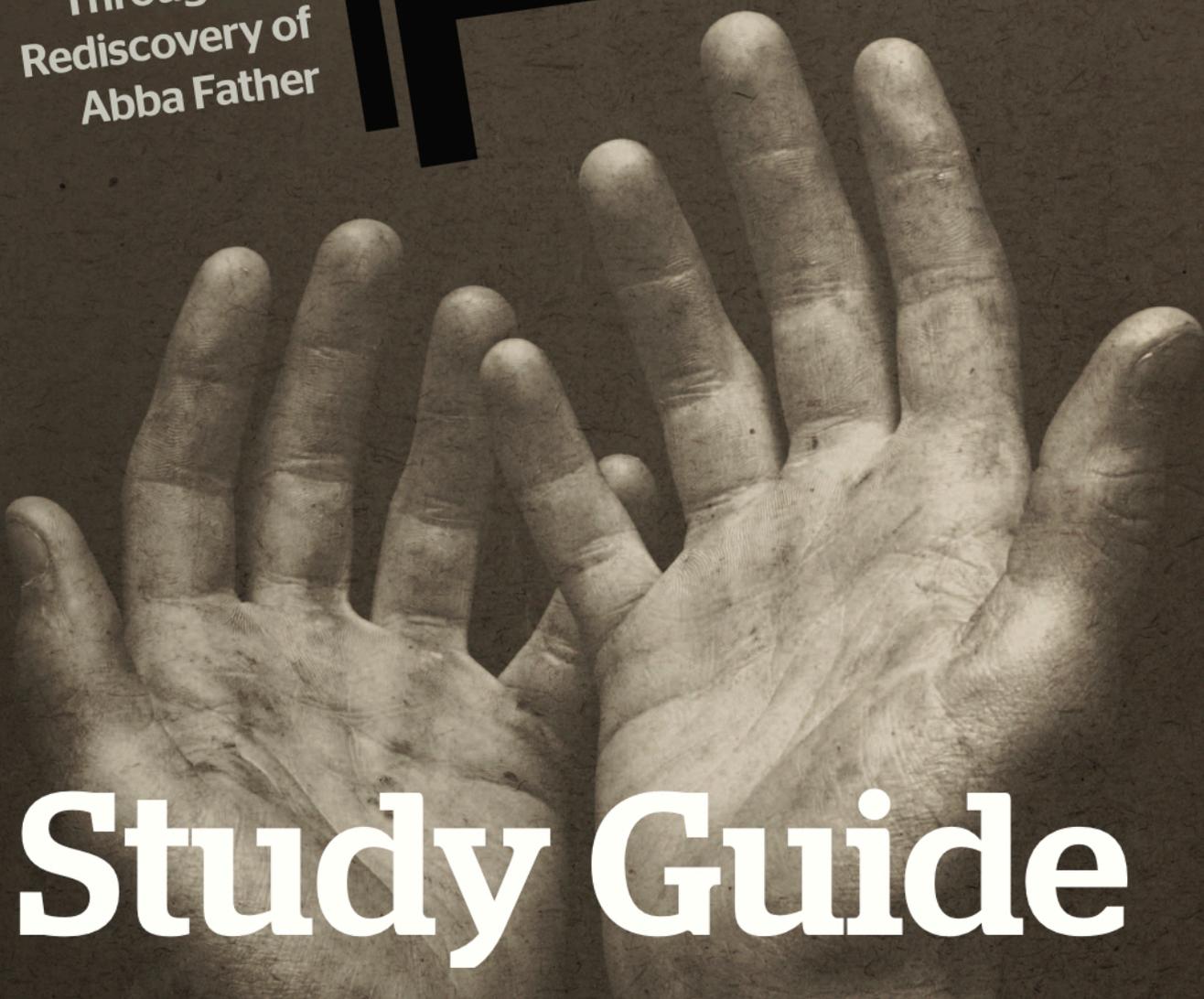


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# RECLAIMING ADOPTION

Missional Living  
Through the  
Rediscovery of  
Abba Father



# Study Guide

A T4A Resource for Churches

# How to Use This Study

This discussion/study guide for *Reclaiming Adoption: Missional Living Through the Rediscovery of Abba Father* is just that: a guide. It is meant to guide, not determine, your group discussions. You may choose to work through the questions in each chapter consecutively or select only a few for your group to discuss. Please feel complete freedom to use this study in a way that best serves the needs of your group.

Although the primary focus of *Reclaiming Adoption* is upon our adoption by God, we encourage you to think about and discuss its implications for and applications to horizontal adoption (our adoption of children) and orphan care. You can do this with any or all of the questions in this study guide, whether they directly refer to orphan care or not. We also encourage you to check out our orphan care and adoption [resource page](http://www.togetherforadoption.org/?page_id=9545) for suggestions on practical ways your church or small group can care for the orphan: [http://www.togetherforadoption.org/?page\\_id=9545](http://www.togetherforadoption.org/?page_id=9545).

Each study concludes with quotations for meditation. You may find it helpful to ask group members to share about which quotations they found most encouraging and insightful.

You are welcome to make as many copies of the study guide as you need. We only ask that you not alter any of its content without permission. If you have any questions about using this guide, please contact [dan.cruver@TogetherforAdoption.org](mailto:dan.cruver@TogetherforAdoption.org).

If your group uses this study guide, could you send us an email simply to let us know ([dan.cruver@TogetherforAdoption.org](mailto:dan.cruver@TogetherforAdoption.org))? Also, any feedback that you can provide about the study would be greatly appreciated.

## About the Authors

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**\*The cover for this study guide (and the book) was designed by Brannon McAllister, a freelance designer who lives in New York City: <http://www.brannonmcallister.com>.**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Study 1 - Adoption of Prodigals</b>	1
Study 1 - Quotations for Meditation	4
<b>Study 2 - Adoption and the Trinity</b>	7
Study 2 - Quotations for Meditation	10
<b>Study 3 - Adoption and the Incarnation</b>	13
Study 3 - Quotations for Meditation	17
<b>Study 4 - Adoption and Union with Christ</b>	21
Study 4 - Quotations for Meditation	24
<b>Study 5 - The Good News of Adoption</b>	27
Study 5 - Quotations for Meditation	29
<b>Study 6 - The Freedom of Adoption</b>	30
Study 6 - Quotations for Meditation	33
<b>Study 7 - Adoption and Missional Living</b>	34
Study 7 - Quotations for Meditation	36
<b>Study 8 - Adoption: The Heart of the Gospel</b>	37
Study 8 - Quotations for Meditation	39
<b>Chapter Outlines</b>	42
<b>Appendix 1 - Additional Questions for Study 7</b>	45
<b>Appendix 2 - What Orphans Need</b>	46
<b>Appendix 3 - Caring for Orphans While Soaked with a Sense of Exile</b>	48
<b>Appendix 4 - Do We Really Have Time for Theology?</b>	50

# Reclaiming Adoption: Missional Living Through the Rediscovery of Abba Father

## CHAPTER 1: ADOPTION OF PRODIGALS

### Study 1

**Chapter Summary:** When Christians hear the word “adoption,” we all too often think first of horizontal adoption, or adoption of children by parents. A right view of the doctrine of vertical adoption – or God’s adoption of prodigals like us, can give us a better understanding of our place in God’s family and our mission in the world.

1. How have you typically viewed adoption in the past?
2. What is the difference between horizontal adoption and vertical adoption?
3. In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, how can the older son be estranged from his father in staying put and keeping his rules?
4. In what times in your life have you resembled the younger son from the Parable of the Prodigal Son? In what times in your life have you resembled the older son?

## CHAPTER 1: ADOPTION OF PRODIGALS

### notes

5. The author states:

*The story of the Bible is that God the Father sent His only true and eternal Son on a mission, and that mission was to bring many wayward and rebellious sons home to glory (Hebrews 2:10). That is the Story behind the story of the Prodigal Sons. That is the only story that gives our stories any meaning or significance (p. 11).*

Where have you sought meaning or significance in your life apart from the Gospel?

6. When in history did God create the concept of adoption?

7. The author states:

*Redemption is not the end of God's work. Adoption as sons is (p. 13).*

How does this statement line up with your views of God's ultimate plan for us and the world?

8. According to the author, what is the ultimate purpose of horizontal adoption?

9. According to the author, what does it mean to live life missionally? How does this compare to the way you have typically seen missional living?

## CHAPTER 1: ADOPTION OF PRODIGALS

*notes*

10. What does the author mean when he talks about looking at the world with a wide-angle lens versus a narrow lens? With which lens do you look at the world? How does your lens for looking at the world affect the way you live?
  
11. Do you focus on your guilt and failures or do you focus on the grace of God? How does this affect the way you live? How does this affect your ability to live life on mission in general? How should this affect your ability to care for orphans?
  
12. According to the author, what are some of the results of failing to gain a biblical understanding of God's Fatherhood? What are the implications for our lives if we fully understand and embrace God's Fatherhood?

## STUDY 1: Quotations for Meditation

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**Read in conjunction with pages 11-15 in *Reclaiming Adoption*:** “The term [adoption] stems from the Hellenistic world of law; its content, however, must not be inferred from the various Roman or Greek legal systems, nor from the adoption ritual of the Hellenistic mystery cults, but must rather be considered against the Old Testament, redemptive-historical background of the adoption of Israel as son of God” (Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, pp. 197-198).

**Read in conjunction with pages 11-15 in *Reclaiming Adoption*:** “All I can suggest here is that we first understand Paul’s use of *huiothesia* (adoption) in its biblical context. Only then may we begin to ascertain which, if any, aspects of the first-century practices of adoption coalesce with Paul’s use of *huiothesia* and are demanded by it. By tackling the question in this manner, we may do justice to the circumstances out of which Paul wrote, and steer clear of foisting on the biblical text ideas arbitrarily extracted from Graeco-Roman forms of adoption. It is important to remember that for all Paul’s awareness of the world he lived in, closest to his thought, and most determinative of it, was the history and faith of God’s people. Any verifiable allusions he makes to Graeco-Roman forms of adoption relate, I suggest, to the doctrine’s application. But what [must be] of particular concern [to us] is the basic narrative of redemptive history” (Dr. J. R. Trumper, “A Fresh Exposition of Adoption: I. An Outline”).

**Read in conjunction with the section “Before Time: Ephesians 1:4-5” on page 12 in *Reclaiming Adoption*:** “Love of a parent for a child is mysterious, powerful; it is edifying and restorative; it is securing and enabling. Likewise but in divine splendor, grasping God’s love is always invigorating and encouraging. When we begin to ponder the fact that God’s adoptive grace is rooted in his pre-temporal decision to love us, typified in his elective love of Israel in the Old Covenant, brought to us fully in the loving obedience of his Son, applied to us in the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and consummated in us at the consummation of the ages, we can only be drawn to worship, gratitude, and awe. God’s adoptive love then is motivation for us to love Him, serve Him, and to emulate Him. As hymn writer Isaac Watts put it, ‘Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all’” (excerpt from a Together for Adoption interview with Dr. David Garner:

<http://www.togetherforadoption.org/wp-content/media/interview-with-dr-dave-garner.pdf>).

“A great number of people have temperaments that predispose them to either a life of moral conformity or of self-discovery. Some, however, go back and forth, trying first one strategy and then the other in different seasons of their lives. Many have tried the moral conformity paradigm, found it crushed them, and in a dramatic turn moved into a life of self-discovery. Others are on

## STUDY 1: Quotations for Meditation (con't)

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the opposite trajectory. Some people combine both approaches under the roof of the same personality. There are some traditional-looking elder brothers that, as a release valve, maintain a secret life of younger brother behavior” (Tim Keller, *The Prodigal God*, p. 32).

“In her novel *Wise Blood*, Flannery O’Connor says of her character Hazel Motes, ‘there was a deep, black, wordless conviction in him that the way to avoid Jesus was to avoid sin’” (*Ibid.*, p. 37).

“We flee, but God pursues us. While we are on the [run], we think we are free—but, all the while, life is unraveling. Here is the real problem in all our running. When we refuse to be found by our Creator, we are in exile from who we were made to be. We strive to make a home in a foreign land [like the prodigal], and it never quite works. The longer we stay away, though, the less memory we have of our true homeland. The longer we run, the greater the chaos grows. And when humanity collectively refuses God, this disharmony breeds distorted relationships, injustice and, ultimately, violence. All things betray us, as [Francis] Thompson wrote, when we have betrayed our God” (Gerrit Scott Dawson, *Called by a New Name*, p. 67).

“Why will we be given new bodies? According to the early Christians, the purpose of this new body will be to rule wisely over God’s new world. Forget those images about lounging around playing harps. There will be work to do and we shall relish doing it. All the skills and talents we have put to God’s service in this present life—and perhaps too the interests and likings we gave up because they conflicted with our vocation—will be enhanced and ennobled and given back to us to be exercised to his glory . . . If . . . the biblical view of God’s future is of the renewal of the entire cosmos, there will be plenty to be done, entire new projects to undertake” (N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, p. 161).

“The faith which lays claim to justification sets aside the record of our own sin and spiritual achievement and concentrates on ‘the wholly alien righteousness of Christ,’ as Luther would say. It looks away from our imperfection—sins committed and righteous deeds left undone—and fixes its attention on the sinless life and saving death of Jesus. Unrecognized son or pride in works can obscure this view. But the righteousness which makes us ‘accepted in the beloved’ is *his* righteousness, not ours” (Richard F. Lovelace, *Renewal As a Way of Life*, p. 139).

## STUDY 1: Quotations for Meditation (con't)

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“In [the incarnation] the Son of God descended into our house of bondage, and by living out in it a life of perfect obedience to the Father he restored it as the house of God the Father. It was not by being a father that he restored the Father’s house or revealed the Father, but by being a son, and by restoring true sonship to our humanity in his own perfect filial life. Thus into our house of bondage, Jesus brought the freedom of God’s sons and daughters through living a life that broke through the bondage and slavery of our sin into the liberty of a sinless humanity rejoicing in the love and faithfulness of God the Father” (Thomas Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, pp. 121-122).

“Our sonship rests on a love that never began as well as a love that will never end. In eternity before the beginning of time and obviously before the beginning of us, God chose to make us His children. The gospel was not God’s afterthought or even His forethought; it was His eternal thought” (Michael P. V. Barrett, *Complete in Him*, p. 170).

“In our adoption, not only does God guarantee for us the legal rights fixing our standing in His family, but He also brings us ‘home’ to experience all the benefits of sonship. We are not just sons of God ‘on paper’; we are the sons of God in our daily experience. The tragedy is that so many believers continue to live in the orphanage without taking advantage of all that belongs to them” (*ibid.*, p. 181).

“The gospel is God’s drama in which the church participates through witness and worship. Jesus is the principal actor in the theo-drama’s climax. It is as Jesus Christ that the Son goes into the ‘far country’ prior to his ‘home-coming’” (Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, p. 193).

# Reclaiming Adoption: Missional Living Through the Rediscovery of Abba Father

## CHAPTER 2: ADOPTION AND THE TRINITY

### Study 2

**Chapter Summary:** As prodigals, our hearts all too often drift away from God, and toward whatever idols capture our fancy at any given point in time. As we begin to more fully understand the triune nature of God, we become more aware of the community into which He has adopted us, and we are able to break free from our idols, find our affections redirected to the One Who adopted us, and live our lives aligned with His mission in the world.

1. What does the author mean when he says that we live “between the times”?
2. According to Tim Keller’s definition, what are some idols you’ve had in your life – past and present?
3. What does the author mean when he talks about loving the things of the Father rather than the Father Himself? When in your life have you been guilty of that? Are you now? In what way?
4. The author states:

*God’s missional movement into the world is His adoptive plan at work (p. 21).*

Do you agree with that statement? Why or why not? If this is true, what are the implications for your mission in the world?

## CHAPTER 2: ADOPTION AND THE TRINITY

### *notes*

5. The author states:

*So, as wonderful as the story of our adoption is, it is the Story of the Trinity behind it that gives God's work of adoption its ultimate meaning, beauty, and significance (p. 23).*

How does the story of the Trinity give adoption its ultimate meaning, beauty, and significance? Have you ever connected the Trinity with adoption?

6. The author states:

*If that reciprocal love ceased for even a moment, God would cease to be God and the gospel would immediately turn into unimaginably bad news for all of creation (p. 24).*

How would a cessation of love between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit cause the Gospel to turn into bad news for all of creation?

7. If, as 1 Corinthians 13 tells us, love can never turn in upon itself, but always turns out upon other persons, what would you say to our culture's predominant messages that stress individualism almost above all else?

## CHAPTER 2: ADOPTION AND THE TRINITY

*notes*

8. According to the author, why did God create man?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. What was different about how God created man versus how He created everything else? What is the significance of that difference?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. What is the “theology of discomfort”? Do you live by this theology? How? How is Jesus’ coming to Earth the ultimate example of this theology?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
11. We live in a culture that tries to avoid suffering at all costs. How does the Gospel address our constant striving for comfort and ease above all else?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
12. How does our relationship with the Trinity propel us into missional living? How should it propel us to care for orphans who are without hope and home?

## STUDY 2: Quotations for Meditation

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“For the one true God to exist is to exist in a community of undivided Persons from eternity to eternity. For Him to be is to live in personal relationship within Himself. His creative work must always be viewed in light of who He is as Trinity” (Douglas F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1*, p. 177).

“A unipersonal god would not have within himself that eternal love or communion into which he would wish to introduce us. Nor would such a god become incarnate; instead he would instruct us from afar about how we were to live rightly” (Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, p. 249).

“The Love that God is, is not that of solitary inactive or static love, whatever that may be, but the active movement of reciprocal loving within the eternal Being God which is the one ultimate Source of all love. That God is Love means that he is the eternally loving One in himself who loves through himself, whose Love moves unceasingly within his eternal Life as God, so that in loving us in the gift of his dear Son and the mission of his Spirit he loves us with the very Love which he is” (Thomas Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 5).

“The doctrine of the Holy Trinity gives expression to the fact that through Jesus Christ and in his Spirit God has opened himself to us in such a way that in being reconciled to him we lowly sinful creatures may know him, at least in some measure, in the inner relations of his divine Being and have communion with him in his intra-trinitarian Life as Father, Son and Holy Spirit” (*Ibid.*, p. 32).

“By revealing himself in the Lord Jesus Christ as *his* dear Son, God reveals that Fatherhood belongs to his eternal Being, and in giving his Son to be the Savior of the world, he reveals that he loves us to the uttermost with an eternal fatherly love. That is the basic truth that underlies the whole Gospel of salvation from end to end, but, as St. Paul reminds us, it is love which we know only through Christ dwelling in our hearts and through the Holy Spirit who sheds abroad the love of God into our hearts” (*Ibid.*, p. 55).

“As a work of raising up believers to intimate communion with God, salvation [is] nothing other than the extension to conscious creatures of the relations that obtain between the divine persons. That is why the Trinity reveals itself essentially in the work of salvation and that is why the Trinity is the basis on which salvation stands. Only because a triune god exists does one of the divine persons . . . become incarnate, placing his [adopted] human brothers within this relationship as sons to the heavenly Father, or indeed placing his Father within a paternal relationship to [his brothers and sisters]” (Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, p. 248).

## STUDY 2: Quotations for Meditation (con't)

“The very love of the Father for the Son, poured out upon him through the Spirit [at his baptism], is what we as adopted children of the Father are to feel” (Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key*, p. 142).

“Instead of standing between us and the Father as some sort of buffer zone, in Christ we gain access to the Father, enter into the very presence of the Father” (*Ibid.*, p. 142).

“It is a personal union by grace and adoption that enters into the closest and dearest relationship with the Triune God Himself, so that we can say with the Apostle Paul: ‘I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me (Gal. 2:20)’” (Douglas F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1*, p. 309).

“[Jesus] lived the life of the perfect believer, who believed for us, who yielded to God’s faithfulness the perfect response of trust and faith, and who brought to God his Father the perfect response of thankful reception and appropriation. It was for our sakes and in our place that Jesus lived that vicarious life in utter reliance upon God and in laying hold upon his mercy and goodness. Ninety percent of all that Jesus taught about prayer was concerned with petitionary prayer, that prayer of a child asking gifts of its Father. But he was himself that child asking and receiving, seeking and finding, and knocking to find the door of heaven opened to him. It was not for himself that he did that, for what did he the Son of God need that he did not have? It was for us that he lived that life of trust and faith in the Father’s goodness, of believing and appropriating the Father’s bounty, that in him our humanity might receive that for which we blindly ask, find that for which we unwittingly seek, and have opened to us the door of salvation beyond all our expectation” (Thomas Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, p. 125).

“In the incarnation, the Son of God abased himself, substituted himself in our place, interposed himself between us and God the Father, taking all our shame and curse upon himself, not as a third person, but as one who is God himself, God against whom we had sinned and rebelled, and yet as he who is man identified to the utmost with man’s estrangement and disobedience that he might really stand in humanity’s place and work out in himself humanity’s reconciliation. In that he thus took our place of sin and shame and death, he freely gives us his place of holiness and glory and life, that we through his poverty might become rich, that we through his being made sin and a curse for us, might be reconciled to God clothed with his righteousness and stand before God in his person. He came in our name, that we in his name might have access to the presence of the Father and be restored to him as his children” (Thomas Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, p. 151).

## STUDY 2: Quotations for Meditation (con't)

"I've often reflected on the rather obvious thought that when his disciples were about to have the world collapse in on them, our Lord spent so much time in the Upper Room speaking to them about the mystery of the Trinity. If anything could underline the necessity of Trinitarianism for practical Christianity, that must surely be it!" (In his book *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*, Robert Letham shares what Sinclair Ferguson wrote to him in an email, p. 375).

"On the night in which the conflict between the powers of darkness and the Light of the world reached its height, our Lord made his prayers for his church. The high priestly prayer of John 17 forms a majestic conclusion. We overhear the intimacy of Jesus' relationship with his Father and how our lives as his people are taken up into that love. The life of the Father and the Son in the bonds of the Spirit is the context in which the Church has her life and, actually, is the only way the nature of the Church properly can be understood" (Gerrit Scott Dawson, *Given and Sent in One Love*, p. 23).

"The Father sent the Son through the Spirit to enter the world in human flesh and bones. The Son loves his FAther as he has from all eternity but, since the incarnation, he has done so from *inside* our humanity. From his position as the man Jesus, the Son loves his Father and obeys him and rejoices in his love" (*Ibid.*, p. 25).

"Our story is about what happened when the love between Father and Son was fleshed out within our world. As the Son took up our humanity, joining himself to us, our humanity was taken up in the interplay of love between the divine persons" (*Ibid.*, p. 25).

"We, the Church, are a triple gift. We are the gift of the Father to the Son. We are the gift of the Son to the Father. We are the gift of the Spirit to the Father and the Son. In this love of the persons of the Triune God giving us to one another, we are transformed. We were found by the Father who sent his Son to seek us when we were lost. We were called by the Spirit out of the darkness and into the light when he quickened us to new life. We were healed by the touch of the Son when we were broken and battered. We were forgiven in the name and by the loving work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Our hard hearts were replaced with new hearts, with the Triune God who has taken up residence in us, so that we may respond to the love of God and to one another" (*Ibid.*, pp. 27-28).

# Reclaiming Adoption: Missional Living Through the Rediscovery of Abba Father

## CHAPTER 3: ADOPTION AND THE INCARNATION

### Study 3

**Chapter Summary:** When we find ourselves paralyzed by our fears and idolatry and seemingly unable to participate in God's mission in the world, it is often due to an inaccurate view of God and His relationship with us. If we begin to better understand the incarnation of Jesus, and focus on what He accomplished in His life, death, and resurrection for us and in our place, we're better able to look outside of ourselves, live out of this reality, and move outward in love and service toward others.

1. Has fear ever left you paralyzed and unable to follow Jesus? When? How did God bring you out of it?

2. The author states:

*If there are three gods and not one, we could not be assured that what we get with one we also get with the other two. Even if we knew what one of them thought of us, we would always be looking over our shoulder for the other two. Three distinct gods is not good news for sinners (p. 38).*

How does the reality of the Trinity dispel the fear and uncertainty that comes from seeing the three Persons of the Trinity as three distinct gods? How would three separate gods be bad news for sinners?

## CHAPTER 3: ADOPTION AND THE INCARNATION

### notes

3. The author states:

*Practically, this means that we must never think of the Father or seek to relate to Him apart from Jesus (p. 39).*

Do you see your relationship with God the Father as separate from your relationship with Jesus? Why does the author say we don't have a right to do so?

4. What are the implications of us participating in Jesus' "knowing of God as Father"?

5. Do you look at people as image-bearers of God? Do you think of people as sons of God? How might such a view of humanity change how you relate to others?

6. What are the consequences of sin to our relationship with God?

## CHAPTER 3: ADOPTION AND THE INCARNATION

notes

7. James Torrance states:

*He assumes that very humanity which is in need of redemption, and by being anointed by the Spirit in our humanity, by a life of perfect obedience for us, by dying and rising again, our humanity is healed in him (p. 44).*

What does Torrance mean when he says that “our humanity is healed in” Jesus? How might such a view of Jesus and our humanity change the way we relate to a fallen world? How might it shape the way we serve orphans?

8. What do you typically think of when you hear the term “resurrection power”? How does the author define it? How does Jesus’ resurrection power free us to abandon all and follow Him unto death? Is something holding you back from doing just that?

9. Have you ever felt as if you had lost the very presence of God? What happened? What are the consequences of sin to our relationship with God?

## CHAPTER 3: ADOPTION AND THE INCARNATION

### notes

10. The author states:

*As the God-man, not only did Jesus become my obedience, my faith, my prayer, my love to the Father, my feelings of joy in the Father, but He also became my forsakenness—without ceasing to be God (p. 46).*

Do you find your view of Jesus to be too small at times? How have you put Jesus into a box? How have you limited Him in your mind and life? What would it take for you to see Jesus as the author does?

11. During your own times of struggle, do you look to Jesus, or do you look to yourself, to get you back on track? What is the danger of looking to yourself in terms of your ability to live a life missionally?

12. The author states:

The good news of the Gospel is that Jesus has done it all for us and in our place. Only as we believe and live in the reality of what he has done are we progressively freed to live truly missional and radically obedient lives in a broken world.

How do we live in the reality of what Jesus has done? How does that free us to live “truly missional and radically obedient lives” in the midst of the world’s brokenness? How does it free us to sacrificially care for orphans?

## STUDY 3: Quotations for Meditation

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“Jesus is not man becoming God, but God becoming man—God incarnate, God descending into human flesh, coming into it from outside and from above, in order to be one of us, and to be one with us” (Thomas Torrance, *When Christ Comes and Comes Again*, p. 33).

“The disease at the core of our humanity is beyond our skill to heal. God, however, did not leave us alone to wallow in the devices and desires of our own hearts. The LORD our God determined that he would bring salvation to a helpless race. He would do so by coming himself to his people . . . His arrival in our midst was our salvation. The LORD himself came to save us. He came to us as a *man* in Jesus Christ, who took upon himself the sin and separation of humanity, made it his own in the terrible moment of dereliction on the cross, and then healed the breach . . . Thus, in his union with us, Jesus healed us. By becoming what we are, the eternal Son of God could act from within our humanity for the sake of all humanity. The one who stands as creator in relationship to all human beings did a creative work within the humanity he took from us. In turn, joined to him by the Spirit, united to his new humanity, we may thus receive the benefits of all he accomplished in our flesh” (Gerrit Scott Dawson, “Far as the Curse is Found,” *An Introduction to Torrance Theology*, pp. 59-61).

“Take Zacchaeus, that mean and hard-hearted extortioner who did not have it in him to be a Christian; he was so enslaved to his miserly greed and so tightly bound by his own selfishness that he was not free to make any decision to follow Jesus even if he wanted to. But then Jesus took him by surprise, and announced to him the good news: ‘This day I must abide at they house.’ Jesus announced that He had already decided to enter into the home and life of Zacchaeus, and then, for the first time, beyond any imaginable possibility, Zacchaeus found himself free to follow Jesus, free and able to have Jesus Christ in his home and his heart: he was able to make a decision for Christ, because Christ had already made a decision on his behalf” (Thomas Torrance, *When Christ Comes and Comes Again*, p. 35).

“Jesus lived a fully human life, but all through that human life it was God who was living it for our sakes that He might reconcile us to Himself and gather our frail human life into union with His divine life. The whole life of Jesus was the life of God with us sinners, God taking our place and doing for us what we could not do for ourselves, God laying hold of our rebellious will, making it His own and bending it back from its disobedience to obedience, from its defiance to love. And so we hear Jesus praying in Gethsemane, ‘Not my will, but thine be done’” (Thomas Torrance, *When Christ Comes and Comes Again*, pp. 42-43).

“When Jesus came to the grave of Lazarus some four days after his friend’s death, he prayed with a confidence that we may sometimes lack: ‘So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, *Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me*’ (John 11:41-42). The picture that we have been able to build up is this. The Father is well pleased with Jesus’ sonship (Luke 3:22), and consequently he always hear him (John 11:41-42; 17:1-26). On this our confidence is grounded, because the basis of all prayer is the sonship of Jesus. Now, and this is the important point, we actually share Jesus’ sonship with him by faith. How? God puts believers *into* Christ, so that everything that belongs to Christ’s perfect humanity belongs to us. We have his righteousness

## STUDY 3: Quotations for Meditation (con't)

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(Romans 3:21-22); his is the life that is presented to God so that we are accepted (Col. 3:4); he is our righteousness before God (1 Corinthians 1:30). Justification by faith means that God looks on us and regards us with the same acceptance with which he regards Jesus. Now, we have a man in heaven *for us*, who always lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25)” (Graeme Goldsworthy, *Prayer and the Knowledge of God*, pp. 49-50).

“Integral to the humanity of Jesus was his call for faith. Faith is not only belief or mental assent but personal trust in all areas of life and being. Again we see the uniqueness of Christ in his call to faith in both God the Father and in himself. Both the Father and the Son act in response to faith (Matt 9:22; Mark 10:52; Luke :20; etc.). Faith is the most fundamental human activity in relation to God; subjecting oneself wholly to God (Father, Son, and Spirit) is the most truly human act possible. And it is so because faith is one of the most basic activities of the incarnate Son [Matt 4]. Thus, the faith of believers is not their own but the vicarious faith of the incarnate Son for them. Autonomy from God has always been the original sin, the dehumanizing force in creation. The incarnation revealed both the why and the how of human fulfillment which are bound up with living in dependence (faith) on God. This is behind one of the dominant themes on the lips of Jesus, as for instance when he said, ‘He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it’ (Matt 10:39). This perspective gives coherence to the [Passover] mystery; rather than being the tragic end to a human life it was the portal through which humanity can realize true life” (Myk Habets, *The Anointed Son*, p. 250).

“I believe that it is concentration upon the *vicarious humanity* of Christ in the incarnation and atonement, in death and resurrection, that is particularly important for us today. It is curious that evangelicals often link the substitutionary act of Christ only with his death, and not with his incarnate person and life—that is dynamite for them! The thereby undermine the radical nature of substitution, what the New Testament calls *katallage*, Christ in our place and Christ for us in every respect. Substitution understood in this radical way means that Christ takes our place in all our human life and activity before God, even in our believing, praying, and worshipping of God, for he has yoked himself to us in such a profound way that he stands in for us and upholds us at every point in our human relations before God” (Thomas Torrance, *Preaching Christ Today*, pp. 30-31).

“Only the message that another true and obedient human being has come on our behalf, that he has lived for us the kind of life we should live but can’t, that he has paid fully the penalty we deserve for the life we do live but shouldn’t—only this message can give assurance that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, pp. 83-84).

“In Jesus Christ the Son of God penetrated into the dark depths of our alienated, enslaved and distorted human existence, making it his own in order to heal, sanctify and renew it in himself throughout the whole course of his vicarious human life, death and resurrection and thus restore us to perfect filial [loving] union with God the Father . . . In [Jesus] the dehumanizing breach between man and God has been healed, for he is perfect Man in whom there is no split between what he is and what he ought to be. If to be truly man is to be with God and to be wholly determined in his humanity

## STUDY 3: Quotations for Meditation (con't)

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through fellowship with God, then Jesus Christ is the one true Man for he is perfectly one with God. He is the one Man who is perfectly and completely in the image of God, but he is much more than that—he is the only One who is both the Image and the Reality of God, for in the incarnated Person God and Man, divine and human nature, are inseparably united. Jesus Christ is that, however, precisely as *our* fellow-man, as *our* brother, for it is *our* actual human nature that have been taken up in him and been perfectly united to his Divine Being and Nature . . . For us to be [truly] human, therefor, is to be in Christ” (Thomas Torrance, “The Goodness and Dignity of Man,” *Christ in our Place*, pp. 379-380).

“[Jesus] touched lepers, thereby endangering his own flesh, and placing himself under the same legal judgment they experienced. He shared the table of sinners, emphasizing that he had come to have fellowship with them in order that they might be raised to have fellowship with him. He wept and groaned; he tasted human weakness and fear. ('Never man feared like this Man,' said Martin Luther of our Lord Jesus' loud crying and tears in the Garden of Gethsemane.) He was bewildered by what God was doing in his life ('My God, why have you forsaken me?' Matt. 27:46). His sympathy is not merely verbal, therefore, or theoretical. It is actual, and real. For he is indeed our Brother Savior, our Kinsman Redeemer” (Sinclair Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*, p. 35).

“If God is quite separate from Jesus, then the Cross stands for nothing but unrelieved darkness and despair. But if Jesus Christ is God incarnated, God himself come to be one of us and to make our lost cause his own, then the Cross is something altogether different, the mighty act of God bearing and vanquishing in atoning sacrifice all the wickedness, hatred and violence of mankind” (Thomas Torrance, “The Goodness and Dignity of Man,” *Christ in our Place*, p. 378).

“Jesus, in his incarnation, ‘moved in’ with the poor. He lived with, ate with, and associated with the socially ostracized (Matt. 9:13). He raised the son of the poor widow (Luke 7:11-16) and showed the greatest respect to the immoral woman who was a social outcast (Luke 7:36ff). Indeed, Jesus spoke with women in public, something that a man with any standing in society would not have done, but Jesus also refused to go along with the racism of his culture, making a hated Samaritan the hero of one of his most famous parables (Luke 10:26ff) and touching off a riot when he claimed that God loved Gentiles like the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian as much as Jews (Luke 4:25-27). Jesus showed special concern for children, despite his apostles’ belief that they were not worth Jesus’ time (Luke 18:15) (Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice*, p. 44).

“In Proverbs we see God identifying with the poor symbolically. But in the incarnation and death of Jesus we see God identifying with the poor and marginal literally. Jesus was born in a feed trough. When his parents had him circumcised the offering they made—two pigeons—was that prescribed for the poorest class of people in society. He lived among the poor and the marginalized, who were drawn to him even as the respectable were repulsed by him. We see the kind of life he led when he said, ‘Foxes have holes, birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head’ (Luke 9:58). At the end of his life he rode into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey, spent his last evening in a borrowed room, and when he died he was laid in a borrowed tomb. They cast lots for his only possession, his robe, for there on the cross he was stripped of everything. He died naked and penniless. He had little the world valued and the little he had was taken. He was discarded—thrown away. But only because of Him do we have any hope” (*Ibid.*, pp. 185-186).

## STUDY 3: Quotations for Meditation (con't)

“It is in Jesus Christ, and in him alone, that the real truth of human nature is to be found, for in him God has made good his original claim in creation, when he affirmed the goodness and integrity of man before him. Jesus Christ is the Word by whom, for whom, and in whom we have been created in the image of God, so that in his Incarnation as Immanuel, God with us and for us and in us, he is the key to the secret of our creation and redemption - in him we may now penetrate through all the distortion, depravity and degradation of humanity to the true nature of a man hidden beneath it all” (Thomas Torrance, “The Goodness and Dignity of Man,” *Christ in our Place.*, pp. 376-377).

“In the humanity of Jesus Christ, in his mind and in his life, in the whole obedience of his incarnate being and knowing, we are given not only the revealed knowledge of God but the embodiment of that knowledge in our humanity” (Thomas Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, p. 132).

“We do not rely upon our act of faith, but upon the faith of Christ which undergirds and upholds our faith. But his faith is not in word only; it has been translated into his life and saving action and set forth in the covenant of his Body and Blood . . . Jesus Christ was not only the fulfillment and embodiment of God’s righteousness and holy Act, but also the embodiment of our act of faith and trust and obedience toward God. He stood in our place, taking our cause upon him, also as Believer, as the Obedient One who was himself justified before God as his beloved Son in whom he was well pleased. He offered to God a perfect confidence and trust, a perfect faith and response which we are unable to offer, and he appropriated all God’s blessings which we are unable to appropriate. Through union with him we share in his faith, in his obedience, in his trust and his appropriation of the Father’s blessings; we share in his justification before God. Therefore, when we are justified by faith, this does not mean that it is *our* faith that justifies us, far from it—it is the faith of Christ alone that justifies us, but we in faith flee from our own acts, even of repentance, confession, trust and response, and take refuge in the obedience and faithfulness of Christ—‘Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.’ That is what it means to be justified by faith” (*ibid.*, pp. 159-160).

“In the most radical way, God has adjusted to us—in his incarnation and atonement. In Jesus Christ he became a limited human being, vulnerable to suffering and death. On the cross, he submitted to our condition—as sinners—and died in our place to forgive us. In the most profound way, God has said to us, in Christ, ‘I will adjust to you. I will change for you. I’ll serve you though it means a sacrifice for me.’ If he has done this for us, we can and should say the same to God and others. St. Paul writes, ‘the love of Christ constrains us’ (2 Corinthians 5:14)” (Tim Keller, *The Reason for God*, p. 47).

# Reclaiming Adoption: Missional Living Through the Rediscovery of Abba Father

## CHAPTER 4: ADOPTION AND UNION WITH CHRIST

### Study 4

**Chapter Summary:** We as Christians often find our identity in what roles or responsibilities we fill, instead of in our relationship to Jesus. A right understanding of who Jesus is, and what our relationship is to Him, will lead us to see that it is not we who engage in our mission on earth in an effort to imitate Jesus; rather, it is Jesus' mission on earth that we are joined to as a result of our union to Him, and in joining His mission, we will imitate Him.

1. Where do you find your primary identity? Where would the author say that we as Christians should find our primary identity?

2. The author states:

*Apart from who Jesus is and who I am in relationship with him, my humanity becomes either a source of confidence (producing self-reliance and pride) or a source of discouragement (weakening hope and faith, and producing ingratitude toward God) (pp. 49-50).*

Talk about times in your life when your humanity has been both a source of confidence and a source of discouragement. Where did these times lead you? How would a right orientation toward Jesus change the way you view your humanity?

## CHAPTER 4: ADOPTION AND UNION WITH CHRIST

### notes

3. If we can be adopted without being in Christ, then why would there be no need for Jesus? If we can be in Christ without being adopted, then why would there be no Trinity?
  
4. How are our adoption and our union with Christ “essentially the same thing”?
  
5. What is the “double binding” between Jesus and those He redeems?
  
6. How does our union with Christ contradict the messages we often hear in church that tend to separate and distinguish between the sacred and the secular in our lives?
  
7. The author states:

*Our missional engagement as Christians is not an imitation of Christ and His mission. It is a participation in Christ and His mission (p. 53).*

How might the author respond to the WWJD movement so popular in churches a few short years ago?

## CHAPTER 4: ADOPTION AND UNION WITH CHRIST

### notes

8. How do we shift from trying to imitate Christ in His mission to wanting to join Christ in His mission?
  
9. When in your life have you seen Jesus multiply your efforts?
  
10. The author answers his own question, “Who is Jesus?” How does his view of who Jesus is line up with the way you see Jesus? How would a more complete view of Jesus change the way you live?

11. The author states:

*If you have been adopted in the Beloved, that is your reality as well, and it has everything to do with how you live each day. Your adoption by God in Christ is not just for security today and forever; it is also for your empowerment in God's mission, today and forever (p. 56).*

Is this your reality? Does your adoption by God in Christ change the way you live every moment of every day, or is it something you simply see as a free pass to heaven with a little help in sin avoidance thrown into the mix? What would it take for you to move beyond a small view of Jesus to a more complete view?

## STUDY 4: Quotations for Meditation

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“In Pauline language, we are constituted joint-heirs with Christ who is the first-born among many brethren, for we are made to share sonship with Christ the incarnate Son of God. Our human nature is set within the Father-Son relationship of Christ. We share brotherhood with Jesus and so share with him the Fatherhood of God, and in and through him we share in the one Spirit of the living God . . . In the epistle to the Hebrews . . . we hear of the Son who, having been ‘made like his brethren’, ascends to the Father as their representative and high priest, presenting them to the Father as sons and daughters consecrated through his own self-offering . . . Through the consecrated bonds of our union with Christ we are made to share in the union of the Son with the Father” (Thomas Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, p. 230).

“To share in [God’s] love by our union with Christ is to share in the fellowship of his suffering. To share in his love of the Father is also to share in his mission from the Father, which is the outpouring of his love for the sake of the world” (Andrew Purves, Mark Achtemeier, *Union in Christ*, p. 44).

“The resurrection . . . means that God has established a real bond between his reality and ours in this world. In Jesus Christ he has made his divine reality to intersect and overlap with ours, so that we in Jesus Christ may actually and truly know God and have communion with him without having to take leave of the realm of our own this-worldly existence” (Thomas Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, p. 233).

“Would to God that every one of us who knows the Lord Jesus as his Savior would learn to live in the reality of our union with Him. If only we would realize that regardless of our personal failures, imperfections, and sins, the merit of Jesus Christ encompasses and subsumes all of our service to Him. What we do personally cannot increase or decrease God’s acceptance of us. What we do as believers is pleasing and acceptable to God because He always sees us together with His Son, His dearly Beloved . . . It is faith in the reality of our union with Christ that leads to the proper obedience of God’s laws for holiness . . . Fixing our minds on the amazing truth that we are united to Christ will profoundly impact that way we live. It will give us boldness and motivation for life and confidence in death” (Michael P. V. Barrett, *Complete in Him*, pp. 94-95).

“Christ is always a feast. The more we feast on Him, the more spiritual strength we are going to gain. By faith we must procure to ourselves all that Christ is and all that Christ has for His people. He is our life” (*Ibid.*, p. 108).

“Miss what it means that everything is done and said, believed and hoped for, through the name of Jesus, and everything in the gospel is suddenly turned on its head to become law, duty,

## STUDY 4: Quotations for Meditation (con't)

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obligation and responsibility. Miss the *through* ministry of Jesus and we are well on our way to being Christians who look as though we have spent forever sucking on a pickle—joyless, exhausted and embittered!” (Andrew Purves, *The Crucifixion of Ministry*, p. 50).

“To participate in Christ’s ministry means that I share in his life. Sharing in his life means that who he is and what he is up to defines the whole work of my ministry. Wherever Christ is and wherever we are joined to him, there truly is the intentional, disciplined and faithful ministry of the church. It is not our ministries that make Christ present; it is the present, living Christ who makes our ministries possible” (*Ibid.*, p. 53).

“Without the ascension Jesus’ ministry remains in the past, even given his resurrection. It is not enough for us to believe that he who died for us is alive again. He must yet reign in power and be present in ministry. By his ascension he ever lives *to continue the ministry he had while on earth*. In this sense the disciples are no more privileged than we are. The Lord who was there with them is, in his Spirit and freedom, here with us. It should be clear why I said that the loss of the ascension is fatal to our ministries. If Jesus is not now a present, acting and reigning Lord, it is completely up to us to do something messianic in imitation of him; and that is beyond our abilities, although we flail around and tragically keep trying” (*Ibid.*, pp. 62-63).

“Jesus remains live and real historical happening, more real and more historical than any other historical event, for this is the only historical event that does not suffer from decay . . . It is historical event in the fullness of time, and not a historical event [that suffers] from the privation and cessation of time. Here time itself is redeemed and recreated and as such is carried forward into the future, for it is not allowed to see the corruption of the grave” (Thomas Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, p. 252).

“The Christian Church is what it is because of its indissoluble union with Christ through the Spirit, for in him is concentrated the Church and all ministry. Because Christ fulfilled his ministry by sharing the life of the people of God, the Church is what it is through sharing in his life and ministry, leaving by the very Gospel it proclaims. Because the Person and Work of Christ, what he was and what he did, are inseparable, what the Church is in him and what it does in proclaiming him, its being and its ministry, are inseparable. As there is only one Christ and only one Body, so there is only one ministry, that of Christ and his Body. But Christ shares in it in his utterly unique way, as vicarious Redeemer, and Lord; the Church shares in it in an utterly different way as the redeemed people who as servants and heralds point away from themselves to Christ alone” (Thomas Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, p. 208).

## STUDY 4: Quotations for Meditation (con't)

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“Who I am in Christ can be compared to an ear of corn plucked from its stalk. Thinking of my life as that ear of corn, my first impression is that I am only a husk, because that is all I see when looking at the unprocessed ear. This husk represents my works. My tendency is to look at what I have done that is wrong and is obvious to my human sight, and to say, ‘Look at what a terribly person I am. That cheating shows who I really am, as does that lustful glance and that mean-spirited comment. That unholy person is who I am.’ But this characterization based on our misdeeds is not true for us who are in union with Christ” (Bryan Chapell, *Holiness by Grace*, p. 55).

“God’s gracious provision for our needs includes God’s grace for sanctification as well as for justification. It is not enough to tell believers, ‘*You are accepted through faith in Christ.*’ We must tell them also, ‘*You are delivered from the bondages of sin through the power of the indwelling Christ. . . .*’ In order to combat this sense of helplessness before the binding power of indwelling sin, believers should first be assured that sanctification, like justification, is grounded in union with Christ. The power of sin to rule their lives has been *destroyed* in the cross of Christ; we have died with Christ, and have been raised up together with him in newness of life. Therefore, we are not to set the estimates of our power to conquer sin according to past experiences of our will power, but are to fix our attention on Christ and the power of his risen life in which we participate: for we have died and our life is now hidden with Christ in God . . . . This power is accessible in our experience through *faith*, not through simple striving of the will” (Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, pp. 114-115).

“*Union with Christ . . . is a privilege bestowed upon believers in their very first entrance into a holy estate, on which all ability to do good works doth depend, and all sincere obedience to the law doth follow after it, as fruit produced by it*” (Walter Marshall, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*, p. 31).

“That we maybe be persuaded of [our] reconciliation, we receive the Spirit of adoption through Christ, whereby we cry, *Abba, Father* (Rom. viii. 15). Hereby also we are persuaded of our future enjoyment of the everlasting happiness, and of sufficient strength both to will and to perform our duty acceptably, until we come to that enjoyment” (*Ibid.*, p. 37).

“His *incarnation, death, and resurrection*, were the *cause* of all the holiness that ever was, or shall be given to man, from the fall of Adam, to the end of the world; and that by the mighty power of his Spirit, whereby all saints that ever were, or shall be, are joined together, to be members of that one mystical body whereof he is the head” (*Ibid.*, p. 39).

# Reclaiming Adoption: Missional Living Through the Rediscovery of Abba Father

## CHAPTER 5: THE GOOD NEWS OF ADOPTION

### Study 5

**Chapter Summary:** Christians often get so preoccupied with what God has saved us from in Jesus, that we lose sight of what, or Whom, we have been saved to. A clearer understanding of the relationship we have with our heavenly Father through Jesus will allow us to see ourselves not as servants, but as beloved children and heirs of God's glory, which in turn enables us to better model God's love to the lost and marginalized in our world.

1. The author states:

We know what we have been saved from, but we do not know how to live in the present age? (p. 57)

Do you agree with this statement? Do you see this true in your own life?

2. How would you describe your relationship with God? Do you think of yourself as His beloved child? How does your view of your relationship with God affect the way you approach Him?
3. "The God of the Universe invites you to call him 'Daddy'" (p. 61). Does your prayer life reflect this? How would this truth motivate you to pray more?
4. In what ways does God provide for you? Do you live in confidence daily that God will supply your greatest needs? What keeps you from living with that assurance all the time?

## CHAPTER 5: THE GOOD NEWS OF ADOPTION

### *notes*

5. When in your life has your desire for happiness conflicted with God's desire for you to be holy? Talk about some of the "mud pies" you have made in the "slum" when God was offering you a "holiday at the sea". (p. 63)
  
6. As a Father, God disciplines us because we are His children. What are some of the ways in which God disciplines us and what is the difference between discipline and punishment? (pp. 63-64)
  
7. "But the day will come when all who now are sons and daughters of God in Jesus Christ will enter into the glory of the full inheritance of God's children." (pp. 64-65). What does a full inheritance mean for us as God's people?
  
8. How does Adoption reflect the heart of the Father towards His people? How does Adoption change us to give our hearts to the Father *and* to the fatherless? How can the truth of your adoption by God give you a heart for the marginalized?

## STUDY 5: Quotations for Meditation

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“Adoption is about being wanted. It is about belonging. These are deeply emotive themes, which resonate with the cares and concerns of many in our increasingly fractured society. To be adopted is to be invited into a loving and caring environment. It is about being welcomed, wanted and invited. Adoption celebrates the privilege of invitation, in which the outsider is welcomed into the fold of faith and love” (Alister McGrath, *Knowing Christ*, pp. 144-145).

“God became man in Christ to turn creatures into sons, not simply to produce better men of the old kind, but to produce a new kind of man. It is not like teaching a horse to jump better and better, but like turning a horse into a winged creature” (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*).

"Adopting grace is the proof of the Father's undying love for dying sinners. In adoption we learn the truth of Jesus' words: 'The Father himself loves you'" [John 16:27] (Philip G. Ryken, *The Message of Salvation*, p. 212).

"The final privilege we receive in adoption is acceptance as beloved brothers with Jesus Christ. By nature we were a disgrace before God, having nothing in common with God's divine Son. But in his love, God predestined us for adoption, and therefore Jesus took up our flesh to make us holy and without blemish, as Ephesians 1:4 says, and thereby made us fit to be his brothers. He united himself with us in the incarnation in order to make atonement for our sins (Heb. 2:17), and we are spiritually joined with him through faith. Thus he presents us before God on the basis of the holiness he provides. Hebrews 2:11-13 declares, 'For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin [or 'are of the same family,' NIV]. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, 'I will tell of your name to my brothers . . . Behold, I and the children God has given me.' He is our elder brother, so that our adoption is, as Paul emphasizes, 'through Jesus Christ'" (Richard Phillips, *Chosen in Christ*, pp. 64-65).

"The Son of God, who went into the far country for our sake, has returned from death and has been welcomed by the Father! By God's grace, we share that welcome! When we say that our adoption means that all our debts and obligations are cancelled, we do not mean that they have simply been nullified by divine fiat. Rather, they were put to the account of God's Son. He took the bill of debt to the cross and nailed it there (Col. 2:14). His death wrote the word 'cancelled' over all our debts. So when we are adopted into God's family, it is only through Christ, and at infinite cost to him" (Sinclair Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*, p. 31).

# Reclaiming Adoption: Missional Living Through the Rediscovery of Abba Father

## CHAPTER 6: THE FREEDOM OF ADOPTION

### Study 6

**Chapter Summary:** As Christians, we begin to get a taste of the freedom God brings us when He adopts us into His family and liberates us from sin's stranglehold on us. Still, we often fail to understand all of the freedoms that are now ours as His beloved children, including the freedom of legal rights, the freedom of personal delights, and the freedom to live a hopeful and sacrificial life in the midst of the world's brokenness.

1. The author cites Galatians 4:4-7 to highlight the difference between adoption and justification. How is adoption different from justification?
2. What comes to your mind when you think of the concept of inheritance? According to Colossians 1:12-13 and Matthew 5:5, what does our inheritance in Christ include?
3. When have you found yourself falling back into performance-based religion (p. 71)? How does your adoption in Christ free you from living this way?

## CHAPTER 6: THE FREEDOM OF ADOPTION

### notes

4. The author states:

*Paul literally says that adoption is critical because there is only one Father who can deconstruct every earthly illusion about fatherhood (p. 76).*

How does the objective Fatherhood of God overcome our subject feelings about fatherhood in general and our own father in particular?

How would you teach a fatherless child—an orphan—about a loving heavenly Father when his own earthly father abandoned him before birth? When her earthly father abused her and she was put into the foster system? How does God's perfect Fatherly love diminish the pain of abuse and neglect and abandonment? How do we, as God's children through adoption, bring the Father's love to the fatherless?

5. The author states:

*And this Father loves us so much that he has given us his only begotten Son to make us his adopted sons and daughters (p. 77).*

What does this tell us about our need for the Community of Believers? How does that inform the current attitude that Christians can be "lone rangers?"

## CHAPTER 6: THE FREEDOM OF ADOPTION

### notes

6. The author states:

*As we come alive to the radical implications of our adoption, we begin to live a whole new life. Such lavish love propels us into godly living (p. 78).*

How does the astonishing love of the Father drive us to live differently from the world, that is, from trying to earn our acceptance through either religious or loose living?

7. The author describes adoption as “the freedom of never having to pose or pretend about anything before God...” (p. 78). Why are we naturally given to trying to hide our weaknesses and sins? When in your life have you felt that your sin was bigger than God’s mercy and love? When have you been afraid to approach God because of your own failure? How does adoption free us to confess our brokenness to our God and to each other?
8. Do you view the sacrificial life God calls you to as something you do, or do you view it as something God does in and through you by the Gospel? Why does your perception matter?

## STUDY 6: Quotations for Meditation

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"The . . . second purpose for Christ's coming was 'that we might receive adoption as sons' (Gal. 4:5). Christ's coming had an adopting purpose as well as atoning purpose. God sent his Son to make us all his sons and daughters. Christ accomplished our adoption as well as our redemption. It would be enough for God to release us from slavery, to rescue us from our captivity to the law, and so to redeem us from its curse. But God did not stop there. Once Christ had gained our freedom, he gathered us into his family. He went beyond redemption to adoption, turning slaves into sons" (Philip Graham Ryken, *Galatians*, p. 163).

"The heart is constituted such that the only way to dispossess it of an old affection is by the expulsive power of a new one...and when God stands revealed as an object of confidence to sinners—and where our desire after Him is not chilled into apathy by that barrier of human guilt which intercepts every approach that is not made to Him through the appointed Mediator...it is when released from the spirit of bondage...and admitted into the number of God's children, through the faith that is in Christ Jesus, the Spirit of adoption is poured upon us—it is then that the heart, brought under the mastery of one great and predominant affection, is delivered from the tyranny of its former desires and the only way in which deliverance is possible" (Scottish Pastor, Thomas Chalmers, 1780-1847).

"Jesus had not come simply to deliver one nation from political oppression, but to save all of us from sin, evil, and death itself. He came to bring the human race Home. Therefore he did not come in strength but in weakness. He came and experienced the exile that we deserved. He was expelled from the presence of the Father, he was thrust into the darkness, the uttermost despair of spiritual alienation—in our place. He took upon himself the full curse of human rebellion, cosmic homelessness, so that we could be welcomed into our true home" (Tim Keller, *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith*, pp.101-102).

"There is assurance and security in [God the Father's] love for us. Just as a child does not worry about getting 'fired' for disobeying the rules, just as a child know that, if anything, a father's heart goes out more to a troubled child, not less, so we know that God's affection for us is deep and not based on our performance" (Tim Keller, *Galatians: Living in Line with the Truth of the Gospel*).

"There is a confidence and boldness. We don't walk in fear of anyone or anything, for our Father owns the place! God will honor us as he honors his only begotten Son. Thus we live with 'heads held high.' Christians also have a new authority over sin and the devil . . . Our sonship removes the fear that is at the root of much of our disobedience" (Tim Keller, *Galatians: Living in Line with the Truth of the Gospel*).

# Reclaiming Adoption: Missional Living Through the Rediscovery of Abba Father

## CHAPTER 7: ADOPTION AND MISSIONAL LIVING

### Study 7

**Chapter Summary:** Jesus came to earth not just to save sinners, but to renew all of creation under His Kingdom reign. As His representatives on Earth, the church's mission is both to declare and to demonstrate the Gospel to the world. When adoption and orphan care become an integral part of the church's DNA, a watching world gets a foretaste of God's coming Kingdom, where all things will be made new, and where there will be no orphans.

1. What does the author mean by a "culture of adoption" within the church (pp. 83ff)? Have you been in churches where you witnessed such a culture of adoption? Discuss.
2. How is Adoption the "foundation and goal for the mission of the church to the world?" (p. 84)
3. Does American Christianity reflect the truth that the God of the Bible cares for the "least of these?" (pp. 85-86) Why or why not?

4. The author states:

*Mission is both declaring the words and works of Jesus and doing in the world what he has commanded us to do. It is the declaration that speaks the saving word. It is the demonstration that shows the living word. (p. 85)*

How does this line up with what you typically see in churches in America today?

## CHAPTER 7: ADOPTION AND MISSIONAL LIVING

### notes

5. The author states:

*Biblically, adoption and orphan care are not primarily something we do because we are infertile or want to meet a great need. Rather, they are tangible demonstrations and pictures of the gospel... (p. 86).*

How is this a reality? How do we demonstrate the gospel through orphan care?

6. Do you typically think first that Jesus came and lived and died to save you from hell...or do you think first that Jesus came and lived and died to secure not only the redemption of individuals but also the renewal of all creation? How would the latter view change how you share Jesus with others? How would it change the way you live your life daily?

7. How might you help your church integrate orphan care into its missional culture? How equipped is your church to care for the orphan?

8. How does caring for your city's foster children (as well as youth who have aged out of foster care) promote the welfare of the city?

9. Do you believe the Great Commission and James 1:27 are mutually exclusive? Why or why not?

There are more questions for this chapter in Appendix 1

## STUDY 7: Quotations for Meditation

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“God’s purpose rules everything; everyone is on some mission or other. The Son’s primary mission is to communicate himself—his Spirit, his resurrection life—to others and so to enlarge the circle of triune fellowship to include creation. *The gospel communicates this mission and is itself a mission of communication* . . . The Father sends the Son in order to share his truth with others; the Father sends the Spirit in order to share the love he bears for the Son with others. *The purpose of the two missions, then, is communion, and community: a sharing in the truth and love—the very life—of God*” (Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, p. 70).

“The identity of the church is tied up with the church’s mission not only to preserve the gospel but to transmit it to people in every culture in the world. In other words, Christian identity *is* Christian mission, and hence transmission. Indeed, the history of Christianity is largely that of cross-cultural transmission . . . Christianity would have died out long ago had it not been for its extraordinary capacity to be ‘translated’ into different cultures” (*Ibid.*, pp. 129-130).

“Christian mission and theology alike involve ministering the gospel to culture in words and acts of truth, love, and justice that correspond to, participate in, and render the prior triune mission” (*Ibid.*, p. 313).

“If we confuse evangelism and social justice we lose what is the single most unique service that Christians can offer the world. Others, alongside believers, can feed the hungry. But Christians have the gospel of Jesus by which men and women can be born again into the certain hope of eternal life. No one else can make such an invitation. However, many Christians who care intensely about evangelism see the work of doing justice as a distraction for Christians that detracts from the mission of evangelism. That is also a grave error. Imagine an eloquent Christian preacher who every Sunday delivers compelling sermons. But one of his female parishioners comes to learn that the minister verbally abuses and browbeats his wife daily. After she discovers this, she unsurprisingly finds his sermons completely unpersuasive. Why? His deeds contradict his words, and so his words have no power. Imagine instead a new minister whose public oratory is quite mediocre. However, as time goes on, the parishioners come to see that he is a man of sterling character, wisdom, humility, and love. Soon, because of the quality of his life, his members will find that they are hanging on every word of his preaching. When a city perceives a church as existing strictly and only for itself and its own members, the preaching of that church will not resonate with outsiders. But if neighbors see church members loving their city through astonishing, sacrificial deeds of compassion, they will be much more open to the church’s message. Deeds of mercy and justice should be done out of love, not simply as a means to the end of evangelism. And yet there is no better way for Christians to lay a foundation for evangelism than by doing justice” (Tim Keller, *Generous Justice*, pp. 141-142).

# Reclaiming Adoption: Missional Living Through the Rediscovery of Abba Father

## CHAPTER 8: ADOPTION: THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

### Study 8

**Chapter Summary:** Vertical adoption is central to the Gospel's message. The many similarities between vertical adoption and horizontal adoption give us the reassurance and confidence that because God has been through the adoptive process Himself, He will support us and be actively involved with us as we seek to adopt children who have no one.

1. Where is the deepest and strongest foundation of adoption found? Explain.
2. What are some of the legal realities that God had to deal with in His adoption of us? How does that affect our adoption of children? (pp. 97-98)
3. How was our adoption costly to God? How is our adoption of children costly to us? How does the cost God paid to adopt us motivate us to love children who need a family?
4. Why is the word "Abba" and the way Jesus used it important for understanding the way God thinks about us? (pp. 98-99)

## CHAPTER 8: ADOPTION: THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

### *notes*

5. If we are heirs of all things through God and fellow-heirs with Christ (Galatians 4:6-7; Romans 8:16-17), how should that affect the way we view earthly money and possessions? (p. 101)
  
6. If God predestined us for adoption before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4-6), how much were you involved in the process? Is Adoption merely a Plan B for God? (pp. 101-102)
  
7. Since God adopted Israel, an enslaved (Hosea 11:1) and rebellious people (Psalm 106:7), what pattern does that set for us? (p. 103)
  
8. Adoption means that suffering comes before the experience of glory (Romans 8:18, 22-23). How should this shape and inform our worldview, especially when set against “the American Dream?” (pp. 103-104)

## CHAPTER 8: Quotations for Meditation

"In Pauline language, we are constituted joint-heirs with Christ who is the first-born among many brethren, for we are made to share sonship with Christ the incarnate Son of God. Our human nature is set within the Father-Son relationship of Christ. We share brotherhood with Jesus and so share with him the Fatherhood of God, and in and through him we share in the one Spirit of the living God. We recall the profound and central place this is given in our Lord's high priestly prayer which we are allowed to overhear in John 17, and what a significant part it plays in the epistle to the Hebrews, where we hear of the Son who, having been 'made like his brethren', ascends to the Father as their representative and high priest, presenting them to the Father as sons and daughters consecrated through his own self-offering. In both writing we are told that through the consecrated bonds of our union with Christ we are made to share in the union of the Son with the Father" (Thomas Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, p. 230).

"The whole sweep of salvation history has been sovereignly engineered by God the Father and has climaxed eschatologically in the action of his sending the Son into the world, culminating in our adoption" (Trevor Burke, *Adopted into God's Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor*, 87-88).

"The role of God as Father adopting us into his family is...a positive way of setting forth what the apostle Paul means by salvation...Our adoption as sons, according to Paul, is not our native or natural condition. God's family comprises solely adopted sons and daughters—there are no natural-born sons or daughters in his divine household. Stated another way, creatively God may be the Father of all humankind, since all are his 'offspring' (genos; cf. Acts 17:28b), but salvifically God is the Father only of those who are in Christ and are his sons and daughters by adoption and grace. There is only one who rightly qualifies as a natural son and that is Jesus...We are adopted sons by grace; he is son by nature" (*Ibid.*, p. 89).

"The significance of the incarnation, Christ becoming a man, is preparatory and with a view to the sons of men becoming the adopted sons of God" (*Ibid.*, p. 118).

"The goal of God's unique Son coming into the world was to secure the believer's adoption" (*Ibid.*, p. 120).

"The picture portrayed of God by Paul is not of a Father reluctantly trying to hold back his Son; to the contrary, the latter is sent into the world at the former's behest in order to accomplish and bring about adoption" (*Ibid.*, p. 121).

## CHAPTER 8: Quotations for Meditation (con't)

“We can only be adopted in union with the natural Son. Christ is the Son and we were chosen in him as sons by adoption. Thus, election, foreordination, and adoption are all founded in the relation between the Father and the Son in eternity, a relation that takes fully into account the Holy Spirit by whom these realities are effected” (Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*, p. 77).

“The Word of God became man, the Son of God became the Son of man, 'so that what we had lost in Adam...we might recover in Jesus Christ,' 'that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God” (*Ibid.*, p. 96).

“I love the word adoption. It describes perfectly what our relationship to God really means. Adoption isn't simply a concept or a big theological word; it's a family word, a loving parent-child word. It promises belonging, closeness, and a brand-new and highly favored identity. And it says much about the heart of a loving, determined, all-powerful Father who goes looking for children who will forever bear his name” (Tullian Tchividjian, *Do I Know God?*, p. 25).

“Adoption is an overarching way of viewing the Christian faith. Adoption pertains to the beginning of salvation, the Christian life, and the resurrection of the dead” (Robert Peterson, *Adopted by God: From Wayward Sinners to Cherished Children*, p. 7).

“‘The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed’ (Rom. 8:19). Thanks to the Son of God, we are center stage in God's plan. The creation takes a back seat to us. It longs for our final salvation, because in that day the creation too will get in on the blessings —our blessings. Our full identity will be made known only when Jesus returns. Then it will be revealed what beautiful sons and daughters of God he has made us. In the meantime, we ‘groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies’ (Rom. 8:23). This glorious expectation should inspire great hope within us. One day God will give us the final installment of our sonship. Every part of us will be completely redeemed, *including* our bodies. God will equip us to enter into our full inheritance on the new earth” (*Ibid.*, p. 11).

# CHAPTER OUTLINES

## Chapter 1 - Adoption of Prodigals

### I. Goal of the Book: Vertical Adoption First

- A. Vertical Adoption Supports Horizontal Adoption
- B. The Church's Neglect of the Theology of Adoption
  - 1. Lack of Writing
  - 2. Defense of Other Doctrines
  - 3. Lack of Missional Living

### II. The Prodigal Sons and Adoption

- A. Both Sons Were Estranged
  - 1) Older Son Keeps Rules
  - 2) Younger Son Breaks Rules
- B. The Father's Mission to Adopt
  - 1) Through the True Son, Jesus
  - 2) For Communion with Himself

### III. The Story of Adoption

- A. Before Time (Eph 1:4-5)-God Predestined us to Adoption
- B. Israel's Privilege (Rom 9:4)-Israel is God's Corporate Son
- C. Jesus' Mission (Gal 4:4-6)-God Redeems to Adopt
- D. Creation's Goal (Rom 8:15, 22-23)-Adoption is the End of Redemptive History.

### IV. The Mission of Adoption

- A. Adoption's "Wide Angle View" Mobilizes the Church's Mission
- B. God's Fatherly Embrace Motivates the Believer's Service

## Chapter 2 - Adoption and the Trinity

### I. Introduction: Adoption by the Trinity is the Antidote to Idolatry

- A. Problem: We Love the Father's Things Instead of the Father
  - 1. Finding Identity in Loose Living
  - 2. Finding Identity in Religious Living
- B. Antidote: Adoption Gives Us the Trinity for Whom Our Hearts were made
  - 1. The Trinity is the Only Real Object of Affection
  - 2. The Trinity is the Only Real Motivation for Mission

### II. Preexistence: The Trinity Is Eternal

- A. Father, Son and Holy Spirit Precede Time
- B. Father, Son and Holy Spirit Precede Mission

### III. Relationship: The Trinity Is a Communion of Persons

- A. Father, Son and Holy Spirit Always Enjoy Reciprocal Love
- B. Father, Son and Holy Spirit Always Enjoy Infinite Relational Advantage
- C. Father, Son and Holy Spirit Enlarge the Circle of Communal Love through Adoption

## CHAPTER OUTLINES (con't)

### **IV. Creation: The Trinity Is a Creator of Communion and Mission**

- A. Creation is Evidence of Trinitarian Essence
  - 1. Humanity is Uniquely Created in God's Image
  - 2. Humanity is Uniquely Created for God's Communion
- B. Mission is Evidence of Trinitarian Communion
  - 1. The Trinity's Mission Means Entering into our Suffering
  - 2. The Trinity's Adoption Leads us into Suffering

## **Chapter 3 - Adoption and the Incarnation**

### **I. Introduction: Without the Trinity there is No Good News in Adoption**

- A. Doubts about the Trinity Lead to Missional and Soul Paralysis
- B. Knowledge of the Trinity Comes through Jesus Christ

### **II. Jesus' Incarnation is Central**

- A. Jesus is the Only One Who Knows the Father
- B. Jesus is the Only Way we Know the Father
- C. Jesus Mission of Adoption Gives us His Knowledge of the Father

### **III. Jesus' Incarnation Brings Communion**

- A. Adam Lost Sonship for Us
  - 1. Image Bearers are now Alienated
  - 2. Communion is Replaced with Conflict
- B. Jesus Gained Sonship for Us
  - 1. Jesus' Communion with the Father is Eternal
  - 2. Jesus' Incarnation Brings Us Communion with the Father
    - a) Healing comes from His Own Person
    - b) Healing comes from His Own Substitution

### **IV. Jesus Resurrection Brings Comfort**

- A. Jesus is God Offered to Humanity
- B. Jesus is Man Offered to God

## **Chapter 4 - Adoption and Our Union with Christ**

### **I. Introduction: Identity is Key**

- A. Properly Placed Identity is in Jesus
- B. Properly Placed Identity is our Humanity

### **II. Our Bond to Christ and In Christ**

- A. The Placement of sons in The Son
  - 1. Adoption unto the Father and Being in Christ are Inseparable
  - 2. Jesus Has Joined Himself to Us in Our Humanity
  - 3. Jesus Has Joined Us to Himself
- B. The Ministry of the Son

## CHAPTER OUTLINES (con't)

1. Union with Christ Determines Our Reality
2. Union with Christ Determines Our Ministry
- C. The Ministry of the Sons
  1. Our Missional Engagement is Participation in Christ
  2. Our Missional Engagement Results in our Imitation of Christ
    - a. We are Humbled because it is Christ's Ministry
    - b. We are Energized because it Guarantees Effectiveness

### **III. Our Identity in Christ**

- A. Who Is Jesus?
  1. Jesus Is One with the Father
  2. Jesus Is One with Humanity
- B. Who Are We in Relationship to Jesus?
  1. We are Brothers with Jesus
  2. We are in the Family of the Father

## **Chapter 5 - The Good News of Adoption**

### **I. Intro: We Have been Saved from Sin and Wrath to God through Adoption**

### **II. The Eternal Foundations of Adoption**

- A. God Chooses Us in Christ
- B. God Wills Our Adoption

### **III. The Privileges of Adoption**

- A. Prayer: Personal Relationship with Our Heavenly Father
- B. Provision: Personal Care from Our Heavenly Father
- C. Discipline: Personal Holiness from Our Heavenly Father
- D. Inheritance: Personal Promises from Our Heavenly Father

### **IV. The Heart of Adoption**

## **Chapter 6 - The Freedom of Adoption**

### **I. Introduction: God the Father intends for us to experience and understand the freedom that is ours by Adoption.**

### **II. The Freedom of Legal Rights**

- A. The Legal Rights of Sons and Daughters: Not Only Justification
- B. The Legal Guarantee of an Inheritance
- C. The Legal Privilege of Discipline in Love

### **III. The Freedom of Personal Delights**

- A. The Freedom to Delight in Subjective Wonder
- B. The Freedom to Delight in Our Father's Love for Us
- C. The Freedom to Delight in Safe Vulnerability

### **IV. The Freedom of a Missional Life**

## CHAPTER OUTLINES (con't)

### Chapter 7 - Adoption and Missional Living

- I. Introduction: Adoption is at the Heart of Redemptive History and is the Foundation and Goal for the Mission of the Church in the World.**
- II. Gospel Leads to Mission**
  - A. It Includes the Declaration of the Good News
  - B. It Involves the Demonstration of the Good News
- III. Adoption as Mission**
  - A. Jesus' Mission Centers on Adoption
  - B. Jesus' Mission is the Model for Our Mission
    - 1. Adoption Cares for the "Least of These"
    - 2. Adoption Demonstrates the Gospel
- IV. Application of Adoption**
  - A. The Church and The Orphan
    - 1. Integrate Orphan Care into the Church's Missional Culture
    - 2. Create a Culture of Orphan Care in the Church
  - B. The Church and the City
    - 1. Demonstrate the Gospel to the City through Orphan Care
    - 2. Seek the Welfare of the City through Orphan Care
- V. The Church, Adoption, and the Nations**
  - A. Integrate Orphan Care into Church Planting
  - B. Demonstrate the Transformational Power of the Gospel through the Church

### Chapter 8 - Adoption: The Heart of the Gospel

- I. Introduction: God's adoption of humans is at the heart of the Gospel (Gal 4:4-5)**
- II. Eight Similarities Between God's Adoption of Us and Our Adoption of Children**
  - A. Adoption Was and Is Costly
  - B. Adoption Did and Does Involve the Legal Status of the Child
  - C. Adoption was Blessed and is Blessed with God's Pouring out a Spirit of Sonship
  - D. Adoption Was and Is Marked by Moral Transformation through the Spirit
  - E. Adoption Brought us, and Brings Our Children, the rights of Being Heirs of the Father
  - F. Adoption Was and Is Seriously Planned
  - G. Adoption Was and Often Is Now from Very Bad Situations
  - H. Adoption Meant and Means that we Suffer Now and Experience Glory Later.
- III. John Piper's Letter to His Wife Noel Concerning the Adoption of His Daughter Talitha**

## APPENDIX 1

### **Additional questions for study 7 - “Adoption and Missional Living”**

How is “doing justice” a foretaste to the world of the Kingdom of God? How have you typically seen acts of justice in the past?

In light of how God sees the weak and vulnerable, how should we? Whose job is it to care for the weak and vulnerable? How is your church doing? How are you doing?

Why are there waiting children in a nation with as many churches as we have in the United States?

How is the church uniquely positioned to care for orphans?

How can the church in the United States make the greatest impact on the world’s orphan crisis?

## APPENDIX 2

### What Orphans Need

By Dan Cruver

When Christians are unsure of their Father's delight in them, real Christian joy is absent and passionate Christian living is lacking. It is almost impossible (if not entirely impossible) to mobilize Christians who are unsure of God's delight in them to care for orphans over the long haul, or at least to mobilize Christians who will serve orphans with unflappable confidence and joy.

When Jesus was about to go public with the mission of God, his Father declared over him, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" ([Matthew 3:17](#)). As Scripture makes clear, Jesus had been sent to fulfill the Father's mission to redeem humanity and renew creation—which includes, by the way, the removal of the word "orphan" from the human vocabulary. The Gospel writers tell us that God's Son went forward with the mission of his Father in the strength and knowledge of his Father's delight ([Matthew 3:17](#); [Mark 1:11](#); [Luke 3:22](#)).

Dr. C.F.W. Walther, a pastor who lived in the 1800's, wrote: "Every Christian may apply to himself the declaration of God: 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'" As God's children, not only do we have the privilege of participating in His mission to redeem and renew creation, we also do so in the strength and knowledge of our Father's delight.

What orphans need are churches that are full of people who wake up each morning hearing and rehearsing these amazing words that are declared over them. "You are my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased. Yes, you were once without hope and without God in this world, but I have brought you near by the blood of Jesus. I have embraced you in the Beloved. Live in my love as you move out in mission."

If you are a Christian, God declares these amazing words over you. He doesn't speak them over you because you have earned them. You could never do enough to earn these words of love. God speaks these words over you because of who Jesus is for you.

As I've already mentioned, when God the Father spoke these words over His Son (Matthew 3:17), it was the day that Jesus launched his public messianic ministry. As our Messiah, Jesus was the faithful Son who always did the will of his Father. Never once did he disobey or disappoint Him. All of his living, from his birth in the manger to his death on the cross, was perfect in thought, word, deed, and motive. His missional life was perfectly lived, and he lived it as our Messiah. This means, among many other things, that the words that were spoken over him on that wonderful day are also spoken over us today.

Living as Christians in mission—in other words, being the church—involves learning to live each day knowing that God the Father delights in us even as He delights in Jesus. Those who learn to

live in the reality of God's loving pleasure will find that circumstances no longer control them. They will find that they are able to deal with the difficulties of a missional life with confidence and humility. To be adopted by God is to enter into a family relationship where all of God's children are treated even as He treats His Beloved Son. If we are confident that we are being loved by God like this, we will not only desire to love others like we are loved, we will also be empowered and compelled to do so.

Imagine the impact that churches would have upon the global orphan crisis if they were filled with people who moved forward in mission in the strength and knowledge of their Father's delight. Just imagine.

What orphans need are communities of missional Christians (churches) who live in the joy of their Father's delight.

## APPENDIX 3

### **Caring for Orphans While Soaked with a Sense of Exile**

By Dan Cruver

Yesterday, I was deeply moved by something that I read in a letter that J.R.R. Tolkien wrote to his son Christopher. As I reflected upon his words, it occurred to me that he touches on something that is profoundly relevant to the global orphan crisis. Tolkien writes:

“We all long for [Eden], and we are constantly glimpsing it: our whole nature at its best and least corrupted, its gentlest and most humane, is still soaked with the sense of ‘exile’. If you come to think of it, your (very just) horror at the stupid murder of the hawk, and your obstinate memory of this ‘home’ of yours in an idyllic hour (when often there is an illusion of the stay of time and decay and a sense of gentle peace) are derived from Eden” (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, p. 110).

One of the challenges for Christians in the Western world is that we are often guilty of trying to dry up our profound “sense of exile” with the nonabsorbent paper towels of the incomplete joys of this world. That’s not to say that it is wrong for Christians to enjoy themselves in the here-and-now. God gives His children many good gifts that we are to enjoy now with gratitude in our hearts. But our here-and-now enjoyment was never meant to be the way we deal with the deep ache of exile. When we deal with our “sense of exile” by using God’s good gifts to self-medicate, we will find ourselves moving away from the world’s most needy rather than to them. Self-medicating people are not easily mobilized for self-sacrificial service.

The reality is that we are in exile. Eden has been lost. We are exiles in the here-and-now (1 Peter 1:1). The period of time in which we live as exiles is deeply marked by suffering and unrest (Romans 8:18). The presence of 143,000,000 vulnerable and orphaned children in the world is irrefutable evidence of that fact.

Although we find ourselves in exile—still soaked with a deep sense of Eden-lost—God has not left us to wander aimlessly within it. He has not left us alone to cope with our deep sense of exile through self-medicating behavior. No, Jesus entered into our exile, became a man of sorrows, was forsaken by the Father at the cross in order that he might lead us out of our exile into eternal belonging. Jesus endured the very worst of our exile in order that he might bring us home!

What Jesus did through his life, death, and resurrection has provided us with “a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul” (Hebrews 6:19-20) in the midst of our exile. As a result, we can enjoy the incomplete joys of this world without using them to deal with our deep sense of exile. Only when we rest in what Jesus has already done to one day bring us back home (Romans 8:19-23) are we able to move toward our world’s most needy.

The gospel takes those who are marked with a deep sense of exile, frees them from the “need” to self-medicate, and moves them out to serve the orphan, the widow, and the marginalized. Only by the power of the gospel can we do the self-sacrificial work of caring for orphans while soaked with the sense of exile.

## APPENDIX 4

### **Do We Really Have Time for Theology When Orphans Need Our Help Now?**

By Dan Cruver

Occasionally, when people hear about Together for Adoption's emphasis and stress upon theology, they sincerely ask, "Do we really have time to study the theology of adoption when there is so much to be done for orphans now? Isn't it enough that Scripture commands us to care for orphans? Shouldn't we just do it?"

If we think of theology merely as information about God, as the mental collection of facts about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then this question is legitimate. But if by theology we mean a real knowing of God, an ongoing and growing relational engagement with God that flows from and is based upon objective truth, the question loses its teeth. Yes, theology necessarily involves information about God. Scripture is full of it. But theology is never *merely* information.

In Matthew 11:27 Jesus says, "All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one *knows the Son* except the Father, and no one *knows the Father* except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (emphasis mine). Believe it or not, Jesus is talking about theology here. If you think about it, theology did not begin with the creation of man. It has always existed in the *eternal mutual knowing* of the Father and Son. For all of eternity past the Father has known the Son and the Son the Father.

Understood like this, theology is a gracious gift to humanity. In reality, theology is actually a sharing in the mutual knowing of the Father and Son. It is a participation in the communion of love that the Holy Trinity is ("God is love"). There is no greater gift that can be given to man.

So, do we really have time for theology when orphans need our help now? Yes, we do. If theology is ultimately about our participation in the love between the Father and the Son, then nothing can better mobilize and energize us to care for orphans now than theology. Nothing.

Rightly understood and practiced, robust theology produces robust action. Just look at the life of Jesus. He enjoyed an infinitely robust theology and no one did more for the poor and marginalized than he did. If you think about it, what orphans need, then, is Christians who are deeply theological.