

THE GOD WHO LOVES and ADOPTS US
FPC
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Dan Chun

I don't watch a lot of television. For some you might think that is reprehensible...some of you may think that is commendable.

Only when people lend me their seasons DVD's of like The Office or 24 do I get more hip and discover what everyone is talking about.

But let me tell you, watching 10 episodes in a row of the TV show "24 can be really tense and depressing as "24-star" Jack Bauer of the Counter Terrorist Unit fights the bad guys. Really emotionally exhausting and a rollercoaster as he fights evil....almost as exciting as ministry in following Christ but not quite as adventuresome.

But I tell you...what I do like in watching TV is seeing those Time Life commercials when they are trying to see you a series of CD's like recently – the one called Malt Shop Music....the old 60's music.

10 CD's – 15 songs each.

What I like about them is that as they play the oldie songs they also show the artists who sang them. I see the different faces that you have never seen before.

For me that is really cool because being so young...I have heard about these songs – I had heard of these groups...but I never knew what they looked like.

So when I see and hear the song "16 Candles" I finally get to see the group called The Crests.

When I hear the song "A Teenager in Love" I finally get to see what the group looks like – Dion and the Belmonts.

When these commercials come on it is a real treasure trove for me.

I get to see The Penguins sing Earth Angel,

The Tokens sing The Lion Sleeps Tonight

Richie Valens sings Donna

The Platters sing Smoke Gets in your Eyes. I had never seen the performers faces before.

Oldies are great – there is like Tallahassee Lassie by Freddy Cannon. You young people don't know what you are missing out on. Have you heard of that song Tallahassee Lassie?

Here, let's hear a clip (roll cut #13)

Oh what profound lyrics!

What poetry!

What rhyming!

Or what about the classics like Diana by Paul Anka? Let's play a snippet (role CD cut #9) – and boomers if you remember the lyrics – sing them out for the teenagers here.

So what I like about the commercials is though as a young child I listened to their music on the radio I never knew what they looked like except for the really famous ones like the Supremes or Lesley Gore. We never had MTV...we only had shows like Shindig or American Bandstand.

What is great about the Bible is that different books reveal different faces of God that we might have never seen before. We discover artists or players in history we never have met.

We see different views that show how loving, accepting, forgiving, and wise our Lord is.

For the last 7 months we have been studying the Gospel of Mark learning about Jesus. It ended on Easter with the Resurrection!

Today we begin a new series on a book of the Bible called Ephesians. It is actually a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to believers in the city of Ephesus which I why it's formally called "The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians."

This new series will give us a different look at God, this time seen through the eyes of the Apostle Paul who is the main theologian and church planter in the New Testament.

So Ephesians is a pretty important book. We get a clearer look at God's face.

Here's a quick history lesson on the book called Ephesians.

Paul wrote this letter around 61 A.D. from Rome where he was under house arrest awaiting his trial.

Sometimes people's best thoughts come from the clarity of being in solitude, especially when they know they might be dying soon.

The last words and testament of a man are crucially important and though this book does not carry his very last words which are probably in his writings to a disciple called The Letters to Timothy, this letter to the Ephesians is really important because of the face of God and the community God wants that Paul describes.

By the time he wrote this letter, Paul had been around for a while. A seasoned follower of Jesus for nearly 30 years he had made 3 missionary trips planting churches all around the Mediterranean basins.

His prison was in a house where he could receive visitors, teach, pray with people, and send out letters. Many scholars think it was during this time that he wrote his prison epistles to the Colossians, Philippians, Philemon as well as the Ephesians.

Ephesus was one of the major 5 cities in the Roman Empire at that time along with Alexandria, Antioch, Corinth and Rome.

Population around a quarter of a million. A major port city on the Aegean...the gateway to what is now called Turkey....as it lay on the main route from Rome going east to Asia.

Ephesus's famous temple of Artemis was considered one of the 7 wonders of the world...4 times larger than the Parthenon in Athens. Built entirely of marble....the size of a football field. Too bad it is not around today.

It was the prototype for stadiums today, seating 25,000 spectators as they watched fighting between men and/or wild animals.

In his journeys Paul spent more than 3 years in Ephesus.. It was very dear to his heart. His friends Priscilla and Aquila lived there. John the Apostle is believed to have written his Gospel there and returned there after his exile on the island of Patmos.

It's very possible that Paul's letter to the Ephesians was an encyclical letter or circular letter meant to be shared with other churches in Asia Minor...so where it says I wrote to the church of Ephesus in verse one...some scholars believe that this was left blank and could be filled in with another church's name if needed.

Okay let's hear the first 12 verses of the passage. Here's something interesting: verses 3-14 in the Original Greek comprise the longest single sentence ever found in ancient Greek. In our English Bibles, however, it is broken up into 8-9 sentences.

Hear this:

Eph. 1:1 ¶ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, ¶ To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

Eph. 1:2 ¶ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph. 1:3 ¶ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,

Eph. 1:4 just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.

Eph. 1:5 He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will,

Eph. 1:6 to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Eph. 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace

Eph. 1:8 that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight

Eph. 1:9 he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ,

Eph. 1:10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Eph. 1:11 In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will,

Eph. 1:12 so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory.

In this beautiful, long, rich passage, I want to today focus on verses 5:

Eph. 1:5 God destined us for ADOPTION as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of His will,

Preparing for this sermon, when I read this verse ...it rocked me!

Hear me out.

You know that I have preached multiple times that we as followers of Christ should have a heart for the downtrodden.

We have a nice place here, but it is not to make it only accessible to people with means. No, this is a training ground for the followers of Christ to welcome all people and to go out and minister to those in need.

You have heard people say from this pulpit that we must have a heart for the orphans and the widows. Amen?

Many of you heard Harry Greene the president of a prison ministry say from this platform we must have a heart for inmates and their families. Amen?

Many of you heard Wess Stafford speak from this pulpit. He is the head of a world relief organization, called Compassion International and he called us to have a heart for needy children around the world. Amen?

Our church family responded by sponsoring more than 200 children around the world. The monthly sponsorship provides them with clothes and food and education and a relationship with Jesus.

In May Pam and I are going to Thailand to see Compassion at work there and hoping to meet in person the two Thai children whom we have been sponsoring.

Now follow me here back to the scripture

Here in the fifth verse, Paul declares that the very nature of our relationship with God is that He has adopted us.

God, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the Almighty God has chosen you, chosen me to be adopted into His family.

Isn't that incredible? We are in His family.

Do you realize what this means?

It means that if God is saying to those of us who were born into a family that is highly dysfunctional...to those who may have had birth parents but did not have emotional parents...if by chance they were cruel to us, neglected us or did not affirm us...or God forbid they abused us...God is saying...

I know. I see. I have not forgotten you....and I want to adopt you into my family. I AM THE real parent you have longed for. I will treat you as you truly deserve to be treated – loved, affirmed, forgiven, nurtured.

It means if we feel we are economically or emotionally poor, God is saying, I am giving you the inheritance of one of my royal children. I will open up the doors of my blessings on you.

Listen to the words again in the first chapter:

Eph. 1:5 He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will,
Eph. 1:6 to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.
Eph. 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace
Eph. 1:8 that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight
Eph. 1:9 he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ,

Like a favored son or daughter God wants to lavish....lavish on us his blessings and share us the wisdom to know His will.

We can be strong and wise and confident and have great self-esteem because as children of God we are princes and princesses of the almighty King.

And this king says, as we learned last Sunday...You are loved....by God Himself. He died for you...He suffered for you...He created you to be adopted by Him.

You are worthy...and nothing you do or will do will separate you from the love of God.

Some may take issue with God choosing us ...and we don't choose Him. Well, we do have to choose Him but the wonderful, grace-filled news of the Gospel is that in His love we can know He chose us first. There is NO possibility of rejection!!!

God chooses us because of His mercy and grace and not because of our own merit. If the only people who get to go to heaven are those smart enough and wise enough to choose God and figure it all out, then that means heaven is only for those with the highest SAT scores or the highest GPA's or the ones brilliant enough to figure out the secret of life.

But that is why Christianity is so great. It says...here there is nothing you can do to get into heaven....it is all about God's grace. Not that you deserve...but God chooses to give you wisdom, love, mercy and a relationship with him.

That is what grace is. We don't deserve it. But He chose to adopt us

The children sponsored by Compassion, and who get their pictures on our wall are not there because we think they are worthy enough to be placed on our wall.

They are on our wall because of God's grace. It is not because of what they do.

We didn't choose them because they were smart or athletic or courteous or helpful or skilled. Not we just chose to sponsor them out of pure grace and love.

Same with God. He paid the price for us. He adopted us. Not with \$32 a month but with the life of his son Jesus...a far greater price. He paid the bill not for sponsorship but for adoption. Even though he knew our sins and faults.

When we sponsor children thru world relief organizations like Compassion or World Vision, we don't know their faults or sins or selfishness. However, when God adopts us, God knows our faults, failures and foibles and He still chooses to adopt us.

This is what God does. He takes imperfect people and often discarded, abandoned people and calls them His children.

He adopts us and loves us in a way that no human, earthly parent can love. They He tells us, as beloved, rich members of His family to go out and love others – bring them into the family so that they too, can have a home. There is no better gift!

Friends, we need to know that we have been adopted by God. And as his adopted children, He wants us to love others in an abundant grace He gave us. He wants us to love others not because we are better but because we were chosen to receive love and therefore to give love.

When Paul wrote these words about being “adopted sons and daughters” it was in context of Roman law that said adopted children had the same rights and privileges as biological children. They were not considered second class members of the family. So it is in God's family.

Is it possible that IF we are truly Christ-like we should have this adopting kind of love with other people?

In Hawaiian culture, we call it “hanai” – taking someone into your family as your own. That's what I love about Hawaii. Every one is auntie or uncle.

That all said, I want to challenge us as God's family to something even more radical.

Some of us give money to this church to minister to the hurting needs of the world.

Some of us sponsor children through organizations like Compassion to make sure that child is being taken care.

But for some of us....God may be tugging on our hearts to literally adopt a child.

Yes, for some, God may be calling you today to adopt a child. As God has adopted you....so you may be called to adopt a child as a fully colored way to love sacrificially one who without you would not have a good life.

We can be Mother Teresas beginning with just one....and therefore change the world...one child at a time.

There are many families in our church who have already done this. There are maybe others among us who are considering it right now...or maybe some might after today want to consider it.

We usually hear from parents about the adoption experience. But today I want you to hear from another perspective – from Sue Sullivan, one of our church youth, an 8th grader, about her 2 adopted sisters.

Sue, please come up.

SUE SPEAKS

She was 12 at the time, her body at the top of the stairs, looking down on her future family. Her eyes were fluttering with excitement and delight; her hands were shaking with fear and apprehension. She had lengthy black hair and auburn eyes; she was quiet at first impression, yet talkative if you were her best friend. She was eager yet pondered the years that lay ahead in her new life. Her name was Rose Xiao Hua Sullivan. She is the first of my two adopted sisters from China. There are 145,000,000 orphans in the world today, and 125,000 orphans in the United States, according to Focus on the Family. Millions of children around the world are not adopted each year. Each child needs a devoted and compassionate family to grow up with. Children need to be adopted or else they will live a very difficult life.

Some parents choose to put their child up for adoption; some are forced to. Parents may abandon their child because their country has a one-child rule, such as in China. Some families cannot afford to feed one more mouth. Another reason is if either the parent or the child does not have good health. Countries such as Australia require that you be married in order to have children.

When children around the globe do not get adopted, they face a dismal future. According to the USA Adoption Chart, there were 132,000 children adopted worldwide in 2000, and in 2004 there were only 118,000 children adopted. The rest are forced to face a tough life. If my two sisters hadn't been adopted by the age of 14, they would have ended up working in factories for the rest of their lives, bringing home barely anything.

Adoption is of an advantage to everyone. You open new doors to the child that would have never been glanced at if the child were not adopted. The child gets has better opportunities for the future and has an improved socially economic lifestyle. Most of all, you get to love and care for a human being that longed to have a family. Having two adopted sisters in my family has made me a better person all around. I have learned something new from my adopted sisters Rose and Jade with each day, whether it being something big or small to grow from. I have learned to accept cultural differences and learned to be more selfless. I appreciate my good health because my sisters have many medical issues. I feel more blessed because my sisters came to America with nothing more than the clothes on their back.

So how do we improve these children's lives? Adopting a child would the more obvious answer. However, there are more ways we can help. Volunteer or donate money to an organization that deals with adoptions. Help those millions of children around the world that long to have a loving and nurturing family. Although it may be costly and the process may take longer than having a biological child, it is extremely rewarding. Adoption is beneficial to everyone- the child and the family. Robert Frost best put it when he once said, "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference."



Thanks Sue. That was great.

It's great to hear from the sister of an adopted child. Was it forced upon her? How does that change things in a family. These are all things a family thinks about.

And now a parent's perspective...Garrett Sullivan who is not only an elder of this church but is also on the board of an adoption agency called the Hawaii International Child. Let's hear from Garrett:

You may remember a while back when Pastor Dan's Sunday message was "Too Small to Ignore." During that sermon, Dan never mentioned sponsorship through Compassion International as a solution to the many forgotten children of the world. On the way home that day in the car my four daughters discussed his sermon as we usually do and they felt very strongly that he should have discussed adoption as one of the many options for these children.

Please allow me to share our story of how the Sullivan Family came to adopt two older special needs children from the Waiting Child Program of China.

My hope is that our story inspires you or someone you know to consider adoption.

Honey would you consider adopting a special needs child?

Whoa...

My wife Janis Loo asked me that question for about 20 of our 24 years of marriage. For 19 out of those 20 times, my standard answer was "we'll see." My code word for no. In my mind, I was busy with building a business and furthermore, why would I adopt a child when I had 3 great biological children already? But she was patient and never nagged. Always gentle in her asking. As I look back I think I was rather selfish in my response.

It was only after Janis donated her kidney to a stranger that an unintended consequence came about.

There was an article in the newspaper written by 13 year old adopted girl who talked about her sense of hopelessness because she was missing her right hand. A loving family from Hawaii adopted her and she began to blossom like a flower once she arrived in Hawaii with her new family. It was a very moving human interest story. That day, Janis asked if I had read the article in the paper, did I enjoy it, and was I ready now?

Well, for the first time, I thought that if Janis felt so compelled after all these years and that she was so generous in donating life to a stranger, how I could be the one to stand in the way of a need she felt about adoption.

We held a family meeting and discussed our thoughts of adoption with our two daughters and one son. We asked them to pray about it and said we would have a vote a week later, with any no vote, killing the idea. It passed unanimously and we were on what to us 50 year old parents was a new adventure in life.

As we progressed we found the only certain fact an adoption organization can tell a prospective parent is that “nothing is certain”. Yes, nothing is certain. For a person who thrives on being organized, this was difficult for me.

Given our ages we wanted an older child that was about the age of our youngest daughter, Susannah, who was 12 at the time. After filling out the long and detailed adoption application, we began the anxious waiting period. From start to finish it took about 9 months until we received our notification that we could travel to Guangzhou China to pick up our new 12 year old daughter Xiao Hua whose American name is Rose. Janis wanted to leave that night for China. We felt the adoption experience would be best if all our children came with us to see the orphanage. They did with the exception of our son, Patrick, who was in college in Washington DC.

I was so happy when we arrived at the orphanage as I felt this great sense of accomplishment that this long process was finally over. That feeling quickly passed as we met our new daughter Rose in the orphanage receiving room with several teenage girlfriends from the orphanage. I quickly felt very serendipitous as I realized that we were going to be taking Rose from the only family she had known. My feelings kept vacillating from extreme happiness to extreme sadness as I watched these girls laugh, dance, joke and begin the process of saying farewell to another orphan friend they would probably never see again.

During this time, I noticed another girl who seemed to exude a special kindred spirit among all of the girls. I just kept finding myself drawn to her smile.

I cannot explain my feelings in that room that day.

We all said our sad goodbyes and headed back to Hawaii.

For the next few days I kept feeling the kindred spirit of that one girl whose name turned out to Zhi Hao. I said nothing to Janis about these feelings. About 3 weeks after we returned, Janis asked if I remembered this girl and I said yes, she said much to my surprise that she was thinking of this same girl.

Well, we did it again. Held the family meeting, took the vote, and went back to China last November for Zhi Hao, whose American name is Jade.

So far, it has been a wonderful and very rewarding experience. Jade and Rose are very conscientious 7th and 8th grade students at Kawananakoa Middle School and are trying hard to adapt to American culture and family life. However, I would be remiss if I did not tell you older child adoption presents a complex family situation whenever you bring a new person into an already established family.

My daughters, Jennine and Susannah, have been very supportive and I would like to take a moment to thank them publicly because I know there have been times that it has been difficult to be patient with their new sisters. To Janis, who has surely done the heavy lifting with regard to spending an hour each day with Rose and Jade to help them with their homework, I admire you more with each passing day.

To return to Dan's message, "Too Small to Ignore," I don't think that adoption is for everyone.

How many of you know a couple that longs to have a child but has not yet conceived? These are the people that can give these children a new life.

I ask that you consider it or recommend it strongly to someone you know who wants to give a new life to a child wanting love and a home.



Thanks Garrett. For the Sullivans they chose children from far away....from China. As did Gerald and Sharon Toyomura, Kendrik and Elizabeth Sue Ako, Merton and Nina Pang, Tony and Karen Lee and others in our church. Our own choir director Mary Chesnut Hicks chose to adopt a child from Kazakhstan.

But there are children right here in Hawaii who need adopting. Don't need to do the long paper work for an international child. Cheaper procedural costs. Many local kids are available for foster parenting or adoption. Many of them are disabled.

Kelly Rosatti not only helps families get their children adopted through a program called Inc. but she herself has adopted children and plans to adopt another.

Kelly is the executive director of Hawaii Family Forum and President of Hope Inc.

HOPE INC (In the Name of Christ), a Christian adoption agency and Hawaii Family Forum have partnered with the State Department of Human Services to recruit, train and support families from the faith based community willing to provide a forever home to needy children.

Please welcome Kelly Rosatti as she shares about adoption from a slightly different angle...helping Hawaii kids.



In case some of you might be interested about adoption we do have exhibits and booths just around the corner.

The adoption laws for China are changing May 1. If you are over 50 years of age, you will not be allowed to adopt and they are checking peoples body mass rate and other things. Things will be much tougher for China. So if you were ever thinking about it, now is the time.

LOWER SCREEN

Adoption is not for everyone, but I wanted under the theme of adoption just mention it as one way we help the orphans and the widows...and for many adoption agencies you can be single and adopt which many people do not know. It would be certainly and above and beyond the call of duty move to adopt.

But then God made an above and beyond move when He adopted us.

What a great God that He would adopt us who are imperfect and in many ways disabled and dysfunctional...but He chose us to love us. What a great god!

And maybe we will be known as a church that nurtures hundreds of children—through our Children’s ministries, youth ministries.... sponsor children like through Compassion International...and we are church that adopts children not for our sake....but for their sake that they might have the life God intended...that they might know Christ.

I want to close with this video.

ROLL VIDEO and LOWER LIGHTS AS I TALK

Notice that how excited the parents are to meet their children as in this DVD they fly to China via Hawaii International Child to finally pick up their child that for many have prayed for and paid for and filled out countless forms for.

The Chinese nannies or orphanage staff bring the children to the new parents.

And as you see the delight of the parents in seeing their children...think of the delight of God when He sees us created and desires to adopt us into His family.

We close with a montage of couples who couldn’t or wouldn’t have children but who like God are so happy to love their children...imagine the months or maybe the years of praying and preparing and saving their money and then finally seeing the child they selected via pictures and now in person.

We close with the music of The Lord’s Prayer as we thank God for children...and for an unconditional love to love all children of all cultures....and for some of us to sacrifice what we have to make a difference in a child’s life....to give him or her a future and a hope and the love of Jesus.

WHEN VIDEO ENDS, I SAY

Amen.

Let's pray.

BRING UP LIGHTS FOR ROS WHEN SHE SINGS