

life matters

Opening Your Heart to a Child by Carolyn Cavanaugh

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ADOPTION MAKES HEADLINES when celebrities bring home children from other countries. The news is sometimes met with controversy, although adoption is nothing new. It's a way of growing a family when infertility is a problem, or caring for children whose birthparents are unable to continue in that capacity.

The Bible cites several instances of adoption, most notably Moses' adoption by Pharaoh's daughter.¹ In Galatians 4:5, God uses the term to describe how children are added to His family through salvation. It's a wonderful process!

So why are the numbers of adoptions going down? There are several factors. Infertile couples often turn first to technology for help building their families. Fewer babies are available for adoption because women are more willing to either have abortions or parent children on their own.²

Myths and misperceptions about adoption also persist.³ As the National Council for Adoption reports, "Women who now deliver unplanned babies without a supportive male partner may not know that one million stable couples are now available to adopt the babies that they may attempt to raise with great difficulty, and that the evidence shows that both they and their babies can live better lives if the adoption option is selected."²

Changes in laws and higher funding support have, however, led to an increase in adoptions of children with special needs. This category can apply to children with disabilities, sibling groups, children over two years of

age, or children of a different race or ethnicity than the adopting parents.

Also, international adoptions have nearly doubled in the last decade, although some countries have tightened up their rules out of a sense that they can better care for their orphaned children themselves. The Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption seeks to implement uniform standards and safeguards that protect all parties involved in these arrangements.⁴

DESPITE THE DIFFICULTIES, I encourage everyone to consider the pleasures of adoption. My husband and I know about them from experience. We adopted our son from Korea twenty-three years ago. Yes, it involved a maze of paperwork, legalities, and waiting. Along the way, you may run into other roadblocks like we did.

While going through our home-study – by which the adoption agency determines a couple's fitness as parents – an anonymous caller attempted to turn us in as child abusers. This lengthened the process for adopting Patrick. We persevered and learned to forgive, in the Lord's strength. Forgiveness was complete the moment Pat was laid in my arms at the airport in Detroit and he became our flesh and blood – not that he wasn't becoming ours long before that moment.

Adoption is a loving way to build your family. Would I recommend it for your family? You bet! Is it easy bringing a child who isn't biologically related to you into your home? Is it easy to raise any child? It's your responsibility to love and nurture them in either case. It is not an easy job, but ultimately a rewarding one. You have the same ups and downs

of any parent, watching them grow, mature, and reach various milestones.

My tears of joy at Pat's high school graduation, and last year at his wedding, were the same as any parent. The following poem, used to announce our son's arrival so many years ago, beautifully expresses my feelings for him now:

*Not flesh of my flesh,
not bone of my bone,
but still miraculously
my own.
Never forget
for a single minute
you didn't grow
under my heart
but in it.⁵*

1. Genesis 30:3, 48:5; Exodus 2:10; 2 Samuel 9:11; Esther 2:7.

2. The Supreme Court's 1972 *Stanley v. Illinois* decision opened the door to allowing an unmarried birthfather to overrule a birthmother's adoption plan; *Roe v. Wade* (1973) and subsequent abortion rulings stripped fathers (married or unmarried) of the right to overrule a mother's abortion plan. The percentage of women releasing parental rights went from 8.75 in 1973 to 0.9 in 1989-95. There were 19.4 infant adoptions per 1,000 abortions in 1996. *Adoption Factbook III*, National Council for Adoption, <https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/documents/AdoptionFactbook.pdf>.

3. "Adoption Myths and Facts," Adoption Associates, http://www.planadoption.com/pregnant/questions/myths_and_facts/.

4. Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, http://travel.state.gov/pdf/JCICS_fact_sheet.pdf, http://travel.state.gov/family/adoption/convention/convention_2300.html

5. "The Answer," Fleur Conkling Heyliger; reprinted from the *Saturday Evening Post* magazine, © 1952, Saturday Evening Post Society.