

Cruciform Press

AFTER THEY ARE YOURS

THE GRACE AND GRIT OF ADOPTION

Brian Borgman

Foreword by Dan Cruver

"A compelling story about saying yes to God and then watching the Father shape and redeem his sons and daughters through love, grace, and mercy."

— Kelly Rosati, Focus on the Family

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Brian Borgman

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To Alex, our son.
I thank God for the day He brought you
into our lives.
Love, Dad

Alex, Ariel, and I would also like to lovingly
remember our dear friend and ardent supporter:

Diane Gamble
(12/16/52 – 3/17/14)

– Brian Borgman

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“*After They Are Yours* is a compelling story about saying *yes* to God and then watching the Father shape and redeem his sons and daughters through love, grace, and mercy.”

Kelly Rosati, Vice President of Community Outreach,
Focus on the Family

“The decision to adopt is heroic. The reality is often hard. This book does not sugar coat the sacrifice that comes standard with adoption. It will help those considering adoption to count the cost. And it will provide encouragement and help for parents who have already welcomed a child into their forever family.”

Bob Lepine, Co-Host, *FamilyLife Today*

“It’s all here — joy, hurt, and longing. And this is precisely what we most need: truth-telling that plunges beyond cliché and façade to speak of both the beauty and the brokenness that so often come woven together in adoption, all of it wrapped round by God’s limitless grace.”

Jedd Medefind, President, Christian Alliance for Orphans
and author of *Becoming Home*

“It’s one thing to tell the truth about being an adoptive parent, it’s a whole other thing to peer into a man’s soul as he wrestles with God. *After They Are Yours* opens a window into the life of a father of an adoptive family and allows you to peek into his mind, seeing snapshots of and watching him grapple with his raw emotions. He’s a husband, a protector and defender of his wife. Oh yes, he’s a father, duty bound to raise up his children to live a disciplined life through discipleship, love and second chances. He’s a man...strong yet weak. The power of his struggle beckons you to pray for the father. This book was a glimpse of how God fights for us and doesn’t let go. I wanted to be their intercessor. *After They Are Yours* reminds us of the importance of having people who will wrap around adoptive families with support and prayer when a family says ‘Yes’ to God’s call to adopt. It reinforces that God has called

for a lifetime commitment when we adopt and that He will be faithful.”

Dr. Sharen Ford, Program Director of Adoption & Orphan Care, Focus on the Family

“This book will be a blessed resource for all parents who have adopted or are considering adopting a child. It is rooted in sound theology and personal experience. The author is realistic about the unique and significant challenges faced by those who adopt (“adopt boldly with eyes wide open”), while also extolling the privilege of reflecting God’s grace by seeking to rescue a child from darkness (“God enters into this abusive, oppressive family and removes us”). The greatest strength of this book is the transparent way in which the author tells his family’s adoption story. He openly shares his own struggles and sins along with his family’s experiences of God’s grace and mercy. His insights will benefit all parents, not just those who have adopted.”

Dr. Jim Newheiser, pastor, author, Director of the Institute of Biblical Counseling and Discipleship, founding member of the Fellowship of Independent Reformed Evangelicals

“Just as marriage is given to us by God and intended to reflect, however imperfectly, the relationship between Christ and His church, earthly adoption illustrates the glorious work of God’s sovereign, gracious adoption of each of us into His family so that we may cry out “Abba, Father!” And just as marriage is a marred reflection due to our sinful condition, adoption is fraught with peril and pain along with the joy and gladness.

After They are Yours is a vivid, plain spoken picture of that joy and pain. Would that all the adoptive families I have worked with over the decades could have read this as part of the adoptive process! The book also presents a clear, Biblical teaching concerning a proper response to the difficulties which arise in every adoption and in fact in every parent’s life.

My wife, Diane, and I have watched this joy and pain and

love lived out in the lives of Brian and Ariel and all three of our Borgman grandkids, and can testify to God's gracious faithfulness and provision for them, and to God's love of adoption, on earth as it is in heaven!

I highly recommend this very accessible, truthful picture of adoption."

Judge David Gamble, elder; President and Trustee of City of Refuge, Gardnerville, NV

"Too many people enter the adoption process with false hopes, images of grandeur, and rose-colored glasses about their future with an adopted child that too often are based on marketing and adoptive parents not sharing 'the rest of the story.' The consequences of such misguided beliefs and motives can be devastating to the adopted child and adoptive family. Thankfully, we now have *After They Are Yours* to protect well-intentioned, prospective parents from the perils of ignorance and prepare them for their future. Through his raw honesty, vulnerability, and insight, and with scriptural truths as his foundation, Borgman gives potential and current adoptive parents, and any other parents for that matter, an invaluable resource to ensure that they can enter into the life-changing world of adoption with eyes wide open."

Philip Darke, President of Providence World and co-author of *In Pursuit of Orphan Excellence*

"Brian invites us into his family's adoption journey with refreshingly raw honesty, where he articulates the very real challenges and very real joy found in the day-to-day 'after they are yours.'"

Andy Lehman, Vice President of Lifesong for Orphans and Founding Board Member of the Christian Alliance for Orphans & the Orphan Sunday campaign

“With the explosion of the orphan care movement among evangelicals in recent years, this book provides a timely, much needed perspective on the challenges often facing adoptive and foster parents. As Borgman takes readers on his family’s journey of adoption, he does not hold back on some of his most personal struggles. While some of these anecdotes may be difficult to read, this transparent, gritty story highlights how God loves to take the messiest of situations and then transform them for his glory. This book provides a healthy dose of realism every prospective adoptive parent needs, followed by practical insights and the hope of redemption that is only found in the Gospel.”

Matt Oettinger, Campus Elder/Orphan Care Ministry
Leader of The Summit Church, Raleigh-Durham, NC

“Adoption, like missions for so many years before, has been sold to sincere disciples by romanticizing the calling. And as in missions many have flung themselves into the noble life-altering calling of adoption only to find themselves secretly wondering if they have been sold a bill of goods. The prince has turned into a toad. The good news is most refreshing to those who feel stuck in a bad story but are too ashamed and afraid to admit that reality is not that charming. Too often we unintentionally promote noble callings, like missions and adoption, with the lure of prosperity; not because we promise blessing, but because we do not honestly warn of difficulty. Brian Borgman’s book is long overdue. He boldly unveils the secret too many are unwilling to discuss: adoption can be very, very hard. This will be a book that I will buy and hand out to many couples who with starry eyes plunged into the calling of adoption and are now in the full shock of difficulty. They, like Bunyan’s Mr. Ready-to-halt will find in Pastor Borgman a Mr. Great-heart who tells them as the sincere and weary traveler was told, “Your travel hither has been with difficulty, but that will make thy Rest the sweeter.”

Bob Bixby, Lead Pastor of Redeemer Church, Fremont,
CA

“*After They Are Yours* is a compelling acknowledgment that parenting adopted children can be uniquely challenging. Brian Borgman lets us step into his family’s experience as he unashamedly shares the joys and difficulties of their adoption story. Pain and loss are an inescapable part of every adoption, and Borgman points us to the Gospel that provides both the framework and the fuel that families will need for the challenges that come. Grace and grit indeed; this is an excellent resource.”

Stephen Story, Executive Director, Covenant Care
Services

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Foreword

Romanticizing adoption is so easy and so tempting. Who doesn't approve of the idea of giving a child a loving home? Who doesn't want to see an orphan loved by a committed Christian family? When we primarily look at adoption as giving orphans homes, it's tempting to think of their placement in a home as the happy ending—the child who was without hope and home in the world now has a loving family. Yes, the day an orphan becomes a loved-on child in a permanent family is indeed happy. But let's never forget that the post-adoption journey always involves some suffering. Especially when the adopted child is older, that “happy ending” is often just the beginning of a much longer, difficult story—a story marked by struggles with attachment and bonding, and by visceral feelings of loneliness, resentment, anger, doubt, and regret. Love may often seem elusive, and is sometimes simply impossible. To borrow words from Isaiah 53:3, the post-adoption journey is frequently “acquainted with grief.”

Having served with Together for Adoption for almost 7 years now, I have talked to many couples who began their adoption journeys with great anticipation and excitement, only to be met with behavioral and emotional issues that quickly moved them out of their depth. Every one of these couples went from feeling *hopeful* as parents to feeling *hopeless*. And often what makes this sense of hopelessness especially unbearable is feeling unsupported or misunderstood by the local and larger Christian community.

For a great many adoptive families, the most difficult and longest part of the adoption journey is what happens after they are yours.

This is why I am extremely grateful for this new book. Brian Borgman is a husband, father, and pastor who has experienced both the beauty and brokenness of adoption. He wants to provide specific, tangible help to two kinds of families—those who struggle with “the hidden side of adoption,” as well as prospective adoptive parents, so they may adopt boldly with eyes wide open, depending daily upon the unmatched grace of God in the grit of the adoption journey.

After They Are Yours is not watered down or sanitized. Brian writes with a raw, refreshing honesty and vulnerability, coupled with hope-giving biblical insight and courage. His use and application of Scripture is compelling and convincing. This is a book the Lord will use to bring many adoptive families through the deep, dark shadows that often accompany the journey on “the other side of adoption.”

If you are a prospective adoptive parent, an adoptive family in the midst of post-adoption struggles, or someone who knows such families, Brian wrote this book for you. As you read, my hope is that you will know and experience the grace of God the Father in the grit of adoption.

Dan Cruver

President, Together for Adoption

Editor and co-author of *Reclaiming Adoption: Missional Living through the Rediscovery of Abba Father*

INTRODUCTION

Why I Wrote This Book

This book has numerous origins, but perhaps the most catalytic was a conversation I had with Eli Perez from *Family Life Today*. I had traveled to Little Rock, Arkansas to be interviewed for their radio program, and Eli was assigned to take me to lunch. As we sat in P.F. Chang's he made a simple, sincere request.

“Tell me about your family.”

“Well, I have three children, Ashley, Zach, and Alex.” As I went on about my kids, I got around to Alex's athletic exploits. “He is a Babe Ruth All-Star. He not only is a terrific pitcher with a frightening fastball, he can hit the ball a mile. He has been a varsity basketball player since he was a freshman. He is a leading rebounder and scorer. He is All-league and team MVP. He gets under the basket and knows how to bang bodies, box out and score and rebound. Oh, he also won state in discus and placed in shot put. It was the first year he ever threw.”

Eli looked at me and asked the inevitable question, “How big is he?”

“He is 6'1” and weighs 210 pounds.”

Looking at me he could tell something was amiss.

I laughed and said, “Alex is adopted. He didn’t get his size or athletic ability from me!”

Eli began asking questions about how long Alex has been in our family and what our adoption experience has been like.

I told him, “His mom and I have often talked about writing a book, *The Other Side of Adoption*. It has been really tough. Years of blessings *and* deep struggles.”

Eli then told me stories of families he has known who also have struggled with adoptions. Some of those stories involved real tragedies. He encouraged me to pursue the idea of writing such a book. “I think something like that needs to be written.”

Since that time, not only has Alex grown, but my sense of the need for this book has grown. Even while ministering in a closed country in the Far East, I was asked by the pastor to sit down with three families who were all going through adoptive family struggles. I listened to their heartache and trials and tried to offer some biblical counsel and lessons learned through personal experience. Although the culture was vastly different, the problems and challenges were the same.

Thankful for Adoption

I have served as pastor at a church in Nevada since 1993, and one thing I am so very thankful for is the wonderful emphasis our church gives to adoption. You could say that our church specializes in adoption. One of our vital ministries is the City of Refuge, a home operated by a couple in the church. Through this ministry we take care

of unwed pregnant moms who have made the choice to give their babies life. We also facilitate the choice by some of these moms to give their baby *a* life through adoption. So many heart-warming stories have come from the City of Refuge, stories of babies saved from abortion and adopted into loving families. In addition, many families in our church have adopted children. One family in particular adopted a special needs baby and is looking to adopt again. Another family recently completed an international adoption of multiple children from a very dark and dangerous country. These families are heroes.

I am also thankful for books like Russell Moore's *Adopted for Life* and conferences like *Together for Adoption*. Even the movie *The Blind Side* has contributed to a resurgence of interest in adoption in our society and especially in the church. At the time of this writing, a recent edition of WORLD Magazine featured several inspiring stories of adoption. For society to see the beauty of adoption is a good thing, and for the church to be actively engaged in adoption is a powerful testimony to true religion. "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (James 1:27). Adoption is an expression of pure and undefiled religion.

I love adoption for three reasons. The first has two interlocking components: adoption is a redemptive theme in the Bible that extols God's marvelous love; and adoption is a viable alternative to the tragic sin of abortion. As pro-lifers, we cannot afford merely to express our

opposition to abortion. We must also be out front in offering real alternatives to women who experience an unplanned pregnancy. Adoption is one of those alternatives. To say “no” to abortion is to give the baby life. To say “yes” to adoption when the mother is not prepared to keep the child is to give the baby *a* life.

The second reason I love adoption is because as Christians we should reflect the compassion of our heavenly Father by seeking to bring relief to those who are suffering. When a Christian couple seeks to rescue children from orphanages—especially from countries where the living conditions may be especially inhumane—they are manifesting the compassionate heart of God who delights to relieve the suffering of the afflicted.

Finally, I love adoption because my wife and I are adoptive parents. We know the great joys of adoption, but we also know the other side—the pain and tears, the anger and frustration. We know the perplexity of wondering, “Is this really worth it?” and the shame of having even asked the question. We know the thrill of watching Alex excel, and the guilt and heartbreak of erupting with an anger that seems to make all the joys and thrills evaporate in a moment.

Discouraging Words

Some will read that last paragraph and think, “Well, that’s not just adoptive parents; that describes many parents.” True enough. All kids are sinners. I’ve heard many times there isn’t “supposed” to be any difference in the parenting experience between adopted and natural

children. And certainly there are adoptive families in which the children assimilate beautifully, where the parental love is noble and unreserved. But there are also many godly, spiritually mature parents who struggle with a difficult adopted child, who feel the distance and detachment of the child's affections and suffer the tensions of a weak or non-existent parent-child bond. For those of us who have lived it, we know there can be a difference.

This is why words such as the following—well-meaning, and from an outstanding, milestone book on Christian adoption—can so easily discourage and disserve struggling adoptive parents.

You'll hear often from adopting parents who immediately blame all behavioral and discipline problems on the circumstance of the adoption. Sometimes parents will panic about "attachment disorder" because the child is mischievous or strong-willed.

In the vast majority of cases, however, parents are simply identifying the normal range of differences in children, or they're blaming bad behavior or uninformed parenting on a "syndrome." This isn't unique to adoption.... There may indeed be factors involved in misbehavior, but in the vast majority of instances, a child's misbehavior is explained by Genesis, not genes; by Eden, not adoption.

People speak of rearing "adopted children" with hushed tones and raised eyebrows, as though this task is not for the faint of heart. They speak of the trials of "adopted" children with their identity crises and

hidden hurts, as though one is predestined for misery because of adoption itself...

The reality, though, is that in most ways parenting is parenting, and growing up is growing up. It's always hard. Some unique challenges go along with adoption—challenges related to finding a sense of belonging, to discipline and discipleship, to answering questions about origins. Count these as all joy.¹

It's not my intention to dissect this statement at any length. There is obviously a measure of truth here—truth that some adoptive parents do need to receive. Recently, however, when I read these words to a group in a workshop at a biblical counseling conference, I heard the sighs and saw the hurt. And I know why.

To give just two examples, Reactive Attachment Disorder and Fetal Alcohol Syndrome are deeply painful realities that many adoptive families must live with. Words like those quoted above can suggest to struggling parents that such conditions are, if not quite imaginary, then either inconsequential or exceedingly rare. This only adds to the shame, increases the silence of real suffering, and discourages parental attempts to uncover potential underlying factors. Instead of trying to learn about the condition of an adopted child, adoptive parents—especially Christians—often think they are bad parents, ineffective disciplinarians, or even failures. They can feel hopeless, not to mention isolated from and unsupported by the very community that ought to understand.

Those who do learn about attachment disorders or

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome may feel ashamed, as if making excuses when trying to explain their challenges. My wife and I have been there and we know of many other adoptive parents who have as well. To these parents the shared experiences are familiar and the hurt, isolation, and sense of shame are real.

Comforting Words

For years it seemed as though very few materials dealt head-on with the struggles of adoptive families. Thankfully, that seems to be changing.

For all its beauty, adoption also has significant challenges... Although you are doing a wonderful thing, you must recognize that children were meant to live with their natural parents. When children are raised by those who aren't their natural parents, there will be struggles and difficulties. *Parenting an adopted child is often harder than parenting your natural child. Your adopted child deals with significant personal issues that your natural child never has to deal with.*²

I was so glad and relieved when I first read these words a few years ago.

Like any other difficult journey in the Christian life, the journey of adoption will always benefit from honesty and transparency. Many adoptive parents I talk to—and I talk to many—often feel misunderstood by family and friends. They frequently feel judged because they are “too hard” on the child. Or they hear, “He behaves himself just

fine when he is with us...” Often we are made to feel as though we are whining if we talk about our challenges.

So let me make this clear from the beginning—this book is the story of our challenges as adoptive parents. I don’t believe any of it qualifies as whining, but you can judge that for yourself. Certainly the experiences of some adoptive parents have been much better than ours. For others, the experience has been far worse. I don’t claim that what we’ve been through grants us any special authority or status, but I do think our story will resonate with a great many adoptive parents.



A Brief Aside

All struggles in the Christian life share the same root cause, the same hope, the same source of strength, and the same ultimate resolution. All of us who have been spiritually adopted by the Father can be strengthened when we see how God has worked in the lives of other struggling Christians, regardless of the nature of those struggles. For this reason, I believe that what you read in this book can be inspiring, encouraging, and helpful to you—even if you are not involved in adoption in any way. If that’s you, I encourage you to read on. Listen in as I talk directly to adoptive parents; no one will mind. Take a look at our lives and the struggles we’ve faced. They won’t be exactly like yours, but the grace, mercy, and strength we have found in God in the midst of it all is exactly what you can find in your abiding challenges. We share the same Father, the same Savior, the same Spirit, and we all live in the same

fallen world. In a very real way, our struggles are yours, and yours are ours. We're in this together.



I hope that what I have to say in this book, informed and shaped by Scripture, will be helpful to parents like us who struggle. But know that you'll find no special solution here, no offer of peace and freedom that will solve all your problems in this life. All I can offer you is my experience with Scripture. Through its truth and guidance, through conviction and encouragement, Scripture has been my lifeline to God. It has helped me immeasurably in all our struggles, and in very specific, tangible ways. The truth of Scripture, and our experience of interacting with it and receiving encouragement from it, lies at the heart of our story as adoptive parents. Certainly I have nothing of value to tell you apart from what Scripture has done for us and through us in the midst of our struggles. In this book, I want to show you how Scripture has been our support and help—because I know it can be yours as well, regardless of your circumstances.

In the end, I hope this book accomplishes two purposes. The first is to encourage families who struggle with “the other side of adoption” or what happens “after they are yours.” The second is to encourage prospective adoptive parents to adopt boldly with eyes wide open, knowing both the challenges that may lie ahead and that there is grace from God, sufficient grace, to give them all they need to do something so incredibly God-like. A friend of mine, an adoptive parent of four, wrote, “As a

parent you need truth. The quicker you know the truth, the quicker you can adjust your expectations and start advocating for your child. Not knowing is dangerous. Too many adoptive parents are living, parenting, and problem solving in the dark — or at least in a heavy fog bank.”

May our heavenly Father, who adopted us by his grace, use this book to equip parents “after they are yours.”

One

FROM CONVICTION TO FOSTER CARE

Our Story, Part One

I am going to speak transparently about our struggles with Alex, so there are two things you should be aware of. First, Alex knows I will share some of the more painful events of our lives and he is OK with that, so please don't think I'm talking behind his back. Second, I am writing mostly out of our failures, not our successes. My wife, Ariel, and I learned way too late some of the lessons described in this book. Some of the stories reveal our sin. We are OK with that because we are sinners who have been forgiven by a loving Savior and by Alex. Because I'm a pastor, some might think I have a reputation to protect. But I'm not concerned that some of our stories may raise eyebrows. I am not looking for a call to a bigger church, and I am secure in my relationship with the family of Grace Community Church, so I am going to let the clay show. My family and I live in the real world of sin

and failure, and for these reasons and many more we are thankful for the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

How It All Started

My wife, Ariel, and I have always been strongly pro-life. We believe abortion is murder, our national tragedy and crisis, and the worst form of oppression and injustice in the world today. Like many pro-life people we support our local community pregnancy center as well as pro-life candidates. But something was missing. We thought we could do more. We knew a man in a neighboring church who worked for Koinonia Ministries. This is a Christian ministry that helps train people, especially Christians, to be foster parents.³ The ministry also serves as a liaison with local child and family services in helping place foster children. We wanted to get involved. Helping out a child in desperate need of love, care, and safety seemed to be fully consistent with our pro-life principles.

“We Would Like to Help”

We went through the initial training, then through additional training to qualify as therapeutic foster parents who could take care of special-needs children. At times the training was daunting. Horror stories abounded. But we were committed, confident that this was a way to serve God. Helping a child in need was a good thing and we knew God would help us.

Then came the day when the state social worker came to our house for our final interview. He asked whether we spanked our own children. I answered, “Yes. Is that

a problem? We understand we cannot spank the foster children.”

“Oh no. No problem. Just making some notes.”

He went on. “I notice you seem to be very religious. How many times a week do you go to church?”

“Well, I am the pastor. I am technically at church every day. Is there a problem?”

“No. No problem. What other kind of religious activities do you do outside of church?”

“We have family devotions.”

“How often?”

“Every day.”

“What do those consist of?”

“Well, we read the Bible or a book together. We pray. And we sing. I am not sure why you are asking these questions.”

“Don’t worry Mr. Borgman, I am just trying to get a feel for your home environment.”

When the social worker left I had a sinking feeling in my stomach. I said to Ariel, “I bet they deny us.”

“They can’t deny us because we are Christians and spank our own kids,” she said.

After the two-week period for review and approval we still had not heard anything. Another week went by and I called Koinonia to express our concerns. I was assured they would look into it. Koinonia called back and said there were just some delays. Another two weeks passed and this time Koinonia initiated contact with the state. After some relentless probing, Koinonia was told the social worker noted that we “used corporal punish-

ment on our biological children and were excessively religious.” The social worker recommended that we be denied foster parent status.

The Koinonia director could not believe what he was hearing. He protested. He appealed to the fact that spanking your biological children is not against the law. He argued that we had gone through the training and had a stable marriage, family, and home life. He reminded them that we were the very kind of people the state was looking for to fill a huge need for the perpetual demands for safe foster homes. None of his arguments prevailed.

We concluded that the Lord had closed this door. Our consciences were clear. We had made our plans, we had done our best, and we knew our hearts were in the right place. We had prayed that God would give us favor, and we believed he had directed our steps (Proverbs 16:9). Yet the door seemed to be shut. God’s ways are certainly not our ways.

“A Tough One”

About a month later I received a call from the state. “Mr. Borgman, we have a 20-month-old little boy who needs immediate foster care.”

“I’m sorry, we weren’t approved for foster care,” I said.

“Well, Mr. Borgman, I have a paper right here that says you have provisional approval to care for children up to 24 months old.”

“When was that dated?”

“Today. Are you interested?”

“Let me call you back.”

I called Koinonia. Ariel was excited. I was apprehensive. The director was upset because the state had broken two matters of protocol. First, the state is supposed to contact Koinonia for placements with Koinonia-trained foster parents. Second, there was no age limitation in the approval process. To be trained for therapeutic care was to be eligible for children of any age who were in need. Knowing our desire to care for a child, he contacted the state to inquire about this particular child.

The director's words are forever embedded in my mind. "Brian, this little guy is a tough one. He is 20 months old. He has a 36-month-old brother. The state needs to separate them. They are violent together. Brian, he has been in four homes in six weeks. No one seems to be able to handle him. It will be a tough assignment to break you in on. Don't feel bad if you pass on this one. There will be others."

"Let me talk to Ariel—we need to pray about it."

I told my wife about this little boy and, before I could even say, "Let's pray about it," she told me, "This is the kind of child we need to help. I think we should say *yes*." That was it. I knew resistance was futile! Within two hours a kind and friendly case worker brought Alex to our home.

Alex had blonde hair and blue eyes and looked like a 20-month-old action figure. He had muscles and a little six-pack. He was quiet and observant for the first week, except when he ate. When we put him in his high chair to feed him he dug in with both hands. He knew what it was to go without a meal—or two or three—so he tried to

cram as much food into his little mouth as possible. Ariel put a bowl of fruit on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator and told him he could eat anytime (something we learned in our training). We were heartbroken at his plight and delighted to be able to help. That was the first week. An excerpt from Ariel's journal on 7/2/97 reads, "Alex played well today and tonight with Ash and Zach. He smiled, laughed, ate well, played well with toys, looked at a couple books, had a bottle at 8:30 pm, and was tucked into bed at 8:45. He went right to sleep, happy."

"Happy" wasn't the word to describe the second week. The second week started with teeth marks. Alex decided to bite Zach, who is three years older than Alex. Alex also decided that wearing his cereal would be more fun than eating it. How could he eat like a ravenous zombie and then dump cereal on his head? He threw tantrums, screamed, and was an all-around disruptive force. Ariel was exhausted and I realized why he had been in four homes in six weeks. Ariel wrote, "A long afternoon of testing! Lots of biting (he bit both Ash and Zach). Lots of hitting and pushing. Ash and Zach went to evening service with Dad, I stayed home and put Alex to bed. I need a break. I'm beat."

With strict limitations on how we could discipline, we felt at a loss to know what to do. "Time out" was a bust because he would occupy himself by destroying something. One morning Alex dumped the cereal and sticky milk on his head again. Ariel, thinking quickly, took him into the bathroom and ran a cold bath. He screamed and squirmed as she bathed him in the cold water. From that point on, the cereal stayed in the bowl.

Then we went on a family vacation eastward across the United States. We drove. In a mini-van. What were we thinking?

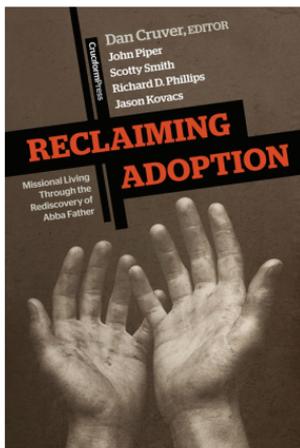
Heading for New Jersey, we checked into a roadside hotel in Salt Lake City. Our room was on the third floor, and as I went back down to the van to get the rest of the luggage, Ariel opened the windows to air out the room. While unloading the van I heard Alex yelling, “Daddy! Hi, Daddy!” As I looked up, he was standing on the windowsill, pounding on the screen which was in the process of falling out. As my heart burst out of my chest I hollered up to Ariel, and Alex was rescued. That’s when we realized that Alex had no fear.

Later in New Jersey, while leaving a K-Mart, Alex and Zach wanted to ride those little toy cars that rock back and forth. We put in the quarters and let them ride. When Zach’s ride was over he got off. When Alex’s ride was over he stayed in the car, trying violently to make it keep rocking. I told him it was time to go. He looked at me without a word and went back to rocking the car. After a couple more commands, “Alex, get down, we need to leave,” he was blatantly ignoring me. This was a shock. I was not used to being ignored by my children.

I motioned to Ariel that we should walk off a little ways. We grabbed the other two kids and said, “Bye, Alex.” He didn’t say a word, just kept trying to force that car to go again. We walked further. While he was never out of our sight, he never looked at us once. He never called for us. We stood there for ten minutes in stunned silence; he was completely indifferent to our absence. He

only cared about the car. We began to understand the meaning of “reactive attachment disorder.” There would be many other episodes like this one.

Alex was diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Attention Deficit Disorder. He was also delayed in speech. We decided that we would not let these diagnoses define him or excuse him. We did our best to love and help him. As time went on, Alex improved. In spite of some improvement, we were never without Alex-generated chaos or destruction. Life was always interesting with Alex.



[Reclaiming Adoption](#)

Missional Living Through the
Rediscovery of Abba Father

Dan Cruver, Editor
John Piper, Scotty Smith
Richard D. Phillips, Jason Kovacs

bit.ly/AdoptBK

“There is no greater need in our day than theological clarity. Dan has brought us near to God’s heart. As you read this book, you will sense the need to embrace your own acceptance as God’s adopted child.”

-Darrin Patrick, Pastor and author

“I can’t recall ever hearing about, much less reading, a book like this before. Simply put, this remarkable volume fills a much-needed gap in our understanding of what the Bible says both about God’s adoption of us and our adoption of others. I highly recommend it.”

Sam Storms, Author of The Singing God: Discover the Joy of Being Enjoyed by God

“The authors writing here are some of the most fearless thinkers and activists in the Christian orphan care movement. Read. Be empowered. And then join Jesus for the orphans of the world.”

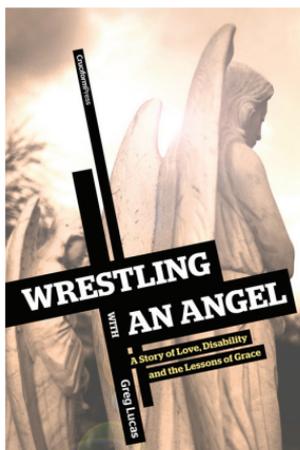
Russell D. Moore, Pastor and author of Adopted for Life

“With spiritual insight and effective teaching, *Reclaiming Adoption* will help believers better understand our place with Christ and work in his kingdom.”

Ed Stetzer, President, LifeWay Research

“Something like...a revival, is happening right now in evangelical theology...it may have the momentum to reinvigorate evangelical systematic theology...The most promising sign I’ve seen so far is the new book *Reclaiming Adoption*.”

Fred Sanders, Ph.D., Biola University



[Wrestling with an Angel](#)

A Story of Love, Disability
and the Lessons of Grace

by Greg Lucas

The riveting, inspiring true story that readers have called “a touchstone book of my life,” and “alternately hilarious and heartbreaking,” a book that “turns the diamond of grace in such a way that you see facets you never really noticed before.”

bit.ly/CPWrestle

“C.S. Lewis wrote that he paradoxically loved *The Lord of the Rings* because it ‘broke his heart’ – and Greg Lucas’ writing does the same for me.”

Justin Taylor, Managing Editor, ESV Study Bible

“Witty...stunning...striking...humorous and heartfelt. *Wrestling with an Angel* provides a fresh, honest look at one father’s struggle to embrace God in the midst of his son’s disability. Can sheer laughter and weeping gracefully coexist in a world of so much affliction? Greg knows all about it. I highly recommend this wonderfully personal book!”

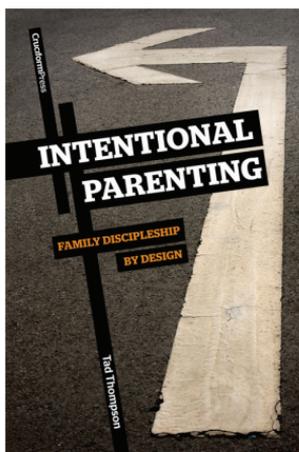
Joni Eareckson Tada, Joni and Friends International

“You will laugh; you will cry. You will feel sick; you will feel inspired. You will be repulsed by the ugliness of sin; you will be overwhelmed by the love of God. Greg Lucas takes us on an unforgettable ride as he extracts the most beautiful insights into grace from the most painful experiences of life.”

David P. Murray, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary

“Greg Lucas is a captivating storyteller. When he writes about life with Jake, I recognize God’s grace and loving persistence in my life. I want more!”

Noël Piper, author, and wife of pastor and author John Piper



[Intentional Parenting](#)

Family Discipleship by Design

by Tad Thompson

The Big Picture and a Simple Plan – That's What You Need to Do Family Discipleship Well

This book will allow you to take all the sermons, teachings, and exhortations you have received on the topic of family discipleship, make sense of it, and put it to use.

bit.ly/Parent

“As parents, we know God has given us the responsibility to train our children in his ways. But many parents don’t know where or how to start. Tad has done us all a favor by identifying seven key categories of biblical teaching we can utilize in teaching our children godly truth and principles. This easy-to-follow plan will help any parent put the truth of God’s Word into their children’s hearts.”

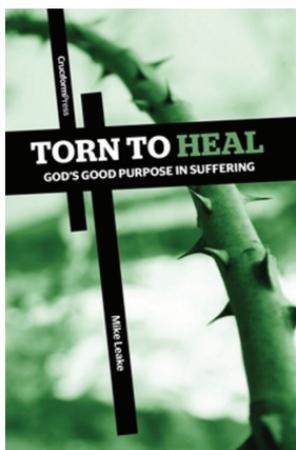
***Kevin Ezell, President, North American Mission Board,
Southern Baptist Convention; father of six***

“Here is a practical page-turner that encourages fathers to engage the hearts of their families with truth and grace. In an age when truth is either ignored or despised, it is refreshing to see a book written for ordinary fathers who want their families to be sanctified by the truth. Thompson writes with a grace which reminds us that parenting flows from the sweet mercies of Christ.”

***Joel Beeke, President, Puritan Reformed Theological
Seminary***

“Need an introductory text to the topic of discipling children? Here is a clear, simple book on family discipleship, centered on the gospel rather than human successes or external behaviors.”

***James M. Hamilton, Associate Professor of Biblical
Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary***



[Torn to Heal](#)

God's Good Purpose in Suffering

by Mike Leake

**Receive comfort for today.
Be prepared to for tomorrow.**

87 pages

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"The most concise, readable, and helpful theology of suffering I've come across. The content, length, and tone is just perfect for those who are in the furnace of affliction screaming 'Why?'"

Dr. David Murray, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary

"Mike Leake has taken the ugliness of suffering, turned it over in his capable hands, and shown God's goodness and faithfulness in the midst. More than simple encouragement, it is a handbook of scriptural truths about Who God is and how He sustains."

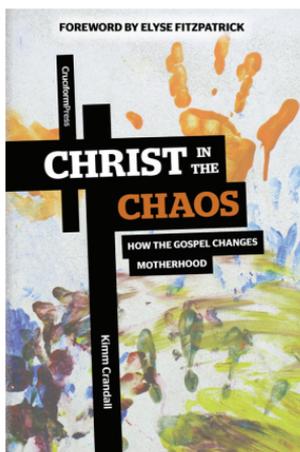
Lore Ferguson writes for Gospel Coalition, CBMW, and more

"A gospel-driven path between dualism that acts as if God has lost control of his world and fatalism/stoicism that tries to bury pain beneath emotionless acceptance of whatever happens. The result is a brief but potent primer on the purpose of suffering."

Timothy Paul Jones, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

"Explores God's redemptive purposes in human suffering in a concise, biblical and authentic way. Mike shuns cliches and platitudes to help the reader put life's hardships into divine perspective and to endure in Christ's strength. It is a must-read for Christians in distress."

Dave Miller, Second Vice-President, Southern Baptist Convention



[Christ in the Chaos](#)

How the Gospel Changes
Motherhood

by Kimm Crandall

MOMS: Stop comparing yourself to others. Stop striving to meet false expectations. Stop thinking your performance dictates your worth.

Look to the gospel for rest, joy, sufficiency, identity, and motivation.

[bitly/Christ-in](https://bitly.com/Christ-in)

“Although Kimm Crandall’s message would revive any soul longing for the breath of the gospel of grace, I am especially eager to recommend this book to that heart who strives to know God and to make him known to the little ones who call her ‘Momma.’ Kimm is a candid and gracious fellow sojourner, faithfully pointing to God’s immeasurable steadfast love and grace in the midst of our mess.”

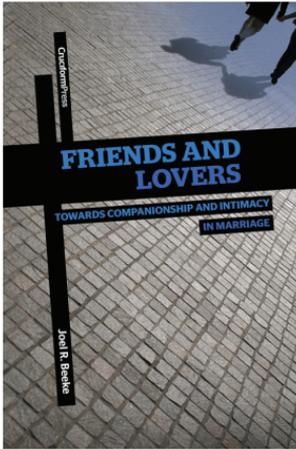
Lauren Chandler, wife of Matt Chandler (pastor of The Village Church), mother of three, writer, singer, and speaker

“What an amazingly wild and wise, disruptive and delighting, freeing and focusing book. Kimm’s book is for every parent willing to take the stewardship of children and the riches of the gospel seriously. This is one of the most helpful and encouraging books on parenting I’ve read in the past twenty years. This will be a book you will want to give to parents, to-be parents, and grandparents.”

Scotty Smith, author; Founding Pastor, Christ Community Church

“Kimm Crandall has discovered that chaos can be the perfect context in which to experience God’s liberating grace. She is a wise, practical, gospel-drenched guide for anyone navigating through the wearisome terrain of parenting.”

Tullian Tchividjian, author; Pastor, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church



[Friends and Lovers](#)

Cultivating Companionship and Intimacy in Marriage

by Joel R. Beeke

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The secret?... Intimate Christian companionship.

bitly/FriendsAnd

"A book about love, marriage, and sex from Joel Beeke that is surprisingly candid yet without a trace of smuttiness. Fresh and refreshingly straightforward, this is the best book of its kind."

Derek WH Thomas, Visiting Professor, Reformed Theo. Sem.

"Marriage is hard work. And wonderful. And sometimes, it's both at the same time. *Friends and Lovers* is like a personal mentoring session on marriage with a man whose heart is devoted to seeing Christ honored in how we love each other as husbands and wives. It's full of practical wisdom and grace. A delight."

Bob Lepine, Co-Host, FamilyLife Today

"By laying the theological, emotional, social, and spiritual foundations of marriage before heading to the bedroom, Joel Beeke provides a healthy corrective to the excessive and obsessive sex-focus of our generation and even of some pastors. But, thankfully, he also goes on to provide wise, practical, down-to-earth direction for couples wanting to discover or recover physical intimacy that will both satisfy themselves and honor God."

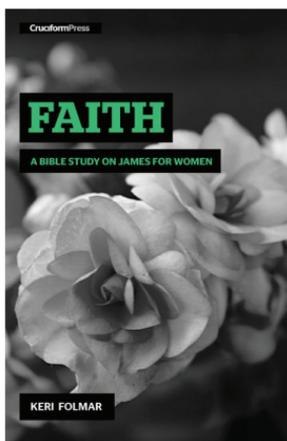
Dr. David Murray, Professor, Puritan Reformed Theo. Sem.

"There is no better book than this to renew the affection of happy marriage."

Geoffrey Thomas, Pastor, Alfred Place Baptist Church, Wales



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Inductive Bible studies for women by Keri Folmar endorsed by..

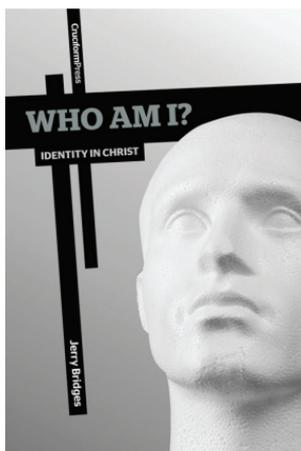
Kathleen Nielson is author of the *Living Word Bible Studies*; Director of Women's Initiatives, The Gospel Coalition; and wife of Niel, who served as President of Covenant College from 2002 to 2012.

Diane Schreiner – wife of professor, author, and pastor Tom Schreiner, and mother of four grown children – has led women's Bible studies for more than 20 years.

Connie Dever is author of *The Praise Factory* children's ministry curriculum and wife of Pastor Mark Dever, President of 9 Marks Ministries

Kristie Anyabwile, holds a history degree from NC State University, and is married to Thabiti, Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church, Grand Cayman, and a Council Member for The Gospel Coalition.

Gloria Furman is a pastor's wife in the Middle East and author of *Glimpses of Grace* and *Treasuring Christ When Your Hands Are Full*.



[Who Am I?](#)

Identity in Christ

by Jerry Bridges

Jerry Bridges unpacks Scripture to give the Christian eight clear, simple, interlocking answers to one of the most essential questions of life.

bit.ly/WHOAMI

“Jerry Bridges’ gift for simple but deep spiritual communication is fully displayed in this warm-hearted, biblical spelling out of the Christian’s true identity in Christ.”

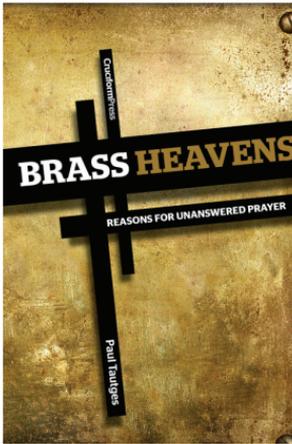
J.I. Packer, Theological Editor, ESV Study Bible; author, Knowing God, A Quest for Godliness, Concise Theology

“I know of no one better prepared than Jerry Bridges to write *Who Am I?* He is a man who knows who he is in Christ and he helps us to see succinctly and clearly who we are to be. Thank you for another gift to the Church of your wisdom and insight in this book.”

R.C. Sproul, founder, chairman, president, Ligonier Ministries; executive editor, Tabletalk magazine; general editor, The Reformation Study Bible

“*Who Am I?* answers one of the most pressing questions of our time in clear gospel categories straight from the Bible. This little book is a great resource to ground new believers and remind all of us of what God has made us through faith in Jesus. Thank the Lord for Jerry Bridges, who continues to provide the warm, clear, and biblically balanced teaching that has made him so beloved to this generation of Christians.”

Richard D. Phillips, Senior Minister, Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC



[Brass Heavens](#)

Reasons for Unanswered Prayer

by Paul Tautges

Does it ever seem like God is not listening?

Scripture offers six clear reasons why your prayers may go unanswered.

Learn what they are and what you can do about it.

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“Paul Tautges scatters the darkness of doubt. He blends biblical teaching with practical illustrations to challenge and comfort us when the heavens seem as brass. Read this to revive your prayers, to melt the heavens, and to increase your answers.”

David Murray, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary

“Some things in the Scriptures are conveniently ignored...but this book will not let us continue to bury Scripture's clear teaching, or continue to ignore the ongoing rebellions, unrelinquished resentments, and unconfessed sins in our lives that may be hindering our prayers.”

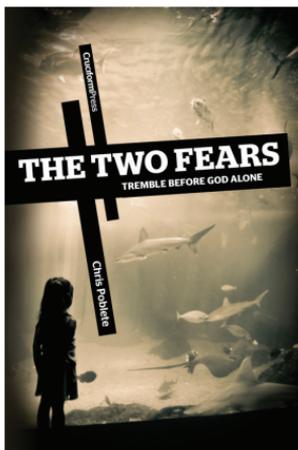
Nancy Guthrie, author, Seeing Jesus in the Old Testament

“Both motivating and convicting...Read and obey for the sake of your future, your family, and the work of God in the world.”

Jim Elliff, President, Christian Communicators Worldwide

“Like the Scriptures, Paul Tautges does not leave us in the pit of despair, but shows that where sin abounds, grace superabounds—there are biblical pathways for dealing with our role in unanswered prayers and for responding humbly to God's affectionate sovereignty.”

Bob Kelleman, Executive Dir., Biblical Counseling Coalition



[The Two Fears](#)

Tremble Before God Alone

by Chris Poblete

**You can fear God...
or everything else.**

**Only one fear brings life and hope,
wisdom and joy.**

Fear wisely.

bit.ly/2Fears

"We are too scared. And we aren't scared enough. Reading this book will prompt you to seek in your own life the biblical tension between 'fear not' and 'fear God.'"

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"An importantly counter-cultural book, moving us beyond a homeboy God we could fist-bump to a holy God we can worship. *The Two Fears* helps us recover a biblical fear of God and all the awe, repentance, and freedom from self-centered fears that go with it. An awesome resource!"

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"In this practical and very readable book, Chris Poblete shows how both the absence of true fear and the presence of 'unholy [false] fear' stem from an absence of a knowledge of the awesome God of the Bible, and that, in meeting him, we discover the real dimensions of creational existence and the wonderful benefits of living in fear and deep respect before him, freed from the [false] fear of men."

Peter Jones, PhD, TruthXchange, Scholar-in-Residence and Adjunct Professor, Westminster Seminary in California

"I commend this book to you: it will fuel your worship and empower your discipleship."

Gabe Tribbett, Christ's Covenant Church, Winona Lake, IA