

“For This Child I Prayed....”: Perspectives from an Adoptive Parent

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Brothers and sisters, it is an honor to participate in this important forum on families. The challenges which families face today are many, but for those denied the opportunity of parenthood, they are challenges sometimes longed for. In the first book of Samuel, we read the poignant supplications of Hannah who was “in bitterness of soul.” The scriptures record that she “prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore”ⁱ because “the Lord had shut up her womb.”ⁱⁱ Hannah is joined in this unpopular scriptural sorority by Sarah, Rachel, Elisabeth, and others, who also pled with the Lord to take away their “reproach.”ⁱⁱⁱ These are women with whom I was only vaguely familiar until their plight became my own.

As Latter-day Saints, we place tremendous importance on families. We believe the psalmist who proclaimed, “Children are an heritage of the Lord . . . Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them.”^{iv} The profoundly inspired and relevant document “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” proclaims to all the Lord’s sacred design for families. Within the Church, there is no doubt as to the importance of this institution in God’s eternal plan. From girlhood, women are taught that motherhood is the greatest career. Young men are prepared to preside as priesthood leaders in their homes. Most assume that one need only be obedient to obtain the blessing of parenthood. When it becomes evident for some that this blessing is to be withheld for a season, the impact can be devastating to their self-identity, their faith, and sometimes their marriage relationship.

According to the American Society for Reproductive Medicine, “infertility affects about 6.1 million people in the U.S.—about 10 percent of the reproductive age population.”^v This piece of information was never shared with me as I attended Young Women classes. The possibility

that some of us would not bear children never came up. Like many, infertility took me completely by surprise. I was raised in a large family, where I often played the role of second mother. At Brigham Young University I obtained a bachelor's degree in child development and family relations. I met my husband in a class called "The LDS Family." (I promise I did not go there looking for him!) I was honest, true, chaste, benevolent, and took for granted that I would become "a joyful mother of children"^{vi} who would "arise up and call [me] blessed."^{vii}

But life is full of irony, and when it became apparent that I could not conceive a child, I experienced shock and disbelief, bewilderment, and feelings of betrayal. Turning to medical science for help, my husband and I endured the indignity of having the most sacred and private of relations charted, measured, and scored as we spent thousands of dollars that we could not afford pursuing what we thought was our birthright. Although I cannot presume that all experience infertility the same, my personal experience, research, and the adoptive applicants I counsel suggest that I was not alone in my reaction. The literature suggests several common responses to infertility experienced by couples regardless of their values or religion. I have found these to be consistent with the LDS couples I counsel.

ISOLATION AND ALIENATION: In our family-oriented LDS culture, couples experiencing infertility often feel uncomfortable in ward and family activities, feeling that they don't fit in. Baby blessings, Mother's Day programs, and even some Relief Society lessons can be very painful. Some may even feel isolated within their own marriage when partners pull within their own hurt and fail to work through it together.

MARITAL STRESS: The pressures of trying to create a family, combined with grief and loss issues related to infertility, present a potential for increased stress within marriage. These stressors can include financial pressures, communication problems, pressure from extended family, compromised intimacy, and the emotional roller coaster of failed attempts to conceive. A couple has the opportunity to pull together or pull apart. My experience suggests that LDS couples with a commitment to an eternal marriage generally pull together, but stressors still exist.

ROLE IDENTITY AND SELF-ESTEEM: One researcher identifies infertility as a "catastrophic role failure for women."^{viii} Infertile LDS women, counseled from childhood to prepare to become "mothers in Zion," are at particular risk for a serious loss of identity. I love the story recounted by Sister Ardeth Kapp about moving into a new home and being visited by neighborhood children. When asked if her children could play, she gently informed them that she had no children. "Do you mean you're not a mother?" they persisted. "No," she replied, "I'm not a mother." Then with total puzzlement they asked "Well, if you're not a mother, then what are you?"^{ix} Kids are great. I remember being visited by a new home teacher and his young son. After looking around for a bit, the boy demanded, "Where are all the kids?" I said "I don't know! I've been wondering the same thing!" When denied this most glorious of all roles for women, one can't help but wonder, "If I'm not a mother, then what am I?"

Although fatherhood is a role most of our priesthood brethren look forward to, men generally define themselves according to their careers and priesthood duties. Consequently, the loss of role identity due to infertility is usually more profound for women. In trying to explain this to the husbands in an adoption class I was teaching, a metaphor formed itself in my mind:

Suppose, I told them, that you are eleven years old, and you and your buddies in the ward are invited to a Priesthood Preview. You kind of poke each other and act a little silly because you are eleven years old, but you are really excited because the bishop is going to talk to you about receiving the priesthood. You have been taught all your life that this great honor and responsibility will be yours if you prepare worthily. Before you know it, you're having your twelfth birthday and you've been invited to go in and have your interview with the bishop. You've been practicing your articles of faith and you hope he doesn't ask you number eleven, but you feel pretty confident. The bishop visits with you a little bit and then says, "You are a really fine young man. You are worthy and prepared, but I'm sorry to tell you that we cannot ordain you a deacon right now. No, it's nothing you've done wrong, but for reasons we don't understand, you are going to have to wait a while." So you sit with your parents while your buddies pass the sacrament and kind of duck down when people say "you don't need to be afraid to be a deacon" and you're sure it's because you didn't know number eleven.

Then you finally turn fourteen, and you get to visit with the bishop again. He says, "You are such a fine young man and are truly worthy to hold the priesthood. But for reasons we don't understand, we are not going to be able to ordain you a teacher at this time." So you sit with your folks and pretend you don't care.

Then you turn sixteen and again visit with the bishop. "I'm so sorry," he says. "You are such a fine, worthy, young man. You would be a wonderful priest. In fact, you are better prepared to hold the priesthood than many of the young men your age. But for reasons we don't understand, we are not going to be able to ordain you to the priesthood at this time. Maybe someday." So you sit with your folks while your buddies sit at the sacrament table and people whisper wondering why you aren't worthy to join them.

Finally, you turn nineteen. You've prepared all your life to serve a mission. Then you meet with the bishop. "I'm sorry, but it looks like we are never going to give you the priesthood. It's nothing you've done wrong. No one has prepared better than you to serve a mission. I am truly sorry, but there is nothing we can do." So you try to reconcile your future without temple marriage and other priesthood blessings.

That, brethren, is what infertility feels like to the sisters. It isn't just the loss of a role. It is the loss of an identity.

GENDER DIFFERENCES: Depending on the meaning each partner attaches to parenthood, their reaction to infertility may be different. Whereas wives may express grief, husbands often manifest bewilderment. When we visit in my office, I sometimes see a wife in tears and a husband with that "deer in the headlights" look. His wife is hurting and he doesn't know how to

fix it. He may feel responsible to make things better. Socialized to be the protector/ fixer, he may have a tendency to look for practical solutions and attitudes. Wanting only to be held and consoled, his wife may misinterpret his best efforts as a lack of feeling. While both partners experience grief, they may express it differently, creating a potential for miscommunication.

GRIEF AND LOSS: Grief and loss are a very real part of infertility. It is the loss of a dream, the loss of control over one's choices. Unfortunately, it is not usually understood or recognized by others as legitimate. Researchers Berk and Shapiro state: "Grief is . . . a natural reaction to the feelings of helplessness when a couple realizes that pregnancy will never occur. This grief over the loss of life's goals—the pregnancy experience and having children—is particularly difficult because our society does not recognize such a loss with rituals or other processes that could allow the couple to work through the time of grief."^x

No one ever brought me a casserole because my latest attempt at conception failed, although the grief was real. It was not something that I would bring to the Relief Society's attention. Couples often submit themselves to great discomfort, great expense, and tremendous emotional risk with each procedure to try to achieve pregnancy. Each failure can be devastating, but often few are aware of their loss. Silber and Dorner observe: "Infertility is grief experience, although traditionally it has not been viewed as such. Infertility is a loss. It is a loss of the [imagined] child. They will go through all of the normal stages of grieving for this loss, just as if they had lost a child through death. However, society does not relate to or understand the loss of infertility because it is invisible."^{xi}

As with other kinds of loss, infertile couples may experience fairly predictable stages of grief. These may include shock, denial, anger, grief, and depression before reaching acceptance and resolution. As with other forms of grief, these stages may occur in any order and may repeat themselves after apparent resolution. Barbara Menning stated: "My infertility resides in my heart as an old friend. I do not hear from it for weeks at a time, and then a moment, a thought, a baby announcement or some such thing, and I will feel a tug—maybe even be sad or shed a few tears. And I think, 'there's my old friend. It will always be with me.'"^{xii}

Patricia Johnston adds: "Infertility's scars remain on the soul long after the wounds have healed."^{xiii}

Because infertility is so intensely private, well-meaning friends and family may feel frustration, not knowing how to approach with support. Please be patient and sensitive. Avoid practical advice. We joke in adoption classes about some of the well-intentioned suggestions offered by friends and family. If you have a childless couple in your ward or family, take care that your curiosity doesn't exceed your sensitivity. Accept them without judgment or pity and respect their privacy if they choose not to share. And please don't force a Mother's Day flower on them if they decline one.

My experience with infertility was a journey of faith. Through long years of waiting, failed treatments, the shedding of many tears, and countless pleadings in prayer, I finally learned to let go and accept the wisdom and the timing of my Father in Heaven. I learned to trust Him, knowing that he loved me and wanted every good thing for me. I learned that when I accepted

mortality, I accepted all the possibilities of joys and sorrows that life has to offer. I also learned in a very sacred way that when we suffer, our Father in Heaven is aware and grieves with us as any loving father would.

Eventually, our path led us to LDS Family Services, and in time we were blessed with a wonderful infant son. With Hannah I rejoiced: “For this child I prayed and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him.”^{xiv}

Ironically, it was Hannah, who, nineteen years later, gave me peace when I was mourning over sending that handsome son thousands of miles away to serve a mission. Again she taught me as I read that she rejoiced that she had a son to lend to the Lord. Soberly, I remembered that I too had made promises to the Lord if he would send me a son. Two years after receiving our son, we adopted our beautiful daughter. Although I later experienced the miracle of giving birth to a son, we learned that adoption is its own miracle.

Like many couples, we first had misgivings about raising a child not of our bone. We knew that we could love any child but wondered if it would be the same. We had to be nudged a little bit toward the adoption option. But once we began the process, we were filled with the spirit of anticipation and excitement. Nevertheless, there were times when I again resented the loss of control over the decision of whether or not I could be a mother. Like all adoptive applicants, we were required to submit to the scrutiny of a home study and to requirements regarding age, health, income, and marital and emotional stability. I’ve decided that in the premortal existence the Lord rounded up all those with impatience and control issues and made us infertile. Adoptive applicants have to give up both impatience and control. But I came to understand that adoption is a sacred trust. Birth parents who make an adoption plan do not “put up” or “give up” their children for adoption. They do not “give them away.” They transfer their rights and responsibilities to adoptive parents, whom they trust will provide for the child they love what they cannot. They have a right to be assured that those parents will be qualified.

Well, I wish I could tell you it was love at first sight when I first met my new son. I guess I was expecting a tiny babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and instead was presented with a three-week-old, 11-pound, 23-inch-long baby fullback. He had outgrown the clothes he was wearing, his face was broken out in baby pimples, and he wore the most woebegone expression. My first reaction was, “What else have you got?” My husband, who is a huge BYU football fan, was elated. And once we got him home and into his own jammies, I fell in love with him too. We later discovered that he was suffering from colic and double ear infections. From the vantage point of having parented adopted as well as biological children, I can tell you that bonding with children is not automatic in any case. When I was presented with my biological son, my reaction was, “Oh, so that’s who you are.” Bonding develops as we rock and feed and walk the floor with a child, regardless of how he or she came to us.

Although adoption may seem to some like an artificial way to create a family, I have come to believe that adoption is a sacred plan of our Father in Heaven. In reality, He has placed each of His children in mortal adoptive homes, trusting in the parents He has chosen to love and raise them as if they were their own. Loving sweethearts, with no biological connection, become one family unit through the laws and ordinances of holy matrimony. Throughout time, our Father in

Heaven has included adoption as a tool to further His purposes and to provide parents for children who need them. Moses was provided an adoptive home, where he was kept safe to one day lead the children of Israel to freedom. Joseph of Nazareth was carefully selected to be the adoptive father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The Murdock twins were provided to bring peace to Joseph and Emma and security to beloved infant children.

The Apostle Paul often taught the principle of adoption in defining our relationship with the Savior. To the Ephesians he preached: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.”^{xv}

And then to the Romans he said: “But ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”^{xvi}

Through the sealing covenant of the temple and because of the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, we have the promise of eternal family. Those were glorious days when our precious children were brought to us in the sealing room of the temple. Through that sacred ordinance, they became ours for eternity. On the day that our son was sealed to us, we also completed ordinances that created an unbroken chain of seven generations of my husband’s family. This was the result of research I had done while waiting for my children. I sometimes called him my “genealogy baby,” joking that if you did enough genealogy, they gave you a baby. Being sealed to our son as well as providing this ordinance to others, I had come to care about what was a very sweet experience indeed.

The sealing covenant is a critical reason that LDS Family Services is engaged in adoption services. We follow the counsel of the First Presidency, which echoes that of previous prophets. On June 26, 2002, the First Presidency issued the following statement:

When a man and woman conceive a child out of wedlock, every effort should be made to encourage them to marry. When the probability of a successful marriage is unlikely due to age or other circumstances, unwed parents should be counseled to place the child for adoption through LDS Family Services to ensure that the baby will be sealed to temple-worthy parents. Adoption is an unselfish, loving decision that blesses both the birth parents and the child in this life and in eternity.

Birth parents who do not marry should not be counseled to keep the infant as a condition of repentance or out of a sense of obligation to care for one’s own. Unwed parents are not able to provide the blessings of the sealing covenant. Further, they are generally unable to provide a stable, nurturing environment, which is so essential for the baby’s well being. Unmarried parents should give prayerful consideration to the best interests of the child and the blessings that can

come to an infant who is sealed to a mother and a father.^{xvii}

Unfortunately, some otherwise faithful Latter-day Saint families struggle with this counsel. Perhaps this is because they have misinformation about adoption. Adoption is an institution that has gradually evolved over time. This has led to the persistence of myths and misunderstandings about adoption, which contribute to the confusion of both potential adoptive parents and birth parents considering an adoption plan. These include the following.

Myth #1: Children who are placed for adoption are not wanted by their birth parents.

The first time I took my beautiful daughter to church, a well-meaning older sister approached me and said, “They just don’t know what they’re giving up, do they?” It was all I could do to keep from kicking her in the shin. Although I did not have the opportunity to meet or correspond with my children’s birth parents, I have no doubt that their decision to place them for adoption was based entirely on their love for them. My work with birth parents has convinced me that those who make an adoption plan are the most unselfish, courageous, and loving people there are. In spite of their incredible personal loss, they are able to choose what is best for their children because they love them. One birth mother wrote: “I wanted Milli to have the best life possible. I didn’t ever want her to go without anything. I was 18 years old and unmarried. There was no way I could have provided for her. I have sent pictures and keepsakes . . . so that she will always know that I care. . . .”^{xviii}

When my daughter was about twelve years old, I obtained a letter written to her by her birth mother shortly after placement. Her words left no doubt that her decision was made with love. She said, “I want you to know that I love you more than I can express in words. . . . It was the hardest thing I have ever done in my whole life. . . . I have shown my love for you by doing what I believe is best for you.” There is no question in my daughter’s mind that she was placed for adoption because she was loved.

Myth #2: Birth parents can come back and take away my adopted child.

Although writers of sensational headlines and television tabloids love to share such stories, these instances are rare. Adoption laws have been established to protect children legally placed for adoption. As long as adoption statutes are observed, there is little chance birth parents could reclaim the child once their rights have been legally terminated. It is critical that prospective adoptive applicants choose a reputable agency or adoption attorney to represent them. LDS Family Services is very conservative and cautious in its adoption practice to protect the safety of children placed for adoption.

Myth #3: Adopted children are more likely to have mental and emotional problems.

In fact, in a 1994 study conducted by the Search Institute,^{xix} adolescents who were adopted as infants actually scored higher than children in single-parent homes in areas of academic achievement, social competency, self-confidence, and security. In a replication of these findings, adopted adolescents scored equally with nonadopted adolescents from intact families in academic standing, mental health, and social responsibility. The outcome of such studies

becomes skewed when children adopted at any age or in any circumstances are included in the same study. Older children who have experienced the emotional traumas of abuse and neglect before they are placed for adoption present a different outcome. Their representation in mental health care is more likely a result of their troubled beginnings than their adoption.

On the same note, adoptive parents sometimes jump too quickly to the assumption that all problems experienced in adolescence are due to their child's adoption. Finding one's identity is a normal developmental task of the teenage years. If there are issues relating to adoption, this is likely to be the time for them to come up. But any child, adopted or otherwise, is likely to fantasize about being raised by different parents in the struggle to figure out who they are. Many parents hear their kids zing them with "I wish you weren't my mother!" An adopted kid has that extra arrow in his quiver to zing you with: "You aren't my real mother!"

Myth #4: All adopted children are exceptional.

Adoptive parents have a tendency to believe their children are absolutely incredible. I have been guilty of this. They truly are celebrated children, but as President Hinckley said: "The fact is . . . most children grow up to be just people."^{xx} Adopted kids are no more likely to fulfill all our hopes and dreams, to become star quarterbacks for BYU, rocket scientists, doctors, or lawyers than any other children. They are just as likely to be a pain in the neck and break our hearts. Adoptive parents don't need to feel guilty when parenthood completely overwhelms them.

Myth #5: Adopted children should be spared the stigma of adoption by not telling them they are adopted or by waiting until they are old enough to understand.

Being adopted is nothing to be ashamed of and is not difficult to explain. Adopted children can understand from the very beginning that adoption means love. They can understand that they are celebrated children who came to their family because so many people loved them, including their birth family. They can understand that their birth mother is the person who gave birth to them and chose their parents for them. A healthy openness about adoption creates security and a positive identity. Many examples can be shared with them of famous people who were adopted, including U.S. presidents, scientists, athletes, and celebrities.

A healthy dose of humor goes a long way as well, and adoptive parents shouldn't feel threatened when their kids tease them about their status. When I praise my kids for their great looks, academic achievement, or anything else I'm proud of, they love to remind me that they're adopted. They also find it to be a handy disclaimer. When Dad acts goofy, my adopted son will turn to his nonadopted brother and remind him, "You do realize that you're more likely to turn out like Dad." His brother takes it in good sport and groans, "I know; why did I have to be the one stuck with the family genes?" I'm reminded of a cartoon that showed two boys cruising down the street on skateboards. "What a relief!" one boy says to the other. "My parents just told me I'm adopted!"

Myth #6: Adopted children and birth parents never get over the loss of separation from each other.

A current fad in psychological thinking suggests that adopted infants experience a “primal wound” as a result of being separated from their birth parents. This has been described as “pop psychology” and is challenged as having no basis in fact.^{xxi} The truth is that newborn infants attach easily to adoptive parents. Their security lies in the consistency of the care they are given. Attachment disorders are generally a result of an absence of nurturing in the early stages of life. Issues in adolescence can be minimized with a healthy sharing of information. We teach our adoptive couples to share their child’s story from the very beginning. This should include the first chapter of a loving birth family, who cared so much that they wanted him to have what they could not provide, including a temple sealing.

Although birth parents grieve and take time to heal after placing a child for adoption, they do in fact heal. Those who choose adoption actually may experience less grief than those who choose to single parent. One young mother stated that she had shed more tears for the child she chose to single parent than for the loss of the child she placed for adoption. Loving, supportive family and friends and wise priesthood leaders play a major role in helping birth parents to continue to feel peace in their decision. Postplacement counseling is critical to help these individuals redefine their lives and to work through issues of grief and loss. Loving bishops help them to understand the healing power of the Atonement as they learn to forgive themselves.

Myth #7: It is in the best interest of all parties that adoptions be completely closed.

In my opinion, one of the most significant developments in adoption over the past decade is the increase in openness. An open adoption is one where information is exchanged between the birth parents and the adoptive parents. As we have discovered at LDS Family Services, this can be facilitated without sacrificing privacy and confidentiality. Our birth parents and adoptive parents have the opportunity to meet in an agency setting and to exchange letters, pictures, and gifts through the agency for as long as they desire. Following finalization, couples are given the responsibility to decide what is best for them, and some choose even more openness.

Thirty years ago it was believed that a birth mother should not see or hold her child after birth if she was making an adoption plan. Often she was sent away to have the baby so no one would know she was pregnant. She then returned home suffering grief and loss with no one to acknowledge it or to help her through it. She was given no information about the adoptive family and may not have been told if the baby was a boy or girl. Consequently, years later, they started showing up in counseling clinics with unresolved grief. We have since learned that information brings healing. Communication with the adoptive family about the child they placed gives birth parents the reassurance that they made the right decision. They see that their child is cherished and thriving in the care of the family they chose for him or her, and that gives them permission to move on with their lives.

When I adopted my children 19 and 21 years ago, I was only given the barest of information about their birth parents. All that I received about my son was typed on one side of this 3 x 5 card. It included a few interests and the physical characteristics of his birth parents. When he was about 14, I was able to obtain more nonidentifying information which gave me some insight into the circumstances of his birth mother. I learned that she was two weeks overdue when she first contacted the agency. She delivered the next day, and it was not believed that she even saw

him. The agency selected the adoptive family, and she would have received little information about us. She sought no follow-up counseling. I have many concerns for that birth mother and pray continually that the Spirit will bear witness to her that she did the right thing. How I wish she could know what a fine, handsome young man her son turned out to be.

Myth #8: Children should always be placed with families of the same ethnicity.

While it would be preferable to place children in matched families, studies show that children placed in homes of a different race actually do very well. In the study done by the Search Institute, children in transracial families scored just as high in attachment to adoptive parents as other adopted children. Couples who choose to adopt children of a different ethnicity need to be well educated in the dynamics for them and for their families. Finding role models of their same race and teaching them about their cultural heritage helps them develop a healthy self-image. A child whose skin does not match that of his family will always be conspicuously adopted, so they will need help to respond to comments and questions. Ed Kehl, a former BYU football player, and several other African-American siblings were adopted by a Caucasian family. Ed explained that when people commented on the differences in their family photo, he would simply respond that his mother tended to burn things.

Our first choice would be to place an African-American child in a sealed, active, LDS African-American, home. But those are rarely available. Our second choice is to place a child of any race with a family of any race which could provide the sealing covenant. When the options for an African-American child are between being raised by a single mother in severe, inner-city poverty, without the blessings of the gospel, or being raised by two loving Caucasian parents in a secure LDS home where he will be sealed to them for eternity, the choice is less difficult.

Myth #9: Only wealthy couples can adopt children.

Although exorbitant prices are sometimes paid for an adoption, ethical practice standards should keep adoption costs at any reputable adoption agency within reasonable limits. Because of their intense desire for a child, couples are sometimes caught in a trap of desperation and respond to offers for a speedy placement, which may have a heavy price tag attached. In reality, careful planning and taking advantage of new adoption tax laws can put adoption within the reach of most couples. A recent law passed by Congress provides an adoption tax credit of up to \$10,000^{xxii}, and the state of Utah has an Adoption Indemnity Benefit^{xxiii}, which provides a reimbursement of \$3,155 for many insurance plans. In order to provide sealed homes for children, LDS Family Services charges a sliding fee based on income for qualified couples. Financial security and the ability to manage resources are more important than the size of a couple's income.

In addition to financial stability, qualifying to become adoptive parents at LDS Family Services also includes showing evidence of emotional and marital stability, good health, and a reasonable life expectancy. Couples are required to clear criminal background and child abuse registry checks and to have a sealed marriage and current temple recommends. Their suitability as parents is assessed through interviews and letters of recommendation. Bishops, we depend on you to provide us with honest and straightforward feedback. Although it may be difficult to

express concerns that might jeopardize a couple's chances of approval, withholding concerns may jeopardize a child later on. Give us a chance to work with a couple's problems. It may be that, with help, they can prepare to qualify later on. The bishop's recommendation is renewed every year so that you can keep us current on issues that we may not be aware of otherwise. We also call you one more time when a couple is selected to ensure that they are qualified. I hate to hear through the grapevine that one of my approved couples is seeking counseling in another agency because they don't want to put their adoption in jeopardy. I would rather receive a call from their bishop advising me that they need my help.

Myth #10: Adoption cures infertility.

I have two responses to this. First of all, adopting a child does not enable a couple to conceive. In spite of all the couples you know that gave birth to a baby after they adopted, including myself, this only occurs in about 5 percent of the cases, and I can promise you I didn't "just relax." Adoptive couples tire of being told that now they have adopted, they will be able to have their "own child." An adopted child is their "own child." Rita Laws offers these definitions:

Natural Child: any child who is not artificial

Real Parent: any parent who is not imaginary

Your Own Child: any child who is not someone else's child

Adopted Child: a natural child, with a real parent, who is all my own.^{xxiv}

My second response to this is the counsel given to us by our caseworker when we adopted our first child. She told us that adoption does not cure infertility; it cures childlessness. Patricia Johnston stated that "adoption makes us parents, but it doesn't make us fertile."^{xxv} Adoption is a precious gift that has brought the joy of parenthood into my life and the lives of many of my clients. It is a miracle every time I witness a courageous birth mother place her precious child in the arms of a grateful adoptive couple. But the emotional issues of infertility must be addressed for what they represent. Grief and loss issues related to infertility will not simply disappear when a child is placed in your home. If prospective adoptive parents have not worked through their grief, it can actually jeopardize the success of the placement. Silber and Dorner state: "If a couple adopts before they have worked through the stages of grief (for example, while they are still depressed), the pain can actually become more intense. . . . If the infertility issue is not resolved prior to adoption, it can impact the parent-child relationship over the years. . . . Adoption professionals must . . . understand the grief and loss issues in adoption and help their clients recognize that even if infertility is resolved (through adoption) it doesn't go away."^{xxvi}

If one or both partners are still in denial, they may view an adopted child as a consolation prize or hold a space for their "own child." They may fail to recognize their grief and be unprepared if it erupts later. If they are in the anger stage, they may direct it toward the birth mother, refusing to share letters and pictures so needed for her healing and rob the child of information he is entitled to. Unresolved anger can also create more tension in the marriage or contribute to blaming an acting-out teen on his adoption. It is also sometimes directed at the agency and the adoption worker when a couple has to wait a long time for a baby. Depression may create difficulty in bonding and nurturing the child.

Acceptance may come in stages as well. A couple may resolve adequately to facilitate an adoption but find that there is more work to do later. I thought I was completely resolved until I was not able to produce any more children, biologically or through adoption. Until forced to accept the reality that there would only be three, I didn't recognize that I was in denial. Healing came when I was able to accept my Heavenly Father's plan for me instead of insisting that He accept my plan for me. In time I have come to realize that His mission for me is multifaceted. One of those facets is parenthood. To my surprise, it has included other facets that I had never considered but which have been richly rewarding. These have included further education and increased opportunities for service. Another, which I cherish, is the privilege of assisting birth parents and adoptive parents to create eternal homes for precious sons and daughters of our Father in Heaven.

The spirit that accompanies adoption is very sacred. It is unlike anything else. Adoptive applicants feel it even before they know they have been selected for a child. It is often felt as a strong spirit of confirmation when birth parents and adoptive parents meet. It is profound at placement and continues through the years that follow in the spirit of gratitude. There is a poem that I give my couples at placement that expresses this bond. It is titled "To Our Birth Parents."

While I will never know
the terror of being young and pregnant,
I will always remember the horror of the infertility specialist's words,
"I'm sorry, there is nothing more we can do."

While I may never have the joy
of feeling a child grow within my womb,
I will rejoice with the child growing within my life.

While I will never know the anguish
of choosing another to raise my child,
I will never forget the anguish of waiting to be chosen.

While I don't understand why God
put these paths before us,
I am forever grateful that we held each other's hands
and walked together.^{xxvii}

I don't know if I will ever have the opportunity to meet the two courageous women whose incredible selflessness made it possible for me to know the joys of motherhood. I don't think I have words that could adequately express my gratitude for them. They are my heroes. I have taught my children to respect them and to know of their love and courage.

Part of the special spirit of adoption is felt when couples with longing in their hearts are informed that their prayers have been answered. I remember feeling overwhelmed with the realization that my Father in Heaven truly was aware of me and really had heard my many prayers. It was a profound confirmation of faith, which I share with Hannah and Rachel and

Elisabeth and many other sweet sisters I have come to know. After the test of my faith came the miracle. How grateful I am to a loving Father in Heaven who has given me precious gifts, whose values were hidden from me but known to Him. Adoption is a gift beyond measure, but also precious to me is the test of infertility. It has taught me to trust my Father in Heaven even when I don't understand. It has blessed me with great faith, which continues to strengthen me in every trial. How grateful I am for my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who suffered all things, including the grief of infertility and childlessness, so that He could understand. I testify that He lives, that our Father in Heaven lives, and that He has a plan for us. I pray that we may all learn to submit our will to His, and I testify that if we will do so, great treasures will be in store. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes:

- ⁱ Samuel 1:10
- ⁱⁱ Samuel 1:6
- ⁱⁱⁱ Luke 1:25
- ^{iv} Psalms 127:3
- ^v American Society of Reproductive Medicine (1998). "Frequently Asked Questions About Infertility"
- ^{vi} Psalms 113:9
- ^{vii} Proverbs 31:28
- ^{viii} A. Griel, K. Porter, T. Leitko, and K. Riscilli. (1989). "Why me?: Theodicies of infertile women and men," Sociology of Health & Illness Vol. 11, No. 3 1989. Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- ^{ix} Ardeth G. Kapp (1979) Miracles in Pinafores and Blue Jeans, 1979. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company.
- ^x Al Berk and J. Shapiro (1984) "Some implications of infertility on marital therapy," Family Therapy, Vol. XI, No. 1, 1984. Libra Publishing, Inc., Roslyn Hts. N.Y.
- ^{xi} K. Silber and P. M. Dorner. (1990). Children of Open Adoption. San Antonio: Corona Publishing Co.
- ^{xii} Barbara Eck Menning (1988). Infertility: A Guide for the Childless Couple, 2nd ed., February 1988, Simon & Schuster
- ^{xiii} Patricia Irwin Johnston (1994). Understanding Infertility. 1994. Indianapolis: Perspectives Press, Inc.
- ^{xiv} Samuel 1:27
- ^{xv} Ephesians 1:3–6
- ^{xvi} Romans 8:15–17
- ^{xvii} Adoption and Unwed Parents: Letter to General Authorities and Priesthood and Auxiliary leaders in the United States and Canada, June 26, 2002
- ^{xviii} Erin Noel O'Deen (1995) quoted in Minton, Lynn, Fresh Voices, "One birth parent's view," Parade Magazine, March 12, 1995.
- ^{xix} Peter L. Benson, et al. (1994). "Growing Up Adopted: A Portrait of Adolescents and Their Families." Final Report, 1994, Search Institute, Minneapolis, MN.
- ^{xx} Gordon B. Hinckley, "A Conversation with Single Adults," Ensign, Mar. 1997, 58.
- ^{xxi} Denis Donovan, M.D. (2000) "Rethinking Adoption," Adoption Medical News, Vol. VI, Nos. 9–10, September–December 2000
- ^{xxii} P.L. 104–188. Adoption Tax Credit.
- ^{xxiii} Utah Code Section 31A-610.1. Adoption Indemnity Benefit.
- ^{xxiv} Rita Laws, quoted by Patricia Irwin Johnston (1994). Taking Charge of Infertility, Indianapolis: Perspectives Press, Inc.
- ^{xxv} Patricia Irwin Johnston (1994). Taking Charge of Infertility, Indianapolis: Perspectives Press, Inc.
- ^{xxvi} K. Silber and P. M. Dorner (1990). Children of Open Adoption, San Antonio: Corona Publishing Co.
- ^{xxvii} M. Erin. Source unknown.