

Excerpt #3 from *Entwined by Adoption: Our Story of Infertility, Teen Pregnancy and Faith*

Are You Ready to Adopt?

In April 2010, a Tennessee adoptive mom stunned the world when she put her seven-year-old son on a flight back to Moscow without a chaperone. The boy carried a note in his pocket telling the Russian officials his adoptive mother didn't want him anymore. She claimed he threatened her family and friends with violent behavior, in spite of the fact the doctor at the orphanage told her, "He's healthy," when she asked if he had any physical or mental problems.

While no one condoned the woman's choice to send him back in such a heartless manner, many could sympathize. The voices who spoke out on her behalf, surprisingly enough, were other adoptive parents. They blamed the adoption agencies for not accurately describing a child's troubled past or providing adequate training and options. Yet, thousands of overseas adoptees have flourished in their American families. So, what's up? What's one to do when considering adoption?

Preparation Is Key

*Prepare your work outside
and make it ready for yourself in the field;
afterwards, then, build your house.*

Proverbs 24:27

Let's ask for the Lord's help.

As we investigate all aspects of adoption, Lord, we ask for Your wisdom to prepare us for what may lie ahead. Give us strength to look at all issues honestly, and to be willing to change the things that may need to be

changed. Help us to submit to Your will in our lives, whatever that may be.

We didn't write this book with the purpose of demeaning Kelly's adoptive parents. Anyone with children will tell you parenting is hard, and kids don't come with instruction manuals. Unfortunately, in Kelly's case, something fell through the cracks. We don't know if the adoption agency dropped the ball or whether things were hidden from them. In either case, she suffered many hardships growing up in an ill-prepared family.

Kelly's father struggled with alcoholism, and much of the heartache and downward spiral of the family could be laid at the feet of this problem. Perhaps adequate groundwork had not been laid to give her parents the tools they needed for adoption. It is our hope that this book will be a tool of preparation for those considering such an endeavor.

The Tennessee woman, and the many adoptive couples who came to her defense, obviously felt under-prepared and perhaps taken advantage of. While the adoption agencies in their cases may bear some blame, it's unfair to expect an agency to cover every possible scenario that may arise.

Adoptions come with unknowns. It's the nature of the beast and it's an issue, we as adoptive parents, must accept. Often the information adoptive parents receive is second- or third-hand and may not be completely accurate. We've all played telephone as kids and found the game amusing when the final version of the original message was revealed. Agencies can only give the information provided to them. They do their best, but they have no control over information that is withheld or deemed unnecessary to pass on. This is especially true in foreign adoption where cultural perceptions of a healthy child may be different from ours.

Orphans from foreign countries are in desperate need of forever homes and what I have to say is in no way intended to

discourage people from pursuing these adoptions. However, even though I have not participated in foreign adoption, the subject needs to be addressed. I am obligated to point out that there seems to be a black hole for some families after the adoption takes place. Some families are left reeling with their child's emotional baggage with no support from the adoption agency or social programs.

Children are not cats or dogs that can be rehomed. Unfortunately, there have been families that have gotten in over their heads, and out of desperation, have done just that. Through the Internet they have opted for the "easy" way out and placed their child with strangers that have not been vetted in anyway, with no home study, background check, etc. This has opened the door for child molesters, parents deemed unfit, and criminals to possess a child for their own purposes.

"Rehoming" is not an option and should never be considered. How sad for a child that has been rescued from one hell only to wind up in a hotter one.

In many cases, God may be the only person in the universe who knows what your child has experienced or been through. Orphanages in foreign countries may mean well but have scant financial resources or be understaffed. Depending on the country's culture there may be a negative stigma toward orphans that might consider them as throw away kids.

Prepare yourself. Study up on attachment disorders. Look for an adoption agency that provides "after adoption help" for families who need it. What kind of social services are provided in your area that might provide counseling, etc. Look for a Christian orphanage that understands the need for love and attention, and most of all, pray, pray, pray. Don't go into this on your own. Follow the Lord's leading. He will either open the right doors or He will close them.

Our adoption of Bryan was an open one and considered

cutting edge at the time. We met both birth parents and had good communication with Kelly's stepmom and dad, yet information that should have been passed on, was not. Not until Kelly and I sat down to write this book, did I find out that Bryan had been born a month premature or that he came out black and not breathing. Molly thought Kelly had given birth to a stillborn child. Although this information was relayed to the adoption agency, yet, someone failed to pass on the information to us.

Bryan turned out to have ADHD. We found out, when he was about seven years old, that his birth dad also had the disorder, but he simply failed to pass on that information. The truth is this: how many ADHD teenage boys would even think about it?

This information is not to scare one off from adopting but to give realistic expectations. Don't depend on the adoption agency to prepare you, even though many of them do a good job. Take it upon yourself to do the research. Reading this book is a great start. Keep reading. Go through the questions in this lesson and answer them as honestly as you can. It is our hope you will have a greater understanding of yourself, spouse, and the realities of the adoption process.

1. Do you want to adopt? List the reasons.
2. What do you think adoption will be like?
3. What are your greatest fears concerning adoption?
4. It is normal to have concerns. All couples do.
5. How would you handle things in the event that one of your fears was realized?

The best way to deal with fear is to face it head-on. Research how people who have encountered your concern handled the situation.

6. Do you feel adopting will fulfill your desire to be a

parent? How?

7. How does your spouse feel about adopting?
8. Do you and your spouse have similar expectations concerning adoption? If not, why not?

If not, you need to come to some agreement. Good communication is key. Adoption is a big decision. Be careful not to manipulate your spouse to give in. You will be setting yourselves up for problems down the road.

9. Do you or your spouse battle alcoholism, drug addiction, or mental illness?

Don't complicate your life anymore if you answered "yes" to any of the above questions. Children of alcoholics and drug addicts rarely come out unscathed. Is it fair to bring a child into such volatile circumstances? With the help of our good Lord, these issues can be overcome. Pursue help in those areas first, then, if the problem is dealt with and you develop a track record of a good number of years, seek to adopt.

10. Are you or your spouse hooked on video games or other time-consuming pastimes?
11. Are both of you prepared to give the time and emotional energy a new child requires?

A child will disrupt your game playing for sure. In today's world we see a growing number of video gamer widows. The raising of children has been left to mothers who receive little or no support from their husbands. The children are the big losers in a situation of this kind, and adopted children will read it as rejection.

Kids need both Mom and Dad!

12. Do you fear that you might not be a good parent or that you won't love the child? Why do you feel that way?

These are normal feelings. If you are concerned about being a good parent, you will most likely do just fine. There is no such thing as a "perfect parent." We all make mistakes. If you care about doing well, with God's help, you will.

Real love is choosing what is best for someone. If you take good care of the child and express affection, the child will feel loved. How can you not become attached to an innocent child who needs you? This concern usually vanishes for most people as soon as they see the child.

Do you fear that something may be wrong with the child?

The reality is this: bringing a baby into your home carries a risk, whether by birth or adoption. There are no guarantees. This risk is part of parenthood. Fear that a child might not be perfect should not prevent us from adopting. None of us are perfect. Just as our heavenly Father adopted us with our weaknesses, we should be willing to take the risk to open our homes to a child who needs one. Jesus saw us as redeemable. Can we think any less of an unfortunate child?

Recent research shows that traumatic events, like the death of a family member or depression impacts not only the mother carrying a child, but also impacts the child's later behavior.⁽⁴⁷⁾ This is true for all children whether biological or adopted. Adoption agencies cannot know all a birth mother experiences during her pregnancy. Human beings are complex, and you cannot have a guarantee your child will not come with issues.

The best thing you can do is be proactive. Check into what your insurance will cover. Find out what services are available in

your area if your child turns out to have health risks, such as fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, attachment disorders, mental health issues, and other disabilities. Educate yourself on these issues so you will recognize symptoms and be able to get early intervention help if needed.

Most adoptions do well. The disruption rate falls between 10 and 15 percent. Just like divorce, no one wins if a disruption occurs but the child has the most to lose. Adequate preparation may help eliminate this unfortunate outcome. With 85 to 90 percent resulting in successful placements, be encouraged. Pray, pray, pray. As Kelly's and my story attests, the Lord wants to be involved. He will bring the child He desires to your family.

When Bryan was still a preschooler, I had a nagging suspicion he struggled with ADHD. At the time I believed ADHD to be an excuse for parents not bothering to discipline their child. I lived in denial not wanting to recognize my thinking to be wrong. Nor did I want to label my child.

At the end of his kindergarten year, his schoolteacher strongly suggested that I medicate him before he entered the first grade. She feared none of the first-grade teachers would have the ability to handle him. I dismissed it. Then one day I took Bryan, now a six-year-old, to the pediatrician's office. As the doctor and I discussed Bryan's health, she calmly asked me when I planned on addressing my son's ADHD issues. She told me to look at him. Bryan lay belly down across the doctor's rolling stool. As he zoomed across the room, I had to recognize he literally bounced from wall to wall. I no longer could deny it.

The first day I medicated him I couldn't help but be stunned. Legos had been nothing more to him than missiles to be thrown throughout the house, but on medication he actually built something for the first time. I realized the turmoil our family had been in, due in part, to our not wanting to admit he had a problem.

If you adopt a child with challenges, don't be trapped in the denial syndrome. Get help. Your entire family will benefit, and you will avoid feeling like a failing parent. A common misconception of outsiders is to blame your parenting. This goes across the board, whether the child is biological or adopted. Get professional help and do what you can to help your child. Be gracious to friends and family who misunderstand. They have not walked in your shoes.

13. How would you feel about your adopted child if a month after the adoption you discovered you were pregnant?
14. What plan could you implement that would ensure the adopted child would be treated equally to the biological sibling?

We originally celebrated "Gotcha Days" each year on the day we brought Bryan home. This gave way to the extra birthday parties we would have with Kelly's family. Bryan got the message of love and felt special. Life is full of unforeseen curve balls. We can't always predict what life is going to throw at us. But we always must come up with a strategy to keep the adopted child from feeling marginalized. This helps us accomplish the goal.

Brianna, our biological daughter, went through a number of years where she endured a seizure every twenty seconds. This will throw the best of families into turmoil. Our focus had to be helping her achieve a better quality of life. I worried Bryan would feel marginalized. It might not have been the best solution, but when John was home, he took over Bryan's care and I tended to Brianna. Bryan does remember his dad spent more time with him than I did, but as he grew older he understood why.

15. How strong is your marriage?

16. Has your marriage struggled with major issues before you began a quest for a child?
17. If there are problems in your marriage, do you think having a child will heal your relationship with your spouse?
18. In what way would a child help?

Children tend to poke holes in marital relationships because they are needy members of the family. To hope a child will bring the two of you closer together is unrealistic.

19. Has infertility treatment strained out your marriage?
20. Has the spontaneity of your love life taken a hit?

If you said yes to the above questions, focus on restoring that part of the marriage as you pursue adoption. You will be glad you did.

21. How open is the communication between you and your spouse?

You will be taking on a great responsibility when you adopt. It's important that you are both on the same page.

22. How do you feel about adopting a child of a different race?
23. How does your spouse feel about adopting a child of a different race?
24. How does your extended family feel about you adopting?
25. How would your extended family feel about your adopting a child of a different race?

You may choose to adopt, even if you have family members who don't want you to. By answering the above questions, you will know where they stand. This will help you to plan strategies to protect your child from any bias. This is especially important if you intend to adopt a child of a different race.

My mother worked as a principal and schoolteacher. Growing up I heard her say negative things about problems adoptive children seemed to have. This attitude came from a few bad experiences she encountered at work. When we considered adoption, I knew my mother might not be thrilled with the idea. However, I knew she loved children and that she'd fall in love with our child. This turned out to be the case. She became hooked the minute she held Bryan as a baby.

26. Do you feel that the Lord may be calling you to the ministry of adoption? Why or why not?

When a child is brought into your home, you take on the unglamorous task of being the child's servant. All babies come with needs and frailties. This is true whether the child is biological or adopted. Adopting a child is a ministry, just as any other call of God, and it should be approached as such. What you have experienced in bringing you to consider adoption may be God's direction and preparation. He will bring good out of your pain if you trust Him.

There are thousands of innocent children who need forever families. Is it possible the Lord is asking you and your spouse to rise to the challenge to love, nurture, and care for one or more of these little ones? Every child deserves a loving family, don't you think?