

## Interview with Tricia Goyer

1. Sherrie, as you know my husband and I are in the process of adopting a baby girl from China. It seems every time I tell someone about our journey, I hear the words, "My husband/wife and I have always talked about adopting a child." What do you think is the number one concern that keeps couples from moving past the "thinking about it" stage to the "doing it" stage?

Adoption experts say that there is usually a "dragger" and a "dragee!" Perhaps lack of unity between husband and wife is the presenting reason. This can result from financial concerns or differing emotions and perspectives. If infertility led the couple to the door of adoption, are both *really* ready to accept the fact that there won't be a child whose face will mirror theirs? Based on my research with nearly 200 parents, I can say with certainty that many secretly wonder, "Can I provide all that this child needs?" "Will I be able to love an adopted child as much as a biological child?"

There also is the aspect of God's will. "If God would only write a message in the clouds, then we would know!" I remember when I told our oldest daughter about a friend's unexpected pregnancy. She started crying and when I asked about the tears, she said that she felt such a burden for the baby and the birth mother. I believe a mom's heart was born at that time. I love Psalm 139:16 that says something like this: "Every single day of our lives was planned before any of them came to be." To me, as an adopted person, this means that my life is not a mistake, I am God's creation. Second, that God hand picked who my birth and adoptive parents would be. He knew exactly what combination of influences was necessary to make me into the person He desires. And last, if He knew every day of my life before any one of them ever came to be, He must have a very special plan for my life. Even though we can't rely on feelings as a barometer for proceeding with an adoption, we can depend on God's Spirit within, to give us the will and the heart to do it.

2. In your speaking and writing, you never try to sugar-coat the adoption journey, rather you believe both parents and children can grow in the midst of the unique challenges. What are some of these challenges? You're right! I'm not good at sugar coating because I believe with all my heart that it is the Truth that sets us free. Sometimes truth hurts, but it is necessary. One of the unique challenges is that adoptive family living is based on loss. Loss for the adoptee of a sense of connection and belonging with the birth family, loss for the parents that adopt of the first nine months of life while the baby is in the womb and the miracle of birth, and loss for the birth parents of a vital part of themselves. It is important that everyone involved understand this loss and the message that it brings. The message is that loss can be redeemed by Jesus Christ! I love the way God shows us how to deal with adoption loss in Ezekiel, chapter 16:4-7 (Living Bible). He is speaking to the orphaned nation of Israel and He doesn't tell them to bite the bullet and pretend it never happened. He doesn't tell them to buck up and be strong. No! He acknowledges the emotional reality of the adopted person. "On the day you were born, you were thrown out into an open field, unwanted..." Most birth mothers don't throw their babies out, although some do. This is not to give a bad rap to birth mothers. It is God saying, "I

understand your pain.” Then, God says, “...and I called you forth to life...” God calls us to life through a relationship with Jesus Christ. And then, the frosting on the cake—He declares His opinion of us—“a jewel among jewels.” Now, that’s what I call redemption!

3. I noticed one of your speaking topics is "The Love Language of Adoptees" How do the love languages of adoptees differ?

Because of our early life loss of the birth family, we adoptees tend to look at life through a lens of rejection. If a phone call or letter isn’t returned, guess what? We interpret it as rejection! I always tease fellow adoptees by saying that if our AOL mail flag says “no mail,” we interpret it as rejection. There are certain well-intentioned statements that non-adopted people say that make us cringe inside, instead of receiving love. One example is, “Your birth mother loved you so much that she gave you to us.” The way many adoptees interpret this is, “Well, if love is what ‘got rid’ of me, then I don’t want anything to do with anyone else’s love. Love must hurt.” To an adoptee, love and abandonment don’t equate. Yes, the birth mother may make the most loving plan possible and have an incredible adoption ceremony. But to that baby or child, when the mother disappears, it equals abandonment. Absence equals abandonment to many adoptees.

4. When we were going through our adoption material, I noticed one of the agency's recommended books was, "Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew." Can you share one of the twenty things?

The first of the *Twenty Things* is the loss mentioned above. The second is that the adoptee will likely have emotional vulnerabilities resulting from the loss. We’ve already discussed looking at life through a lens of rejection. Other vulnerabilities are having mixed feelings about our adoption, but feeling we must always put on a happy face, especially on birthdays. This summer I spoke at China Heritage Camp Too in Denver, Colorado and two of the mothers had read *Twenty Things*. They told me that their children had perfect attendance at school and were the picture of health, except on their birthdays, when both ran 102 degree fevers. Our bodies remember the pain! Goodbyes are upsetting to most of us. Will that person really come back? In the book, there is a list of emotional vulnerabilities. I encourage parents to use this as a springboard to study their kids so they can learn their vulnerabilities. Then, they must share them with the children. Many parents are afraid this will make the child feel inferior. Just the opposite is true. It may be the first time that your child feels understood and accepted unconditionally. It also provides an opportunity for parents to become the child’s number-one cheerleader in life.

5. Can you share about our own adoption experience?

I was adopted at ten days of age and carried into my parent’s home by my adoptive grandmother, Leah Cook, who was the social worker on my case. My dad always said, “You were so small, I could hold you in the palms of my hands!” He loved telling that story until his dying day at age 83, and I loved hearing it. I didn’t think much about adoption until my husband and I had our first daughter. I sat in the OB-GYN’s office and

read about how babies develop. It was so fascinating and I began wondering if my birth mother had the same questions when I was developing in her. That led to other questions, such as, “Is she still alive? Do I look like her? Would she want to meet me?” I was determined to find her and let her know that I had good parents and a happy life. I wanted to take any guilt away from her. My husband and parents thought it unwise—basically, I believe they were afraid I would be hurt. So, I pushed it all beneath in the guise of perfectionism until I was about 35. Then I began searching on my own. I searched for 12 years to no avail and subsequently hired a sweet old lady who loved adoptees. She found her in two days! Within two weeks, my husband and I were on a plane bound west to meet my birth mother. I didn’t know if I would laugh or cry. It was uncharted territory. I did a little of both. To make a long story short, my birth mother was kind from a distance and things soured as the week progressed. She was not able to receive the love I wanted to give. Two days after returning home, I called to thank her for the visit. I knew when I heard her voice that something had dramatically changed. She began verbally attacking me and announced she wanted nothing more to do with me. I heard her words in my ears, but at that very moment, a Scripture came to mind: Isaiah 49: 15-16: “*Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Yes, she may, but I (God) will never forget you. See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands. Your walls are always before me.*” I realized that Jesus Christ was standing with me in my deepest adoptee fear. I wouldn’t trade that painful moment for anything, for I realized that His power and sweet presence is far deeper than any pain life can throw at me.

6. Why was it important to you to be a voice for adoptees?

We adoptees tend to be well defended and don’t often talk about our innermost thoughts about adoption. When I wrote my second book, *Twenty Life-Transforming Choices Adoptees Need to Make*, I interviewed more than 70 adoptees. Afterwards, they said, “I know I’m not alone anymore.” Someone needs to be a voice for those that have no voice—especially the unborn and little children. It’s important to me because I believe God has called me to wrap words around feelings and experiences that are unique to adoptees and difficult for them to understand.

7. One of the things you talk about is an adoptees ability to recognize his/her special needs. Why is this so important? Special needs are the same as emotional vulnerabilities that we discussed earlier. Once we recognize those vulnerabilities, we gain some form of control over the situation, instead of feeling like a helpless victim of circumstances. We can say, “That triggered adoption loss,” and then go on with life.

8. Is it true that many adoptees place very high standards upon themselves? Why?

Many adoptees expect perfection, not only in themselves, but also in others. Just ask my husband of 41 years! The reason we expect perfection is that we live in a fantasy world much of the time, dreaming of that perfect family/person out there that may be ours someday. My layman’s understanding of “the family romance theory” is that all children, adopted or not, get ticked off at their parents and want to find another set of parents that would be perfect. However, when non-adopted children reach the age of 7-8, they realize that mom and dad aren’t perfect, they’re not perfect, and that no one on earth is perfect.

They give up the fantasy parents and move on. However, the adoptee still has a set of parents out there somewhere. If parents see their children gazing out the window, they may be thinking of those parents. They may be either a king and queen or street beggars. Another reason we may become perfectionists is to keep the pain at bay. That's what I did for years until I just couldn't deny the fact that I wanted to find my birth mother, no matter what anyone thought.

9. In what ways can parents help celebrate a child's differences?

Parents can celebrate the child's differences by acknowledging them, instead of trying to make the child just like the family. Some parents say to adopted children, "You belong!" They don't say that to biological children. That only alienates the child further. They can say things like, "What would our family be without you? You add so much to our little group!" Have a cultural dinner for your child, but make sure that you celebrate each family member's culture, not just the child's, or the child will feel "different." The best thing is to take them to Heritage Camp. Check out [hcamps@juno.com](mailto:hcamps@juno.com). These are incredible opportunities for adoptees to be with fellow adoptees and parents with parents. We all need each other. How I wish I could have had such an experience!

10. Finally, how does adoption reflect God's heart?

Adoption reflects God's heart because He loves the lost, the least, and the littlest. I believe He has a special love for the orphan. If you go to our site at [www.sherrieeldridge.com](http://www.sherrieeldridge.com), there is an article called "The Awesome Legacy of the Orphan." Many adoptees fear being forgotten by God and others. What incredible proof in Scripture that God loves the orphan. Also, adoption is not the plan of some adoption agency or person, it is GOD'S plan for forming His family! We are all God's creations, but not His children, until we are born again through Jesus Christ and adopted into His family. Jesus Himself was an adopted Son, so we can follow in His footsteps. More than anything, I believe adoption reflects His sovereignty. Only by accepting that He can do anything in any way to bring glory to Himself, can we have peace about relinquishment and adoption and know that it is all by His grand design.

Thank you so much!

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