

finding
FAMILY

Finding
FAMILY

How Deeply Rooted Faith
Grew Our Family Tree

WENDY
BATCHELDER

REDEMPTION 
PRESS

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Dedication

To my family:

Those who were with me from the beginning and those
who I met along the way.

Those related by blood and those related by love.

Thank you for lifting me up and carrying me through
this process.

This testimony is dedicated to you.

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author's note



I NEVER REALLY FELT ACCEPTED. I can't think of a single time in my life when I truly felt like I belonged. There was always a little part of me that felt like I wasn't supposed to be there or that I wasn't truly in the right place—whether it was my career, my family, or with friends. I struggled with feeling I was never good enough, like I never measured up. Even though I may have appeared to be successful, I never felt satisfied. No matter what I did or tried, I never felt good enough.

As I moved into my mid and late twenties, as with most of us, I started to truly understand who I am. I explored what characteristics defined who I am, how I viewed myself, the way the world viewed me, and the hurts and hang-ups that shaped me.

Perhaps you've done the same. Who we are and the way we think about ourselves become central to what we consider to be our identity. In turn, our identity is influenced by what we allow it to be influenced by. If that's our

friends, then we care deeply about what our friends say about us. If it's our career, then we care deeply about that next promotion or the title or value of the impact of our work. In short, we seek value from others that we can only get from God.

In 2010 I began searching for my biological parents, thinking it might fill the void about who I was by finding them, or at least finding out more about them. There were obvious things like medical information or answering questions about my ethnicity that I'd never had answers to, but there were also questions of personality and preferences that I simply didn't know. Did I take after my mother or father? Did I inherit his laugh or her knack for organizing? I just didn't know, and it felt like a gap in who I was, a gap in my identity.

After years of searching on and off for them, the same years I spent changing jobs, exploring new hobbies, having a family of my own, and traveling, I came up with nothing. I felt just as unsatisfied as I did when I started my search. I wanted to give up. It felt as if I would never know where I came from and that I would always have a gap in knowing who I was. It's also important to note that during this time, I did not know Jesus. I believed in Him and I would go so far as to say I loved Him, but I did not have a relationship with Him.

Looking back now, nearly ten years later, I see that I was searching for my identity and my purpose from earthly things: other people, my job, my family, friends, money, success, stuff, my weight, my ability to make a family and create a home. Perhaps you too struggle with these things.

In 2014, while I was pregnant with our second child, my husband and I started attending a new church. It was during that year I came to know the Lord in a way I hadn't before. I can't remember a time I didn't believe in God, yet I hadn't been in a relationship with Him until late in that same year. During 2014 and the three years that followed, I grew closer and closer to Jesus. I learned how to fill that gaping hole in my life. Only God was able to quench my thirst, to truly understand who I was. To know God is to know *whose* you are. Know whose you are, and you can learn *who* you are . . . His.

Once I knew the Lord and knew who I was in Christ, things changed dramatically for me. I had given up on finding my birth parents. But then one day things really changed. All of a sudden, God placed people in my life, a stir in my heart, and a clear path to find my birth parents. A path never before seen, suddenly available and clearly illuminated by Him. I experienced a series of powerful, profound, and truly transformational events over the course of three short months. Only after I had placed my worth, my value, and my identity in the Lord did He lay out what I had started searching for—my earthly identity. It was only when I had placed my eternal identity first in God that He, in turn, fulfilled my desire to find my biological family. I had to put Him first. But He was not done with me. He had something even bigger in mind.

It's a surreal experience, the first time you realize God is asking you to do something for Him. I was driving home from the gym one evening, after another attempt at restorative yoga (hint: it's not for me). I remember being frus-

trated that I had just spent an hour trying to relax when so much was happening in my life, and being unable to let go just long enough to breathe. I started praying from that place of frustration when it clearly, and seemingly out of nowhere, occurred to me I was supposed to share my testimony. And not just share with anyone.

I was to write about it.

Broadly.

Publicly.

It clearly occurred to me in that moment I was to write a book.

This might not have been too weird or surprising for someone who, perhaps, was an established author. However, I was not. Not even close.

So I laughed. Out loud. It seemed so preposterous and so absurd—I didn't know what else to do but to laugh. The funny thing is, over the next several weeks, as I was sharing about the recent events with some close friends, every single person I shared with immediately said the exact same words to me: "You should write a book." God was affirming His directive to me through other people.

God has a funny way of getting my attention. He knows me. He knows I need a big flashing sign or a swing over the head with a two-by-four. I have a tough time with subtle hints—He knows it—and through these people, He showed me He was serious. I was called to write about my experience. This book you have in your hands is the result of nearly three years of slow, steady obedience to the Lord's calling. You may be here with me on these pages because you're adopted, or perhaps you're a birth or adoptive par-

ent. Or perhaps you are simply looking to better understand your identity in the Lord. Whatever reason you have come to read these pages, I am so glad you are here. I don't believe it's an accident.

Throughout my story I will share more about what God says about us, about who we are, and about why we matter to Him. I will also share my personal journey about my family, my adoption, and ultimately my reunion with my birth parents and extended biological family. Remember—this came about only after I grew closer to God, turned to Him for my identity, my purpose, and my path to reunion. I hope through reading the pages in this book, you too will find peace with who you are, understanding about how God has created you and your family, and the ability to accept God's love for you, as His chosen son or daughter.

For years I did not believe God could love me. I didn't believe the Lord would love someone who wasn't created with intention, whose life on this earth was, by all human accounts, accidental. I lived believing that truth for thirty-three years. What I hope you come to learn through this book is that each and every one of us is chosen by God. No matter what the circumstances, He has predestined you according to His purpose for your life and loves you (Ephesians 1:3–14).

Each chapter will walk through a characteristic that God has outlined about us in Ephesians, a piece of my personal story, reflection questions for you to work through, action steps, and affirmations. These could be completed individually, with a friend or loved one, or in a small group. I encourage you to dig deep and search the depths of your

soul to tap in to your true feelings and to accept the love of Jesus Christ. I pray the words on these pages help you feel the love of Jesus and help you find peace in the identity God has given you.

You, friend, are chosen.

chapter one



ADOPTED & ASHAMED

*And the man and his wife were both naked
and were not ashamed.*

Genesis 2:25

I HAD A BONE TO PICK with the Christian faith.
Now don't get me wrong—I believed in God and mostly believed in Jesus, although I didn't really understand it all.

I wasn't an atheist.

I loved God and believed in Him. He had carried me through several tough times in the past.

I wasn't against the principles or the message I heard in church.

I believed in most of what I heard in services—when I went.

But when that preacher lady (or man) stood in front

of the congregation and started talking about our purpose, our calling, it didn't resonate with me. You know what I mean—when they start getting all Romans 8:28—“And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them”—on you.

Well . . .

That's where I sorta stopped tracking.

I would always think, *Yeah maybe for you, but not me.*

That's not my reality.

That's not my truth.

My entire life, I had known one fact about how I came into this world, and it was not on purpose.

I was an accident.

There was no plan when it came to my conception. That I knew for sure.

Born as the product of teen pregnancy, I deeply struggled with this teaching about purpose. God created you on purpose, for a purpose?

Seriously? Tell that to the teen mom who gave me up at sixteen years old. Tell that to the birth father who wasn't involved. I don't think they would see purpose there either—other than broken hearts.

I wrestled with this concept for years. As far as I knew, my biological mother and father were dating at the time I was conceived but certainly did not purposefully plan to get pregnant. Shortly after I was conceived, they broke up. The details are a bit fuzzy for both parties as far as I know.

Let me back up.

I was born in December 1983 and adopted nine days after my birth by loving parents who raised me as their

own flesh and blood. My father was also adopted and from day one wanted me to know I was adopted so there would be no surprises. My mother fully supported this approach, and therefore I cannot remember a single day of my life that I did not know I was adopted.

In my early years, being adopted didn't seem out of the ordinary at all. It seemed as normal as saying I had brown eyes or that I was right-handed. Being adopted was just one descriptor of who I was, and I did not feel like it made me different or unique in any way.

However, because I grew up looking different than my older-than-average parents, it wasn't uncommon for me to be asked one of two questions: "Are those your grandparents?" or bluntly, "Are you adopted?"

Not kidding. Kids are not exactly the most thoughtful or considerate. I am tall and have dark hair and dark-brown eyes, whereas my parents are both fair skinned: my father with red hair and green eyes, my mom blond and blue-eyed. They were thirty-eight and thirty-nine years old, respectively, when I was born, and as such, I was raised an only child by older parents. After one or both of those first couple of questions would come, I'd wait, because next was almost always some form of the same question: "So do you want to meet your birth parents?"

Sigh.

Sometimes it was as insensitive as "So do you want to meet your *real* parents?"

Real parents?

As if my adoptive parents were just stand-ins or some kind of fake parents.

It still stings writing these words. I'd remind the askers

that these “*are* my ‘real’ parents.” The ones who kissed boo-boos and looked under the bed for monsters. The ones who grounded me for being late for curfew and who said yes to the man who asked for my hand in marriage.

These are my real parents.

The ones who raised me.

My mom and my dad.

Tee and Bill.

For years this was the end of the story. I had two loving parents. I didn’t need to, or want to, find my biological parents. Especially if they’d made a choice to remove themselves from my life. Who was I to undo that? And for what purpose? I didn’t have a reason to open that door, so I didn’t.

Adoption and Shame

Adoption is a tough topic for a million reasons. The emotions, the circumstances—they are complicated and different for everyone. I think the unsaid truth about adoption for most is that it wasn’t the first choice. It’s hard for me to type these words and put them on this page, because I know they hurt. They hurt me, and they may also hurt you. They aren’t warm and fuzzy, and they certainly don’t make anyone particularly comfortable to say out loud. But for many of us, they are true.

Usually (but admittedly, not always) there are a few things that happen with adoption. There is a person or a couple who want to have a baby and can’t, and there is a person who is having, or had, a baby who either cannot or does not want to keep the baby, and then there is the baby

itself. This group of people, often referred to as the adoption triad, is the union between the birth parents, adoptee, and adoptive parents. The triad is wound tight with so many complex emotions. For me, underneath several softer emotions, I mostly felt shame.

Shame is a big, heavy emotion defined as “a painful feeling of humiliation or distress caused by consciousness of wrong or foolish behavior.”¹ As the adoptee in my particular situation, I was aware that my existence was the result of what society would likely describe as wrong or foolish behavior. Certainly, the church, the Bible, and most people I knew would agree with that. Adoptees feel shame for two big reasons: they were perceived to be unwanted by their birth parents (regardless of truth) and they were the second choice to their adoptive parents (also regardless of truth).

Additionally, the remaining members of the adoption triad face their own brand of shame. Society puts a lot of pressure on the family unit. Almost from the moment a couple is married, the questions start rolling in regarding when children will join the picture. Unfortunately, when things do not go the “normal” way, many of us feel shame. Adoptive parents feel shame for not being able to get pregnant like “everybody else.” Birth parents feel shame for getting pregnant when they did not desire to, often facing judgment of their parents, peers, and even complete strangers. Those are not popular statements, I realize. And I recognize they may not be true for every situation. Yet many of us believe these things to be true about ourselves or others.

¹ <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/shame>, accessed February 6, 2020.

Shame in the Garden

We can trace shame all the way back to the beginning of humanity. In Genesis we see God created a beautiful garden where everything was good and there was no sin. The world existed peacefully, and humanity was at peace with one another and with God. But then mankind decided to try life apart from God, by disobeying His guidance and making their own decisions by eating the fruit from the tree that God told them not to.

We've all done this. We have all done something we know we're not supposed to, which pulls us apart from God's guidance and leads us to sin. In the garden, Adam and Eve made the decision to believe that who they were with God wasn't enough—they desired more than God. They took things into their own hands, sinned, and felt shame.

Before sin, the Bible clearly states in Genesis 2:25 that “the man and his wife were naked and were not ashamed.” After sin, Adam and Eve hid from God in the garden because they became very aware of their sin and were ashamed.

In the same way Adam and Eve felt shame, I too felt ashamed. As a small child, I always knew I was adopted, but it was the only truth I knew, and I didn't realize it was different. Much like Adam and Eve were naked and not ashamed, as a child I was adopted and not ashamed. It felt normal to me. However, as I grew up, I learned that not everyone was adopted, and further, that it wasn't as common as I'd thought. At a young age, I knew many adopted people because my parents were friends with many other people who also adopted kids. As I became a teenager, I learned that not only was adoption not the norm but was

something to be made fun of. Yes, I was teased for being adopted. Perhaps you were too.

Unwanted

The summer before my freshman year of high school, at the impressionable age of fourteen, I was enjoying a quiet evening of dial-up internet via AOL. A boy from my class sent me an IM (instant message). At first, it seemed harmless enough, so I willingly engaged in what seemed like an innocent conversation. He was with a friend, and they began saying unkind things to me about how I didn't belong. They told me I didn't look like my parents and started questioning me on why that was. They asked me if my parents were my grandparents. I explained that no, they weren't my grandparents but that I was adopted, which was why I didn't look like them. *No big deal*, I thought.

Wrong.

I guess it was a big deal.

To this day I will never forget the exact words they used, but for the sake of staying on the G-rated side of things, let's just paraphrase: no one must like me, especially my parents, since they "got rid of me." The exact ending was: "No one wants you or likes you. Not even your parents."

I sat on the other side of the computer screen and cried. I cried for long, long time that night, and I cried many times over the years that followed. I let what those bullies said sink into my heart and carve a home in my brain. I did not have a defensible position, I thought. I was adopted. My birth parents did give me away. I didn't know why they gave me up. I just knew they did. Perhaps this was true.

Unwanted.

Second choice.

Simply filling a void for two people unable to fill in their preferred way.

Deep shame set in. I was now adopted and very ashamed.

Worst of all, I suspected perhaps this was true for God too. If He was real, how could He love me, when I wasn't supposed to be here? When I am a second choice? When I am an accident? Maybe I wasn't His choice or a part of His plan either.

Maybe I wasn't anyone's choice.

Maybe I wasn't anyone's plan.

The truth is, I wasn't unwanted, not in the least. But that didn't stop me from believing the words spoken to me by my peers. The Enemy has an interesting way of making us feel ashamed instead of feeling ashamed of the sin. In this case, I felt ashamed to be adopted instead of feeling ashamed of the sin that led to my conception and eventual adoption. This shame felt a lot like rejection both by my birth parents and by my peers, who thought it was super fun to point out how unloved I was and that my birth parents gave me away. As Lysa TerKeurst says in her book *Uninvited*, "The enemy loves to take our rejection and twist it into raw, irrational fear that God really doesn't have a good plan for us."² Truth bomb. That was exactly how I felt.

God's Plan > Our Plan

We need to remember that even though adoption may not have been our plan, it was part of God's plan. As an

² Lysa TerKeurst, *Uninvited* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2016), 129.

adoptee I found it hard to accept that my adoptive parents first attempted to have biological children of their own, and when that did not work out, they then chose adoption. Feeling like (or *being*) their second choice for how they created a family is a complex thing to wrestle with. The key word here is *their*. It was their second choice for how *they* wanted to have children. We have to remember—God’s plan is perfect. He planned our lives long before we were born. This is always God’s plan for us—we are planned for.

The same is true for how I feel about my birth parents. True, they did not plan to have me. At sixteen and seventeen years old, they were not intending to get pregnant. But God knew it would happen, and God made plans for me. God made plans for you too. God does not make mistakes. As Paul wrote in Romans 8:28–29 (NLT), “And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.” There is so much goodness and freedom for us in these two verses.

First, the emphasis is on who makes everything work together. Very clearly Paul states, “God causes everything to work together.” The important thing to note here is that it is reserved for those who love God. Romans 8:28 is explicit that for those who love Him, the outcome is positive. You might be thinking, *Okay, but it doesn’t feel beneficial. I am still hurting*. Rest in knowing that the verse does not say when; it just says it works together. Take heart—your story

isn't over, this isn't the end, and God will cause your story to work together too. I had no idea what God was up to, but I was about to find out.

Carrying the Cross

In April of 2010, I was twenty-six years old, married, newly pregnant, and had stuffed the shame of my adoption deep down inside my heart. It was so deep, I didn't even recognize it as shame anymore. I believed the comments made by the bullies. I believed the comments made about me by family members that I wasn't a "true heir" because I was adopted—that I wasn't really family. I read stories about adoption that made it seem like rainbows and butterflies, without mention of the complexities of the emotions on all sides. It was as if after the baby was united with the adoptive parents, the adoption received a perfect little checkmark and everyone was to go off and live happily ever after. That's simply not true.

For nearly three decades I made these feelings and the harsh words said about adoption, about me, my personal truths. My personal cross. I let these things people said to me or about me become my reality and my identity. I chose to believe them.

That is precisely the problem. I believed everyone and everything else above God. I looked to the wrong place to find my identity, my value, and my worth. It was from this place that I was struggling. Struggling to know just who I was. Struggling to strive for acceptance, approval, and true love. It did not feel like everything was working together. Quite the opposite, in fact. I was up for a promotion at

work, had just started a graduate degree program, was questioning myself and who I was, all the while pregnant and about to become a mom for the first time.

I was only six weeks pregnant but already found myself thinking about my birth mother and what it was like for her, knowing she was carrying a baby and was going to give her away—give me away. I couldn't imagine what that must have felt like. I already felt so connected to my baby. For the first time, I found myself wondering about her. I could feel that there was some amount of small change—something stirring deep, deep down in my heart. This little seed of curiosity sprouted roots, and my interest grew. Things were about to change.

Reflection

Questions

1. How would you describe who you are?
2. Who have you let define who you are? If not God, why not?
3. When have you felt apart or separated from God? What was life like then?

Affirmations

1. God loves me and created me exactly how I am.
2. God has a plan for me.
3. I am enough just how God made me.