

Adoption

This article, an understandably anonymous contribution that draws on personal experience as well as wider consultation, explores the joys and the challenges, and also some of the practicalities, of adoption. Whilst some of the procedural aspects are written from a UK perspective, the wider discussion of issues will be helpful to readers worldwide.

AT THE OUTSET it is essential to set forth a verse in Scripture that should be a very important guide in every aspect of our lives, not least in relation to the matter of adoption. Proverbs 3:6 says, "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths".

So what happens when a young couple decides to have a family, and they take this, as with all decisions in life, to the Lord in prayer? If perhaps after a year there is no sign of conception, do we just accept that the Lord may have "shut up her womb" (1 Sam. 1:5), as in cases in the Bible, or do we go further and seek medical opinion? If there is no medical reason for not conceiving, maybe we feel that this is the way our life has to go. Alternatively, there may be another line of thinking. What if God has seen fit to bring another child (who cannot remain with its natural parents) into a loving relationship with us which could lead to the child learning about God and His Word?

When we are sick we can and do seek treatment for a whole variety of medical conditions, such as cancer, and undergo treatments such as transplants and heart bypasses. If we say it is God's will when no natural children are forthcoming, is it consistent then to seek help in the case of illness? The same argument could be put in relation to jobs and our homes. We pray for God to guide us in our employment and choice of home, but we are still subsequently inclined to seek better homes and better jobs, notwithstanding our belief that God guided us in our first choices.

So, with children, if we have taken the matter to God in prayer and no natural child comes, could we then not use the same approach and pray that God will guide us in relation to the matter of adoption?

The adoption process

If we decide to go for adoption, then it would best be done at an early stage, because the waiting list

could be as long as five years or more, particularly for very young infants. The longer we delay, the longer it is before we can become a family unit. Don't forget that during the waiting time a natural birth may still occur.

The process of adoption is not easy, not least because of the emotional strain of waiting. One way that can be

of help to those waiting is for young families in the ecclesia with children to include the couple in some aspects of their family life. Let them spend time with your children, inviting them round to baby-sit, or to be present at a child's birthday. Allow them to call as often as they wish to help with the everyday caring of the children. Incidentally, this may be viewed favourably by the authorities because of the trouble taken by the applicant and the supporting community.

In addition, there is considerable stress involved in undergoing the process used by the authorities to establish the suitability of the applicants for parenthood. In particular, they are very careful about how the child will be brought up. Brethren and sisters must be very open and tell the authorities about their intentions regarding Sunday School, daily readings, fellowship and our ethos of bringing children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. The authorities, particularly in these days, may look on us as a 'cult', and in extreme cases some authorities may have difficulty in fitting brethren and sisters into the category of 'stable parents'.

The underlying problem here is the issue of 'freedom of expression', which may well be applied to the issue of Sunday School and other activities that we would encourage our children to participate in. The irony is that in 'the natural family' the bringing up of the children is entirely at the parent's discretion, but, in the process of establishing suitability for adoptive parenthood, these matters can be a deciding factor. But, as before, if it is the Lord's will, our applications will progress.

The probation period

Once a child is put into your arms and you start to care for it, love starts to grow, and the loving mother's instinct is there whether you gave birth or not. This can happen instantly, whether the

child is placed into the mother's arms after giving birth or whether it is the first time you hold an older child you hope to adopt. The love you feel when you put the child's cheek near yours is one of the most wonderful feelings there is. Love grows with us both in marriage and in the parent and child relationship.

For families taking a child for adoption, the thirteen weeks before the adoption can be legalised can be a most stressful time, and again all members of the family and their ecclesia can help and support this new prospective family unit. This period might be extended, as some authorities and social services can take longer, depending on the pressure of work in their department.

In the world at large we know that children occasionally die soon after birth or in young life—a true tragedy for the parents and family. But the equivalent can happen within the framework of adoption. If the adoption does not go through after the probationary period, as could be the case if the natural mother decides she wants to keep the child, then this can be as traumatic to the adoptive parents as a death is to natural parents. In this case, the love, support and prayers of the parents of the young couple and brethren and sisters in the ecclesia will be invaluable. In this matter, as in all aspects of our life, our firm belief that God knows best can enable us to endure.

Adopting an older child

The availability of young babies for adoption is diminishing, partly as a result of greater use of contraception and partly the desire of local authorities to keep original family units together as far as possible. The latter is done by providing exceptional funding and support as required. For these and other reasons, young children, as distinct from babies, can often be placed for adoption more easily, very often with a reduction in waiting time.

If we decide to adopt an older child then we must realise that our way of life may be a stark contrast to their previous experience. It can be a hard struggle, and only by practising the fruits of the spirit will we have any hope of bringing an older child to the Truth. If in later years the children do not accept the Truth, then that is no different from when this happens with children who were born to Christadelphian families. Just be sure that you have done your best to show them the teachings of Christ and how they should live their lives before God. It is a great responsibility and privilege to bring any child up to know God

and His Son, and we must always remember that our role is limited to sowing the seed and praying for the increase, leaving the matter of calling to God.

Becoming a family in the Lord

If we are blessed with adopting children, then as soon as they can understand they should be told what you believe God has done for them and for you. He saw fit to bring mother, father and child together to become a family by His blessing. Children will always respect you for allowing them to know that you wanted them so much, and how deeply you love them. In fact, as the family unit grows together then adoption may disappear as an issue, the family being united in love.

The Scriptural concept of the family shows us that family life in the Lord is not confined to flesh and blood, since "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 15:50). It is the growing in love of us all as one large family, irrespective of our parentage. Until we can see the concept of the family as God does, we do not fully appreciate all He has done on our behalf. We should love every member of the body as we do our family, and love one another as ourselves; therefore birth and blood do not apply. All are equal before our heavenly Father. We are all adopted sons and daughters of God, and praise be to Him for seeing us and calling us His children. Without the love of our heavenly Father we would not have been able to call Him our Father.

The concept of the family has been from the beginning of Creation, and we must see each other as part of the family of God—not one family here and another there, but all of us as *one family*. Leviticus 19:34 expresses how God regards the love that should exist in the ecclesia. This Scriptural guidance should be followed both by the family concerned and the wider ecclesial family: "But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God".

Paul talks of faith, hope and love, but he also tells us that the greatest of these is love. Love is the one thing that will abide in the Kingdom, and love surpasses everything. The feeding of a child, caring for it and devoting your life to it brings love to the fore, whether you gave birth or not. If we think ahead to the time when our children marry, then we may find ourselves loving their partners as much as our own children. This again

points to the pre-eminence of love over flesh and blood. All through our lives we have to reflect the love of God to our fellow men, and what greater privilege could there be than to prepare the way for someone to come into the family of Christ?

Concluding thoughts

Adopting children can be a most fulfilling experience in our lives. For the adoptive mother it is the equivalent of giving birth (but without the nine months of waiting and pain). It can enrich your lives and give such happiness. Once the custody of the child is granted, then, in the minds of the new parents, it is no longer adopted, it is theirs. Given the right loving relationship, the whole concept of adoption, and even the very word, will, over time, fade from the memory.

All children can, of course, cause pain, whether through their words or deeds, in particular through not accepting the Truth. The pain for some couples in this context can come if their children decide to look for their 'birth parents'. If this does happen (and it is not common) then we must help our children by cautioning them as to

what they might find. Their enquiries as to their birth parents may be the cause of great embarrassment, and could lead to distressing rejection. Also, the comparison between the childhood they have known and the childhood they might have known could be very traumatic indeed.

Whatever the situation, we must be there for them in the same way as we would be for all our children, giving them loving support even when things are not as we would want them to be. In extreme cases, where the 'birth family' want to re-establish communications with your children, even though they have no legal right of access, you must as before continue with your love and support, and almost invariably the child will not want to go to anyone else.

For those of us who are privileged to adopt children, no matter what the outcome when they are older, nothing can take away the love and pleasure we had when they were small, the joy of watching their first steps, the first time at school and the lovely memories as they grew up. These will remain with us no matter what the children become, adopted or otherwise; and what a lovely feeling that brings!