

Training Minds by the Gospel to Love Our Adopted Children

Dennae Pierre [adapted from www.togetherforadoption.org, April-May 2011]

Dennae is an adoptive mother who is founder and Executive Director of Foster Care Initiatives, a non-profit focused on biological, foster, and adoptive children thriving together in family contexts.

One of the big adoption questions I get asked is, “Can you love a kid that you adopt as much as you love your biological children?” When someone raises a concern about adoption, I like to show how those questions or fears are not specific to adoption. Whether or not we can love unconditionally is a question that could be asked about biological children, marriages, and friendships [the last two of which aren’t biology-based]. When love is reduced to a feeling then it becomes a works-based love. Instead of loving our children because God has placed us over them as their parent, we love them because they have earned favor in our eyes and we love them less because they have done something upsetting to us.

I have seen parents of only biological children favor one child over the other (especially if one child has similar interests, hobbies, and skills and the other does not). This also shows that a parent is lacking in understanding of what it means to love unconditionally. It makes their love contingent upon what they get from that child. It is selfish ... we no longer seek to have children so that we might bring glory to our God; instead, we have children so we can bring glory to ourselves. This is why we dream of having smart beautiful children who make us feel like good parents ... This is why we love attractive people and shy away from the undesirable. We are erasing God and filling his throne with ourselves, loving those like us and those better than us. If we reduce love to a biological component then we are giving a big win to the atheist’s argument...

Works-based love is prevalent in our culture. We marry because someone makes us feel a certain way, meets our needs, and fulfills our desires for love. We grow discontent in our marriages because our spouse stops doing those things ... This is the way the world loves, but not the way Christ has called us to love. We are shown a different kind of love in Jesus and it is to transform how we think and speak of love. I cannot do an in-depth cultural analysis in a short blog post, but I give these few examples to try to begin to show the cultural influence that leads us to ask this question ... “Can You love an adopted child the same as you love your biological children?” The answer, I believe, is “YES!” But the answer is so wonderful it requires multiple angles of looking at it ... You **CAN** love a child that looks, acts, and thinks nothing of you. You **CAN** love a child with challenges in mental development even if you went to Harvard. You **CAN** love an ugly child, an annoying child, or a socially awkward child ...

You can do this because love is so much more than pheromones and hormones. Love is so much more than a necessary evolution of human emotion to ensure survival. Love is a beautiful, intense choice that fills our hearts and minds with an unexplainable joy. It is a love not based on the object of our love, but a love that flows from understanding the ocean of God’s love for us. A love that comes from understanding what God had to forgive us from in order to adopt us ... Can you love a child you adopt the same as you love your biological children? ... we can’t tie our love to a biological component and our love for our children cannot be based on an instinctual love that is somehow tied to shared genes ... if we cannot answer yes, then our love for our children shows evidence of a works-based understanding of love.

... Our thoughts, actions, and words were full of deceit, selfishness, lust, greed, and pride. When God looked at us, he saw a man or woman in total rebellion to him, partnering with Satan gearing up to plot an attack against himself and everything that is good, righteous, and holy. If we water down who we were before Christ then we water down a very important aspect of the gospel itself ... [1 John 3:10 says we were all naturally children of the devil along with all who do not love those God puts in our family, but by adoption]... “See what great love the father has *lavished* upon us, that we should be called children of God!” (1 John 3:1). Have you tasted that sweet love...? Do you know the depths of God’s love that rescued you and made you his child?

If the answer is yes, then how can we NOT love all [God put in our family, see 1 John 3:14-18] ... regardless of their genetic make-up? Regardless of how much they look like us? Regardless of how similar their athletic or academic talent is to us? If we are struggling to love a child deeply, then there is something askew in our understanding of God's love for us. Dive deeply into understanding the Father's love for you and you will have the freedom to love adopted children as though they were your biological children and biological children as though they were adopted.

What About Loving Children When They're Unlovable?

I talked to a foster parent recently who was explaining how she doesn't know how you can get through foster care without first tasting the love of Christ. There is so much truth to that statement! Of course, we can be thankful for evidences of God's common grace in enabling people who are not Christians to still love children, but at the end of the day, the best place to go to see perfect love for unlovable people is the cross.

Sometimes when we parent, our children are not particularly "lovable." What parent looks at their 2 year old throwing a tantrum on the supermarket floor and says, "Oh, how adorable! I just want to give this child some hugs and kisses?" I have worked with many teenagers who were not the most inviting people to talk with and love on. Their parents even begin to talk about feeling intimidated by them and finding themselves tempted to withdraw from their kids. Or what about difficult things that go along with attachment disorders, autism, substance exposure, and past traumatic memories?

In parenting, as in every other area of life, the best way to grow in our ability to face difficult situations *with joy* is by understanding two very important truths: First, understand the goodness and greatness of God's love! Second, understand the darkness, evil, and depths of your sin. If we don't understand how corrupt, vile, wicked, and evil we were before Christ then we cannot fully appreciate the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. The fact that God loved us, saved us, and adopted us loses its weight when we don't see what we actually deserved.

If we had a right view of our sin before God, then the thought that God would adopt us would be appalling to us; except, that we also understand...God's glorious love! If we don't fully appreciate God's love, grace, and forgiveness then we will never be able to relate to him as Father. Instead of joining our father for a feast in our honor like the prodigal son did, we will turn and walk back to eat with the pigs, plotting of how we are going to earn our way back into relationship with him.

- This why we can love a child who is acting unlovable, because you can relate to that child! You were unlovable...BUT God loved you.
- This is why we discipline our children and help them learn how to be apart of a God-fearing family, because you were unruly and defiant, BUT GOD loves you enough to discipline you.
- This is why we can pursue teenagers who want to walk around with an iPod in their ears day and night, because you were an enemy of the gospel, BUT GOD made you his child.
- This is why we can forgive those who deeply wrong us, because you deserve hell and condemnation, BUT GOD forgave you and you stand before him righteous, without condemnation. Praise be to God!