

I Am Adopted

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Date: 21 December 2025

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[0 : 0 0] Well, hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. And I just want to wish you a Merry Christmas here on the Sunday before Christmas.

Hope you have just a wonderful day with your family celebrating what Jesus did to bring hope into this world. Also, just want to invite you, if you'd like to learn a little more about us as a church, you can go to FCCGreensburg.com or check out the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But hey, today we are excited to get into the Word of God. But most of all, let that Word get into us and transform these hearts. Now, as you're turning in your Bibles to John chapter 1, Lee Strobel tells a story that takes place shortly after the Korean War.

See, an American soldier had met a Korean woman. And while he went back to America, never seeing her again, she was now pregnant. She gave birth to a little girl, but she was not full Korean. And her curly hair and even her complexion gave that away quickly. And sadly, in that culture, children of mixed race were often looked down upon and ostracized.

[1 : 1 3] In fact, some women were known to kill their child to spare them from such a life of rejection. But good news, she didn't do that. And for seven years, she tried to raise her daughter the best she could with the very little she had.

But finally, she couldn't take the rejection any longer. And she did something that we would see as unthinkable. She abandoned her little girl to the streets. Alone, she was ruthlessly taunted by strangers.

Even called the ugliest word in the Korean language, tuki, which means alien devil. And it didn't take long for her to draw all kinds of conclusions about herself as she wandered the streets for two years before she found herself at an orphanage that wasn't the greatest place either.

But at least she had shelter. One day, word came that an American couple would be coming to the orphanage to adopt a little boy. All the children got so excited that at least one of them could have hope.

One would get a family. So this little girl spent the whole day helping to bathe and clean up the little boys, making them as presentable as possible. And then the next day, the couple arrived.

[2 : 2 9] And here's what she said in her own words. It was like Goliath had come back to life. I saw the man with his huge hands lift up each and every baby. I knew he loved every one of them as if they were his own.

I saw tears running down his face. And I knew if they could, they would have taken the whole lot home with them. But then she said this. He saw me out of the corner of his eye.

Now let me tell you, she said, I was nine years old, but I didn't even weigh 30 pounds. I was a scrawny thing. I had worms in my body, lice in my hair, boils all over me.

I was full of scars. I was not a pretty sight. But the man came over to me and he began rattling away something in English. And I looked up at him and then he took his huge hand and laid it on my face. What was he saying? Well, he was saying, I want this child. This is the child for me. But then something happened you'd never expect.

[3 : 3 1] She says, the hand on my face felt so good. And inside I said, oh, please keep that up. Don't let your hand go. But nobody had ever shown that kind of affection to me before.

I didn't know what to do. So just out of instinct, I yanked his hand off my face. I looked up at him and I spit on him. And then I turned around and ran away.

Can you imagine? I mean, her window of opportunity is open. Here is hope. And what does she do? She spits in his face. The couple then turned and walked out of the orphanage.

She thought she had ruined her opportunity to have a family, maybe any of their opportunity, until the next day. They returned, knowing the suffering she had endured, the trauma she'd have to work through.

And they came back and they said, this little girl is the one we want. This is the child the Lord has led us to. We choose her.

[4 : 30] They named her Stephanie. They took her back to America. They got her all the medical attention she needed to be 100% healthy. She grew up, had a great life, went on to have her own family, even has grandkids now.

She also has a ministry where she shares her story as she advocates for orphans all around the world. Now, let me speak some names of those in our church family who were adopted.

And I just want to be sensitive to this because I know there are all kinds of emotions that can be attached to this. But these are people that are important to our FCC family, that we love.

They're one of us. I think of names like Leanne, Takesha, Delana, Eliah, Neom, Sarah.

And you know what? The list goes on. And while we are big advocates of fostering and adoption at FCC, here's the thing. All of us can be adopted into the family of God.

[5 : 33] So do me a favor. Wherever you are right now, on the count of three, I want you to yell these words with me. I am adopted.

Even if it doesn't make sense yet, say it with me, okay? On the count of three. One, two, three. I am adopted. And if you're like me, or if you're like, hey, what's he even talking about?

Listen, you'll know by the end of this message. But before we go there, let me just give you a quick recap of where we've been in this Christmas series that will weave through the candlelit services on the 23rd and the 24th, ending on the 28th.

So when you come in next Sunday, we're still going to have all the Christmas decorations up as we started too early and we're going to end a little late, okay? And it's all good.

But in this series, we've been walking through the first half of the Gospel of John chapter 1. And we've been talking all about how the Word is alive and the Word is Jesus, that he is God, that he is eternal, he's part of the Trinity, three in one, Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

[6 : 42] He is creator of everything. He is life. Zoe, remember that? Life. He is light and he is a light into our path.

And as we saw a couple weeks ago, Jesus was rejected by so many as he still is today. And yet there's hope for each of us. So let's look at John 1.

If you're not in John chapter 1, it's probably about four-fifths of the way through your Bible. It is the fourth book of the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and then you come to John, the last Gospel, John 1, verse 12.

And like we've said, 90% of what's in the Gospel of John is not in the other three Gospels. And so right after this passage about Jesus being rejected by the world and by the Jewish people as a whole, here's what God's Word says, John 1, verse 12.

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, children born not of natural descent, nor of a human decision, or a husband's will, but born of God.

[7 : 55] So two things I want us to get today about adoption in Christ. Here's the first thing. Spiritual adoption is personal. It's very, very personal. And I'll never forget a little over 15 years ago getting to meet two of our best friends' new baby.

If you are newer to FCC, Pastor Mitch and I have been friends for close to 20 years. Our wives have been best friends double that since they were basically in diapers.

And Mitch even loves to brag about how he has the ultimate one-upper on us as they secretly set Bethany and I up right about this time 19 years ago. Bumping forward four years to 2010, they had just gone through the adoption process right here in Indiana.

See, back then they had to put together a scrapbook of their family and they didn't have quite all the technology we have today. So a pregnant mother would look through these different scrapbooks who was looking to give their child up for adoption and they would choose a family.

And then they would make sure that it was a good match and they would go from there. So they were chosen and Courtney actually got to be in the delivery room when Aliyah was born. I can't even imagine how special that moment was for her.

[9 : 12] And we remember meeting him for the first time around 15 years ago and even as a baby he had that infectious big smile that we've all come to love to this day.

But I've always thought it was so powerful how his biological mother knew she couldn't properly care for him. And she chose to give him life, one, and then she chose to love him enough to give him to a great family.

Not only did they choose Aliyah, but his bio mom chose them. She made it personal. And when we look at the first part of John 1, 12, God's word simply says, yet to all who did receive him, Jesus. So let's get technical for a second because it really matters. The word yet, yet to all who did receive him, can also be translated as but, one T, okay?

And the reason but is so important is because it makes this dramatic shift. The previous verse was talking about the rejection of Christ by the world. So we kind of have this dark, sad tone going on.

[10 : 21] And then we see, but to all who would receive him. So, but that rejection doesn't thwart God's perfect plan of redemption for those who would make it personal by choosing to receive his amazing grace.

So we see this shift from the darkness of evil in this world to the light of Jesus that breaks through it, bringing light into the darkness, bringing hope.

See, Jesus has already done his part. Romans 5.8 says, but God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

He made it personal. He left the perfection of heaven to come down to this dreary earth, born in a stinky stable, laid in a manger, raised in an ordinary family from a lowly part of Israel.

He grew in wisdom and stature, and he began his public ministry showing us that he is the way, the truth, and the life. He's the only way to the Father.

[11 : 23] He loved the outcasts and showed them they matter. He called the wealthy to lay down their idol and follow him. He healed the sick and those struggling. He made clean the leper, and he taught the true heart behind the kingdom for all who would receive him.

But, there's that word again, he had interrupted the religious hierarchy of the day, and they weren't okay losing control to Jesus, refusing to believe he was the coming Messiah.

They were so selfish they couldn't see the truth, so they mistreated and mocked him. They lied and falsely accused him, even arrested, beat, and forced him to carry his cross to Golgotha.

There he was nailed to it and suffered with the weight of our sins upon his shoulders, yelling out, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

And then he breathed his last as his body lay lifeless from Friday afternoon until Sunday morning.

Then, everything changed as he rose from the grave, conquering death, offering us Zoe life forever.

[12 : 31] And listen, that's how he made it personal to you, to me. And we have to respond back to that personal invitation as John 1, 12 says, by receiving him.

Now, that word receive means to take hold, to obtain, or to grasp. That means it's more than just mere intellectual acknowledgement. But that head knowledge has to travel about 12 to 15 inches down to my heart where it truly clicks as we take hold of that personal relationship with Christ, choosing to make him the treasure I seek, choosing to live for him.

And then in that next line, same verse, John takes that commitment even further. He first says, to receive him. Then he says, to those who believed in his name.

Now, he uses the verb form of the word believe 98 times in this gospel. Let that sink in for a second. 98 times we see the word believe.

Do you know what that means? And pardon my bad English, but he ain't closing this letter until you and I understand what the word believe is really all about. He wants us to get that.

[13 : 43] Because let me tell you what it's not. Believe is not just a one-time prayer prayed. It's not just a one-time repeating a confession of faith after the preacher.

It's not just even a one, two, or three time getting yourself dunked in water. Believing is personal.

And the only way to truly get what this word means in your life is to read through the book of John and hear the other passages that use this word and start to get a full picture.

And I wish I could read you all of them, but this sermon's only about 30 minutes. So let me just share three. It says in John 6, verse 35, Then Jesus declared, whoever, or then, let me say it again.

Then Jesus declared, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry. And whoever, listen to this, believes in me will never be thirsty.

See, he alone is the source of everything we need. And then John 11, 25 and 26, Jesus talking to Martha after Lazarus had died and he's comforting her.

[14:53] He says, I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live. Even though they die and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.

And then he asked them this question, do you believe this? So your eternity, my eternity depends upon true belief in Jesus that bears fruit.

And then last, John tells us why he wrote this letter in the first place in John 20, 31. But these, or these words, are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

And that by believing you may have life in his name. So as we focus back to John 1, 12, I love how it mirrors those last three words of John 20, 31.

Believing in his name. Listen, no other name, no other path, no other source of life. Jesus alone.

And that phrase means that when you believe, you are taking all of Jesus according to the word of God.

[16:07] See, Bible scholar, John MacArthur, who just recently passed away, he put it like this in his commentary. He said his name, Jesus, refers to the totality of Christ being, all that he is and all he does.

Thus, it is not possible to separate his deity from his humanity, his being Savior from his being Lord, or his person from his redemptive work. Saving faith accepts Jesus Christ in all that Scripture reveals concerning him.

So, when I say I believe, it's not just, fine, Grandma, I believe, now get off my back as I go live like the devil. Okay? That's not belief.

That's a lie. Okay? And you can't trick God. You can't manipulate God. Think about it. It's not even just when everything in my faith is even new and shiny and life is going great.

Man, I warn new believers all the time. Satan's going to attack. Be ready. Put your faith deeper. Go deeper. Put those roots down in Christ. So, even go read the parable of the sower.

[17:15] That will kind of show you that some people spring up quickly but fade away very quickly. See, true belief doesn't fade when life gets hard. Belief puts faith roots deeper, trusting our God who is faithful every step of the way.

You know, when I say I believe, that means, Jesus, you have all of me and I receive all of you. not my version of you so I can do what I want so I can make my religion, I don't love that word, but my religion match my political agenda.

Uh-uh. I come all in humbled and surrendered to your lordship in my life, Jesus. I come all in ready by the Holy Spirit's power to live a life of holiness and purity as I walk with you daily.

Your word is truth and it is my guide. I don't have a work version of me, an at-home version, a weekend party version, and a Sunday version.

When I say I believe, Jesus, you get all of me. And listen, that doesn't mean you're going to be perfect. Let me just give you a spoiler alert right now. You won't be. And I'm not.

[18:19] We might as well just let that go. You will stumble. You will have to fight through the flesh and the power of the Holy Spirit as you become more like Jesus. You will have moments of doubt.

And yet when we fall on our faces and life has just kicked the snot out of us, we cry back out to Jesus. We repent. We get up in that godly perseverance and we grow learning from our mistakes. Not only are you saved by grace through faith, but you and I as children of God are sustained every day by that same amazing grace. That's why we worship Him.

Not just on a Sunday, even though that's an absolute blessing and game changer, but with our life, the rest of those 144 hours in a week, okay?

Or in the six days. So, we are adopted into the family of God. And Jesus made that personal by dying for us.

[19:18] And then we make it personal by believing in Him. That's a full surrender to Him. And then let me show you one more thing today. Second, spiritual adoption is transformational.

It's transformational. That is the biggest word I've ever used on an outline. 16 letters. Because you know big words aren't really my style, but I love this word so much because when we truly believe, when we repent of our sins, when we've been baptized into Christ, we're coming all in.

And everything changes and we're transformed into a new creation in Christ. And that begins this lifelong process of change, of growth.

You could call it seeking purity, seeking holiness, seeking to look more like Jesus, letting Him impact every nook and cranny of our lives.

And listen, it can be an absolute blast to see how God can change us and grow us when these hearts fully belong to Him. So let's jump back into our passage here and read verses 12 and 13 one more time.

[20 : 28] Okay? So we just talked about this first part. Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, now watch this, He gave the right to become children of God.

If you're a follower of Jesus, that's what you are. That's your identity. Verse 13, children born not of a natural descent nor of a human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

See, the reason I started off today asking us all to shout out, I am adopted, is because your identity as a child of God depends upon your adoption into the family of God.

Let me say that again in case I just got a little confusing. Your identity as a child of God depends upon whether you've been adopted into the family of God, whether you've been born again.

Jesus makes it clear that sin has brought death for all of us, spiritual death, but we must be born again, a spiritual birth, as we become a child of God.

[21 : 29] So, when we choose by faith to receive Jesus and we have that fruit-bearing belief, we are now adopted into Christ and that adoption changes our whole trajectory.

Let me give you an example from our church family. We have a family that are just beginning the process of adopting from the country of Hungary and their heart in this adoption is not only to add to their family, but also to change the trajectory of a child's life who may otherwise face hardships like probably most of us couldn't imagine.

And who knows how God will use this child to impact this world for the kingdom of God. We also know the straightforward command in God's word for those adopted into Christ to take care of orphans.

And just like for this child that will one day be a part of our FCC family, when we are adopted spiritually through faith, everything also changes about our present situation, about our future.

And like I do from time to time, I want to remind you of some of what God's word says about who you are as a child of God. Because trust me, Satan's going to fill your mind as much as he can with lies, as much as we let him.

[22 : 45] But I want to share who you are as a child of God. What is your identity? Here's what it says in the word. Here's just a few things. You were created with a purpose.

You are beloved as God's adopted child. You are blessed as his spiritual sons and daughters. You are saved as his new creation. You are forgiven as God's redeemed saint.

You are prized as God's dwelling place. You are gifted as the Lord's specialized worker. And never forget, you have resources and a rich inheritance from your Father.

You have access and authority through the Son. You have a seal, a seal and a strengthening of the Holy Spirit. And you have hope and a home in heaven for all eternity.

You can be strong during your spiritual attack. You can be triumphant over temptation. You can be constant during criticism.

[23 : 43] You can be faithful after failure. You can be loyal after loss. And you can be glorifying to God through it all. And church, listen, there's nothing like spiritual adoption because we don't have to live like those who have no hope.

We are children of God destined for a paradise who now can walk in what Galatians 5, 22, and 23 tell us are the fruits of the Spirit. Every day, yeah, eternity is going to be greater than anything our minds can comprehend.

But every day you have the opportunity to walk in the fruits of the Holy Spirit in your life. That's love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control.

See, that's what happens when the Holy Spirit really has us. See, it doesn't matter if you were told that you're an accident, if you were told that you were an oopsie, or even the product of loving parents who couldn't wait to care for you because your birth wasn't ultimately decided by your parents' choice.

Your birth was pre-planned before the foundations of the earth and your Abba Father created you to love you, designed you for a purpose in this life to impact others for the kingdom. So, why does we sometimes just trudge through life letting the stress overwhelm and the worldly things define us?

[25 : 10] Why do I feel the need to be fully entrenched in that rat race when I've been called to a heavenly journey as my God is with me every step of the way? See, all you own, all you've accomplished for this world will fade.

The clothes you wear, the awards you win, the thundering praise that you receive will be forgotten in time. But who you are in Christ is your true identity.

And the impact you make on lives, showing them the love of Christ, will ring into eternity. Jesus even asked this soul-stirring question in Mark 8, 36. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world and yet forfeit their very soul?

And as we think about Joseph and Mary, think about the shepherds and even the wise men who came a little later to present Jesus with the gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh, can you imagine the hope that now permeated their lives?

Can you imagine the awe and wonder of how God would use that little baby? Well, I think you can standing 2,000 years on this side.

[26 : 20] It really is transformational because this Christmas you can say, I am a child of the living God. I am adopted. Because this baby grew into a man.

He performed signs, miracles, and wonders. And he even gave his innocent life on the cross for our guilty ones resurrecting from the grave three days later.

Appearing to over 500 people after that before he ascended back up into heaven. And because of his life, death, burial, and resurrection, I, you, can walk in a new identity as a child of the king.

So one more time before we close today. Say this with me, okay? The words, I am adopted. Are you ready? Say this with me. I am adopted.

And yes, you are. And what a joy to be born of God. Pray with me. Father, we are just so very grateful for your amazing love that when we were lost because of our sins, our sin that separates us from a perfect heavenly father who in your perfection and holiness cannot stand before the filth of our sin.

[27 : 40] And yet you loved us so much that you made a way. You made a bridge. Jesus is that bridge as he went to the cross, took the weight of the world's sins upon his shoulders, and died to say, I love you big time.

And then, for the rest of Friday, all day Saturday, into Sunday, what they call in the Jewish culture, three days, Jesus, you rose from the grave, conquered death, and you offer us life on this earth.

Father, thank you. We thank you for that hope that we can celebrate. And while Christmas is a wonderful thing where we remember the baby born into this world to bring hope, but we will never forget that that baby grew into a man, gave his life, resurrected, and sits at the right hand to the Father, and we just honor and glorify and worship you today, Jesus.

We pray all this in your holy and precious name. And God's people said, Amen and Amen. Hey, thank you for joining us. Let me just tell you again in case you came halfway into this recording. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana. And if you have any questions about your faith, you want to talk about giving your life to Jesus, maybe just questions about our church, here's a couple ways you can connect with us.

[29 : 05] You can call us at 812-663-8488. That's 663-8488. Or you can email me at ray at FCCgreensburg.com.

Hey, God bless you. Hope you have a Merry Christmas.