



Photo by Megan Bruegger

The Gift of Adoption By Jenifer Heath

My husband, Jason, and I have participated in the adoption of a couple dozen horses in the last 8 years, and we've had the privilege of offering support and encouragement to many adoptive families through our **mentorship program at Haven Acres**. In 2002 we took in a 13-year-old teen with a difficult past and have raised him like our own. And, there was a time or two that we discussed the possibility of adopting an abused or neglected child I had cared for while working as a nurse in the emergency department. However, we had never talked about international adoption. Now with several grown children, we certainly believed that our family was complete.

In mid-December 2020, my eyes were drawn to a photo on Facebook of a smiling 15-year-old Colombian boy. Pictured there because he would "age out" of the system in seven short months and would no longer be adoptable, he emergently needed a committed and loving family. **The Holy Spirit tugged on my heart.** I broached the subject with Jason and our kids that evening at dinner. After the initial shock wore off, everyone seemed excited about the proposition. With the family's full support, I instantly began contacting people to see how we could **pursue adopting Alex.**

Our contact person at the adoption agency had a couple of concerns. First, she inquired as to whether Jason and I had any experience with traumatized children. Second, she worried that we would not be able to file the paperwork in time for Alex's 16th birthday, the only way we could guarantee his adoption. I briefly explained our experience in raising a traumatized young man with mental health challenges and our passion for running Haven Acres, **a youth ranch designed specifically to mentor and assist at-risk youth and their families.** Seemingly convinced that we were good candidates, she proceeded to read me the boy's story. I reassured her that I would work diligently to complete the process within the required time frame.

I cannot begin to enumerate all the ways **God has been in the details** of this undertaking.

First, the timing. Running a youth ranch requires many hours of work, but our least busy time of the year is winter. Beginning the mountain of paperwork that comprised the adoption process in the middle of December was the perfect time. In fact, I don't think I could have done it any other time of the year.

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Second, the finances. I love that God has a plan for us long before we are even aware of it. Shortly after the New Year, we received some inheritance money. Our initial plan was to make improvements to our home, but when confronted with this opportunity, we could not justify spending thousands on superficial things that did not matter in the span of eternity. So, the money paid for the adoption instead.

Third, the speed. Most adoptions take at least one year to process. Ours had to be finished in seven months. The 2.5 pound stack of papers was overnighted to the U.S. government and arrived ON Alex's 16th birthday, **a miracle of enormous proportion!**

Last, the attachment. Working with various kids from hard places, attachment becomes one of the most difficult and critical issues that they and their caregivers face. To assist in preparing both child and family for the transition of adoption, we were encouraged to have virtual visits. From the initial meeting, we knew that **Alex belonged in our family** and felt a profound connection with him. We have found Alex to be extremely affectionate and loving, amazingly resilient, and able to attach and build relationships. This is nothing short of a miracle!

There are some striking spiritual parallels as we have been navigating this thing called adoption. It's crazy to think that we spent countless hours filling out forms, invested a substantial amount of money, interrupted our comfortable family dynamic, and ventured into the unknown all for someone we had never met. And yet, how much more has our **Heavenly Father done for us?** Ephesians 1:5 says, “God decided in advance to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. This is what He wanted to do, and it gave Him great delight.” He chose to add us to His family, in spite of our failures, our sin, and our reluctance. He invested everything He had by sending His only Son to pay the price for our sins. Romans 5:8 explains, “But God demonstrated His love for us in this; While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

On the flip side of the coin, adoptees also make some significant sacrifices when they agree to adoption: leaving their birth country, adapting to a new language and culture, saying goodbye to friends and the familiarity of their surroundings, and **choosing to follow, adapt to, and do life with a family** with whom they are newly acquainted. The enormity of the loss overwhelms me.

It's not so different for a person when they choose to become a Christian, accepting the offer of adoption through Jesus into the family of God. There are things that are lost: bad habits, familiar yet unhealthy friendships, the risk of severing family relationships for some, and the “right” to live selfishly. Instead, we take on the responsibility of living righteously. But in the end, the gains are so much greater than the things lost both in physical and spiritual adoption! Because of this adoption, I have a greater understanding of what **Christ has done for us and how much God desires relationship with His children**. If you would like more information about being adopted into the family of God, don't hesitate to contact us. **We'd be glad to have you as part of the family!**



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