

From the August 4, 2008 Issue

The Impact of Adoption

In celebration of our first year anniversary, we asked our readers to tell us about how the Gospel of Adoption has impacted their lives. The response has been remarkable and encouraging.

We urge you to take the time to read the testimonies below. In doing so you will see how lives have been changed by the realization that the Father, Son, and Spirit not only love us, they like us, and our place in the life of God is absolutely assured.

The first two stories are from regular contributors John Stonecypher and Jonathan Stepp (starting on page 14, Tim Brassell has written a more detailed piece describing his journey). The testimonies of many other readers follow after theirs.

I remember a conversation with my theology professor about 12 years ago.

He would not shut up about "trinity," "incarnation," "adoption," "objective union," blah blah blah. But I had no time for such academic mumbo-jumbo. I was plagued with anxieties, addictions, and failed relationships. In my gut, I knew my pain was connected to problems in my relationship with God. But my professor was stuck on interesting-but-worthless philosophical issues like the dual nature of Christ. So one day in my frustration, I tried to pin him down: "I DON'T WANT TO GO TO HELL. WHAT DO I NEED TO DO TO GET ALL MY DUCKS IN A ROW?"

I saw the gleeful look in his eye that told me I wasn't going to get a straight answer. And he said "Whatever ducks there are, Jesus has already put them in their rows." While my reaction at the time was mostly annoyance, some of that message hit home. I mark that as the day I began to grasp the gospel. In the years since, I've thought a lot about those ducks. I've come more and more to see them as they are, in their happy little rows. And I've been finding more and more peace as I trust in Jesus' duck-arranging skills.

Belief is harder than anything I've ever done. But it works. I am less anxious than I was. In my recovery from addiction, my Higher Power has performed marvelously. And he's teaching me about relationships too. Without my help, the incarnate One has bound me forever in objective union (I am SHOCKED at how 'real life' that word ended up being!) to my Father, and their Spirit lives with me forever to teach me who I am. Who am I? I am the son of my Father, who is well-pleased with my beautifully arranged ducks.

~ John Stonecypher

All my life I thought the good news of Jesus was just potentially good news. I thought it was the good news that I could, potentially, become a child of the Father - if I did what was right. The funny thing is, my definition of the "right thing" changed throughout my life.

First it was "be a good boy and obey my parents." Then it was "be a good church member and

follow the rules." Then it became "truly, in my heart, really accept Jesus." In some ways that last version of the "right thing" was the hardest one of all. Before that version I had a set of rules to measure myself against, but when I started thinking of my relationship with the Father as anchored in my "belief in Jesus" I had no way of knowing - this side of heaven - whether I was truly believing strongly enough, deeply enough, or long enough to be saved.

The good news of my adoption in Jesus Christ hit me like a ton of bricks just two years ago. I was finally able to listen to what the Holy Spirit had been telling me all my life: The Father, Son, and Spirit always wanted me. They created me in Christ so they could hold on to me forever. When the Son became what I am, he made me into what he is - a beloved child of the Father. And because it's the Trinity doing all this, and not me, it means that I will always be a child of my Father in heaven and nothing will ever change that. Thank you Jesus!

~ Jonathan Stepp

To me, the Gospel of adoption just makes sense. What *doesn't* make sense is what I used to think -- the idea that Jesus has only done *most* of the work of salvation and left the rest up to *us*, insanely misguided and perpetually ignorant *us*. If the Holy Trinity is composed of pure beings based on unselfish love, why would there be a catch? There wouldn't be! Someone who loves you and wants to be with you doesn't trap you. He doesn't sit on his hands waiting for you to make the right decision. He does everything he can to make it happen, and that's exactly what Jesus did. It makes sense to me that Jesus would go the distance.

This is such a relief, knowing that I am not responsible for anyone else's salvation. I don't need to convince someone to accept Jesus so they can get into Heaven. He's already accepted them, and that's all they need! I'm out of the equation!

Then if someone asks me for a reason for the hope within me, I don't have to tell them I have something they don't have because they haven't made a commitment to Jesus. I can tell them we both have complete forgiveness, freedom, and salvation because God loves and likes both of us no matter what we've done. I can tell them all the work's already done, now they can enjoy the party. I can tell them they're already at a party and they don't even realize it. Jesus took care of everything so that we can have life and live it more abundantly, and if they neglect to enjoy the party they're missing the point. I can tell everyone they don't have a job to do, I can tell them they're here to enjoy the celebration.

~ Steve Solari

My awareness of this lifelong relationship with Jesus began when my mother took me to church services and festivals at WCG during my childhood. She was the sister of Roy Hammer who was one of the founding WCG members in the East Texas area. I was baptized at the age of twenty-one. My initial conversion occurred during a three-year process prior to coming to Ambassador University. The process involved changing my mind about educational and vocational goals and

becoming very involved with the church and Spokesmans Club. It also involved personal changes of walking away from old relationships and building new ones.

In the midst of doing all that, Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, revealed to me that He is my Savior and has forgiven my sins. I committed my life to Jesus and His Kingdom as He aggressively took hold of me for the rest of my life. I was baptized into the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in 1968 at Ambassador College.

This new life in Jesus' strong grasp has been a wonderful and challenging journey. There have been so many changes of mind, relationships and experiences on this journey. The crème de la crème of my continuing life in Jesus' strong grasp has now dawned after forty years through him helping me aggressively grasp hold of Trinitarian Christ-centered theology. I believe it has emerged as a sort of spiritual discipline of joy in discovering from the ever-present Jesus the answer to the key question of life, "Who Is Jesus?"

What amazing hope and joy has come to me in knowing the good news of Jesus, the One sent by the Father and anointed in the Holy Spirit...the God-Man! I was overjoyed with the good news that the Father has loved me from eternity and has permanently adopted me as His child in the Spirit by Jesus' vicarious work on my behalf, for me and in my place. Seeing and believing the good news of my unconditional permanent acceptance as an adopted child into the joyous life shared by the Trinity is so enlightening and motivating that it frees me to join Jesus with new love, compassion and gratefulness in his ever-present ministry to humanity all around me. Thank you, Jesus, for never letting go! Hallelujah!

~ *Steve Burns*

When I first began to understand the truth of God's eternal purpose and plan of adoption as His beloved child in Jesus, it was astounding to me. I learned this was the very reason for my existence in the first place and for all of humanity also. It was amazing to me to learn that God was a father with such a passionate love that He wanted me as His child at all costs, whatever it might take, even determining before I was born that I would be brought into union with Him in Jesus. Me, actually sharing His life of glory and intimate relationship. So being chosen in Christ and adopted, I have been made holy and blameless in His presence. And the good news is that Jesus has already done it and taken me with Him in His death, burial, resurrection and ascension.

How has the gospel of adoption impacted my life? Everything I thought I knew about God has changed. Isn't this what you call repentance? To quit believing lies about the Father and believe the truth? I could quit believing God was upset with me if I didn't do everything just right. Instead, I can believe God is for me all the time!! I can have assurance of God's love for me now and forever. I don't have to have fear of the judgment. Oh! those scary judgment parables. These used to worry me a lot. I can peace of mind and joy in knowing the truth of the gospel. The truth has set me FREE.

~ *Rita Poyner*

Since my conversion and calling to be a Christian in the WCG, I've been what was called for years "A Spiritual Widow", or "One with an unconverted mate," or "Unequally Yoked"! It was a stigma I got stuck with, and as a babe in Christ, way back in 1976. I didn't even understand what that meant. So, I rejected it. Besides, I read in 1 Cor.7 where it said to stay in the place I was when I was called, and the unbelieving spouse would be sanctified because of me, the believing wife. And I stayed because of a mom who said to me one day when I was crying over my plight, "God must see strength when he only calls one!" That statement came from one who was and has been my spiritual mentor all through the years. Even though now our positions have switched, I know God blessed me with my husband of 35 years.

The overwhelming joy of the Adoption Theology shows me and my man that we're both included and free to be who we are. I LOVE this Gift we've been blessed with by God! And I am so grateful for the Worldwide Church of God and its pastors for truly seeking the truth of the Gospel, the real Gospel of the Triune God's adoption of us all, which has healed an open wound! May you and your ministry be abundantly blessed as we all grow, learning to live in union with our God and understanding his freedom, beauty and love! It's re-enforced my commitment to love and accept all who we come into contact with in our ministry to bikers, both on road and off road riders.

~ *Linda C. Baron*

To begin to understand the gospel—God's love for humanity—is an awesome thing! As our understanding has grown of the magnitude of God's love for all humanity this has had quite an impact on our lives. We long for everyone to understand this. Being bound in legalism for 40+ years, always trying to "get it right" and seeing ourselves continually failing to do that, caused anxiety in our lives. It is so great to now have peace!

The last two years have deepened our understanding very much. To begin to fully grasp the depth of God's love for each of us, for all of humanity is indeed, very thrilling. We are both so thankful and grateful for understanding "The Adopted Life" in Christ. Christ is weaving a beautiful fabric from all humanity by contextualizing the gospel for all cultures so that all may be adopted into the perichoresis relationship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

People will often say, "God loves you" or "God loves me" but we don't often stop to think that God "likes us" too. We often don't like ourselves because we see our imperfections. God knows all about that and he still likes us. This brings great peace. Isn't it awesome that God likes who we are, our personalities, etc..? We no longer have to fear about imperfections. What an amazing God we have—to love us so incredibly and to make sure from the foundation of the world that we would forever be with him, sharing his life! We are totally safe and secure with Jesus. We think of the song, "Amazing love, how can it be, that Jesus Christ would die for me," but not just for me, but for everyone. Thank you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. You truly have amazing love.

~ *Jim and Marj Friddle*

When I was 8 years old I went through "released time," Catholic Catechism class in preparation for my "First Holy Communion," one of the seven sacraments of the RC church. I met Jesus then, someone who loved all people around him. He was someone who knew what to say to people in the situations they found themselves. This Jesus was patient, forgiving and encouraging, not wanting to exclude anyone from what God was doing. I lost sight of that Jesus as I grew up in the church and finally left it at age 21 totally confused as to why the Jesus whom I had met personally at 8 was not spoken of in mass, or the Pentecostal services I experienced with my girlfriend at age 26.

Little did I know that it would not be until I was 49 years old that I would again meet the Jesus I knew so many years before. It was coming to the realization that I had been adopted into the Father, Son and Spirit that opened my eyes to the Jesus I had always known. It was knowing that there was nothing I could do to make him love me more and nothing that I do, as bad as I can be, to make him love me less. I am free to share this love of God in Jesus because it is real. More real than I have ever known and will be even more real after this life is over and I stand face-to-face with Reality.

I am making *The Adopted Life* a permanent link on my church web page so that more people can meet Reality, too.

~ *Frank Ancona*

I've been going to church and hearing (and giving) sermons all my life in Lutheran, Episcopalian, old WCG and reformed WCG, and it's just this year that I finally have come to see that God is exactly like I always wanted him to be, but I had not the framework in which to see him this way. Praise God! Just wish I had known this glorious news 60 years earlier! But then, eternity is a long time!

~ *Dave Fiedler*

Repentance has never been so much fun! Understanding God for who he really is—Father, Son and Spirit mutually indwelling one another in perfect harmonious relationship, and understanding the truth of our inclusion in that relationship through Jesus Christ—has so re-ordered my way of thinking about Him, myself and others that I find it hard to put into words the liberating transformation that has occurred and is occurring in my life.

The understanding that the Father has included me into His life is a marvelous and freeing truth. And the beauty is that He has included not only me or some select group, but rather that He, in his infinite goodness and love, has included us all. As Jesus reveals the Father's face, I am seeing more and more who we truly are. I'm understanding with deeper clarity what C.S Lewis meant when he said "There are no ordinary people." How could there be when we have such an extraordinary Father?

~ *Lance McKinnon*

Before my seventh birthday, my life was turned upside down by the divorce of my parents, resulting in my living with both sets of grandparents. Although supplied with all necessary physical needs, I had no close intimate relationship with any adult. I was taken to church regularly where there was much commotion (screaming, shouting, and snake handling), but little connection. I was constantly threatened by eternal torture of hellfire if I didn't straighten up. Consequently, I knew nothing about the real God of love, much less have a relationship with him.

As I entered college, I had very much decided that if God existed, he wasn't involved in or concerned about the affairs of man. By age 26 I was introduced to the WCG and became involved because it seemed calmer than other "Christian" religions and I was led to believe they had an "inside (and only)" track to God. So started a long thirty-year journey of a performance-based relationship with God, one in which I would never measure up to, and which simultaneously degraded my own family's relationship with me. Why? Because this was my only chance to make things right with God. Proving myself worthy took a lot of energy, and my focus had to be on me. This was "my" time; theirs would be later, or so I thought.

But fortunately, God introduced grace to the WCG and things began to finally make some sense. It was a breath of fresh air. For the first time in my life, I began to embrace a one-on-one relationship with Jesus, my Savior.

But still, I did not have the complete picture. That was to occur several years later. During the fall of 2007, my pastor and I began to encounter those who taught a deeper understanding of the Triune God and how he has included us (Christians), as well as everyone else on the planet, as his adopted children. We started seeing scriptures in a new light, scriptures we had read many times, but which the Holy Spirit was now showing us a richer, deeper, and more loving meaning than we had ever imagined.

The more intimate relationship I had begun to develop with Jesus spread to all of God, including the Father and the Holy Spirit. Now, freedom in Jesus is reality. No more performance-based religion, no more condemnation of self or others who do not yet believe, and no more time wasted on fears, regrets, or doubts. Now, I see his great love for me and all his creation for what it is. I know that we are all loved dearly in his sight—in spite of us.

He says I am his brother. He tells me that he is in me and in the Father and in all and I am in him. He was with me when I was six years old. I was never alone and deep down I think I always felt that, but now I know. Come with me, and share the joy of the Lord forever.

~ Byron Ball

The gospel of our adoption into the life of the Triune God has been liberating! It has given me assurance in my heart for my children and other family members, especially my father. It has shown me that the Gospel is TRULY GOOD NEWS! It has revived my love for God and my desire to know Him better! Surely, this is the most exciting time ever to be alive! We'll have MORE, dear

Lord!

~ Jerome Ellard

Since I first learned that the word gospel means “good news,” I agreed. The only thing clouding the news, turning it into *almost* good news, were the big “ifs” and “buts” that I thought were attached. Jesus saves, but... I could be an heir with Jesus, if... That huge chasm caused by sin, that I believed separated me from God, doesn't exist.

So when asked what impact the gospel of adoption has had on my life, the first word that pops in my mind is assurance. Thank you Jesus, that my salvation depends solely on your finished work. Only the genius of God would come up with a plan that left no wiggle room, no chance of failure. And fail it would if I had anything to do with it. From God's perspective the plan is simple: adopt humanity as his own children. The only way to do that is to have God become part of humanity. Jesus did that so that when he died we died, when he was resurrected so were we, and when he sat down beside the Father, there we are—inseparably connected forever to the triune life through Jesus.

I am awed and amazed at the beauty, the intricacies, the magnificence of the universe, but I am even more awestruck by the relationship of love and life that brought such wonders into being. I'm looking forward to continuing to plumb the depths of that relationship, knowing that all eternity will not be long enough to discover it all. My assurance comes from knowing that I (along with everyone else) am already a part of that relationship. I just tickles me, makes me giddy almost, to think that the Father, Son and Spirit have longed to hear my voice since before the foundation of the world. He accepts me (and everyone) with all my imperfections; he loves me, and he likes me.

~ Jan Taylor

Learning the good news about our adoption and inclusion in Jesus has changed EVERYTHING in my life. Because I grew up in "the church," I always imagined myself to have a relationship with God and Jesus. After all, I belonged to "the church" and having this relationship was part of the benefit package.

Now I know that I belong to Jesus. And that has made all of the difference. The relationship that I thought I had with Jesus pales in comparison to what I now know: that Jesus lives in me. I was created to be adopted by the Triune God. Knowing that I can't do anything to earn the love and approval of the Triune God has given me more peace than I ever could have imagined possible. Jesus loves me because He is Jesus, not because I am me! I can live in peace knowing that since I can't earn Jesus' love, I can't lose it either. God loves me AND He likes me. Regardless of what I do or what I don't do. He loves me so much He wants me to have an unhindered relationship with Him and everyone else.

Knowing who I am in Jesus has allowed me to experience more freedom in my life than ever before. Realizing that I don't have to have all of the answers to the problems and questions in life

means that I don't have to constantly strive to "do the right thing," especially when relying on my own knowledge. I can change my "striving" to relying on God.

This wonderful journey into a greater understanding of who I am in Jesus has been a gradual process. I feel like a completely different person than I was just a year ago. I am excited because I know my journey has just begun.

~ Georgia McKinnon

Like I told a friend of mine: I don't know what it is, really. I just feel so much better.

~ John Cartwright