



Scott Turansky, Senior Pastor  
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## WE ARE ADOPTED

Ephesians: Recognizing Who You Are in Christ  
*Ephesians 1:1-14*

Today we're going to look at a passage of scripture, Ephesians 1:1-14. The passage talks about our identity in Christ. And part of that is that we are adopted into God's family. I'm going to tell you some things I've learned personally about being an adoptive father. We're going to talk about our adoption as believers as taught in these verses. But before I do I want to tell you a story.

As I've told you, Carrie and I have five children. Three of those children are biological and two are adopted. When the three children (Ben is the same age as Megan and Elizabeth) were very young, about five years old, the girls had been with us in our home for a little over a year. We were all sitting around talking and Ben asked a common question that he'd asked before and that we had responded to. The question was this. He said, "Dad, will you tell the exciting story of how I was born?"

And so in that moment I told the exciting story about how "on July 4<sup>th</sup>, Independence Day, we were all getting ready for the celebration in the evening and it was then on that day that your mom got those feelings inside of her that told her it was time for you to come out. So we went off to the hospital and we were at the hospital on that evening, July 4<sup>th</sup>, when fireworks were going off outside the window. We wondered if you would come on July 4<sup>th</sup>. But you didn't. You were late. And so as the fireworks were going off in the night, we were more interested in what was going on in that hospital room. At about on o'clock in the morning you came out. We were excited that we had another boy! We had one boy and one girl, now we have another boy! I cried I was so excited about this. And that was the exciting story of how you were born."

Of course Ben's smiling and beaming about that, enjoying the story. And then there was a pause. And then Megan said, "Tell me the exciting story of how I was born." In that moment I knew I had a problem. One, I don't know about the experience of her birth. And secondly, this was a very important question that had to do with her identity with us. It was in that moment that for the first time I told the exciting story of how Megan and Elizabeth came to be in our family.

It all started when we came to New Jersey and we decided that we were going to increase the size of our family from three kids. We wanted to have more, so Carrie and I went through some training to become adoptive parents. We thought maybe we'd adopt a child from overseas, maybe from Eastern Europe, or somewhere from South America, or something like that. We didn't know, but God had some different plans.

There were these two cute little girls running around in our church in the Sunday school. Carrie was their teacher. They were coming in with bounding energy and bubbly personalities. They were living in a foster home at the time with Lucy and Dennis and they were excited about life. Everything about them was so fun.

It wasn't long before we found out that Megan and Elizabeth would need a more permanent home. Lucy and Dennis are great people, but they didn't want to adopt. We wondered what God would do and we started to pray. We talked to the case worker and the case worker said, "No way. You can't adopt these girls." But we continued to pray.

It wasn't long after that that Lucy got sick and she could no longer care for them even in a foster home. So we, having gone through the foster parent training, then put our names in and because we knew them they allowed the girls to come live with us or they wanted to allow them to come live with us. We were ready for that, but there were still obstacles in the way and so it wasn't really happening. We kept praying.

One day we as a family were getting ready to go camping - getting all the stuff, putting it in the car actually - when we got the phone call that said, "You can come pick up Megan and Elizabeth." We were so excited, but what would we do? There were five of us. We didn't want to bombard the girls, so we decided we would send Mom and Melissa over to pick them up. And that's what happened. They went off to pick them up in the station wagon while Josh and Ben and I waited at home. We sat on the porch. Waited and waited.

I'm telling them, "We were excited about you coming. We were waiting and pretty soon the car came around the corner and you were in it and we were excited. We jumped up and we were ready because you drove in the driveway with everything you owned in our car. And when you got out of the car we were so excited to see you. You got out and you were now coming to live with us. What a fun thing.

But we had a problem. The problem is we had a dog named Bryn and you were deathly afraid of the dog. We tried to protect you from the dog and tried to get you assimilated to the dog." The funny thing is now these girls are twenty-five years old, they're both full time pet groomers, and they love dogs. But back then this was a major problem. For us, this was the exciting story about how Megan and Elizabeth came in to our family.

As I told this exciting story to them, their faces smiled and their eyes were big. It was a valuable story for them. I think that same kind of experience happens with you and me as we listen to the exciting story of how we are adopted into God's family.

It's a powerful story starting in verse 3. Listen to these words in Ephesians 1. *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.*

Wow. You see words in there like *every spiritual blessing in Christ. He chose us. It says in love he predestined us to be adopted according to his pleasure and will.*

It's interesting. As you study the Bible you know that God only has one son. That son is Jesus Christ. In fact John 3:16 says that He is the *only begotten Son* of God. He is the only biological son of God. Only one. That is Jesus Christ. The rest of us come into the family through adoption. It's a privilege that we all have as we enter the family of God.

There were times as our kids were growing up that people would look at us, we'd mention that Megan and Elizabeth are adopted, and people would say, "What a happy family." And it's true. Very happy family. But that's not true for all adopted children.

Many times adopted children go through struggles. I work with many families where children have been adopted into a home and those children experience some difficulties in their lives. I believe that every adopted child experiences heart damage in their lives in their spiritual heart because the parent who's raising them is different than the parent who bore them. And so there are some challenges that they face. Now I also believe that sometimes just living in a loving home is all God needs to bring healing into that person's life. But sometimes it takes a little bit more work than that as adopted children work through some issues and things they need to address in their lives.

But I love to talk to adopted kids. I love to say "You have something that biological kids don't have." They often look at me puzzled as if to say, "What's that?" I say, "Your parents picked you out." Notice in verse 4 it says God *chose us*. Your parents picked you out. If you have biological children you just get whatever comes. You get a boy if it's a boy; you get a girl if it's a girl. If it's ugly, that's what you get. But with an adopted kid, you pick them out. You are picked out. I like to say that we have three that are homegrown and two that are handpicked. God is the one who's picked us out in our lives.

I like this story of two kids that were talking to each other. One was biological and the other was adopted. The first one says, "I came from Mommy's tummy," and the other one says, "Yeah, but I came from Mommy's heart." I think that is so true of children who are adopted. They are picked out.

Verse 4 says *he chose us*. It reminds me of when I was a kid; all of us would get lined up by the backstop. We're going to play baseball and there would be two guys, Carl and Henry. They'd get to pick the teams. Carl would pick first and then Henry would pick and I'd be sitting there by the backstop saying, "I wish I could be on Carl's team." But I didn't say anything; I would be real quiet waiting. And then Carl would say, "I'll take Scott." Quietly I'd walk over there behind Carl, but in my heart I'm going, "Yes! I got picked!" That's the same thing that happens with you and me. We were picked out by God.

*He chose us*, it says. Those are valuable words that ring in our hearts that give us this sense of value inside that God picked us out.

Do you ever feel worthless? Do you ever feel unworthy? Imagine that Jesus were to come into a room and you're in the room with a bunch of people and He says to the people, "Come on out. I'd like to talk to you, spend some time with you." Several people shuffle out of the room and you stay back because you just feel like "He's not talking to me." But Jesus stays in the room and says, "Are you coming?" "Me?" "Yes you. I want to spend time with you." That's the same experience that we have with God that He chose us, He picked us out. Each one of us is special just because of that very reason that God picked us to be a part of His family.

Adopted kids often have identity issues, but God often uses adopted kids in some powerful ways. In fact I say to adopted kids, "God must have a very special plan for you in your life. You can already see it. You see what He's done? He's brought you into this family. God obviously has something planned that is special for you."

If you look in the Bible you can see many children who grow up in nontraditional families that God did amazing things through their lives. Do you remember Moses? He grew up in Pharaoh's daughter's home. A whole different family. God had something special planned for him.

Joseph was ostracized by his family. There were some problems in his family and God took him away to Egypt. He was raised in a different place. God had a special purpose for him.

Little Samuel went to live away from his mom and dad, went to live in the priest's home when he was very young, probably a preschooler at the time. God had a special purpose just for him.

Esther became a queen, but before that she was raised by her uncle, Mordechai. God had a special purpose for her.

I'm convinced God has a special purpose for children who are adopted. Every one of us is adopted into His family and God has a special purpose, a special plan for each one of us.

I think one of the key words that accompanies the word 'adopted' is the word 'new.' Because all things become new. That actually is a verse in the Bible. You get all kinds of new things in your life. One of the things you get is a new Father.

When Megan and Elizabeth first came into our home we did not tell them what to call us. We just waited and watched to see what would happen. Our other children would say "Dad" this or "Mom" this, but Megan and Elizabeth would say "hey you" and we would respond to that. I remember the very first time that Megan called me "Dad." It just warmed my heart so much because it made a statement about our relationship together. What a treasure of a relationship that is, a new father.

The same thing is true in our own lives. We come to know God as Father. He's a new Father for us so that we can understand who He is. The dynamic in that relationship is powerful.

There's another passage of scripture, in Romans 8:15-17, which describes our relationship with God. It says, *The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry,*

*“Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ (the only begotten, right?), if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

The name Abba means daddy. This really rang true in my mind many years ago when Carrie and I were visiting Israel. We were sitting alongside the Sea of Galilee. As we sat there just enjoying and imagining what it would have been like for Jesus to walk on that water or fishermen to be out on that sea, there was a family playing nearby. We couldn’t understand anything they were saying because it was all in Hebrew, except one word. The little boy went down to the water while his dad was out there in the water and he was calling, “Abba! Abba!” I said, “I know that word.” There’s a picture of the kind of relationship we have with God, daddy, that close relationship that we have. Not a distant father that’s way out there, but a close relationship that we enjoy with God in a very personal way. Abba, Father. We get a new Father.

We also get a new name. The girls came into our home and their name became Turansky. It’s a great name. I love that name, Turansky. I remember one day our whole family, all seven of us, were in Kenya and we were sitting around the table and I said, “Hey, everybody. Did you know our names were in the paper today?” There’s only one newspaper in Kenya and we were in it.

Immediately my wife’s eyes got big because she shopped at the Uchumi grocery store where she would spend a lot of schillings on our food. Based on the number of schillings you could enter into the contest that the Uchumi grocery store was having. They were giving out a number of prizes, so when she heard that our name was in the paper, she says, “Oh no. I hope we didn’t win the case of beer.”

I handed her the paper and on the paper it said our name, Turansky. We were the winners of two tickets to the game park. Everybody was excited our name was in the paper, until the kids realized only two. And they knew who mom would choose to go to the game park with her.

The next day I got on the phone, though, and I called up to find some more discount tickets. I found five more discount tickets to go to the game park. So the next night at dinner I said, “I’ve got some more news for our family,” and I told them I bought five more tickets to go to the game park. They were so excited to go to this luxurious game park, the most luxurious game park in all of Kenya, and stay in this beautiful hotel together and enjoy seeing all the different animals in the wild. They were glad that day that their name was Turansky. I bet some of you wish your name was Turansky.

I would talk to our kids regularly and I would say, “You’re a Turansky, which means you better be careful what you do. When you go out into the neighborhood or you go out to this other place you are representing the Turansky family. People will make judgments about the father when they look at the way you act and the things that you do.”

That is so true in our own personal lives as we have a new name. That new name is Christian. When we take on that name Christian, which means little Christ, whenever we go out and we live our lives people are making judgments about the Father. They’re saying, “Is that what God is like?” as they’re watching us. It’s a strategic opportunity for us to help other people know who

God is and it's a tremendous relational concept for us to take on that name Christian. When you're adopted into a family a lot of things become new. One of those is that you get a new name.

Another thing that becomes new is that you get a new way of doing things. You live by different rules. In our home, the Turansky home, we do chores, we have bed times. The girls needed to learn those things as they became adopted into our family. Sometimes they were unwilling to cooperate with the rules and the ways that we do things.

I remember that one time Elizabeth was being disciplined at four years old. She was only in our home for just a little bit. She was sitting on her bed and Carrie went in to talk to her and Elizabeth with her pouty voice says, "I'm ready to go to the next house." That's hard to hear as an adoptive parent. But Carrie says, "This is it, baby. This is your house. This is the end of the line. No bouncing around to houses anymore. This is where you're going to be forever."

Our experience with case workers was really great. I know that some people have trouble with case workers as they're trying to work through the foster care system or the adoption process, but for us the case workers were really great.

I remember Dorinda came into our home. She was a case worker and she was interviewing the girls (they had only been there just a little bit of time). She had Elizabeth alone and she asked the question, "Do you like it here?" I felt very uncomfortable with that question. In fact I'd feel uncomfortable if she asked my other kids that question, "Do you like it here?" But Elizabeth said, "I wish I could go back to Lucy's house." Dorinda said, "Why?" Elizabeth said, "Because they have a blue trike that I can ride." Dorinda was very good. She said, "Well, this is your new home now. There are a lot of nice things that can happen here," and she really helped Elizabeth in that process.

But after that whole time was done and Dorinda had left the house, I said to Elizabeth, "It sounds like you'd like to go back and visit Dennis and Lucy?" "Oh, could you take me there? I'll show you how to get there." Here she's only four years old. They live like fifteen minutes away. I said, "Sure," and so I called Dennis and Lucy and arranged to go visit them the next Saturday.

On that Saturday morning we got up, I said, "Come on, Elizabeth, let's get in the car." "Oh, I'll show you how to get there," she said. And I said, "Great." So we're driving down the road and she doesn't know which way is which. We even get into the neighborhood and I said, "Tell me, which street do I take?" She doesn't know. As we're driving by the house I said, "Which house? Look over there. See if you can tell what house." She has no idea.

I pull into the driveway of the house, she gets out of the car, she runs into the house, straight through the house, through the back door, out under the swing set in the backyard. I sat down with Dennis and Lucy and gave them some updates, talked to them for a bit. I was there for like fifteen, twenty minutes and I thought, "Well, I think it's time for us to go." So I said to Elizabeth, "Hey Lizzie (that's what we called her at that time), time to go!" Pops off the swing set, runs back through the house, right out the door. I'm standing there talking to Dennis and Lucy, wondering what's going on in this little girl's mind as she gets back in the car and we head back.

See, there's new ways to do things in life and those things can be a challenge sometimes as kids are learning how to respond and what to do.

I think sometimes as Christians we look back on the life before we were saved and we say, "I kind of remember some things I had fun with back there." We tend to glamorize either things from our past or we glamorize things that people do who are not believers. Because we live by a certain set of rules in our life. God has set those out for us. We think about, "Wow, I wonder what it would be like to live over there in that kind of house," where people are doing maybe things that are against God's principles. I think we tend to glamorize those things sometimes.

But I've got to tell you. To try to go back and live a life that involves sin is a mess. To go back and try to live something that's outside of the life that God has given us in Christ is dangerous, it's hurtful. We want to be careful not to glamorize things from the past. Live forward as God has called us right now.

Let's go forward in the next verses in Ephesians 1. Verses 7-10 read this way: *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.*

In the first part of verse 7 it uses the word *redemption*. Redemption refers to a price that is paid. An awesome price that God paid for us. A price that required the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins.

Every time an adoption takes place there are costs involved. Sometimes those costs are medical costs that the adoptive family pays for the mother who experiences all those expenses. Sometimes there are travel expenses to bring that adopted child back from another country. Sometimes there are legal costs involved in the adoption process.

The same thing happens in our relationship with God. God bought us. The redemption price was very significant. In fact we read about Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and the word *agony* is used there. They agonized about it knowing that He would bear on His shoulders the weight of the sin of the whole world. When we think about the awesome price that was paid for us to have eternal life, we become very grateful people and we are so honored to be part of God's family. It's a very special thing.

Notice it says there that He lavishes His grace on us. He just gives us all these gifts.

No one enjoyed Christmas more than Megan and Elizabeth when they were growing up. It was so fun to watch them open presents on Christmas morning. They would open something very simple, like a pencil or something, and they'd go, "Thank you so much for this pencil." It was just grateful through and through. It was so fun to celebrate Christmas with them because when they opened a gift it was just really special and every day they were grateful for that. Not grateful

for everything that we did, as often is the case in adoptive families. Sometimes you adopt a child and you think they're going to be so grateful all their lives. That isn't always the case. Sometimes they're not very grateful for all the things they did. But our girls just were so grateful for the gifts that they received.

We can be grateful people because we're adopted in God's family and He lavishes these things on us so every day is a present. Every day we open it up because we have this gift that God has given us, this gift we call today.

Let's go on. Verse 11-14 it says, *In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.*

Do you see that in verse 13? How do you get into the family? It says *when you believed*. The word is 'entrust.'

I want to explain something to you about adoption that's very important for you to understand. There's a process that takes place when any child comes into a family no matter what way that is and it's called bonding. When that new infant that's in a home, even a biological infant, experiences a bonding experience with the mom and with the dad, that's an emotional connectedness that takes place that provides that baby with something very important. A security in that relationship between a mom and a relationship with a dad. It's a very important thing that develops. Trust develops in the midst of that and that trust becomes the basis for confidence and security later on in life. With an adoptive child there's also that bonding that takes place, but sometimes it takes place a little bit differently and over a period of time.

We spent a lot of time holding Megan and holding Elizabeth as they were growing up. We solved their problems. We'd tell them, "Come to me. I'll help you solve the problem. We can work on this together." I took them on trips and worked with their pain. I like to be the doctor person in our family. "Come and I'll help you with the problem you're experiencing." And I've said to them many times over the years, "If you've got a problem, come and tell me. I'll help you solve it." I want them to know where they can come in order to get that problem solved. I want them to know that there's some security in their lives, that there's someone you can trust.

In the same way God does that with us. There needs to be a bonding experience between God and His kids. I think some of us as kids need to work on this a little bit. I think we need to learn to trust God and bring the little hurts that we have to God and learn to give those things to Him. "God, I have an owie on my finger. Would you kiss it and make it better?" "God, there's thunder outside. Could I come and sleep in your bed?" "God, I have a problem. Would you help me solve it?"



When we do those small things in our lives and we come to God and say, “God, I want to bring this to you, I want to trust you with this,” a bonding experience happens between us and God. Trust starts to develop and that does something very important in our own hearts; allows us to have the security we need and the confidence to go ahead and face the challenges that we experience in our lives. It’s exciting to watch the bonding experience take place in a child’s life who’s adopted.

About a year and a half after the girls came into our home, Carrie took the girls and all our children to a children’s movie in a theater. After they were done she noticed that Megan was very quiet and so she said to Megan, “Megan, why are you so quiet?” The movie probably had some kind of family dynamic or something in it and Megan said, “I always want to live in this house.” Carrie assured her that she could always live in our house. It’s a great place for her to be. That night when she was tucking Megan in, Megan repeated the statement. “I always want to live here.” Carrie assured her that she could always live here (and by the way could you tell the case worker that the next time the case worker comes).

Look at verse 13 again. It says that we are *marked in him with a seal*. With a seal. There’s something official about the adoption process when it takes place. There’s something official about being adopted into God’s family, that the Holy Spirit is this seal that marks that adoption as official.

Eventually after the girls were in our home for a while, the adoption came to the place where it could be official and so we went before the judge. The Millers were with us in that experience. My parents flew in to be part of the experience. We went in before the judge and she asked us some questions and asked us to tell the story. Then she signed an official document and out of that came a birth certificate. A birth certificate is a fascinating document.

I want to show you a birth certificate of Elizabeth Turansky. Yes, it’s a new legal document and I want you to see it because it’s retroactive. That’s what’s so fascinating about the document. You can see in the document that the name of the child is Elizabeth Amy Turansky. Her birth date was September 8, 1987.

Do you see the name of the father and the mother on the birth certificate? The name of the father is Scott Alan Turansky and Carrie Ann Swain. We are the official mother and father. It’s as if her whole history and the past has been wiped away. It’s as if those parents were there at her birth. That’s the beauty of this document that’s here. If anyone ever questions whether Megan and Elizabeth are genuine children of Scott and Carrie Turansky, there is an original document with a raised seal on it that’s just as good as a document that anyone has who’s biologically born into a home. It’s a document that says, “Yes, you are genuinely a child of these parents.”

God does the same thing with us with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the seal that says you are genuinely a child of God. All of your past, all of the things that you’ve experienced in the past are put aside.

Do you see the words that are used in the passage? *Predestined*. In love he predestined us. Before the creation of the world He chose us. In other words, it goes back to the very birth

certificate, the very beginning of our birth that God designed that. He knows who we are. All the things that have happened to you in the past have very little consequence as to what's going to happen to you in the future because you are God's child when you've accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

That's the Holy Spirit in our hearts that becomes that seal that says, "Yes, you are a child a God." So that any time that Satan comes along and says, "I don't think you're a Christian because of what just happened," you can go back to the Holy Spirit. He's the seal and He reminds you inside your heart that you are a child of God. That is powerful stuff.

We use the term 'salvation' to describe the relationship that we have with God. When you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior or get saved then you become a part of God's family. You are adopted into God's home. It's not sufficient for you to rely on the salvation of your wife or your husband. It is not sufficient for you to rely on the salvation of your parents, but each one of us must make that commitment to Jesus Christ having believed, it says, we were marked *in him with a seal*. So we must all make the decision to trust Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

Some people can't imagine a Heavenly Father because they didn't have a father or the father they have was a bad model of fatherhood. Some of those people say, "I can't think of God as father." That is a mistake. Because God doesn't want us to use an earthly model of fatherhood to imagine what He's like. He wants us to go to Him and find out, as Jesus says when He's teaching us to pray, to say, "Our Father," we need to get to know God as Father. Once we know Him we use that model to imagine what every earthly parenting example is all about.

You know what we find out? There are not perfect parents. We all had imperfect parents, we are all imperfect parents; but it gives us the opportunity to introduce our children to the perfect parent, God Himself, so that our children can be adopted into the family of God. That is powerful. It's a beautiful picture that God has told us about.

When I finished telling the exciting story of how Megan and Elizabeth came into our family and their eyes were big and they were smiling, do you know what Megan said? "Tell it again, Dad."

We can go to God's word and we can say to God, "Tell it again, Lord. I want to hear it again. Remind me. Remind me of my identity. Remind me of who I am. Remind me that I am a child of yours." I want to encourage you today if you've never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior that you'd make that commitment today and be adopted into God's family.

Let's pray together.