



ADOPTION:

God's Gospel, God's Command

A BIBLE STUDY COMPANION TO
THE MOVIE "LIFEMARK"

“Lifemark” (2022) is a movie revolving around the true story of David, an adopted 18-year-old high school student whose life takes a dramatic turn when his birth mother reaches out to him. With the encouragement of his adoptive parents, David sets out on an emotional journey to meet the mother and father he never knew and thanks them for allowing him to live by choosing adoption.

The film engages the subject of adoption from the perspectives of the adopted child, the adoptive parents and the biological parents — each of whom are faced with potential challenges and joys through the adoption process. The movie tackles various themes, including the value of family, difficult choices, the vulnerability of opening your heart to the adoption process and more. Throughout the film, both David’s adoptive parents and his biological parents refer to their faith, as they seek comfort in God’s plan and purposes through prayer and His Word.

So, what *does* Scripture have to say about adoption?

The answer is a lot! In numerous passages, Scripture references adoption to describe God’s loving care toward humanity. In Romans 8, Paul talks about our new life in Christ as heirs of the Spirit and the benefits this brings. In Galatians 4, Paul writes of our spiritual adoption into the family of God through our Baptism, which elevates us from being slaves to sin to being God’s true sons and daughters. In Ephesians, Paul again comforts us through the language of adoption, in that our salvation and future are secured in our heavenly Father’s claim on us, sealed by the Holy Spirit, all according to His divine plan and gracious will (Eph. 1:5–14).

We can see this adoptive relationship referenced in the Old Testament as well. In Jeremiah 31:9, God says that He has become “a father to Israel,” and later God is described as a loving parent who adopts Israel, teaching, guiding and blessing His people with every good gift He has to offer (Hos. 11:1–4).

This often-used image of adoption is well suited. God’s adoption of His chosen people reflects the act of modern-day adoption in that it is an intentional act of love that makes us full members of His household, receiving all the privileges, rights and responsibilities of true heirs — in this case, heirs to His kingdom.

Another similarity we find between our adoption in Scripture and our understanding of modern-day adoption, which is central to our Lutheran identity, is that, like adopted children, we did not choose Him. But our adoptive Father first chose us and declared us His own beloved children, through no work of our own.

When we are marked with the sign of the cross and baptized with water in the name of the Triune God, we are claimed by our God who loves us, cares for us and provides for all our needs of both body and soul. Scripture makes it clear that our adoption into God’s family is at the heart of the Gospel, as God, our dear Father, claims us and loves us as His own dear children.

But while Scripture makes use of the practice of adoption to help us understand our vertical relationship to our Lord and His gracious, salvific work for us in bringing us into His family, these passages do not *necessarily* inform us on how the Christian is to view adoption in relation to our *neighbor*. It is, in other words, descriptive of God’s work for us, not prescribing any direct action on our part.

So, does the Bible have anything to say about the practice of adoption today? Does God’s Word give us wisdom and understanding, not only about God’s loving adoption of us but also directly concerning and commanding our participation and support for the act of adoption?

The answer is a resounding “yes”! Among the very first commands given to the Israelites was the instruction to care for and protect the widows and orphans among them.

In Exodus 22:21–24, Yahweh reminds His adopted people that their being graciously brought into the family of God should motivate them to care for those most in need, including the sojourner, the widow and the orphan. God tells Moses, “You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child.”

Keep in mind, these are among the *very first* instructions God gives to train His newly adopted people to live according to His good will and command! The care for the orphan

was seen as an essential part of any society that properly recognized the redemptive work that God had accomplished for them.

The Lord also includes specific instructions for the provision of the orphan, including Deuteronomy 14:29, where Israel's tithe of crops was to be shared with them, and again in Deuteronomy 24:19, which gives the command to leave behind any sheaf of grain dropped so that orphans and widows may receive it. Both passages include the promise of blessing for those who remember and obey these commands. On the other hand, God warns Israel of the curse that follows those who refuse justice to "the fatherless" in Deuteronomy 27:19.

The prophets continue the Lord's call for the care of the orphan, as Isaiah, Malachi and Zechariah remind the people that to forget or deny care for the fatherless was to incur God's judgment (Isaiah 1:17; 10:1-2; Mal. 3:5; Zech. 7:9-10; Ezek. 22:7; Psalm 82:3).

Of course, making sure orphans, widows and sojourners (foreigners) are provided for is one thing. But then God goes further by commanding that His people not only care for their needs, but also invite them to their celebration feasts and give the same Sabbath rest as they were given (Deut. 16:14; 5:14)!

You see what God is doing here? By including the widow, the orphan and the foreigner in the celebration of the feasts and the Sabbath, He is elevating those *outside* of the family

of God into *full family member* status with all its benefits and privileges, because God desires them as well! Those who formerly did not belong would now become a full-fledged member of the tightly knit covenant community.

And God was making it the Israelites' responsibility to "adopt" these people whom God desired!

In the same way that, in the film "Lifemark," David's adoption brought him into the family, with all the blessings that came along with being considered their true child, so, too, were we, once orphans, brought into the family of God through Jesus and the giving of His Spirit. This gracious action serves as the motivation for us to joyfully obey God's clear command to care for the least of these — which includes the blessing of adoption — that we might participate not only in their

provision and protection, but in bringing them into our families, homes and hearts and sharing with our neighbor the love we have been shown by our Lord.

Throughout the film, David recognizes that no matter what happens with his birth parents, his adoptive parents who chose him, raised him and loved him are truly his mother and father. In taking care of the orphan and loving him fully as their own, they reflected the love that God has for His adopted people, as we are reminded in 1 John 3:1, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are."

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Questions for Discussion

1. Most Christians would agree that the practice of adoption is a good and necessary thing to provide for children in need. If that is the case, why do you think so few Christians decide to adopt a child themselves? What are some of the hindrances people point to that might keep them from adopting?

2. Read Psalm 146:9; Psalm 68:5; and Deuteronomy 10:18. What do these verses tell us about the connection between adoption and the character of God?

3. In Jesus’ parable in Matthew 25:31–46, Jesus talks about the final judgment. What was the difference between the sheep and the goats in this parable? According to Jesus, when we heed God’s call to care for the orphan through adoption, who are we really serving (vv. 37–40)?

4. In James’ epistle, he reminds us that as we are the new Israel, we are called to adopt members of our surrounding society who need our help, just as the first Israelites were in the Old Testament. Can we claim to be Christians without caring for those weakest and most vulnerable before us? Why or why not? (Read James 1:27 and 1 John 4:20.)

5. How is this responsibility to care for and adopt the orphan at the core of Jesus’ teaching that we are to love one another? If Christians, the people who are called after His own name, become known for caring for and protecting society’s most vulnerable, what kind of example does this set for the world? What example would it set if Christians acted as if these social tasks are the responsibility of the government instead of the church? Though we often fail to perfectly care for our neighbor, including the orphan, what comfort can we be given? (Read Psalm 32:5; Psalm 130:4; Isaiah 55:7; Eph. 1:7; and 1 John 1:9.)

6. In this film, David’s biological mother contrasts the warmth and care of the adoption process with the cold, callousness of the abortion clinic she visited. How do you think David’s mother’s experience reflects the reality of these two very different approaches to an unexpected pregnancy?

7. The movie shows the reality of how entering the adoption process, whether to give up a child or to bring a child into your home, is to make yourself vulnerable. When we open our hearts to adopt, we also open ourselves to circumstances where we may be hurt or disappointed. What other relationships do we enter into where we make ourselves vulnerable by the sacrificial and unconditional giving of ourselves? (For a hint, read Eph. 5.) Given the risk of being hurt, why do you think adoption is still a worthwhile endeavor?

8. Opening your home to adoption is seen as a very difficult thing. Natural parenting has similar challenges, but most parents would agree that the blessings far outweigh the difficulties. How could this insight help encourage parents who might not feel they could handle these challenges to still consider adopting a child in need of a good home?

9. Christians engage in adoption for many reasons, perhaps most of the time because of their desire to be parents. One reason for Christians to adopt that often gets overlooked is because God desires for those children to be saved. Does this approach, which focuses the purpose of adoption primarily on the child instead of on us, change the criteria for who should consider adopting? If so, how?

10. The film addresses the fact that not all adoption stories go as well as David’s, with both the adoptive and biological parents working together for the good of the child they love. Yet even so, we see this as our responsibility as God’s chosen children. What would you say to someone who points to adoptions that have, for whatever reason, resulted in great pain for the child or the parents as a reason to terminate unplanned pregnancies?

11. The title of the movie comes from when David gives his birth mother a memento to remind her of the day she chose life for him, which he refers to as his “lifemark.” What is the day that God chose life and placed His “lifemark” upon you?
