



Brittany Salmon shares her family's story of transracial adoption and offers biblical guidance for others. No one is promising transracial adoption will be easy—least of all Brittany! Yet when an adoptive family honors the ethnicity of their children, they—and the watching world—will see God at work.

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CHAPTER 1

Welcome to the Journey

I have a love/hate relationship with adoption.

I know, that is an odd sentence to start out an adoption book. And yet it's true. For a long time, I considered myself an adoption advocate. And yet, over the years I've found myself no longer comfortable with that label.

Do I earnestly believe that every child should have a safe and loving family? Yes, absolutely.

Do I believe that adoption is the only way to achieve that goal? No.

Do I believe that the best option is for children to be raised safely within their birth families and cultures? Of course.

Is that always an option? Sadly, no.

Do I love adoption for allowing me the incredible honor of parenting our children? Yes.

Do I hate the trauma and loss that adoption also brings? Yes.

The truth is, the longer I've been in the adoption world the more I've come to realize that adoption is complex. Rarely, in the adoption world, is it either/or; more often than not, it's both/and. And I think that's important to acknowledge up front, otherwise the rest of this book might not make sense when I acknowledge pain and trauma but also talk about joy and satisfaction and family.



After my husband, Ben, and I found out that we were pregnant with twins, I read everything I could get my hands on. I scoured the internet for resources on prematurity, NICU stays, identity development, how to tandem nurse, and so on. Once I got the basics down for keeping tiny humans alive, I started reading books on parenting, discipline strategies, disciplining your children . . . you name it, I read about it.

When we started walking through our first adoption journey, I did the same thing. I checked out books from our library, joined online adoption forums, and read mommy blogs. One of the resources I wish I had was a book like the one you're reading right now.

Adoption is complex. It's joy and suffering and loss and gain and hope and disappointment all in one. From an adoptive parent standpoint, we gain a lot. But it needs to be said clearly that adoptees and birth families lose much during this process. Even when adoption is the best and most ethical option—even when a child gains a loving and wonderful family—he or she will still experience loss. When the adoption is cross-cultural, another layer of loss is added: loss of culture, language, and community. Please don't let those statements discourage you. We'll talk about all this in due time.

On our journey to adoption, I read a lot of perspectives, but none that made space for both the realities and hardships that adoption

brings *and* the hope that we have *in all things*—even in really hard things—in Christ. Someone has said that if there’s a book you want to read that doesn’t yet exist, you need to write it. And so, this is why you’re holding this book in your hands today. I firmly believe that we can hold sorrow and joy in the same hand. I believe we can have hope in the midst of hardship, and I believe that brokenness and celebration are all welcomed at the foot of the cross. And I want Christian adoptive families to have access to a guide that boldly proclaims the goodness and glory of God in both the messiness and beauty of our adoption journeys. And so, here it is.

IT’S BOTH/AND, NOT EITHER/OR

A year before our first children were born, dear friends were placed with a child via domestic infant adoption. Our friends are White, and they were placed with a beautiful Black little girl. She was a preemie, and I watched intently, not knowing that we would one day have preemies of our own.

When our preemie twins were about a year old, these friends encouraged us to consider domestic infant adoption. Depending on location, needs vary, but in our state there was a *long* list of White prospective adoptive parents only wanting White, healthy children. Our friend’s agency was in need of families of any ethnicity to adopt non-White children, and even more specifically, we were told that Black male babies were the hardest to place. The number of families willing to adopt Black children was minuscule, and if the agency didn’t have families to place these babies with, the children would then go into foster care. White children were placed quickly, while other BIPOC children went into a system (BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous, People of Color).

Black expectant mothers who chose life for their children and wanted to choose a family for them didn’t have the same plethora of

families to choose from that White birth mothers had.

I learned of this and I was heartbroken. After all, of all the people in the world, Christians *should be* people who hold tightly to the tenets of our faith that all people are created in the image of God and, as such, should be treated equally. Surely we can agree that all children, of every ethnicity, should be treated fairly and have the same access to a safe and loving home. I believed that deep in my bones, and still do today.

Parenting transracially doesn't come naturally, nor does it just happen with time. It is hard work and yet—it's been one of the greatest blessings in our family's life.

So, after much praying and evaluation, we decided to adopt domestically and open our home to a child of any ethnicity. And we decided that we would be committed to learning about whatever cultural and ethnic history our child would bring to our family as we pressed into the adoption community.

Looking back, this was a sweet and hard season as many of my pre-suppositions about the sweetness and inherent goodness of adoption were challenged. I read adoptees' perspectives as well as birth parents' perspectives, and quickly realized that I was only looking at adoption from my point in the adoption triad (birth parent, adoptee, adoptive parent). Yes, we were growing our family. And yes, a child was gaining a new family, but that child had also lost something precious: their first family and culture. Yes, a birth mom was choosing life for a child, but she was also choosing life without her child. And the more I listened and learned, the more my heart was broken.

When we walked through adoption the first time, and I sat in a room holding a baby as another woman left the hospital with empty arms, I felt the juxtaposition acutely:

Joy and sorrow.

Loss and gain.

Broken and whole.

Grateful and devastated.

All of it wrapped up into one moment, one specific place and time. I'd like to share that one emotion trumped all the others, but truthfully, all of them were present on that day. We were in awe and smitten with our son, and we were simultaneously grieved at what he had lost, at what his birth mom had lost.

The beautiful narrative about adoption that I previously held wasn't fully untrue, but it wasn't the full truth either. Adoption *can* be beautiful, but only if that beauty makes room for joy and sorrow to sit together. With adoption, it has to be both/and, not either/or; otherwise you're missing the complete picture.

For my friends who pursued international adoption, their journeys were similar and yet also very different. Yes, their families grew through adoption, but their children suffered loss of family, culture, language, and roots. Some of their children had no remaining relatives, while others have some living relatives who were unable to care for them. And through international adoption, their children's connection to their cultural heritage was strained (at best) and severed (at worst).

Navigating how to parent well transracially has been a learning curve for us, just like much of any parenting is. Parenting transracially doesn't come naturally, nor does it just happen with time. It takes intentionality, listening, learning, growing, repenting, changing, and then repeating and starting over again. It is hard work and yet—it's been one of the greatest blessings in our family's life. Because we have chosen to be a multicultural family and to honor the ethnic heritages of our children, we've learned to navigate and celebrate the tensions a both/and life can bring. But as a result, we get to see and experience the beauty of a gloriously creative God.

A GUIDE FOR THE JOURNEY

Before we jump into the meat of the book, I wanted to take a moment to welcome you— wherever you are in the journey. The state of adoption has changed drastically in the United States and globally over the last few decades. As we grow and learn more about adoption practices, we can intentionally seek to do better, whether we're just beginning the adoption journey or we're seasoned adoptive parents.

When Maya Angelou said, “Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better,” she wasn't speaking to adoptive parents.¹ However, her often-quoted words ring true today for adoptive parents. Now that we know better, now that we've listened to research, adoptees, and birth parents, let's do better. We most certainly can do better. And if you're not sure what I'm talking about or how we can do better, my hope is that this book will serve as a guide.

This book will cover a variety of adoption topics, from honoring our children's ethnic heritage to everyday practicalities like haircare and meals and artifacts in the home. We'll talk about the importance of adoption allies and how to counter insensitive comments. And you'll read stories about our family, and you'll also find essays from adoptees throughout the book.

You saw “cross-cultural” in the subtitle of this book. Though we're talking about transracial and transcultural adoption, cross-cultural incorporates these two individual ideologies. I use cross-cultural because I'm not only speaking to transracial adoptive families, but I'm also talking to transcultural adoptive families as well.² If you're new to adoption, stick with it. I know it can take a little while to learn adoption jargon, but you soon will. I've included a list of explanations of adoption words at the end of the book to help those of you who are new to the adoption world.

IF YOU'RE A PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE PARENT . . .

Maybe you're reading this book as a prospective adoptive parent. There will be times when you feel uncomfortable and wonder, "Is she trying to talk me out of adoption?" I'm not. I don't want you to forsake adoption, but I do want you to pursue adoption in a way that honors the dignity of every person in the triad and in a way that reflects the very goodness of God.

And if honoring the dignity of each person in the adoption triad is difficult, I'm asking you to consider doing two things. First, take some time away to ask God to work on your heart and to sit and listen to adoptees, birth parents, adoption experts, and adoptive parents. Second, figure out how you can invest in your adoption community and support those who are working in family preservation.

If you're a two-parent family, this book is meant to be read together by the both of you! It is so important that both parents be on the same page when it comes to adoption—not only in your decision to adopt, but in how to respond to the many unique situations your family will walk through as a cross-cultural family. So consider reading this together and use the questions at the end of each chapter as a catalyst for conversation. And not only that, but if you have eager family members and friends who want to walk alongside your family, consider gifting them with a copy of this book so they can learn alongside you.

AND FOR NON-ADOPTIVE FAMILIES . . .

Maybe you're not reading this as a prospective adoptive parent, but as clergy, a family member, or friend who wants to support adoptive families or simply learn more. Welcome! I have written a chapter specifically with you in mind. I cannot tell you how happy I am that you're picking up these pages. One of the (many) difficult aspects in

the adoption journey is educating the friends and family supporting us so that they can be safe spaces for our families. We need pastors and Sunday school teachers and friends who are literate in the adoption world. So thank you for taking the time to sit and learn about something that doesn't directly impact your immediate family. Thank you for entering into this space with us. "It takes a village to raise a child" is a common adage, but is especially significant in the adoption community. Adoptees and their families need allies. And as believers, we believe that the family of God should be one of the safest and best places for our children to thrive. Lord, let it be so.

CARING AS GOD CARES

From the beginning, I want to be clear about this: I fully believe that where there is heartache, devastation, and despair, the gospel speaks a true and better word. We serve a God who has promised to one day right every wrong and wipe every tear from our eyes. The grand narrative of Scripture points to a glorious redemption, and every day in between creation and Christ's second coming, He is still working for His glory and our good.

Adoption is something believers care about because God cares about it. Scripture tells us that God is in His holy place when He is being the Father of the fatherless and protector of widows (Ps. 68:5).

We care about the ethics of it, because God cares about the ethics of it (Deut. 10:18; Ps. 10:14).

He cares about the children, expectant moms, the single moms who decide to parent, the birth parents, the social workers serving tirelessly, and yes, the adoptive families. And as believers we have the opportunity to portray God's unconditional love and heart for justice here on earth, right now (James 1:27).

A FEW MORE PLANKS FOR YOUR JOURNEY

It needs to be said plainly, I do not speak for all members of the adoption triad. *I'm speaking as an adoptive parent to adoptive parents, potential adoptive parents, and people supporting cross-cultural adoptive families.* There are *many* adoptees and birth parents speaking out about their corner of the triad, and I think it is so incredibly important to listen to them, but I also think there needs to be some in-house conversation happening in our corner of the triad as well. It is not their job to educate us, but it is our responsibility to learn.

The goal of this book is to simply put another board in your bridge to creating a family where all members of the adoption triad are honored. As such, it must be stated that this is not an exhaustive, one-stop encyclopedia on all-things adoption. I'm not building the whole bridge with one book; I'm giving you a few planks to get you a little further along in your journey and, although I hope you find this resource incredibly helpful, I hope it's not the only resource you seek out!

And so now that you understand the purpose of this book, I want to let you in on a humble confession, dear reader. I am but a fellow journeyer, one who has not yet arrived but is still learning, repenting, and running after Jesus. Speaking of Jesus, you should know that if you're reading this and not a practicing Christian, you are more than welcome here. But please know that my faith informs so much of my life—well, all of it really—and this book is written from a Christian perspective. Still, my hope is that these practices and chapters are helpful to all cross-cultural adoptive parents. On that same note, many of the adoptees and sources who have contributed to this book hold to a diverse set of beliefs. Again, I believe that we can be united in pursuing healthy adoption practices while differing on other matters.

We have the opportunity through community development, orphan care and prevention, family preservation, and adoption to

ensure that every child has a safe family to belong to. I pray that these upcoming pages will serve to that end. And, as the title of the book reminds us, it takes more than love.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. When it comes to transracial or transcultural adoption, what's one area you want to grow in?
2. Is there a specific topic that you're fearful or hesitant of talking about? Why do you think that is?
3. Do you tend to be a more optimistic person (everything is going to be *great!*) or a more pessimistic person (the world is falling apart!)? What impact do you think your tendency will have on the children you adopt into your home?

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