

# DO I BELONG?

Reassuring Kids Adopted  
From Foster Care



CAREY KOENIG, REID KOENIG & HALLEY KOENIG

*Do I Belong?* offers a faith-based understanding of adoption, both as a picture of God's love and as a way to grow one's family. As adoptive parents ourselves, we know there are challenges that accompany the joys; this book addresses those challenges with sound biblical ideas to apply during and after the adoption process.

**SAM AND MARY BROWNBACK**, former Kansas governor and first lady

As someone who spent time in the foster care system, I have a heart for kids who are awaiting their "forever family." Even after that dream comes true, however, many questions and emotions remain. In this encouraging book for kids, Carey Koenig and two of her adopted children, Reid and Halley, take an honest look at the joys and challenges of adoption—and offer words of hope. *Do I Belong?* helps kids adopted from foster care learn to embrace their identity as a beloved child of their parents and a precious son or daughter of their heavenly Father.

**JIM DALY**, president and CEO of Focus on the Family

Carey, Reid, and Halley Koenig have filled a critical need for adoptive families. Written in an age-appropriate, easy-to-read format that's sure to spark thoughtful discussions, *Do I Belong?* captures the issues that kids who were adopted face today. As a foster parent to twenty-three children and biological mother to five, I wish this book had been on my family's bookshelf a long time ago. Any family involved with adoption will be blessed by the Koenigs' thoughtful perspective.

**MICHELE BACHMANN**, former United States representative from Minnesota

*Do I Belong?* is written for children and youth who, like all mankind, hunger for peace through being connected to family. This book is a reminder that even when we have questions, the answer remains that we all belong to the Father.

**DR. SHAREN FORD**, director of foster care and adoption for Focus on the Family

When we adopt children from foster care, we know some of the questions our children have because they ask them out loud. But there are other questions we may know nothing about. And even if we did, would we know how to answer them? *Do I Belong?* provides a great starting point for important conversations that can lead to connection with your children and help them feel seen.

**JASON WEBER**, author, speaker, and national director of More Than Enough at the Christian Alliance for Orphans

As a child adopted from the foster care system, I wish there would have been a resource like this for my parents to share with me. What makes this book special is the way the authors integrate feelings, thoughts, questions, and Scripture together in such a conversational way.

**BOB J. BRUDER-MATTSON**, president and CEO of FaithBridge Foster Care



**Do I Belong?**



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FOCUS  
ON THE FAMILY<sup>®</sup>

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INTRODUCTION

# DO I BELONG?



**THERE ARE  
MORE THAN  
FOUR HUNDRED  
THOUSAND  
CHILDREN IN  
FOSTER CARE  
TODAY.**

and you were once one of those kids. For whatever reason, your birth parents or guardians were unable to care for you, even though they love you. Children like you are sometimes removed from their homes so that these caregivers can receive help and so that you can be safe and taken care of the way you deserve to be. Many caregivers do get the help they need, and the children are able to return to their families. But other times the kids remain in the foster care system until they are adopted into a forever family.

Now that you're out of the foster care system and have been adopted, your life is different, right? You and your family love each other,

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but you might also disagree sometimes. Some days are good, and some days are rough.

Depending on your situation and how old you were when you were adopted, you might still have some bad memories from the past. And those experiences might still affect you. You probably have questions and even confused feelings about your birth family, your time in foster care, and even your family now.

Having questions about these things isn't wrong. Not at all. Whether you've been a part of your forever family for a few weeks or several years, it's completely natural to sometimes wonder: *Do I belong?*

This book is based on our experiences building a family through adoption and looking for answers to our questions. We want to share with others what we've learned. We talked to some pretty smart grown-ups who have studied adoption and foster care for a long time. We also talked to different kids just like you who were adopted from foster care. We wanted to hear about what they went through and the questions they have. We'll answer several of those questions in this book. We've also

included questions at the end of each chapter that you can talk about with your parents. Or you can write down your answers in a journal.

In the pages that follow, you'll hear from kids like John. He knows that God has a plan for all that happened to him; he's just not sure what that plan is yet. He wants to know why God created adoption in the first place.

You'll meet Abby, who spent time with multiple foster families. Some said they were going to adopt her but never did. Finally, one of her foster families kept their word and adopted her, but it felt unfair that she'd had to live in so many places. Is it okay that she still gets mad sometimes?

You'll also hear from Zim, who thinks it's sad that other kids get to live with and know their birth parents but he doesn't. Sometimes Zim feels upset that he was adopted, but he doesn't really understand why he feels this way. How does he tell people that he was adopted? What if someone makes fun of him?

All these kids are amazing and have awesome stories to tell. So do you. We hope you recognize the things that make you amazing

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and special. We want you to see God's plan for your life and how your adoption experience can help others see how much God loves them, too.

We want you to know that you aren't alone—and you never were. The Lord has always been with you, even during your worst times. God brought you out of those bad places, and if you have accepted His love, He has adopted you into His family, just like your parents did.

The Bible says that God is a father to orphans and gives lonely people families (see Psalm 68:5-6). Even before you were born, God loved you. And if you trust in Jesus, you can be sure that God chose to adopt you as one of His own children (see Ephesians 1:4-5). You belong to your forever family, and you belong to Him.

By the end of this book, our prayer is that you will thank God for creating adoption and creating you. We also pray that you'll be ready and excited to share your story with others about what God has done in your life. Look for our later chapter about what a testimony is and how you can share your testimony with others!



## DO I BELONG?

In the book of Matthew, Jesus said,

“You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.”

MATTHEW 5:14-16, MSG

You can shine your light for others.

### **Our Story**

#### *Reid*

Hi, my name is Reid. I was adopted as soon as I was born, so I don’t really know what it’s like not to be adopted. I was adopted because my birth parents were never married. My birth

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mother is from South Carolina, but my birth father is from Mexico and was living in the United States only for a little while. Patty and Miguel knew that making a plan for my adoption was better than having me live with just one of them. I'm glad I got to see Miguel a few times before he went back to Mexico, and I still get to visit with Patty a lot. I'm glad I was adopted, but sometimes I still wonder what it would be like if I wasn't.

I wanted to help write this book with my mother and my sister to tell kids that adoption isn't a bad thing. It's all part of God's amazing plan!

### *Halley*

Hi, I'm Halley, Reid's younger sister. My birth mom, Suzie, was seventeen when she had me. She wasn't married and was still in school. She knew it would be hard to raise me, so she made an adoption plan. I've met Suzie, but I've never met my birth dad. Sometimes I wonder what it would be like if I wasn't adopted. I wonder if the times kids have made fun of me wouldn't have happened. But I like being adopted because

I can feel special, and I love my mom, dad, brothers, and our family dog very much.

I wanted to help write this book because I want kids who were adopted to know they're special and different in a good way. Hopefully, kids who were adopted will also give this book to their friends or anyone who has any questions about adoption.

### *Carey*

Hi, I'm Carey. I'm the proud mom of Reid, Halley, and their younger brother, Benjamin. Reid, Halley, and Ben don't look anything like their dad (Kurt) or me. I often forget that these wonderful kids didn't come from my body, but as a family, we also realize that when the outside world looks at us, here's what they see:

- Dad: brown hair, blue eyes, white skin
- Mom: blonde hair, green eyes, white skin
- Reid: black hair, dark eyes, light-brown skin
- Halley: light-brown hair, hazel eyes, white skin
- Ben: brown hair, brown eyes, dark-brown skin

Even though we look different on the outside, on the inside we're a regular family. We love as a family; we disagree as a family; we behave as a family. We have a lot of the same likes, dislikes, character traits, and habits—both good and bad!

Reid, Halley, and I decided to write this book together because we couldn't find one like it already. Reid and Halley had some questions and thought they probably weren't the only ones who had them. So this book is for you and for anyone else who was adopted and has some questions. This book is also for family members and friends who *weren't* adopted—the people you think might like to know a little more about what makes your story so special.

### **Our Family**

My husband, Kurt, and I wanted to be parents very, very badly. We got married and then started trying to have a baby biologically. Many months later I still wasn't pregnant, so Kurt and I went to the doctor, who told us we

wouldn't be able to have a baby. This news made us sad. We were confused because we thought God wanted us to become parents, and we didn't know anything about adoption yet. But once we started learning about adoption, we thought it was an awesome way to have a family.

We followed the steps for adopting a child, and it took a while before we got a phone call. Finally our friend at the adoption agency told us, "There's a woman here who would like to meet you. She's going to have a little boy soon, and she wants you to be his mom and dad."

That baby boy was Reid. Kurt and I later adopted a girl, Halley, and another boy named Benjamin. We got to know Benjamin's birth mother and his biological half brother, Anthony. The boys' birth mother struggled with drugs when Ben was three years old, and Anthony came to live with us as a temporary foster care placement. After close to a year, their mother got better, and he was able to live with her again.

That's how foster care is supposed to work. Foster families care for children while their

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parents or caregivers get the help they need to take care of their kids the right way. The goal of foster care is to eventually return children to their families. But sometimes it doesn't work out that way, and the courts make the decision to give these kids the chance to be adopted by a forever family.

Kurt and I knew adoption would be a life-changing experience, even though it wouldn't always be easy. But we never could have guessed how truly incredible it is. We know that adoption has its challenges. In our situation, we still get to see Reid's, Halley's, and Ben's birth mothers. In some ways, it's like we're all part of a big family who loves each other very much.

We thank the Lord for creating adoption!



CHAPTER 1

WHY DID  
GOD CREATE  
ADOPTION?





**FROM THE  
BEGINNING  
OF THE  
WORLD, GOD  
MADE MOMS  
AND DADS.**

In the Bible, the book of Genesis describes how God created Adam and Eve to be together. (In Genesis 2:18, God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone.”) Right after God made their bodies, He gave Adam and Eve the freedom to make their own decisions—good and bad. You might already know how those choices turned out, but if not, go to the Bible and start reading from the beginning!

One day Satan tricked Eve, and both she and Adam ate the fruit that God had told them not to. And that’s when sin entered the world. We’ve all been making good and bad choices ever since. But the good news is that God created Adam and Eve as the first dad

and mom! Even though they'd sinned, God loved them so much that He allowed them to live together as husband and wife.

This is God's perfect plan for families: A man and a woman get married first and then become parents.

But because the world we live in is no longer perfect, some couples are never able to physically create babies. Other couples have children before they're ready to be parents. And others want to be parents but aren't able to take care of their children for different reasons.



**THE WORLD  
WE LIVE IN IS  
NO LONGER  
PERFECT.**

## ***JOHN:***

“My birth dad was doing drugs and was hitting my birth mom and hurting her, and then he would hurt me. It wasn’t too good. Whenever my birth parents didn’t want me around, I would go to my grandparents’ house. One day some person picked me up from their house and drove me away. I didn’t know what was happening because I was only four years old, but I remember being hurt and scared. Then I found out I was being adopted.

“It turns out that my new sister had seen something about foster kids on TV and had really wanted brothers and sisters. So my mom decided to adopt my older sister and then found me later. I’m so happy that I live with my new family now. I think my adoption is all part of God’s plan—I’m just not sure what His plan is yet.”

Adoption is a subject that some very smart people have studied for a long time. We know that it helps in a lot of different ways. Adoption can help protect kids like John from sad and even dangerous living situations. It can help create new families where children get the care they need. Adoption also shows the world how great it is to be adopted into God's family. Remember how the Bible says that we as Christians are all adopted into God's family (Ephesians 1:5)? Your life is a picture of what God wants to do for each and every person in the world: He wants to rescue us and adopt us as His sons and daughters!

God is much smarter than all of us, and He works things together for the good of those who love Him (see Romans 8:28). And did you know there are stories in the Bible about adoption? Lots of people in the Bible were adopted. Let's read about some of them.

### **Moses (Exodus 1–2)**

Moses was born during a time when baby boys were being killed. The king of Egypt—also

known as Pharaoh—was worried that the number of Israelites was growing too rapidly. Pharaoh was afraid they would take over, so he told the women who helped deliver the Israelite babies to kill every newborn baby who was a boy. That's why, when Moses' mom and dad had a baby boy, they hid him for three months. I'm sure that was very difficult. But what happened next was even harder for Moses' parents: His mom made a floating basket, placed Moses in it, and then put him in the Nile river. She had no idea what was going to happen to Moses, but she trusted that God would take care of her son. And God did!

Guess who spotted that baby floating in the river? The daughter of Pharaoh, the very king who hated the Israelites! Pharaoh's daughter *adopted* the baby, and Moses grew up in the king's house. After he grew up, Moses went on to lead the Israelites to freedom—away from the evil king of Egypt. Moses would never have had the chance to save all those people if his parents hadn't trusted God and given their son a chance to be adopted.

## **Esther (Esther 2-7)**

Esther was a beautiful young woman who was also an orphan. Esther's parents died when she was young, and her cousin Mordecai *adopted* her. One day Esther was taken to the royal palace, and the king of Persia married her. This made Esther the queen! But then an evil man who worked for the king decided he didn't like Jewish people and convinced the king to kill them all. What did that have to do with Esther? Well, she was also Jewish, but the king didn't know! So Mordecai and Esther came up with a plan to expose the evil man's plan. Esther convinced the king not to kill the Jewish people and saved the day. The Bible indicates that Esther had been placed in her role as queen "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14, ESV). And it all started with Mordecai adopting Esther.

## **Jesus (Matthew 1:18-25)**

The Bible tells us that Mary and Joseph were Jesus' parents when He was on earth. But

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Joseph wasn't Jesus' birth father, was he? God placed Jesus in Mary's belly. Then when Jesus was born, Joseph basically *adopted* Him and raised Jesus as his own son. Did you ever think about how much you have in common with Jesus when He walked on the earth?

### ***QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT***

1. Why do you think God created adoption?

2. Who else in the Bible can you think of who was adopted and did something special?

3. How has reading these stories changed any of your feelings about being adopted?