

*“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”* Matthew 5:14-16 NIV



*Samantha and her birthmother*

## The Ministry of Adoption

*By Stacy Zepeda*

Our road to adoption has been quite a journey, along which God has changed our hearts in ways we never thought possible. He has taught us so much about ourselves and each other and has brought us three amazing and beautiful children and their birthfamilies.

After going through four years of infertility, we began to consider adopting. We knew we desperately wanted to be parents, but we had questions. Would we be able to love them the same? What does it look like? How does it happen?

As we were considering these things, God, very suddenly, placed a four-and-a-half-year-old boy into our lives through a family member. The minute we laid eyes on him, those questions were answered.

Our lives and our hearts would never be the same. Even though we didn't know what it was like to love a biological child, we knew it couldn't feel any better than this.

Three years later, we were ready to adopt again. This time, we went through Bethany Christian Services in Nashville. We were very specific with our desires for this adoption. We wanted a newborn and, while we would tell our children they were adopted, we did not want to have a relationship with the birthparents.

We quickly found out that the Lord's design for this adoption looked different than the picture we had painted. As it turns out, Bethany taught us much of what we needed to know about adoption. The first thing we heard from Bethany was that their mission was to find families for babies, not find babies for families.

This was the beginning of a huge realization for us. Adoption was going to be more than just

building a family for us; it was going to be a ministry. Again, we didn't specifically know what to expect, but we wanted to be open to whatever He was going to do through us.

In January 2005, we got the call that we had been chosen by a birthmother, Rachel. The moment we met her, we knew she would be a part of our lives forever.



*The Zepeda family*

We had so much in common, and we instantly bonded. We talked about plans for her delivery, plans for her daughter, and further contact in the future. Rachel told us just how much she loved her baby and wanted her to have parents who were married.

She explained that there was so much she wanted her to have that she was just unable to provide. After that first meeting, we couldn't imagine not having Rachel in our lives and in our future daughter's life. Our daughter would need to see just how loving, beautiful, selfless, and courageous her birthmother was.

As we waited for the baby to be born, we corresponded with Rachel regularly by email. We went out to lunch, we met Rachel's mother, and even went shopping for the outfit we would bring the baby home in. Our relationship continued to grow.

In March of 2005, we got the call that Rachel was in labor. We rushed to the hospital as if I were giving birth myself. We made it in time to be in the delivery room and I even got to cut the umbilical cord.

As I watched Rachel hold Maiya for the first time, I was overwhelmed with joy. They placed her in my arms and I couldn't help but think about all God had done to get us all to this point.

He had worked on Rachel's heart, He had worked on our hearts, and now a new family was forming; one big family with more members than we ever imagined. Maiya is now two and a half and we visit with Rachel along with Maiya's birthfather once a month, on holidays, and on her birthday.

When Maiya turned one, we started the process to adopt for a third time. Since every adoption and birthmother is different, we weren't sure what to expect.

In August 2006, we were chosen by another birthmother, Jacquie. Since she lives in Denver, we met over the phone. We had a great conversation and instantly bonded. We got to know each other through exchanging emails.

A month before her due date, we took Maiya to Denver to meet Jacquie and her family face-to-face. Our son Mario stayed with his grandparents so that he wouldn't miss school.

As soon as we met, it felt like we were family. We talked for hours, took Jacquie for a prenatal massage, and had dinner with the birthfather.

The next day we went to church with Jacquie and her family, and they made a wonderful French meal to share a little of their heritage with us.

We saw pictures and watched videos of their family. Later that night, we went to Bible study with her parents where their group prayed for Jacquie and her baby and shared their thankfulness for finding the perfect family for their first grandchild.



*Maiya with her birthparents*

As we left Colorado, we were thankful, once again, for all that the Lord had done.

In October 2006, we flew back to Denver for Samantha's birth. We walked into the delivery room to find Jacquie holding Samantha. Jacquie asked if we'd like to hold her and we told her that we would love to, but that this was her time with her daughter.

We returned late the next day to spend time holding and feeding Samantha. Without a doubt, God gave us the strength to give them their space when all we wanted to do was hold that sweet baby.

Samantha is now 10 months old and we keep in contact with Jacquie and her family over the phone and through email. Jacquie and her parents have already come to visit us, and we are looking forward to future visits.

Often, people ask us if we think our children will be confused because of our open adoption arrangements. We say no. Like all children, they are His. The Lord just orchestrates who will raise them and where they will live.

God called us to minister to these birthmothers and their families while they were pregnant, so they could get to know the family to whom they would entrust their children. He has also called us to minister to these families by inviting them to be a part of their child's life.

He has shown us all the love of Christ in a time when we were desperately hurting and confused. Some of us were experiencing the hurt of longing for a child and the others were hurting while faced with an unplanned pregnancy.

Jesus showed us that He loves us all the same and that He was blessing us all in spite of our circumstances. He has led us through this adoption journey, and He will continue to lead us and bless our children. How blessed are our children to be loved by so many.

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