



Beauty for Ashes

Tamra Hyde, Birth Mom
Keynote Address, Colorado FSA 2012

About Tamra Hyde



of adoption award in 2009.

As someone able to articulate the birth parent experience in a thoughtful manner with both sensitivity and humor, she is sought after as an adoption speaker and educator. She was interviewed on a radio talk show for National Adoption Awareness month. Numerous people have been touched by Tamra's message on birth parent panels and in classes for local and national FSA events. Countless others have read or heard her story and thoughts about adoption on the Internet or in print. She had an article published in the Mother's Day edition of the Latter-day Saints women's literary magazine *The Exponent II* and has been featured in community outreach brochures. She is featured in several capacities online: a video interview on the It's About Love website, addressing FAQs in a YouTube video titled, "Adoption and Abortion," on her blog Each Life That Touches Ours For Good and as a guest blogger on other adoption blogs such as the r house. Her voice has also been lent to the on hold recording when you call LDS Family Services.

On a more personal level, she has been able to help and support individual expectant mothers and adoptive couples when needed. Despite all that she has already done to help expectant parents consider adoption as a viable option, adoptive couples overcome fears, and to educate the community, her service has only fueled her passion for adoption advocacy. Her aspirations for the future include writing an adoption book, teaching a CES BYU Education Week class on adoption, continuing to lend her efforts and experience to the adoption cause in any and every way, and maybe even finish her degree! She is a great asset to adoption. We appreciate everything she has and will continue to do.

Tamra Hyde grew up in Memphis, TN. She is the second of eight. She has been heavily involved in adoption promotion for 14 years. Since placing her son in 1996, she has served in a number of ways. Tamra has attended and helped facilitate birth parent groups in Mesa, Provo, and St. George. She became one of the first birth parents to serve on a Families Supporting Adoption (FSA) board. She has also involved herself in community outreach to educate the public about adoption through school presentations, ecclesiastical training, and 5th Sunday ward presentations. She has also addressed a Masters level social work class at Brigham Young University. She was the first birthparent to receive the friends

Keynote Address

I love these types of events! I love being a part of this community—a community of individuals who have been or hope to be a part of the miracle. We represent all angles of the triad—adoptive parents, adoptive hopefuls, birth families, and prospective birth parents. It's likely that a few of you have been adopted. Then we have our adoption professionals whom we adopt into our elite and privileged club – lucky them. Some of the finest people in my association including some of my best friends are people I've met through this work. When I placed for adoption, there was no community, or if there was, I had no knowledge of or access to it. I am honored and surprised to have been asked to speak to you today.

EVOLUTION

In these 16 years since I placed, the face of adoption has been beautified and come out of obscurity. This ball started rolling years earlier first very gradually and with much resistance and then, in my opinion, very rapidly particularly if you consider that for generations adoption had been done in the same way. There were always exceptions but the rule was that adoption was an institution of shame, mystery, misconception, and secrecy.

Many of the women who placed in those days did so not because of a conviction that it was right for them or their child but as a result of social, religious, or family pressure as a way to conceal the unwed pregnancy during a time when the stigma was much greater. These women would have little peace in their choice because the choice wasn't truly theirs. Birthparents had no representation, no voice, and no face. They were mysterious even to themselves as they were encouraged to practice denial and shroud the most defining experience of their lives. They would begin each day with the burden to carry alone of a secret and a broken heart and a thousand nagging unanswered questions as to the whereabouts and well being of their offspring. Often having never said hello or goodbye. The child they carried had no face, no name, and in many cases not even a gender.

Without an accurate account of the circumstances adoptive couples often assumed that the child was abandoned, unwanted, and unloved by whatever *creature* could be so heartless. Often, the adoptive parents were encouraged to conceal the tragic truth in order to protect their child from the knowledge that they were *adopted*. This had an incalculable and detrimental affect on many adopted children. When at age 8, 18, or 80 they discover the true beginning of their own story, they felt confused, betrayed, and ashamed. The people they'd trusted most in the world had withheld from them information about their very identity. Who they were was a skeleton in the closet, something to hide and not to be spoken of—it must be an awful shame. Or, if they had known perhaps it was whispered about or spoken of like a disease or a handicap.

The mind tends to fixate on the mysterious or the forbidden. For many adopted children with no actual birthparent representation, their birth mom became a fantasy or a villain—as needed. She is sometimes the favorite scapegoat or the reason for all of

their problems. Or perhaps she would be pegged into the catchall stereotype of the knocked up 15-year-old who is surely now living in squalor or died of an overdose. In my observation, it is very difficult for adopted children not to identify themselves to some degree by their impression of their birth mom. As you can imagine, this would be less than awesome for one's self esteem. Or conversely, she would be the favorable alternative to the adolescent mind's perceived oppression and restriction. "If I were with her, *she'd* understand me!" I attended an adult adoptee panel where a woman expressed that as a child, she was convinced that Whitney Houston was her birth mom – and she was white.

For adoptive parents, there was most often a total lack of preparation, no counseling or education—"Just pretend it's 'normal'. You'll figure it out." Insecurities and grief related to infertility were not addressed and did not disappear automatically with the placement of a child. Many went into adoption hoping to overcompensate for or cover up their "problem". "Now we can be normal." But, adoption isn't normal—it's unusual; it's different. It's wonderful, but it's not normal. Any effort to make it so invites a culture of denial, which transfers to a child who now feels like plan B.

Adoptive couples often could not embrace and celebrate adoption if they had not had the opportunity to grieve and bury their plan A or else they risked carrying the feeling that their non-biological family was second rate. These parents would likely not be prepared to have a birthparent in their circle even if she were made available. They might feel threatened by, in competition with, or resentful of her. They become subject to drawing the same false conclusions about this entity, this figment, this birth mom who almost existed in a different realm if at all.

Boy that was a downer. I do not mean to say that adoptions done in these less enlightened times were not often replete with miracles as well. I personally know of many that were. But, rejoice for we are the beneficiaries of evolution! Those who sensed something was not quite right with the established way have blazed a trail. Adoptees petitioned to have greater access to their own medical history. Many adoptive parents came to realize that more resources were necessary to do their best raising their children. Birthparents finally began removing their scarlet letter and broke the silence. Adoption professionals saw the ethical flaws in their practices. We owe these pioneers our recognition and gratitude and our continued efforts toward progress in these matters.

Adopted children now know they have a larger than usual support system—they have extras. They know that they came *from* love *to* love. Adoption is one of the things that make them special—not second-class. They can talk about it openly and have their questions answered. They are allowed to love and be loved by she who put her heart on the altar in exchange for the life the child *could* have.

I know many birthparents and adoptive parents who have found a dear friend, even a sister through their open adoption. *Their* support systems are expanded! As Lindsey Redfern, who some of you may know as the dynamic Mrs. R, has said of her sons' birth families, "*They* have adopted *us*! We've adopted each other." Furthermore, there is so much counsel and information available to the preparing adoptive parent. I've seen many a mind set on closed adoption become a changed heart at their first

birthparent panel or their first meeting with a prospective birthparent. These women cease to be an inaccurate stereotype and become humanized. I've also seen many adoptive fathers particularly, once opposed to "sharing" become the biggest cheerleader of a birth mom whose association is felt as an enhancement to their family or social circle.

Birthparents now have a forum and an audience to tell the stories that need telling.

There are mentor birth moms who are further along the path who they can see have survived and even thrived post placement and who can pass on their lists of "Wish I wouldas and wish I wouldn'tas." We receive even greater confirmation and peace to our hearts as we see with our own eyes the fruits of our sacrifice. I've seen those who placed in the dark ages of adoption trapped in a stagnant grief held just below the surface. I've seen birthmothers today have their aches so tempered by their joys. It's always bittersweet, but I've observed that the bitter-to-sweet ratio is directly proportional to the degree of openness. It is indeed a great time to be a part of this community.

COMMUNITY

Growing up LDS in the Bible belt, if ever I happened upon another Mormon it was so exciting. There was this instant rapport like we were cousins or something. That's how I feel anytime I make a new adoption association! To give an example, I was at the baby shower of a friend and saw a clearly white woman with a clearly Asian baby. Of course I struck up a conversation and asked all of the right questions and discovered she had two LDS Family Services and two internationally adopted children. I then revealed myself as a birth mom, and this brand new acquaintance grabbed me somewhat forcefully into her arms and told me through her tears, "I don't have contact with any of my children's' birth moms, let me hug on you for a minute." To which I replied, "I have no contact with my son's mom, let me hug you back!"

We share in an experience that is uncommon. Our mothers and our sisters and our friends can empathize and rejoice for us, but I never feel I can find the words to adequately convey my feelings and experiences. When I talk to another birth mom or an adoptive parent, there is an understanding. Our experiences are parallel in so many ways after all. As birthparents and as adoptive parents we know loss, worry, sacrifice, being misunderstood, and letting go of our plan A. We also know about compensation, an increase in our capacity to love, answered prayers, and gratitude. We both know the sacred privilege it is to be a parent as for some of us it was preceded by heartache, loss, and for some it was not easily come by. We need each other!

For women like myself who want their child to have the world but don't have it to give, for those who pray for children but can't conceive, and for children born into less than ideal situations, adoption is, as Isaiah says, "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." Troy Dunn calls it prayer trading. Adoptive hopefuls pray for a child to join their family, birth parents pray for the best life for their child, and through each other the Lord answers their prayers. The

beginning of both paths are troubled—a crisis pregnancy, infertility—but in hindsight we may *all* call ourselves blessed and we thank God for His wisdom and even for our tribulation.

COMPENSATION

I believe in the power of sacrifice and the principle of compensation, and I believe it applies to all of us. Latter-day Saint Apostle Joseph B. Wirthlin once stated, “Come what may and love it. ... The Lord compensates the faithful for every loss. That which is taken away from those who love the Lord will be added unto them in His own way. While it may not come at the time we desire, the faithful will know that every tear today will eventually be returned a hundredfold with tears of rejoicing and gratitude.” To that I say amen! This sentiment is echoed in Matthew 19:29 which says, “And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.”

When I made my choice, I knew that adoption would mean Justin wins. I knew that he would have a wonderful family with two parents who had the stability, experience, maturity, and preparation he would need. I knew that his parents would win; they would receive this precious perfect child they’d prayed for. But I believed I would be the loser in adoption—even a victim of it. This was a deal I was prepared to strike. I fully anticipated being pretty broken from that point on, but it didn’t matter because if Justin wins I win.

I have happily found that I was very wrong. I’ve experienced the sweet as well as the bitter! I was *transformed* by this experience! *My* life as well as Justin’s *began* with this experience! I believe he was theirs before he was mine but that he came to them through me because nothing short of maternal love and responsibility would’ve shaken me awake. I found healing! The changes I made for my Justin would benefit me for the rest of my life! There was a miraculous degree of deliverance from the confusion, pain, and resentment of having grown up in abuse, as well as from many of the effects of my own foolishness.

I want to make reference to a passage found in the Book of Joel in the Old Testament. In verse twenty-five of chapter two it states: “And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten...” My God is so kind and so concerned for me that He sent me the most precious little missionary. The few months I spent carrying around my “favorite little parasite” was the most significant of my life. Those were my deciding months. Those were the months I spent dying and being born again—my heart being broken and then made whole. This was the time of my conversion. Those nine months changed the course of my life more drastically than anything else has. I learned more in those months than I had in all the years that preceded them. I began to see truth and light where my view had previously been dark and distorted. I began to become me. I remember walking by the mirror in the upstairs bathroom and literally doing a double take. I saw a new countenance and had pleasure in my reflection for the first time.

Through adoption and through my son I learned the meaning of love. The

moment I laid my eyes on him, I felt my heart grow in my chest! I'd thought I'd known what love was. Love meant I like being around the person. It meant missing them when they are gone and that I get something from our association. It meant that they're nice to me. What I felt when I first laid eyes on Justin was so different in purpose and proportion. I'd cut off my right arm for him! I'd step in front of a bus for him! I knew that I would do anything for him—anything. I realized that I'd never *really* known love before that moment.

By placing a child with a couple who could not give each other children I did for them what they could not do for themselves, and in turn the Savior has done for me what I could not do for myself. He has said, "Whosoever will lose his life shall find it". The Lord has always remembered my sacrifice, and He has comforted, taught, carried, and preserved me.

PAIN

Now this doesn't mean I was spared from any and all hardship—not at all. The adoption path is blessed and beautiful and miraculous. It is also hard and painful, but even this is part of the gift. The night before Justin's 14th birthday I laid in bed remembering something I'd done many times before but something different started to happen in my heart. I'm often emotional when I think or speak of the experience, but it's generally gratitude and sweetness that evokes my tears. This night was different. The tears wouldn't stop coming. It felt... different. It'd been years since it had really hurt probably six years or so. I'd always say, "It doesn't hurt anymore. I'm not sad anymore." So I sat arguing with my heart that this emotion must be something other than pain. Finally I had to surrender. It hurt. It felt like a fresh wound again. I found myself holding my stomach like I used to do feeling the empty space like he'd just been there.

There's a beauty in this kind of pain. There *has* been healing. My pain has faded and settled into its proper place and proportion, but I think I'd been wrong. I think now that perhaps the pain never goes away all together, and that's okay. My burdens have been made light enough to bear and even while lying in my bed that night grieving, as I'd done fourteen years earlier. The bitter is tempered with a compensatory sweet. There is peace in it, and gratitude is the overarching emotion. Pain makes up many of the strokes in my beautiful picture. James Gritter, author of *The Spirit of Open Adoption* (if you haven't read it, write that down) says, "I would not give you a nickel for joy this side of pain, but I believe the joy on the other side of pain is a priceless blessing. To get to the genuine joy of adoption, we have to pay our dues."

Joseph B. Wirthlin has also spoken about the power of humor in the hard times. I think some have been surprised and maybe even offended by my levity at times. When I disclose to people for the first time, they often get very heavy and, honestly, kind of uncomfortable. That's when I like to say, "Yep, I got knocked up." Or when I tell folks he's 16 I like to say, "Yeah, I was 11 when I had him," so as not to disclose the well kept secret of my age. I have a dear friend who in their year-end letter to all of their friends and family would always include some uncomfortably personal yet hilarious commentary of their fertility treatments and/or efforts—if you know what I mean. I

can't share the details here, but see me after if you want to know.

PERSPECTIVE & COMPASSION

I want to borrow again from Joseph B. Wirthlin. He also teaches the importance of patience and perspective during difficult times—quote: “Learning to endure times of disappointment, suffering, and sorrow is part of our on-the-job training. These experiences, while often difficult to bear at the time, are precisely the kinds of experiences that stretch our understanding, build our character, and increase our compassion for others. Because Jesus Christ suffered greatly, He understands our suffering. He understands our grief. We experience hard things so that we too may have increased compassion and understanding for others.”

I know a birth mom who has been the shoulder to cry on for her child's adoptive mom who still just wishes she could feel life growing inside her. I know many adoptive parents who haven't turned away in the face of the loss that bore their gain, they have followed the admonition of Christ as they've mourned with her as she's mourned, they have lifted her hands that hang down, they have felt her burden with her. Their joy is not diminished but is fuller for it. They know the price paid for it, and they can share their joy with her. The witness they can offer their child can be invaluable. I want to relate to you a story an adoptive father shared with me. He was showing off their second child who had recently been placed with their family. A friend, looking at this cute little bundle said, “She just didn't want him huh? How could anyone not want him?” To which my friend passionately replied, “You weren't there. You didn't see the anguish in her face. You didn't hear the gut wrenching sobs.” If his child ever wonders if he's precious, his parents have this account as additional evidence that he is.

The day I met Justin's parents, I became aware of a silver lining. Yes, I was losing a child. And yes, that was very sad. But here were these two incredible deserving people with whom I was immediately in love. A couple that had waited and wondered and prayed and cried. They would finally have what they'd dreamed of. I was so excited for them that for a moment I forgot my own loss. I wanted to see pictures of their bliss! I wanted to see them all enjoying each other! A portion of all of their happiness was mine!

Likewise, adoptive families can not only watch and celebrate but also be a part of their birth mom's success! I've seen adoptive parents be a tremendous force for good in the lives of their child's birthparents. For some birthparents, it will be their first opportunity to be a part of a well-functioning family unit.

We can all do that for each other. I was allowed five short years of limited correspondence, and in that time I'm afraid I might have said some pretty insensitive things. I had no understanding of the dynamics of their journey and their feelings until I began to meet other adoptive parents through my volunteering.

ADVOCACY

There is *so much need* for our efforts in this work. I can say for myself, that

everything I thought I knew about adoption initially was wrong. I know a lot of you have also had some pretty powerful misconceptions about birth moms before someone shared their story with you. We encounter the unenlightened everyday—people who will inadvertently say the most offensive things to us about adoption. I have to remind myself to cut them some slack because I once was just as ignorant. Right out of the gate, I thought you only place for adoption if you “have to” or if there was no other way. Adoption, in my mind, was only an option if you would absolutely be the worst of parents, and that didn’t apply to me. I thought that if I placed for adoption my son would feel abandoned and hate me, and that I would be evading responsibility. I thought that adoptive parents might not be able to love him as much as I could. I was difficult to educate as many of us are. These misguided attitudes if not corrected would have prevented me from making the best choice.

I’ve encountered many who have expressed regret saying if they’d only known if they’d only had accurate information that they would have chosen differently. One of my friend’s mothers confided in me that she wished she had done for her daughter what I’d done for my son, but she didn’t know. Nobody told her. I’ve had two girls who have had abortions express to me after hearing my story that they wished they’d heard it before they made their choice. This is why I never miss a chance to educate. I will talk to people anywhere—the grocery store line, wherever. You never know the need of the other person or the impact it could have.

Our stories are powerful testimonies. People started calling me an advocate and my thought is all I’m doing is telling my story. It’s not even hard; it’s my favorite story. I knew a girl who became pregnant as a result of a rape. She didn’t want to select a family. She didn’t want to see the child. She wanted no information about or contact with the adoptive family. Her caseworker twisted her arm to attend group just once. She bolted immediately after but came back to ask for my discretion as I worked at the school she attended. It is not common for me to ask a stranger for a ride and my home was easily within walking distance, but for whatever reason I did ask. We sat in my driveway just shy of 3 hours and I told her the miraculous blessings that had come to Justin’s family and me. Her expression changed, and her heart softened. She said, “It hadn’t occurred to me that there was any joy to be had in this.” She now enjoys such a sweet relationship with her beautiful daughter’s family.

I worked for an amazing wilderness therapy program in Arizona called the Anasazi Foundation for a few years. During that time, I believe I only shared my adoption story four times. From each of those four times there was a girl who would later become pregnant. Two of them placed for adoption. One of these girls told me that after realizing she was pregnant her mind immediately took her back to that night around the fire listening to my story, and she remembered how her heart felt. I’ve also been tracked down by a girl who reported that had I not come to her high school and told my story, she would have never set foot in an agency two years later when she discovered she was pregnant.

I also have a video on YouTube in which I share some of my thoughts on and experiences with adoption. A birth mother later contacted me and shared the following:

This video really helped me make my decision. Recently, I gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. Thanks for helping me make my decision so much better. Your baby is so beautiful. Hope that others make the right decision and go for life and adoption even though it breaks our hearts. Children are such great joys, and adoption has been a gift for me as well.

I'll share a few more comments from individuals that highlight ways in which sharing my story has been instrumental when making decisions regarding adoption. I'll start with a couple from my hometown that was hoping to adopt. The wife was receptive to open adoption but the husband's mentality was "Why do I have to share? Will they be my children or won't they? I don't want some girl looking over my shoulder monitoring my parenting." His clever wife invited me over for family night to tell my story. Fast forward a year or so later and he's asking me, "How can we hear more from our birth mom? We want to know how she is. Did we do something wrong?"

My bishop asked me to speak about adoption in Sacrament meeting one Sunday. Three weeks later I sat by a woman I'd never seen before in Relief Society. The girl teaching the lesson mentioned my adoption talk. Immediately after Relief Society the woman turned to me and asked if I was the girl who'd spoken on adoption three weeks previous. She was visiting her sister who was in my congregation. Her parents had been visiting the Sunday I spoke. She gratefully told me, "I'm an adoptive mother. My folks have never really understood the legitimacy of adoption and particularly not open adoption. You taught them more in ten minutes than I've been able to in 10 years. Thank you." For her parents, it was only the story told first hand from the perspective of a birth mother that would change their heart.

My mother has had the opportunity to share her experience with those whose children are in crisis pregnancy. She can give them a heads up about the attitudes and approaches that worked, as well as those she regrets.

The stories of both birthparents post-placement and adoptive parents are so helpful to those who are considering placing and those hoping to adopt. Okay, I'm tooting my own horn a bit with these stories, but they illustrate the tremendous impact we can have on others. And honestly, these experiences are so gratifying!

It's by small and simple means that great things are brought to pass. I know it can be really daunting to expose ourselves sometimes. People *will* judge a birth mom. Though in my mind my adoption story has *nothing* to do with sin. That's the first place a lot of minds will go. Neither bringing my son into the world nor placing him for adoption is a transgression; on the contrary, it is the holiest thing I've ever been a part of. I have no shame attached to this story. It is about what I did right not what I did wrong. However, some people will try to pick up something ugly and stick it to me.

As adoptive parents your journey through infertility really is nobody's business. For all you know, the person you're talking to may have just received the diagnosis. These stories are our pearls, and yes if we give people access some of them will not understand. Some will say hurtful things. I used to get angry or hurt. Now, I get on my soapbox—it's teaching time! My coming out of the closet was a gradual process. I

remember three months after placing I moved west and thought, “Okay, I’ll leave that behind me. Nobody here needs to know.” Well first of all, I needed to share! This is something you *have* to talk about, but also again people needed me. They needed my story.

So for a few years I would talk about it in group or to rooms full of strangers, but many of my friends didn’t know. I was never ashamed, but I did fear judgment and being misunderstood. Though I’d been *very* active in advocacy, speaking, and writing, it was actually not until I did some more high profile things that I was like, “Well, here goes... I’m going public.” I stopped skirting it in conversation. I posted stuff on my Facebook profile, and now to be honest sometimes I steer the conversation in that direction. It was interesting to find, as is so often the case, that what we fear is actually not even that scary once we face it. Especially when you think of what can be gained. I’ve experienced more reactions of compassion and admiration than those of misunderstanding and meanness though there have been those as well.

I say wear your adoption t-shirts, sport those bumper stickers, answer frankly in the grocery store line when asked where your baby gets *that* hair from. We are under-represented and misrepresented in the media. All we got is *Juno* and *16 and Pregnant*. We have a lot of work to do.

We can change someone’s mind even by our tone. For instance, I don’t whisper shamefully, “I placed a baby for adoption.” I show people from the beginning of the conversation that I am blessed by my choice and that I don’t regret it. I’m well versed in the stats and studies. I practically have prepared statements as a response to some of the most common misconceptions should they come up. This is only after years of being overly emotional and fumbling over my words, of course. I became an adoption advocate before I’d ever even heard the term. I’d just been blessed in “Biblical proportion” and I thought to myself, “Cool! Thanks! That was awesome!” And for a couple years people would cross my path through the most random means and would have some perspective, insight, or comfort to give me. I would often say to myself, “Wow, that was so nice!” Some time later others started being placed in my path only this time they were people who I could support. People whose burdens I was equipped to share and who needed *my* story. It became apparent to me that I had been blessed so much and that it also came with a responsibility. “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required” (Luke 12:48) or to quote an LDS hymn “because I have been given much I too must give.” It may be hard sometimes, but *hello* we are adoption people. We’re not scared of hard!

HARD THINGS

I was speaking at a conference once addressing adoptive hopefuls in regard to open adoption. I made the point that open adoption can be hard and that placing a child for adoption—the thing that would make adoption possible for them—is also hard. I made the point that I’d learned I was capable of doing very hard things and encouraged them not to be... well, chickens. Then, I sat down and the next presenter came in and talked about foster adoption. As I sat there I could hear my own hypocritical voice

saying, “Wow, people who adopt from foster care are amazing, but I could never do that. That would be way ‘too hard.’” It was then that I changed my mind. If I have the opportunity to be married, I will be more than open to doing a foster or international adoption.

Open adoption *can* be hard. Do you want to know why? It’s because it’s a human relationship. Having siblings is hard! Shoot, having neighbors can be hard. Does this mean we eliminate these relationships? Of course not, we apply the same principles to an open adoption relationship that we apply to relationships with any human being—patience, empathy, reasonable boundaries, and above all communication. As in any relationship, an open adoption where there is entitlement, pride, envy, competition, and lack of consideration on either side it will fail. We don’t hit a bump and go, “Well, we tried open adoption. It doesn’t work for us.”

So, open adoption, it might be hard. Going through infertility and the adoption process—hard! Foster, international, or special needs adoption can be even harder. Placing a child for adoption—*hard!* But, what are we in it for—an easy time? No, we are *all* in it for the best interest of the child. We don’t place babies as birth moms, so that *we* can have fun, time, and money or to have greater ease in education, employment, and our social lives. Adoptive parents don’t adopt to fill *their* need. We don’t do open adoptions *just* because we like each other. These are all happy bi-products, but they are not reason enough on their own. We do these hard things because our children need it. And I have found that we are qualified and made equal to the task. Our resources are miraculously expanded, and our losses are miraculously made up—our heartaches are abundantly compensated for.

One of my main resistances to adoption initially was the fear of my own weakness. I thought, “I can’t place. It’s too hard.” I was shown that “the Lord giveth no commandment save he shall prepare a way” (1 Nephi 3:7, *The Book of Mormon*). If He brings you to it, He’ll bring you through it. I didn’t have the strength *or* the wisdom, but He did. *He* sustained me. Through Him I did the impossible; I defied my own heart and very instinct.

OPEN ADOPTION

I need to give a quick shout out for open adoption. When my cousin was reunited with her birth mom, my uncle was pretty uncomfortable with it. He said, “She’s ours. I don’t want to share her.” I replied, “You share her with all of us and there’s no less of her to go around!” Let’s not be greedy! Love is an unlimited renewable resource. We are *all* family anyway. Justin wasn’t mine. He isn’t theirs, and I am not my own. Adoptive parents *and* birthparents must always recognize that they are merely stewards over one of God’s children. If we esteem every man as a brother and we are our brother’s keeper, then we are ready for open adoption. But I imagine, I’m preaching to the choir here.

I want to tell you briefly and in closing what my son’s adoptive family has been to me and what you have the opportunity to be for *your* birthparents. They are an extension of my family in a way—I cannot explain it. I have total confidence in them and

in my decision. I *never* worry about him. I wasn't choosing a family; I was finding the family that God had chosen. The biology that Justin and I share is real and significant. It's a connection that should not be denied, but it is nothing to the mantle, stewardship, and intuition his parents have. Biology does not have to exist for complete and genuine love to exist between family members. Blood may be thicker than water, but family is something thicker. It was a matter of good, better, best. I would have been good. They were better. I would have been enough. He has the best.

I imagine it this way. Before we came here to this mortal experience, God said, "Tamra, you'll have a tough assignment. You'll go to parents who are sad and confused. Your little soul is going to get hurt. You're going to stumble and get lost, but don't worry Tamra. Your sister Debbie (adoptive mom) and your brothers Gale (adoptive dad) and Justin (our son) have volunteered for the rescue effort. Debbie and Gale will wait and pray and cry and wonder; they will share their Justin with you. He will come as your missionary on his way home and though you won't love yourself enough to get well you'll love him enough to get well. You'll remember me, and *I* will heal you."

In chapter eighteen of The Book of Matthew verse five states, "And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me." On this side, it looks like *my* gift and *my* sacrifice, but when we return I imagine we will see more clearly that it was them who gave to me their sacrifice. *They* shared him with *me*! How can I express my gratitude? I like to think of adoption as the work of eternal families and the work of reclaiming lost and wounded souls. What could be higher on the priority list of The Most High? There are no coincidences in adoption. I don't believe it's random, and it certainly wasn't *my* genius that orchestrated it all. I can't even keep my *room* in order! God is all up in this business. It's His business, and He's good at it!

Please do not be shortsighted and misunderstand. Right now you may be drinking from the bitter cup or carrying your cross, but those of us on this side of the tribulation know that we are the lucky ones. So, my message today is fear not and look forward with hope for the time when in spite of all the tears shed, you may with your new and cherished associations call yourselves blessed by a miracle.