



# Book Reviews for Adoptive Parents

## Effective Parenting Books from a Christian Perspective

### **Boundaries with Kids (Cloud & Townsend)**

This is an excellent book from Focus on the Family, on setting effective, firm boundaries with children. It uses a Christian perspective and is a useful guide, especially for school age children.

### **Bringing Up Boys: Practical Advice and Encouragement for Those Shaping the Next Generation of Men (Dobson)**

This book wouldn't have been necessary 50 years ago in America. Fifty years ago everyone knew that boys and girls were different, and few would have argued otherwise. Dobson demonstrates how the secular feminist movement has sought to eliminate gender and make the world unisex. Other than the obvious differences in genitalia, Americans today have little understanding or agreement of how boys and girls are different. This book is helpful for parents raising boys and girls to encourage them to consider how to raise boys that know that it is good to be a boy and girls that know it's good to be a girl. The book encourages fathers, in particular, to be involved in their children's lives in substantive ways. It also encourages parents to stay married to each other. Some Christian readers will see Dobson's position as too extreme; however, he is the only spokesperson for Christian families willing to open up this non-politically correct discussion.

### **Different Children, Different Needs (Boyd)**

This is an incredibly valuable book, written from a Christian perspective. It is especially important for parents of children by adoption, though the book is designed for any parent. The basic premise is that children come with different temperaments that make up the child's personality. When a child and parent have very different temperaments conflict happens, along with parenting challenges. It is also hard to be a kid when you aren't the person your parents hoped you would be. The book presents a rather complex model to help parents determine what their personality is like and how to determine their child's personality. By recognizing these differences, specific guidelines are provided on how to respond to your child's uniqueness. Children by adoption are even more likely than children by birth to come with temperaments different from their (adoptive) parents, making it especially important to read this book and help your child become who God created him/her to be, rather than a miniature version of their parent by adoption.

### **The Key to Your Child's Heart (Smalley)**

This book offers good advice on how to be sensitive to your children's needs and having a close family.

### **Parenting at the Speed of Life (Osborne)**

This is a list of 60 practical suggestions to communicate to your child that you love him/her. This smart little book is written from a Christian dad's perspective. It's a must read for every parent.

### **Parenting Isn't for Cowards (Dobson)**

Dobson advocates spanking only when a child challenges the authority of the parent. This book is especially supportive for parents of strong-willed children. It doesn't take into account issues of adoption, but some parents might find this book useful.

### **Parenting with Love and Logic: Teaching Children Responsibility (Cline & Fay)**

This book advocates logical consequences for children's behavior. It is an excellent guide for responding to children's misbehavior effectively. It's written from a Christian perspective that includes biblical quotes and illustrations. One chapter out of 100 indicates that logical consequences are more effective than spanking.

### **Playtime Devotions: Sharing Bible Moments with Your Baby or Toddler (Tangvald)**

This book presents a wonderful way to include God in special times with babies and toddlers.

### **She Calls Me Daddy: Seven Things Every Man Needs to Know about Building a Complete Daughter (Wolgemuth)**

This is an easy read book for fathers, from a Christian perspective, written by a non-professional (not a counselor, psychologist, etc), but a thoughtful and caring father. As the father of five daughters I found it rather basic, but perhaps a new father would find it helpful to consider important issues like the value of protecting your daughter from physical and emotional harm. Wolgemuth's greatest point is the value of fathers not just focusing on their sons, but developing a life long relationship with their daughters, so their daughters will feel safe and confident coming to them for advice.

### **Teaching Kids about God (Trent, Osborne & Bruner)**

This book is written by Christian psychologists. As a result, understanding children's cognitive and emotional aptitudes at different developmental levels is integrated into how to help children understand God's love at various points in their lives. This is an excellent parenting text for any parent desiring to help their child develop as a Christian.

## **Normal Child Development**

### **The New First Three Years of Life (White)**

This is a guide to normal growth and development and recommends parenting methods to maximize a child's physical, emotional and cognitive development. It does not address adoption issues. However, it is helpful for parents to know what to expect of a child at different ages. For example, a parent that brings home a child at 16 months shouldn't expect to be potty training anytime soon, even for a child by birth. This is an excellent book for any new parent's book shelf.

## **Adoption Books for Adults**

### **Adopting the Older Child (Jewel)**

This book focuses primarily on domestic adoption of older children (though international adoption is referenced occasionally). Many of the issues discussed about adoption of older children apply to international adoption as well. Especially impressive is the emphasis on adoption as a great plan, not a plan B. It provides information about the home study and what social workers are looking for during the home study process. Much of the information in this book would be helpful in preparing social workers for better assessment of parents interested in adopting older children, listing criteria needed in prospective adoptive parents of older children. The last half of the book addresses common challenges children adopted at an older age experience, from separation anxiety to passive-aggressive behavior, and much more. It offers tangible responses to deal with these challenges that parents will find useful.

### **Adoption Parenting: Creating a Toolbox, Building Connections (MacLeod & Macrae)**

This is a how to care for your adopted child handbook. It covers most of the basic parenting challenges experienced when a child first comes home. The target audience is adoptive parents of kids adopted domestically and internationally, so it takes into account much more than other books with only a domestic focus. It provides a variety of options for dealing with sleeping, eating and discipline issues that take into account the special issues that orphaned children bring. It also deals with language development, fostering attachment, dealing with siblings and much more. This is a very helpful user's manual for adoptive families. Issues of faith are not addressed.

### **Attaching in Adoption: Practical Tools for Today's Parents (Gray)**

This book provides indepth understanding of attachment as related to adoption of children at a variety of ages. It provides practical advice on how to promote healthy attachment for adoptive families. It also effectively covers issues of grief children wrestle with when they leave their birth families, former country and culture. Parents and professional adoption workers alike can benefit from the expertise Deborah Gray provides. This book can be read cover to cover, or chapters of particular interest may stand out more than others, for example there is a very interesting chapter on trauma. It details how to recognize if your child is suffering from a traumatic past and steps to take to help children resolve past trauma.

### **Carried Safely Home: The Spiritual Legacy of an Adoptive Family (Wong)**

This book is truly what the title states, the spiritual journey related to adopting internationally. It is filled with scriptural encouragement that helped the author and her family survive a one year delay in bringing their son home from Vietnam after they received his referral pictures. It is a very honest, human story of loving and trusting God, yet struggling with faith at the same time. This book will be extremely helpful, especially during the waiting period, when there is nothing to do but wait and trust God. It is a story of love, faith, and finding that God does deliver more than we could ask or imagine if we wait on Him and trust in His providence for us.

### **How It Feels to be Adopted (Krementz)**

This is a book written by children who were adopted. All but one story is from a child adopted domestically. One is by a child adopted from Korea. It is interesting to see children's perspectives on birth parents and being adopted. A valuable book for adoptive parents (easy reading). When children by adoption are older (teens) they might find it interesting as well. It is neutral in regard to faith.

### **Lifebooks: Creating a Treasure for the Adopted Child (O'Malley)**

This is a terrific book that many eager pre-adoptive parents may want to start on during the waiting period. Many adoptive parents enjoy scrapbooking, and this is one way to do scrapbooking for an adopted child. It gives practical ways to document international adoption in a lifebook format.

### **Raising Adopted Children: Practical, Reassuring Advice for Every Adoptive Parent (Melina)**

This is intended as an "everything you ever wanted to know about adoption, but were afraid to ask" kind of book. It offers helpful advice during the waiting stages. It addresses open-adoption, which doesn't apply to families adopting internationally. Though I don't necessarily agree with all positions the author takes (e.g. encourages keeping the original first name for any child over the age of 12 months). It is good material for thinking about how significant name choice is, especially if a child is going to be called the same name as one of the parents. Is the expectation that the child will be just like the parent? This book deals effectively with adjustment and grief issues. The last chapter of the book speaks to special issues related to adoptive families, including divorce and gay and lesbian issues. Chapters 1-11 are recommended.

### **Real Parents, Real Children, Parenting the Adopted Child (Gulden and Bartels-Rabb)**

This book is about helping adoptive parents understand the inner world of children adopted at various ages (birth to 18). It emphasizes the unique concerns and needs of children by adoption while valuing and empowering adoptive families. The book begins with discussing grief and loss issues, bonding and how to help a child transition into an adoptive family. The last two-thirds of the book address unique issues at various ages and developmental stages. Faith and spiritual development are not addressed.

### **Toddler Adoption: The Weaver's Craft (Hopkins-Best)**

"Sometimes I just want to curl up in a ball and be a little baby again so someone will take care of me. Other times I want to do everything myself, and I feel like running away from you. Please be patient. We have a long time together..." Thus begins an excellent book that helps parents adopting toddlers understand the special issues that a newly adopted toddler will bring.

Reasons for adopting a toddler are explored, discouraging parents from adopting a toddler for the wrong reasons. Challenges related to attachment and grief work are explained, giving room to recognize that some children are quite resilient and don't wrestle with these issues as much as other children adopted as toddlers. Hopkins-Best does an excellent job explaining normal developmental issues for toddlers, which are very important to be aware of, especially for first time parents. Community resources are discussed with directions on how to obtain services. Every parent planning to adopt a toddler should read this book.

### **The Whole Life Adoption Book: Realistic Advice for Building a Healthy Adoptive Family (Schooler)**

As long as parents realize that this is a book written for families adopting domestically, this is a very useful book for any adoptive parent. One of the early chapters is on what constitutes a healthy family prepared for adoption, is excellent. It even includes, as the final point, values that stem from faith in God. Some issues are irrelevant to families adopting internationally. For example, the issue of whether or not to tell the child they are adopted is not even an issue for families adopting from Asia or Africa. It could be a question for families adopting from Eastern Europe. I especially like the chapter on creating a nurturing family—which draws on biblical references to support unconditional love for a child. This book is a must read for all adoptive parent.

### **Dealing with Children with Emotional or Behavioral Problems**

#### **Adopting the Hurt Child (Keck & Kupecky)**

This is an excellent book for adoptive parents of children known to have the baggage of abuse, neglect, and/or adoption at an older age. It provides many vignettes that identify issues children may be dealing with. It offers excellent insight into the reactions of siblings to the entry of a child by adoption into the family. There are a number of excellent suggestions for parents to implement to assist their children in coping with past history. If parents decide they wish to seek counseling/therapy for their child there is a chapter that describes various types of interventions. The only reservation I have about this book is that it recommends holding therapy. Holding therapy is a controversial therapy technique that some feel is harmful and punitive. In the context of this book it only recommends this technique in conjunction with a trained therapist, which is safer than a parent just trying to tackle this technique themselves.

#### **Beneath the Mask: Understanding Adopted Teens (Riley & Meeks)**

For parents adopting older children, this book focuses on the major issues facing children who are wrestling with the adoption experience. (Children adopted at any age may experience some of these issues, but the likelihood of adoption related behavioral, academic and social problems during the teen years increases when a child is adopted at an older age). The book explains six major hurdles for adolescents who were adopted. It also focuses on issues parents may experience in coping with their children's adoption related issues. Though written primarily for mental health professionals who provide psychotherapy to children by adoption, parents will also find this a useful, readable text. The only negative critique of *Beneath the Mask* is that it makes it seem like all the major problems experienced by adopted kids during their teen years are because of the adoption. For many this may be the case, but there are many other factors that trouble teenagers, regardless of whether they were adopted or not. That being said, the issues identified for both the teen and the parents are important. This book can open doors for parent-teen discussion around adoption related issues and help parents make informed decisions about when to seek professional help.

### **Worried No more (Wagner)**

This is a very valuable book for parents (post-adoption) if their children are struggling with anxiety, including separation anxiety, night terrors or other extreme fears. It provides specific instructions on how to effectively reduce anxiety and respond in helpful ways to children's excessive fears.

## **Books Concerning Race**

### **Hate Hurts: How Children Learn and Unlearn Prejudice (Anti-Defamation League)**

Confronting bias and appreciating differences are the goals of this book. The approach is hands-on, developmental, and extremely useful. Filled with scenarios and questions, *Hate Hurts* is designed as a book and as an interactive online course that can be accessed through the Anti-Defamation League's Web site ([www.adl.org](http://www.adl.org)). Discussions appropriate for adults and children give parents and educators examples of how to help children cope with racism, hate, or teasing.

### **Dealing With Racism (Green)**

Green's book is a great introduction to the idea of racism and offers readers a diverse group of real kids with whom they can identify. Through text, illustrations, and photographs, Green presents several different contexts in which racism may arise today—through bullying, through misunderstanding of other cultures, through superficially positive beliefs about people's abilities—as well as historical examples of racism and prejudice. The section on feelings about racism will provide a great starting point to conversation with your youngsters.

### **The Skin I'm In: A First Look at Racism (Thomas)**

Racial discrimination is cruel—and especially so to younger children. This title encourages kids to accept and be comfortable with differences of skin color and other racial characteristics among their friends and in themselves. *A First Look At...* is an easy-to-understand series of books for younger children. Each title explores emotional issues and discusses the questions such difficulties invariably raise among kids of preschool through early school age. Written by a psychotherapist and child counselor, each title promotes positive interaction among children, parents, and teachers. The books are written in simple, direct language that makes sense to younger kids. Each title also features a guide for parents on how to use the book, a glossary, suggested additional reading, and a list of resources. There are attractive full-color illustrations on every page. (Ages 4–7)

### **Does Anybody Else Look Like Me? A Parent's Guide to Raising Multiracial Children (Jackson)**

Donna Jackson Nakazawa's new book offers advice from both parents of children with multiracial or transracial adoption backgrounds, and from the children themselves. The rest of the world sees our families' differences first, she says, and makes comments that range from the innocent to the asinine. We can't change the world singlehandedly, but we can arm our children with a strong sense of self and a selection of quips. (Mine respond to "What are you?" with a blank stare and "Human.")

Nakazawa, a biological mother of half-Japanese, half-Caucasian children, assumes that the same parenting techniques will work equally well for mixed-race adoptees and biological children. As

any adoptive parent raising children apart from their ethnic heritage knows, it's harder when there are no family members to act as role models. And as I know from raising my son, it's particularly hard when you don't know precisely what the child's racial background is. This is a common situation for mixed-race adoptees, but it's ignored here.

Nakazawa has an interesting section on choosing where to live and school your children, recommending that parents stay in the same place as long as possible---friends who've known a child a long time will see him or her as an individual rather than a question mark. A mixed-race family lives on both sides of a racial divide—and if you who don't believe such a divide exists in America, walk around the mall as a blonde, then walk with a black teenager and watch the security guards perk up. No child should have to carry the burden of society's ills, but our kids are our best hope of bridging that divide, and we need all the advice we can get on raising them to be strong. This book is a start.

### **I'm Chocolate, You're Vanilla: Raising Healthy Black and Biracial Children in a Race-Conscious World (Wright)**

This great guide teaches parents and teachers how to reduce the impact of racism on black and biracial children through the stages of development from preschool through adolescence. From understanding a young child's perception of race to instilling a foundation of positive racial identity and general self-esteem, Wright's book can help you raise emotionally healthy children.

## **Africa Specific Books**

### **A Thousand Hills: Rwanda's Rebirth and the Man Who Dreamed It (Kinzer)**

Fourteen years after the 1994 genocide that claimed 800,000 lives in 100 days, Rwandans continue the work of rebuilding their country. Stephen Kinzer, a foreign correspondent, traveled throughout Rwanda where he examined economic and political change based on Asian archetypes. He also witnessed the execution of alternative reconciliation efforts. The author also conducted interviews with Rwanda's president, Paul Kagame.

### **A Family from Ethiopia (Waterlow)**

The vivid photographs of this Ethiopian family, their hut, and many of their possessions help to tell the story of their lives. Of course, it's a challenge to portray a "typical" family in a country that's as vast as Ethiopia; while the majority of people make their living as subsistence farmers, like the family in the book, many others live in large cities.

Nevertheless, reading the book and looking at the pictures with Sabella taught me a lot about her life growing up in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia. I learned as much from her comments that, "No, we didn't do that," as I did from her admissions that, "Yes, we had one of those in our house."

### **Bintou's Braids (Diouf)**

"My name is Bintou, and I want braids. My hair is short and fuzzy." So laments the heroine in the straightforward style she uses to narrate her story. Though Bintou dreams birds would enjoy nesting in her hair, she mostly envisions wearing "long braids with gold coins and seashells," as

her sister and other young women of her African village do. Her Grandma Soukeye explains that girls are only allowed tufts or cornrows in order to avoid vanity, and relays a village cautionary tale to underscore her moral.

Diouf (*Growing Up in Slavery*) creates strong female characters and evokes the feeling of a small village as extended family. With their large expressive eyes and warm demeanor, the girls and women gracefully move through Evans's (*Osceola: Memories of a Sharecropper's Daughter*) oil paintings in abundant earth tones and bright African batiks. Subtle footprints and chicken prints in the ochre sand background add depth to the fluid paintings. When Bintou helps save two drowning cousins and asks that braids be her reward, Grandma Soukeye finds a way to adhere to village tradition while acknowledging Bintou's heroism. This heartfelt story affords glimpses of West African customs as it touches on children's universal desire to be treated as grown-ups. (Ages 4-8.)

### **As We Forgive: Stories of Reconciliation from Rwanda (Larson)**

More than a decade after the 1994 genocide, the Rwandan government has released thousands of murderers back into the communities they ravaged. Survivors and perpetrators have had to learn to live again as neighbors. This book examines the hurt and the hope through gripping stories as victims, orphans, widows, and perpetrators journey toward reconciliation.

### **Life Laid Bare: The Survivors in Rwanda Speak (Hatzfeld)**

French journalist Hatzfeld journeys to Rwanda to speak to 14 survivors who remember the genocide, from a 12-year-old schoolboy (who hid in a mound of corpses) to a 60-year-old teacher (who remembers his well-educated neighbors with their machetes). More than a random collection of oral histories, the focus is on one district, an area of 154 square miles, where in a period of six weeks, about 50,000 Tutsis—five out of six—were murdered by their Hutu neighbors. For each of the 14 interviewed today, Hatzfeld fills in the background and history.

### **Faraway Home (Kurtz)**

When Desta's father decides it's time to go back to Ethiopia to care for his ailing mother, she learns how different his life was from her comfortable life in America. The story is told in a lyrical style, in sentences as beautiful as poetry: "Sometimes at night," Desta's father tells her, "the wind whooshed cold as old bones through the silver blue leaves of the eucalyptus trees outside my home." And Desta—her name means "joy" in Amharic—imagines herself sleeping on the floor, wrapped in a gahbi. For children who were adopted from Ethiopia at older ages, the lives of both Desta and her father may seem familiar.

### **My African Heritage (Kiflom)**

*My African Heritage* is the story of a six year old Ethiopian-Eritrean girl who lives in the United States of American. She introduces her heritage through the various practices of her parents in the United States. The traditions of singing, roasting coffee and New Year's celebrations are highlighted in this story.