



Peace IN THE process

HOW ADOPTION BUILT
MY FAITH & MY FAMILY

KRISTIN HILL TAYLOR

Sample chapter from Kristin Hill Taylor

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How God Chooses & Calls Us

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will — to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ... In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ... When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession — to the praise of his glory.

(Ephesians 1:4-7, 11, 13-14)

I never thought to tell the receptionist we were in the process of adopting Cate when I made her appointment at the local health department to get her four-month immunizations. While checking her in the morning of her appointment, I realized I didn't have the necessary paperwork, most importantly the court order giving us guardianship until Cate's adoption was finalized. Honestly, I never thought to bring it to prove Cate was my daughter even though she didn't officially share my last name yet.

She had been my daughter since she was born, but in reality, well, at least from the government's perspective, it wasn't official. While the health department may be cheaper than the pediatrician's office for immunizations with our health insurance, there's a bit more red tape to maneuver without getting stuck. I reminded myself I was saving at least \$100 – even though it required another appointment the following week with the proper paperwork.

We had to wait on the legal process before Cate could have our last name. I had to prove to the health department she was mine. The whole adoption process gives me perspective on how God adopts us.

Before I knew God, He chose me. Because He chose me, glorious grace is poured into my everyday life and an inheritance is prepared for me. Read Ephesians 1:11 from The Message: “It’s in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone.” Other translations of that verse say we were chosen (NIV), we are united with Christ (NLT), we were made a heritage (ASV), and we have obtained an inheritance (ESV).

We are family. I get that. I didn’t grow Cate in my womb, but we prepared for her and embraced her from the beginning. Greg and I named her and prayed for her before we held her in our arms. We’re grateful for Mandy, who chose life for her, and that God chose her for us.

Cate didn’t have to do anything to be our child. She’s named in our will and was called daughter long before the court recognized her new birth certificate. We chose her in the beginning and we have chosen her every day since. Likewise, God chose me in the beginning and still chooses me today – even when I stumble.

Jesus says people will know we are in His family by our love. Of course, sometimes I don’t do a good job of representing my eternal family name. But this truth is my foundation. And it’s why I was surprised when the health department wanted me to produce some piece of paper to prove Cate was my daughter.

That and many other adoption-related papers lived in a file at home. Not long after, I received another piece of paper that made our reality official. Yes, it was just a piece of paper, but I had waited so long to become a mom that I was relieved when the court considered me one too.

About a week after I became a stay-at-home mom when Cate was four months old, we had our final adoption hearing in the local court, where we knew the judge, considered our attorney our friend, and knew the bailiffs by name, thanks to our jobs. While addressing the judge, I accidentally called him by his first name because that’s how I’d known him months earlier when I wrote a newspaper article about his campaign to be elected the first family court judge in our small town. Our attorney stopped the hearing at one point to take a picture of Cate because she apparently looked especially cute laying on my lap chewing on the stuffed bear the court clerk had given her.

At our next immunization appointment, I proudly told the health department receptionist her name was now officially Catherine Anna Taylor – and, yes, I had a court order to prove it.

I was away from my newsroom desk for six weeks after Cate was born.

My baby girl had a mess of dark hair and long fingers and toes. People often said, “Oh, those long fingers, maybe she’ll play the piano.” Greg has hopes she can palm a basketball. Keeping with the hardwood dream, early on he taught her the modified Kentucky Wildcats cheer that works well with her name. C-A-T-E. Cate. Cate. Cate.

We didn’t plan that (or the fact her initials spell CAT), but it’s a sure way to keep the Hoosier out of her. She really was a Kentucky girl from the beginning. Of course, you have to be a college basketball fan to understand that Wildcat-Hoosier rivalry.

While I was away from my job, three city council meetings were officially in the minutes as I read three novels, usually with Cate by my side. In the 504 hours (including weekends) that I was off work, Cate gained two pounds, bringing her to double-digit weight and moving her up a diaper size.

I left my six-week-old girl home with Greg and I went back to the newsroom in the mornings when my leave was complete. Working at a newspaper that published in the afternoon meant the mornings were hopping. Afternoons were less busy and my bosses let me work at home after lunch. I made phone calls and sent emails, typed stories, and even toted the baby carrier around to informal interviews while Greg went into his office. This arrangement worked well – at least until Cate was mobile.

I wasn’t eager to go back to the job I loved. Six weeks as a momma changed me. But I went back – mostly because I said I would and I needed the health insurance. So back and forth we went, often eating lunch together – our family of three – before one of us went out of the door again. I wondered if this coming and going was really going to be best, but I plugged along and dismissed wonders of what kind of mom I would be if I didn’t have to balance it with a full-time job with sometimes strange hours.

After six weeks back on the job, I really thought about the reality of quitting my job – something my husband had posed before Cate was even born. I didn’t see myself as a stay-at-home mom, so I hadn’t really considered it an option until this point. Greg was thrilled I was entertaining the idea and I was immediately thankful he didn’t push me to stay home even though it would have been his preference from the beginning.

We figured out how to get me health insurance. A diabetic needs insurance, yet the chronic condition can be considered a pre-existing condition, creating hurdles for someone like me trying to get insured. After getting insurance, I gave my editor a month’s notice that I was leaving. It surprised him slightly less than when I phoned in my last-minute request to be off work to meet Mandy about eight months earlier.

Growing up with parents who worked for the local school system and brought home paychecks every other week, giving up my consistent paycheck seemed risky, even with Greg’s efforts to continue growing his law practice well beyond my reporter’s salary. We were a year into Greg’s self-

employment when I told my editor I was leaving. Being my Type-A self who likes the checkbook balanced to the penny, this all made me nervous when I thought too much about the financial aspect. Even so, in my heart, I knew it was right.

God's peace surpassed my understanding again. That provision would have been enough, but then God also provided for us in a financial way we weren't expecting. In addition to practicing law, Greg and his dad had a real estate business of buying, renovating, and selling homes, often ones that were nearing foreclosure. One of those properties sold in March 2007. As the adoption bills came in later that summer, we realized that sale alone would cover the cost of Cate's adoption.

Leaving the newsroom had me thinking about my name again. People say there is much in a name. Mine had often been misspelled, but I haven't always been known by my name alone.

My elementary school label of "Mr. Hill's daughter" wore off as I grew older. But growing up in a small town with a principal as a father and a teacher as mother, being the educators' daughter was how I was known. The label may have contributed to my shyness because I worried I would mess up and disappoint – and my dad was my elementary school principal.

In middle school I started developing a slightly independent identity. But then in high school my aunt was my English teacher both my junior and senior years. I never addressed her by name because I wasn't sure whether to call her Aunt Carolyn or Mrs. Godbey. Either way, other students knew I was "Mrs. Godbey's niece." And just so you know, I got a B in Advanced Placement English at least one of the quarters, so I didn't breeze through my aunt's class.

When I wasn't deciding how to get my aunt's attention those two years, I was in the newspaper office. I spent my senior year as high school newspaper editor, a role that prompted another identity – "Newspaper Editor" – but more importantly served as a springboard to college. When I got to Murray State, hardly anyone knew my name, but I found "The Murray State News." I spent those four years learning about myself. Despite five year's difference in age, my sister and I grew closer. I solidified my love for writing, especially to inform and educate. I made friends I intended to keep for my lifetime. And I met the guy who would become my husband. My collegiate roles were varied, and the labels fewer.

Eight months after I graduated from Murray State, I became Greg's fiancée. And then six months after that, I changed my last name to Taylor. We – now collectively "The Taylors" – spent our first year in Lexington, where we started finding our identity as a couple. Then we moved to Murray, where we've been since August 2003.

Murray is his hometown, but it's also the hometown of our relationship. This is where we met, and this is where we settled. We started our family here and made big decisions about our careers here.

Early on in our time in Murray, I assumed another identity: “Kristin at the Ledger.” In my four years there, I wrote at least 2,175 stories. And that doesn’t include all the court news and police logs I compiled. I laid out pages, snapped pictures, answered more phone calls than I could even tally, and filled in for my editor more than once.

But most of the work in this job happens outside the office, building relationships and learning the community. I covered eighty-eight city council meetings and two murder trials. Each month, I covered regular meetings at city hall, Murray State, Murray-Calloway County Hospital, and CrimeStoppers. And along the way, I kept up with criminal court cases and state politics. Truth be told: I liked my job, my professional identity, more than I ever thought I would. I was pleasantly surprised with the way I became part of the community.

Even so, I knew replacing my pen and notebook with bottles and naptimes was the right thing for me. Cate was only four months old at the time, but she’d already changed me. I fully embraced my new identity as “Cate’s mom,” starting officially after I finished writing about Murray State University’s Board of Regents on my last day as a reporter.

There is much in a name. But there is more to be said about purpose and the way God provides.

Possibly the most ironic part of the health department needing proof she was mine in the beginning was all the other people who have since told me how much we resemble each other. God surprised me over and over again in the best ways throughout Cate’s adoption process, but one of the biggest visible surprises was Cate herself. With an Iranian birth father, we expected her to have olive-toned skin.

Instead people debate whether she looks most like Greg or me. We both have blue eyes; she has gorgeous brown eyes that soak up details. She’s always had defined eyes, which seem to have come from her birth father who we’ve never met. Cate tans well and has always had dark hair. It’s lightened some in recent years, making it closer to Mandy’s hair color.

When people comment on how she looks like me, I pause for a moment because I want to tell them her story, our story. We may not share DNA, but I’m raising a mini-me who was meant to be my daughter.

The similarities go beyond looks. Cate and I are both stereotypical first-borns. She is stubborn, tells detailed stories, likes crafts, loves her friends, wants to have a plan, and has perfectionist tendencies – just like me.

And yet she’s not like me, especially as a child. She’s not afraid of most new things, speaking in front of people doesn’t scare her, she laughs easily, and she wants to play sports. I’m more adventurous as an adult than I ever was as a kid. She makes me proud the way she faces life.

I welcome the similarities because I didn't expect them with adoption. Maybe it's our common dark brown hair that prompts people to say she looks like me. Perhaps it's the skin tone. But it could be the ways she behaves like me. She likes to make her friends cards, especially when they're sad or sick. She likes to help me in the kitchen. She likes to take (and plan!) road trips. And each night before she goes to bed, she asks me what we're doing the next day.

Sometimes I catch myself scolding her for behavior that's just like mine. Ouch. I see my weaknesses in her and cringe, not because she disappoints me but because I disappoint myself and I know she's watching. We both get cranky when we're tired and have been known to break when our plans break.

I watch her live and laugh and write and play and imagine and worry and ponder and plan. And I know that even in my imperfect perfectionist-leaning mothering ways, this girl is one of the best things that's ever happened to me.

Throughout the years, I'm often reminded how Cate – and our other kids who followed – belong in our family. In the fall of 2016, Cate came home from fourth grade full of frustration. It was the same day I listened to “Be Kind to Yourself” by Andrew Peterson for the first time. That song – starting with the title alone – spoke truth into my house and my heart.

“You can't expect to be perfect / It's a fight you've gotta forfeit / You belong to me whatever you do / So lay down your weapon, darling / Take a deep breath and believe that I love you / Be kind to yourself”¹

That afternoon, Cate misplaced a folder with a paper she was supposed to return to school. I know the frustration of knowing you had something but not remembering where you last had it. She was also still missing her best friend who unexpectedly didn't return that year to the school they had shared, and that grief was fresh after a FaceTime conversation earlier in the week. Plus she'd had a little conflict with another classmate during recess.

The frustrations are different for each one of us. We misplace things, overact in our responses to people we love, wish circumstances would change, long for a different season of life, and become overwhelmed with the details of daily life.

Conflicting emotions can rise up when you least expect them. I know how those situations can echo in your heart and the replays often make it worse. Like me, many of Cate's frustrations came from the battles within herself. I fight some of those internal battles myself, so I know the burdens they create. I know the same frustrations that were on her mind that afternoon – or any other

¹ Peterson, Andrew. Be Kind To Yourself. Centricity Music, 2015.

afternoon. I know how being tired magnifies them. I know the personal expectations that are ridiculous and distract from what matters.

It's easy to listen to emotions and lies and expectations. But it's more important to listen to truth. Andrew Peterson's song encompassed a message I've spent years trying to digest. It's the same truth I want my girl – regardless of her age – to hear in her heart and mind when those emotions well up and things are misplaced.

Be kind to yourself. Forfeit the fight to be perfect. Listen to God's truth.

With that message, I think about society and how we hand out participation trophies and tell girls they can be anything they want. That all sounds good – until we've raised a generation that doesn't know how to lose and doesn't recognize that we're all created as individuals with different skills and talents.

At nine years old, Cate was already taller than most Olympic gymnasts, so why would I tell her she can be anything she wants when I know she's not going to become a gymnast or a jockey?

We can't all be anything and everything. We need to be who God created us as individuals to be, always giving our best but recognizing this world doesn't revolve around us.

Adoption reminds me we are chosen and called for reasons we understand better as we draw nearer to our Creator.

God knew when I cried out to him to become pregnant that we would have this story.

A decade after we learned about Cate, I was unpacking boxes from our family's move when a 2006 scrapbook distracted me. I had forgotten all about a letter I'd written to my future baby about what God had taught me through the wait to become a momma. I declared I'd name a baby girl Catherine Anna and listed possibly boy names we never did use. But the best detail? The letter was written in August – about the same time Mandy conceived Cate.

God knew when I scribbled that letter that I would come back to it a decade later and be amazed at His faithfulness. God knew He was going to make us a family through adoption – through THIS adoption. God knew her brown eyes because He created them. He created every single one of her eye lashes and every hair on her head. He knew how she would laugh and that her stories would be long. He knew how we would fit together.

She's taught me nurture trumps nature because biologically speaking she wasn't created within me. But I know without a doubt she was created to be my daughter. I understand her. I yearned for her. I learn from her every day. Her story is my story because through it God rescued my heart.

His works are indeed wonderful. Seems official to me.

This is a sample chapter from "Peace in the Process: How Adoption Built My Faith & My Family" by Kristin Hill Taylor. Learn more at kristinhilltaylor.com or bit.ly/PeaceInTheProcess.