

What Can I do While I Wait? A Self-Assessment Guide for Adoptive Families

When preparing for a special trip, the most important step in creating a successful outcome is the preparation. The preparation can include the mundane details such as making sure you have enough vacation time available from your job, and budgetary considerations to the dreamy, fantasy moments oohing and aahing over travel magazines and imagining yourself unwinding in some far off exotic location.

Certainly your preparation will begin with prayer and seeking God's guidance and travel mercies for your trip. Other preparations will include communication between yourself and your spouse or anyone else who will travel with you. You will also talk to others who have made similar trips to get their advice and hopefully to avoid their mistakes. You will evaluate other trips you have made in the past in order to determine what sort of trip feels right at this time in your life. You will utilize resources such as books, magazines, computerized online travel services, maps, etc. And you will consult with professionals - travel agents, hotel managers, car rental dealers, etc. If it is a special, once in a lifetime trip, you will lavish a great deal of time and attention to the preparation knowing that the outcome will be more than worth it.

So, as you prepare to adopt, it is important to give ample time and attention to the preparation stage. You will find that in the long run, every moment you invest in preparation will pay off handsomely in the ultimate results of a happier and more successful parenting experience. Let us look at preparation in the five significant aspects of our lives: Physical, Mental/Emotional, Social, Spiritual and Financial. Take a look at your self, your surroundings and lifestyle. Consider the following questions independently and with your husband, wife or adult partner who will walk this journey with you.

Then, we will move on to fitting a child and the child's needs into this picture. What adjustments will need to be made? Are you ready and able to make these adjustments? On what aspects of your lifestyle are you flexible? What aspects are you not willing or able to change? Will you be better able to adjust to an infant or an older child?

Physical

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God? Therefore, honor God with your body." I Corinthians 6:19

What is my lifestyle like now? Is it structured and filled with predictable routines? Or is it unpredictable and spontaneous? If my life is based on many routines, how do I react when my routines are interrupted? If I like lots of spontaneity, can I also handle scheduled times for certain activities?

How much sleep do I need? Do I generally get the sleep I need, and what happens if I do not?

What are my eating patterns like? Do I cook a lot of my own meals? Eat out a lot? Snack often, but rarely make meals?

What kind of housekeeper am I? Laid back, messy or a neat-freak? Do I have lots of fragile or special objects in every room of my house? Do I like lots of order, or am I comfortable amid chaos? Do I need a lot of privacy - my own space? Or do I like a lot of open spaces shared with others?

How is my health? Do I take care of my own physical needs? Do I feel I have the stamina and energy to keep up with the needs of a child?

How does a child fit into this picture? Close your eyes. Visualize a day with your child. Picture the room the child will sleep in. What will be served for meals? Will there be a playroom or toys scattered throughout the house?

Make a list of all the physical needs you anticipate a child having and imagine yourself meeting those needs. What changes and adjustments will you need to make in your physical surroundings and lifestyle in order to accommodate the needs of a child? Are you (and your spouse) willing and able to make these adjustments?

What are your long range goals? Can a child be integrated into them?

Mental/Emotional

"Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance." Proverbs 1:9 "Therefore as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another and forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, and whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." Col 3:12 - 17

What are your views on the importance of education? How far did you go with your own education? Do you hope to go farther one day? How will you feel if a child you adopt does not share your values about education? Or is not capable of achieving educationally at the level you had hoped?

Do you like to read a lot? Take classes? Do you have licensure or certification requirements for your job? How much of your time is involved in keeping up with these things?

How do you rate your own personal sense of self worth? Are you a confident person, secure in yourself? Or do you have a lot of unresolved insecurities?

How do you care for your own mental health needs?

What is your definition of parenting? Of a "good mother," a "good father," a "good family life?" How do you anticipate meeting these expectations? How will you feel if you cannot meet these expectations?

How comfortable are you with unknowns? Are you a risk taker? How do you see these issues being relevant to your decision to adopt?

Are you willing and able to seek outside resources to help with challenges you face? When have you done this in your life so far? Where the results satisfactory? Why or why not?

To what extent do other people with whom you have relationships help you meet your own emotional needs? Vice versa?

To what extent do you anticipate a child meeting some of your emotional needs? Are you able to take joy and pride in small successes?

Are you able to laugh at yourself and others and generally enjoy life? Do you consider yourself a serious person?

How much alone time do you generally need? What happens when you cannot get it?

How do you cope with stress? What are your sources of stress? Are you and your partner able to communicate well around stressful issues and concerns?

What is your relationship with extended family? What hopes or expectations do you have for their relationship with your child? How will you feel if these expectations are not met?

Social

"Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils {throughout} the days of his life which God has given him under the sun". Ecclesiastes 8:15

What do you like to do for fun? Do you have hobbies, clubs, activities? How much of your time do you spend in these areas?

Are these activities you can include a child in? If so, with what adjustments? If not, how will having a child impact on your ability to participate in these activities?

What is your neighborhood like? Are there are other families with children in the neighborhood? Do you know the other parents in the neighborhood?

What is the racial and ethnic mix of your neighborhood? How will this impact your decisions around adoption? Do you like to socialize mainly with people that are similar to you in terms of race, religion, lifestyle? Or are you comfortable with diversity?

How do you feel about being perceived as "different"?

Do you like to travel? Vacation? What do you normally do when you have a day or a week off from work?

Are these activities you can do with a child? If yes, with what accommodations? If not, are you prepared to make the necessary adjustments?

Close your eyes and picture yourself on vacation with a child? How does a child fit into this picture?

Spiritual

"Seek first His Kingdom and His Righteousness and all these things will be added unto you." Matthew 6:33

What role does religion play in your life? Are you active in a church, synagogue, temple or community of faith?

How will your view of the importance of a spiritual life change upon the addition of a child in your family?

How does your religious community view family life? Children? Adoption?

How do these views impact your motivations to adopt and/or the type of child you feel most comfortable adopting?

Have you studied God's word and in particular its teachings on caring for vulnerable children and other aspects of family life? Have you sought God's leading and guidance as you embark on this journey and make these decisions?

Does God intend for you to increase your family through adoption, or to care for children in need of families in some other way?

What are your values? What expectations do you have about passing on your values to a child? What impact will it have on you if your child embraces a value system different from your own?

Financial

"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men." Col 3:23 and "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others" I Peter 4:10; and "No one can serve two masters, you cannot serve both God and money." Matthew 6:24

What are the costs involved with various adoption programs you are considering?

How will you need to change your budget to accommodate the needs of a child? What changes will you have to make that will impact you financially upon adopting a child?

Will one parent have to take extended time from work? Does your workplace offer adoption benefits?

Is adoption subsidy an issue you need to look into? What extra financial resources do you expect to need and what sources do you have available to draw upon?

What expectations do you have about what a parent "should" provide for a child financially and materially? How will it impact your ability to feel successful as a parent if you cannot meet these expectations?

These questions are just guidelines to help you think through the multitude of issues, challenges, adjustments and concerns that you may need to cope with upon making the transition into adoptive parenthood. Many of these questions are the same for anyone contemplating becoming a parent, whereas others are more specific to adoption. Answering these questions for yourself and discussing them candidly with your spouse (or another trusted adult

partner traveling the adoption journey with you if you are single) before you begin the homestudy process will help you feel more in control of the process and more empowered to make the decisions that will impact your life and future.

There is no surefire test or formula to help you determine if you are ready to adopt. Hopefully these questions will provide you with the guidance you need to make that determination for yourself. Remember, there are no right answers for everyone, nor are there a set of right answers even for you for your whole life; but there are answers that will be right for you and your family for right now. The other thing to remember is that no one is ever totally prepared to become a parent, or to adopt. You do the best you can to prepare, plan and hedge your bets. Then, the rest of family-making is about love, mystery, grace and hope.