

From
Orphans
to **Heirs**

Celebrating our spiritual adoption

INCLUDES
STUDY GUIDE



MARK STIBBE

Foreword by R.T. Kendall

CHAPTER 1

The Lost Coin

Jesus once told a parable about a lost coin (Luke 15:8–9). It's one of the shortest of his stories and yet it has great significance.

Once upon a time, a woman possessed ten coins. One day, she lost one of the ten. Out of an intense desire to recover it, she then lit a lamp, swept the entire house, and searched carefully until she eventually found it again. As soon as she recovered it, she called her friends and neighbours together and asked them to celebrate with her. All the effort had been worthwhile. Therefore, it was time to have a party.

(MY PARAPHRASE)

Now obviously, in its original context, this little parable is all about lost souls. The chapter as a whole focuses on the lost:

- 1 The Lost Sheep (vv. 1–7)
- 2 The Lost Coin (vv. 8–10)
- 3 The Lost Son (vv. 11–32)

The point Jesus is making in each of these stories is this: God is passionate and intentional about pursuing lost people. He is deeply concerned to go after sinners and to bring them home into his arms of love. Each of these stories reveals the Father's heart for those who do not yet know him. We shall be looking closely at the third of these stories in Chapter 6.

At the same time, the parable of the lost coin speaks to me of something lost to Christian believers over the centuries. I see the woman in the story as an illustration of the Christian church. She has a supply of precious coins, stored away. These coins I liken to the major traditional doctrines of Christian theology. They are like deposits of theological truth given in scripture and then elaborated into statements of faith throughout the centuries. We might see these ten coins as the following:

THE LOST COIN

- 1 The Doctrine of God and Creation
- 2 The Doctrine of Christ and the Spirit
- 3 The Doctrine of the Trinity
- 4 The Doctrine of Man
- 5 The Doctrine of Justification
- 6 The Doctrine of Adoption
- 7 The Doctrine of Sanctification
- 8 The Doctrine of the Word of God
- 9 The Doctrine of the Future
- 10 The Doctrine of the Church

Since the time of the earliest church, these doctrines have been discussed and developed. All, that is, except one. One of these coins has been lost to the church. One of them has received little attention, to the great detriment of believers and the great impoverishment of the church as a whole. As you look at the list, I wonder whether you have spotted the lost coin.

A NEGLECTED TREASURE

For me, the lost coin is the doctrine of spiritual adoption. Of all the ten great doctrines, this is the one that has been lost under the carpet and neglected for nearly two thousand years of church history.

Martin Luther, who rediscovered the great truth that we are justified by faith, did the church a great service. He led people to focus on what Jim Packer calls ‘the foundational blessing of the gospel’¹—that we are made righteous before a holy God by believing that sin’s price has been paid in full on the cross. By believing that Jesus died for my sins, I can say today that it is ‘Just as if I’d never sinned!’ I can say, ‘I’m justified!’

Unfortunately, this same emphasis on justification led to the neglect of what Packer calls ‘the highest blessing of the Gospel’²—that we are adopted as sons and daughters of our heavenly Father through the work of the Holy Spirit. Subsequently, churches have been encouraged to concentrate on the finished work of the cross (justification), but not on the continuing work of the Spirit (adoption). As a result, the doctrine of

spiritual adoption has traditionally been turned into a short postscript in what is seen as the far weightier truth of justification by faith. As one biblical scholar has put it:

*In spite of its importance adoption has failed generally to gain much prominence in the great treatments of systematic and biblical theology. Its discussion frequently ended with an investigation of its relation to regeneration, justification, and sanctification. Consequently it was treated as a minor aspect of the way of salvation.*³

Why has the doctrine of spiritual adoption been so neglected? There are three main reasons. The first has to do with the scarcity of any actual *experience* of what John Wesley called ‘the loving spirit of adoption’ in church history. Such a lack of authentic charismatic experience has had disastrous consequences. Theologians dominated by a Greek rather than a Hebraic way of thinking have, over the centuries, cultivated a religion of the head rather than the heart. As A.W. Tozer once put it:

*The experiential heart theology of a grand army of fragrant saints is rejected in favour of a smug interpretation of Scripture which would have sounded strange to an Augustine, a Rutherford or a Brainerd.*⁴

What an amazing statement that is! Over the centuries, many of the great teachers of the church have produced a theology that has brought light to the head but not heat to the heart. It is this tragic lack of what Tozer calls an ‘experiential heart theology’ that lies behind the neglect of the doctrine of spiritual adoption. In other words, a lack of openness to the actual experience of the Holy Spirit has led to a widespread ignorance concerning the joy, liberty and intimacy of adopted sonship. Only during times of revival will you find any rigorous teaching about spiritual adoption. Thus it is people like Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley and Charles Spurgeon who preach and write about adoption, and they do that first and foremost because they *experienced* the ‘loving spirit of adoption’⁵ during seasons of the Spirit.

The second reason has to do with the church’s difficulties concerning

predestination and free will. At this point I want to own up to my own personal investment in this book. You see, I am an adopted child. My twin sister and I spent our first few months in an orphanage in Hackney, North London. When we were adopted, Philip and Joy Stibbe took us out of that orphanage and brought us home to live with them. When all this happened, the truth of the matter is that Philip (and my mother Joy) chose us. We did not choose them (we were only infants, after all!)

When God adopted us into his family the Bible says that he ‘predestined us to be adopted as his sons’ and that this divine choice took place ‘before the creation of the world’ (Ephesians 1:4–6). In other words, the Father decided in advance that he would adopt us. He made up his mind before the foundation of the universe that he would choose some of us out of the orphanage of this world to be his sons and daughters. If you are a Christian—born again by the Spirit of God—then that is because the Father chose you to be his child. He decided that he wanted you in his family before he flung the stars into space. What a great privilege that is!

At the same time, there is an apparent down side to this truth. For many there is something rather scandalous about God choosing some and not choosing others to be adopted as his sons and daughters. It is this nervous apprehension over the doctrine of predestination that has, I believe, contributed towards the neglect of our spiritual adoption. For a great number of people, the notion of ‘supernatural selection’ seems as ruthless as Darwin’s idea of ‘natural selection’.

A third reason why the doctrine of adoption has been something of a lost coin is because our translations of the Bible have often concealed this truth from us. Recently I spoke to a group of Swedish students in Stockholm. My subject was spiritual adoption. I took them through the five New Testament passages where the word ‘adoption’ occurs. In every case, their Swedish translations had failed to render the Greek word *huiothesia* as ‘adoption’. For this reason alone the doctrine of spiritual adoption was new to them.

Even some of our English translations are guilty of obscuring the great glory of spiritual adoption. The New International Version (NIV) translates Romans 8:15 as follows: ‘For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear but you received the Spirit of sonship’. The

word translated ‘sonship’ is the Greek word *huiiothesia*, meaning adoption. Here is the NIV translation of Galatians 4:5–6: ‘But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons’. The phrase ‘full rights of sons’ is a translation of *huiiothesia*, which most recent researchers insist should be translated ‘adoption’.⁶ In translating *huiiothesia* as ‘sonship’ rather than the more accurate and accessible word ‘adoption’, some of our versions of the Bible have unwittingly contributed to the demise of this particular doctrine in the church.

Here then are three reasons why the church has left the lost coin under the carpet. The first has to do with our resistance to the experience of the fire of the Father’s love. The second has to do with our tendency to shy away from anything that smacks of predestination. The third has to do with inadequate translations of the word *huiiothesia*. During the course of this book I am going to question these three issues. My thesis is that the doctrine of adoption needs to be restored to a place of honour among the great truths of the church. When you consider that there are five places in Paul’s letters alone where the word *huiiothesia* is used, it seems extraordinary that this should need to be said. There are only two passages where being ‘born again’ is mentioned, yet no Bible-believing Christian questions the importance of regeneration!

I firmly believe that it is time for the church to use the light of the Spirit’s revelation, to sweep through God’s word and to search diligently for the lost coin of spiritual adoption. Without this doctrine, we will always be incompletely initiated into the kingdom of God. We will enjoy the foundational blessing of the gospel without experiencing its highest blessing. We will believe that we are born again and that we are children of God, but we will lack the actual experience of sonship and daughterhood that enables us to cultivate a lifelong relationship of intimacy with our Father in heaven. This should not be allowed to go on any longer, otherwise there will always be a tendency for us to live as slaves rather than sons.

In the remainder of this first chapter I would like to offer you three reasons why it is essential for all believers to understand and experience the ‘loving spirit of adoption’:

It enriches our image of God

I don't know what your image of God is, but I can say this with some confidence—many believers never move on from an image of God as a punitive judge. When I was converted at the age of seventeen, I asked Jesus Christ to come into my life to be my Saviour. I did this primarily because a quiet voice inside my heart had said, 'Mark Stibbe, if you died tonight, where would you stand before the judgment seat of Christ?' I realized at that moment that I was a sinner, that I was in desperate danger while I was outside the boundaries of God's love, and that there was a great urgency to repent.

What happened next is recorded in my book, *Thinking Clearly About Revival*.⁷ However, what I didn't say there was that my image of God for the first few years of my Christian life was that he was a stern judge, not a loving father. I was taught to fear God, but not to love him. The net result of this was that I started to live a life of legalism rather than a life of love. However hard I tried, I couldn't live up to God's standards. I functioned as a slave rather than as a son. The main reason was because of a deficient image of God.

Many people suffer from this and indeed some never escape from it. If we are to be set free we must move from a place where we fear God to a place where we can love him as well. For this to occur, we must allow the Holy Spirit to flood our hearts with the revelation of God as 'Abba, Father'. In other words, we need the loving spirit of adoption to penetrate the deepest places of our lives and to bring about a divine disclosure of the true nature of God. In short, we need to move from slavery to sonship.

Once upon a time, a couple wanted to adopt a child. After careful research, an adoption society gave them the name of a child who might be suitable. The backgrounds of both the child and the adopting parents were then carefully checked before the child was brought to their home to see if he felt comfortable with the prospective parents. At the end of that trial period, they were all assessed for suitability and then invited to a local courtroom.

The adopting parents sat in the courtroom looking up at the judge on his platform. He looked at them with the sternest expression and spoke in the gravest of tones.

‘I have not yet signed my name on this certificate of adoption. Up until now you have had a choice whether to say yes or whether to say no to this child. If I sign this piece of paper, then this child will be yours for ever. There will be no going back. According to the law of this state, it will be as if he is your natural son. Now you don’t have any idea how he is going to turn out. He could turn to drugs. He could cost you everything. Now consider. Do you want me to sign this certificate?’

The adopting parents said, ‘Yes.’

At this moment, the judge came down from the platform and, with tears in his eyes, handed them the signed certificate. He looked at them and said, ‘You have made a wonderful decision, and I can say that with certainty because I too have an adopted son.’

Did you see what happened in that story? The judge came down from the high, intimidating and remote place, stepped forward and revealed himself as a loving, adopting father!

Now I submit to you that many Christians still live with a picture of God as a stern judge who speaks in grave tones. Consequently, the whole of their Christian lives is spent in the courtroom. Every morning they dutifully have their quiet times, but these times are spent in the dock dealing with the gnawing guilt of having failed in ways both small and great.

If you are such a person, then you need to have a revelation of God as he truly is. You need to see him step down from that remote place and disclose himself as a ‘dad’. Once that happens, you will no longer be a slave but a son or a daughter. You will no longer be in the courtroom with a judge, you’ll be in the living-room with the Father. Oh yes, you will still have a holy fear of God. But more than anything, you will know him as a Father who is passionate about intimacy with you, and this truth will become the basis for everything you are and do.

It enriches our experience of God

This is the second reason why we so desperately need a better grasp of our adoption. It is at this point that I want to return to a point I made earlier about the neglect of the experiential dimension to Christianity. The truth is that there are many believers who have a dutiful relationship with God based on the scriptures, but there are not so many who have a joyful

relationship with him based on the Spirit. Indeed, there are even fewer who are men and women of both the word and the Spirit, of doctrine and experience, scripture and the power of God (Matthew 22:29).

A few months ago I went to one of our St Andrew's satellite churches to bless the handing on of the leadership from a couple called George and Margaret to a younger couple, Martin and Judy. After the morning service, Martin handed George and Margaret a certificate of adoption. On this piece of paper, which he had designed himself, Martin stipulated that George and Margaret were now adopted as parents. From this moment on, George and Margaret were to be treated as members of Martin and Judy's family.

Not surprisingly, the certificate of adoption caught my attention and I mentioned after the service to Martin that it would be wonderful to have a certificate of spiritual adoption to hand to those who had come to know God as Father during my sermon series on slavery and sonship (a series that forms the backbone of this book). He said that he would design one, and we have been using it ever since.

That same evening at St Andrew's a number of us met before the 6.15pm service in order to seek the Lord and to ask him to reveal his plans and desires for the meeting. At the very end of this time, a young man (who had not been present at the morning events) gave this word: 'There is someone here tonight who is going to receive their certificate of spiritual adoption.' As he said this, my eyes opened, George nearly fell off his seat, and Margaret and I looked at each other with excitement.

At the conclusion of the service, we invited people to come forward to receive prayer from our ministry team at St Andrew's. I went to the door in order to say goodbye to all those who had come. After standing there only a few minutes, a man in his sixties came and asked if he could have a word with me. My normal practice is never to leave the entrance in order to focus on just one person but to make sure that I make contact with everyone. However, something in my spirit compelled me to say yes, so I sat down with this gentleman in the foyer of the church. He then related his story.

He told me that he was a pastor from another part of England who had travelled hours in order to be with us that night. He shared how he had been on sabbatical for four months and how he had been seeking the

Lord during that time for a touch of the Holy Spirit. He mentioned that his whole ministry had been a ministry of the word but not the Spirit, and that he had never experienced the reality of God's power in twenty-five years of church leadership. However, prior to going on sabbatical he had started teaching his church members that they needed to know the power of God as well as the scriptures. He also informed them that he was going to use his four months leave as a time for asking God to fill him with his Holy Spirit. A number of people left the church in protest, but the pastor persevered. He wanted his congregation to be charismatic as well as conservative. He exhorted them to use the four months of his absence in order to be filled with the Holy Spirit themselves.

As he looked at me, I could tell that there was genuine desperation in his heart. He told me that this was the last Sunday before returning to work and that he still hadn't experienced the fire of God. So I took him to the front and, together with George and Margaret, I began to pray for him. After a few moments I recalled the word that had been given in the prayer meeting before the service and I said, 'Tonight, brother, you are going to receive your certificate of spiritual adoption.' At that moment, he started swaying and repeating the words, 'Oh, that's lovely.' This continued for a few moments before he was overwhelmed by the Spirit. He lay on the ground for a few moments before Margaret touched his lips with her hand. Immediately he started speaking in tongues. The new language he used to praise his Father in heaven was extraordinarily beautiful.⁸

You see the point? It's not just that adoption enriches our image of God, it also enriches our experience of God. As the spirit of adoption is released without restraints in our hearts, so we begin to experience the glorious freedom of the children of God. We are impacted by amazing grace and, in response, we are set free to adore the Father with a language as simple as a child's! Though we may not experience precisely the same phenomena as this pastor, we will be free to know God as Father.

It enriches our service of God

This is perhaps the final, compelling motivation for exploring and experiencing our spiritual adoption. Most Christians desire to serve God in some capacity or another. But not every Christian who serves God does

so from the right foundation. Many serve as slaves rather than as sons and daughters.

One of the reasons for this lies in the childhood experiences of Christian believers. Some members of our churches had fathers who were either physically or emotionally absent at a key point in their lives. This means that they find the idea of God as a loving Father very difficult to understand. Their sense of rejection and abandonment by their earthly father leads to a sense of mistrust in their heavenly Father. They can never quite believe that God is a Father who loves them, accepts them and is always there for them. Thus, instead of basing their Christian service on the knowledge of God's favour and faithfulness, they become driven people, always trying to earn God's acceptance and attract his attention through good works.

Recently, I was speaking about spiritual adoption at a conference. A lady called Barbara came up to the platform after my talk and shared her story. She told us how her mother had died on Barbara's first birthday and how she had then been adopted by an elderly couple. When she was ten years old, she was informed about her past and told that she was an adopted child. She was also asked never to mention this again.

Later on in her life, Barbara became a committed Christian and later a minister's wife. However, her infant experience of rejection and her subsequent upbringing radically affected her ability to relate to God. From the moment that she was told about her adoption onwards, Barbara found that she was always under a burden to please her adoptive parents and couldn't bear the thought of letting them down in any way. This had a negative impact on her life as a minister's wife because she was always striving to be accepted by the people in her church and would constantly worry about the slightest sign of rejection (particularly in church business meetings).

Not long ago, however, Barbara went away for the weekend on a retreat designed to help people find wholeness through Christ. During a meeting, a woman who had never met her before came up to her and shared these words: 'You have been doubting that you are a child of God. I want to tell you—you are God's darling daughter!' That had a profound effect on Barbara and she has had a sense of her daughterhood in God's eyes

ever since. No longer does she strive to earn the Father's approval and acceptance through performance. She now daily lives in the revelation that she is accepted and loved by Abba, Father.

Here is another story, this time from a woman in our church called Jane, who is currently serving the Lord as a Christian missionary in Pakistan. This also reflects how the Spirit of adoption enriches our service of God.

If we have received good teaching in our local church fellowship, we know a lot of things about God: that he is a loving Father; that we have become his children, never to be forsaken or abandoned. But our relationship with our earthly father and the various circumstances of our lives, mean that in our hearts—from where the core realities flow—we actually believe and act out in our lives a very different message about God.

My Christian life has been a journey to know God as he really is. I committed my life to Jesus Christ after hearing a talk entitled, 'Can God be known?' It connected with my deep-felt need for a personal relationship with a God who, knowing me completely, loved me and accepted me, and through the gift of his Son, invited me into an intimate, growing relationship.

The reality, however, for many years was very different. God was someone I had to keep on the right side of, who was intolerant of mistakes and before whom I needed to earn acceptance.

When I was seven years old, I had a serious operation. I was in hospital for several weeks and afterwards was sent to a convalescent home in a different part of the country for three months. Both experiences were very traumatic for me. My parents were only allowed to visit me once a fortnight for two hours. The sight of them disappearing behind the iron gates of the lift is a powerful memory. Through my internal lens the whole experience was characterized by unkindness, injustice, loneliness and a sense of abandonment. It left me with an inner determination never to put myself in a situation where I could experience that kind of pain again.

I never realized that its effects were still present in my life until January 1995. I had spent many weeks at the end of services just weeping. I didn't really understand what was happening except that I

felt broken inside and that I was crying out to God from the depths of my heart. Looking back I believe God was softening my heart, melting the self-protective shell, so that he could bring further healing.

During a retreat at St Andrew's Church, Chorleywood, God moved powerfully in my life, especially during the times of worship. I got to the point where I didn't want any more and was ready to close down on God. But through the tears I recognized that life was nothing without him and that I wanted his will for my life. I found myself having to face the pain of that sense of abandonment that had taken root all those years ago and throw myself on God. It felt like jumping off a cliff not knowing if I would land safely, but finding the overwhelming love and faithfulness of God.

The healing that God gave has brought me into a place of greater intimacy with him. Living as a single woman in a Muslim country requires me to be secure in who I am and to have a source of deep affirmation. The Christian life is not essentially about having an emotional experience, but if I do not feel God's love daily, this is less than what my Father intends and has made provision for. Being with God is now my most secure place. In his presence I receive renewed strength and purpose to reach out to others who themselves need to know that they are not rejected or abandoned people but those who have a Father who puts infinite value on our lives and who has adopted us into his family.

This very moving testimony gives us a wonderful picture of how the loving spirit of adoption releases us from the wounds of the past and liberates us into serving the Father with hearts made whole. Knowing that she is adopted, accepted and affirmed by the Father has set Jane free to serve God in a very demanding mission field. Like all those who have experienced the grace of spiritual adoption, Jane serves the Lord out of gratitude rather than guilt. Instead of trying to earn God's acceptance through her ministry, she begins with the knowledge that she is an adopted daughter of the glorious Father. This is the basis of her identity, the source of her security, and the motivation for her ministry. Knowing and experiencing one's spiritual adoption is therefore of critical importance. It enriches our image of God, our experience of God, and our

service of God. Indeed, in the case of the last of these, the adopted child of God is truly the one who discovers perfect freedom.

THE LOST COIN

In his recent book *The Theology of the Apostle Paul* (1998), Jimmy Dunn highlights the importance of the concept of adoption in Paul's theology. He sees significance in the similarities in Paul's language in the following two verses:

Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.'

GALATIANS 4:6

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'

ROMANS 8:15

Why are the similarities between these two verses so revealing? Here is Dunn:

The fact that Paul makes such a similar reference in letters to two different churches (only one of which he knew personally) is a clear enough indication that the sense of sonship, both experienced in and expressed through the 'Abba' prayer, was common in most churches of the diaspora.⁹

Dunn is surely making a valid point here. That Paul could talk in such a similar way to two different churches proves the centrality of adoption in his theology and experience. However, having made this point, it is extraordinary that Dunn only mentions the concept of adoption on two pages in the whole of his book (which is 800 pages in length)! For Dunn to demonstrate how important a concept is and then only look at it twice seems strange to me.

Once again I am led to say that *the doctrine of adoption is the lost coin of*

Christian theology. It has been overshadowed and obscured by our focus on the doctrine of justification. Earlier I quoted Jim Packer’s remark that the main reason for this has been the tendency of those after Luther to emphasize justification by faith to the neglect of adoption through the Spirit. In his classic book, *Knowing God*, Packer contrasts justification and adoption thus:

Justification is a forensic idea, conceived in terms of law, and viewing God as judge. In justification, God declares of penitent believers that they are not, and never will be, liable to the death that their sins deserve, because Jesus Christ, their substitute and sacrifice, tasted death in their place on the cross.

But contrast this, now, with adoption. Adoption is a family idea, conceived in terms of love, and viewing God as father. In adoption, God takes us into his family and fellowship, and establishes us as his children and heirs. Closeness, affection and generosity are at the heart of the relationship. To be right with God the judge is a great thing, but to be loved and cared for by God is a greater.¹⁰

Recently, Clark Pinnock has been restating Packer’s argument. Pinnock has written the following:

Martin Luther’s experience of salvation as justification has skewed the Christian understanding somewhat towards legal terms. Emphasis has been placed on the sinner’s change of status, from guilty to not guilty, rather than on personal union with God. While Luther caught an aspect of the truth, a more relational model is required. Spirit is leading us to union—to transforming, personal, intimate relationship with the triune God.¹¹

In actual fact, Pinnock is being too hard on Luther. While it is true that Luther’s followers emphasized justification and neglected adoption, Packer rightly states that ‘Luther’s grasp of adoption was as strong and clear as his grasp of justification’.¹² It has been the post-Lutheran evangelicals, then, who have neglected the doctrine of adoption. Indeed, Packer shows that

even the Puritans failed to highlight the truth of our adoption adequately. As I have already revealed, it is only in seasons of the Spirit (i.e. revivals) that the doctrine of adoption has been given its rightful place. In those contexts, the driving force for this has been the actual experience of adoption in the lives of believers.

A time to celebrate

The parable of the lost coin ends with a party. Jesus says that when the woman found the coin, she called her friends and neighbours together and said, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' This note of rejoicing is strong in Luke 15 as a whole. When the shepherd finds his lost sheep, he calls his friends and neighbours together in order to rejoice with him. When the lost son comes home, his father says, 'Let's have a feast and celebrate!' Whenever a single sinner comes to a place of repentance, Jesus says there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God.

Recently, a man in his early sixties called Allan started attending St Andrew's with his wife, Jenny. They came to our Alpha course and, as a result, committed their lives to Jesus Christ. One morning—shortly after the Alpha course—Allan came down for a cup of tea and a prayer. As he did so, the Holy Spirit led him to write a poem.

Before you read this poem, let me just say that Allan had never written a poem before this. He is not a sophisticated man of letters, by his own admission. Yet the Lord gave this wonderfully down-to-earth man a prophetic insight into the Father's heart, and he has given permission for me to share it with you. This is what the Holy Spirit led him to write:

*I was lost in the wilderness but not alone,
When the voice of my Father said I must atone.
'Come walk with me and you will see
How I, your Father, can set you free.*

*Each step of the way I will be your guide,
I will never fail to be at your side.
When trouble comes and burdens you,
I will lighten the load as I always do.*

*So walk with me, my friend, my son,
Empty your heart of a past that's done.
Ask forgiveness, I will forgive.
Ask for a new life, I'll let you live.*

*Don't be afraid of the changes I make;
I will only make them for your sake.
But you must also do your part,
And keep me safely in your heart.*

*And remember this I say to you,
I shall watch over all that you do.
Go forward now, I've set you free—
Free to always be with me.'*

From Orphans to Heirs is a celebration of the rediscovery of a lost coin. It is a call to celebrate the fact that the Father has adopted us as his sons and daughters. It is a summons to enjoy the highest blessing of the gospel. It is an invitation to make merry over the glorious truth that we do not need to live as slaves, striving to earn the Father's acceptance through good works. We already have that acceptance and we can know it through the power of the Holy Spirit.

My prayer is this: that you will take hold of this lost coin, brush the dust off it, and study it carefully. On one side of it you will find a picture of one far greater than any monarch—the High King of Heaven, your heavenly 'Abba'. As you study this portrait, I pray that the Holy Spirit will reveal something of the light of the Father's countenance as he smiles at you, his beloved, adopted child. I pray that you will see the words engraved around the edge of this coin: 'The Father himself loves you' (John 16:27).

On the other side of the coin you will see the cross, the means by which the Father's love was demonstrated. You will see the currency of heaven's mercy—not sterling, yen, roubles or dollars, but the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A time to love

At the same time, my prayer is that the loving Spirit of adoption would not only cause you to fall in love with the Father. My prayer is that the same Spirit will also give us a greater compassion for the fatherless generation whose heart cry is audible everywhere today.

In Britain today, there are 50,000 children in care, 10,000 of them in residential homes. Local councils are spending 500 million pounds to keep them there rather than finding suitable parents who might adopt them. The reason for this is because adoption has become the last resort today. It is seen as a final option rather than something positive.

The British Agency for Adoption and Fostering has found that some local authorities are failing to make any adoptions at all. Whereas in the 1970s 21,000 children were being adopted each year, today the number is just 2,000. While the number of children being committed to care is increasing by approximately five per cent each year, the number of children being adopted is dramatically decreasing. In many local authorities, children are being denied the opportunity of being brought up in a loving family atmosphere because of the colour of their (or their parents') skin. Not only is this desperately unfair for the many unadopted children in our nation. It is also producing a fatherless generation bent on crime. Indeed, children who spend long periods in care are fifty times more likely to end up in prison as those who don't. They make up 26 per cent of the adult prison population.

As you read this book, my hope is that we will not only learn to love the Lord our God with a fresh passion. My hope is that we will also receive an increase in compassion for those who don't know this love. There are many literal orphans who need to know that God is a father to the fatherless. There are even more spiritual orphans who need to know this. May the Lord not only restore the Great Commandment to his church. May he also restore the Great Commission.

The key to our liberation as Christians is the biblical image of spiritual adoption. So often we continue to live as spiritual orphans, forgetting that thanks to the saving work of Jesus we have been made sons and daughters of God. *From Orphans to Heirs* explores this image of adoption, much neglected as a way of understanding our salvation, yet crucial in an age when so many people are searching for intimacy. Mark Stibbe also shares his own story of growing up as an adopted child and the insights his experiences gave him into the heart of God, our adopting Father.

**'Destined to become a spiritual classic
for the 21st century church'** *J. John*

'A must for this fatherless generation' *Mike Pilavachi*

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Mark Stibbe is Vicar of St Andrew's Church, Chorleywood, one of the UK's centres of charismatic renewal. While he has written many books, *From Orphans to Heirs* represents his own life's message. He is one of the world's leading preachers of the message of the Father's love. This book has helped thousands of people all over the world to experience the Father's embrace.



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