

A curly red-headed orphan with freckles and a spunky spirit has captivated audiences around the world since the musical *Annie* debuted on Broadway in 1977. Annie's story is a tale of redemption and transformation as the 11-year-old without a father ends up being adopted by one of the richest and most influential men in America, "Daddy" Warbucks. I remember watching *Annie* as a child, loving the songs, and especially wondering how it would feel to be Annie—both the orphan at the beginning and the heiress at the end. Just thinking of the emotional changes throughout the story is enough to make one realize the difference having a father can make in someone's life. Annie's adoption really does change everything for her.

And the same is true for those of us who have been adopted by our Heavenly Father: Our adoption really does change everything! In many ways adoption is the heartbeat of Christianity, the fundamental way we understand our relationship with God through Jesus Christ. J.I. Packer wrote of the significance of our adoption in his book *Knowing God*:

"You sum up the whole of the New Testament teaching in a single phrase, if you speak of it as a revelation of the Fatherhood of the holy Creator. In the same way, you sum up the whole of New Testament religion if you describe it as the knowledge of God as one's holy Father. If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. ... Our understanding of Christianity cannot be better than our grasp of adoption. ... (Adoption) is the highest privilege the gospel offers."

The Scriptures are full of descriptions of our adoption, and there are many angles from which to appreciate its many brilliant facets. In this article, though, I want to let Annie and some of her memorable songs help us to focus on the difference that having God as our Father makes in real life, in everyday situations we have all faced, and in common emotions we have all felt. How does this doctrinal truth actually transform our lives? How does adoption change everything for us?

"It's the Hard-Knock Life": Facing Sin and Guilt

Annie and her fellow orphans describe very well the miserable existence they have in their orphanage—where poor treatment and empty bellies combine to make them want to give up and "throw the towel in" many days. The greatest pain of their situation, however, is the lack of interest and affection they receive from any other person in their lives. As they sing, "No one cares for you a smidge, when you're in an orphanage! It's the hard-knock life!" We can hear the pain in their voices—the pain of separation from their parents and the starving for someone to care for them as much as for someone to feed them.

God's Word tells us that our situation was even bleaker before God became our Father. It wasn't always that way, Paul tells the Ephesians in chapter 2; rather, you were born as "children of wrath." We lived to fulfill our own passions and desires, and our sin separated us from a holy God. Far from being his beloved children, we find out in Romans 5 that we were alienated from God as his enemies! Like the children in the orphanage, we had many

problems in life, but the worst part was that we had no one to fix all our problems, no one to care for us and provide for us.

The good news of the Gospel, however, is that God intervened to fix our problems, that it is exactly those enemies who were far away from God that He has brought near to Himself through the sacrifice of Jesus. Jesus paid the full penalty for our sin so that nothing would separate us from God anymore and we could know the intimacy of relationship with Him as our Father. In fact, Jesus redeemed us so that we could receive “adoption as sons” (Galatians 4:5).

So, how does that change how we deal with our sin and guilt? We know all too well the reality of sin in our lives—the thoughts we’re ashamed to admit we’ve had, the words we wish we could take back, the actions we’re glad we didn’t get caught doing. All sins considered, our guilt is enough to make us despair when we slow down and the weight of it begins to settle on us. Perhaps even worse is that we can’t fix our problem, so as orphans there really is seemingly no hope for us as guilty sinners. That guilt can be devastating!

But when we remember that our Heavenly Father has adopted us, that means our sin has been paid for and our guilt removed. He has fixed our sin problem permanently so that nothing (even our sin) can separate us from his love in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:35-39)! We still battle with sin, but our adoption reminds us we always have hope because of God’s forgiveness rather than despair because of our guilt. As parents, we often remind our children that we love them even when they disobey. We love them not because of their obedience but because they are our children. If you trust Jesus to pay the full penalty for your sins, then your Heavenly Father loves you even when you disobey because you’re his child. Still sinful but guilty no more, you are free to hope and able to smile again.

“You Won’t Be an Orphan For Long”: Facing Loneliness

What’s more, knowing God’s love like that means you’re never alone. In a day and age where it seems no one could ever be isolated or alone because millions of people are only a click away, our struggle for intimacy in deep, honest relationship is epidemic; people report feeling lonelier than ever, even surrounded by other people. Broken family relationships are the order of the day—not just spouses with each other but parent and child as well. Have you had those feelings or experiences? Have you wondered if anyone who really knows you actually loves you and would actually choose to be in relationship with you? Have you felt the pain of broken family relationships and assumed that you could never be really close with anyone, that no love would really last?

It’s certainly easy to feel these emotions as an orphan—to feel that there’s no one who would pick you or want you, to feel that there’s no love strong enough to stay in close relationship with you. Annie sings of those feelings of loneliness. But even before she is adopted, the staff at the Warbucks home tells her that something is about to change because Daddy Warbucks loves her. The reason “You Won’t Be an Orphan For Long” is the nature of the man who loves her: “Tomorrow morning it begins / You’re with a man who always wins / Trust him and he’ll prove / Mountains easily move / Oh, you won’t be an orphan / No, you won’t be an orphan for long!”

Nothing could stop the powerful and passionate Daddy Warbucks from adopting Annie, and nothing can stop the almighty and ever-faithful Creator of heaven and earth from adopting us as his own! Ephesians 1 tells us that his love has been pursuing intimate relationship with us since before the creation of the world: “In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ” (1:5). That’s been God’s plan all along, and the Bible is the story of how He has literally moved heaven and earth to re-establish relationship with us, to adopt us as his children.

A love like that, is one that never ends, that nothing can thwart, that never turns its gaze off us onto something or someone else. “Behold what manner of love the Father has given to us that we should be called sons of God – and that is what we are!” (I John 3:1-2). It’s a powerful thing to know the love of a parent “no matter what.” But human parents are imperfect—our love is not always consistent and unconditional—and even the best parents will die. Relationships here break. We’re never fully safe, and so we often feel isolated and alone.

But God’s love is unconditional and permanent. He has made us his sons through Jesus Christ. It’s a kind of love we can hardly imagine, one where nothing we do, not even death itself can break our relationship (Romans 8:38-39). Daddy Warbucks was powerful and passionate, but our God is almighty and ever-faithful. His love never fails, so we are never alone.

“I Think I’m Gonna Like It Here”: Facing Trials and Suffering

One of the most memorable scenes in the musical occurs when Annie first tours the Warbucks mansion. Having come from the squalid orphanage, everything she sees is a study in contrast: new clothes, silk sheets, swimming pool, tennis courts ... “I think I’m gonna like it here,” Annie easily concludes. The material opulence is certainly stunning, but the most striking contrast of the whole scene is the people who now care about her: instead of the single selfish Miss Hannigan, she now has a staff full of servants whose great desire and first priority is caring for her. If the hardest part of being an orphan was no one caring a smidge, it appears the best part of being adopted will be knowing someone always cares deeply.

After hearing the staff tell her how they intend to wait on her hand and foot, Annie sings, “I know I’m gonna like it here / Used to room in a tomb / Where I’d sit and freeze / Get me now, holy cow / Could someone pinch me please?” As the story unfolds, we certainly learn that all the riches in the world are not going to insulate Annie from some difficult life events. But what becomes immediately clear is that she will always have someone on her side, someone who will never let her “sit and freeze” even in the darkest and coldest of times.

All the way back to the serpent in the Garden of Eden, mankind has been tempted to doubt God’s goodness, to wonder if our Heavenly Father really has our best interest at heart. And there is perhaps no time we struggle with those doubts so much as during suffering—when

things in life aren't going the way we want and we can't imagine a God who really loves us would want them this way either.

How does laying hold of the reality that God is our Father transform those painful and doubt-filled situations? It doesn't take away all the pain and doubts – those are still real and difficult this side of heaven—but it does assure us that God is for us, that He always has our best interest in mind, and that even our suffering comes through his kind and loving hand.

In Matthew 7:9-11, Jesus talks to earthly fathers about the Heavenly Father: “Which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” Knowing the goodness of his Father enabled Jesus in the midst of terrible suffering and deep angst in the Garden of Gethsemane to cry out, “Abba, Father!” and know his Father would hear, understand, and care—even if He still had to drink the bitter cup.

Paul reminds us in Romans and Galatians that God has given us his Spirit so that we have the confidence to cry out “Abba, Father!” in the dark times, too. No matter what trial we face, our adoption into God's family means we have a Father who cares, a Father who will not leave us alone, a Father who intends even the bitter cups for our ultimate good. When the doubts arise, we can rest confidently in the goodness of a Father who has *not* spared his only Son so that He *could* spare us, so that He could have us in his family. Will He then throw us to the wolves, or will He lovingly care for us no matter what comes our way?

“I Don't Need Anything But You”: Facing Insecurity and Need

Daddy Warbucks and Annie sing this catchy tune toward the end of the show, and it serves to highlight the incredible fulfillment their relationship provides for each of them. My favorite description of the dynamic in the relationship comes when Annie sings, “I'm poor as a mouse,” and Warbucks responds, “I'm richer than Midas.” Together they then sing, “But nothing on earth / Could ever divide us / And if tomorrow I'm an apple-seller, too / I don't need anything but you!”

What a beautiful picture of the way we relate to our God – that we come to Him with immense need and find his riches immeasurable and ultimately fulfilling. Indeed, nothing can separate us from our Father, and He is the one our souls long for who is all that we need! God's fatherly provision, then, is certainly a helpful reminder in the midst of material need—He will not let his children go hungry!—but what other things do we find ourselves needing?

We long for validation, don't we? We crave someone telling us we're pretty enough, cool enough, smart enough, godly enough. You can pick the word, but we are all insecure and find ourselves hunting around for fulfillment and security in all sorts of places, especially the opinions of ourselves and others. We want someone to validate us, to tell us we're OK, we're significant, we're worthwhile.

We exhaust ourselves hoping our bosses will look at our performance and our output (at least the parts they get to see) and tell us we're worthwhile employees. We exhaust ourselves hoping our friends will look at our kids and our homes (at least the parts we put on Facebook) and tell us we're worthwhile mothers. We exhaust ourselves hoping our congregations will look at our sermons and our caring and tell us we're worthwhile pastors. And besides leaving us exhausted, what this dynamic produces in our lives is constant busyness in an effort to live up to the standards of others or what we perceive those standards to be.

We're just like Annie when she still lived in the orphanage as we try to impress every potential "parent" with our cuteness, wit, and charm in hopes that someone will pick us and validate us. Now imagine the difference for Annie once Warbucks adopts her. Because she knows she is secure in his love and provision, she doesn't need to seek validation from anyone else; she doesn't need anyone else to "pick" her. She finds everything she needs in relationship with him.

There's no question that our Heavenly Father provides and is all that we need. We know that theoretically. But what our cycles of validation-seeking exhaustion show us is how much we struggle to be satisfied with this. We know in our heads that the approval and acceptance of God is enough, but our hearts chase after the approval and acceptance of 500 more audience members every day so we can be certain that we're worthwhile and secure. We know in our heads that God will provide our daily bread, but we surely feel more secure about it with an extra \$500 in the bank account.

Open God's Word and review your adoption papers regularly. Remind your approval-seeking heart that the God of the universe thinks you're worthwhile, valuable, and worthy of his approval because of Jesus. Remind yourself that He is your kind Father who will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19). Remind yourself that He sings over you like Daddy Warbucks over Annie. And then moment by moment, struggle to believe that it's true—that you really are secure and don't need anything but Him. You may begin to find yourself exhausted less, fulfilled more, and giving to others rather than seeking to draw something from them—in other words, living like a child of the King who is secure in Him alone.

"Tomorrow": Facing Eternity

There's no denying the immediate transformation that Annie's life experiences the day she meets Daddy Warbucks. But perhaps the most amazing change for her is captured in the musical's most memorable song, "Tomorrow." While the words may sound like simple positivism, the reality of the song for Annie is that the future now holds hope—a hope that impacts every cloudy moment of her life. Her story begins in what she describes as a "no tomorrow life" in the orphanage with little hope for the future. By the end, as the daughter of a loving father and the heiress of the Warbucks estate, there's security for the future and reason to sing about tomorrow as she faces it.

As sons of God, the immediate benefits we receive today are innumerable: guilt removed, relationship established, trials given hope, needs met—just to name a few. But the best is

yet to come: “We are God’s children *now*,” (Praise God!) “and what we will be has *not yet* appeared” (I John 3:2). Now but not yet, too. Romans 8 paints the same picture of our adoption as we are already sons and heirs (8:16-17), but we still groan as we “wait eagerly for adoption as sons” (8:24). No matter how good it is now, there’s always something better ahead to look forward to ... can you imagine?

This is the good news for the sons of God, because if we are sons, then we are heirs, too (Romans 8:17, Galatians 4:7). This means that the security we enjoy now with a Father who meets all our needs is not simply a temporary security but rather an eternal security: He will *always* meet all our needs! And the beauty of this relationship is that He himself will continue to be enough. We are heirs to all the Father’s riches, but more importantly we are heirs to the Father himself, an eternally secure relationship with Him.

We often think of the future as uncertain, because many of the details of our lives are. We often think of death as fearsome, because indeed it is part of the pain of the broken world that is not the way it’s supposed to be. But adoption into God’s family means that the most important things in the future are certain. Adoption into God’s family means that death is also the beginning of life eternal with our Heavenly Father and our co-heir, Jesus Christ! No matter how bad (or good) things get today, we have a bright hope for tomorrow because the best is always yet to come.

Maybe there’s a reason the story of the curly red-headed orphan has captivated audiences around the world. Maybe it’s that her story is so much like ours: orphans adopted by a gracious and benevolent Father. Has the fact that God is your Father started transforming every aspect of your life? Do you find yourself reveling in the security and hope of the Warbucks mansion, or do you feel as if you’re still scrubbing floors in the orphanage? For orphans who have become sons the hope of *tomorrow* is already ours today.