

CHAPTER 16

FORGETTING HER NAME

Whoever declared that love at first sight doesn't exist has never witnessed the purity of a puppy or looked deep into a puppy's eyes.

~ELIZABETH PARKER, PAW PRINTS IN THE SAND







JOURNAL ENTRY

I was wasting time on Facebook earlier this month when I noticed this post from a friend who provides temporary housing for rescued dogs seeking a forever home.

MEET SAVANNAH OUR NEW FOSTER.

That simple little bit of text would not have caused me to linger. But the photo that was with it—[the one on page 147]—caused me to stop in my tracks.

I couldn't take my eyes off those amazing eyes. I found out a little bit about the dog from my friend, so Joni and I decided to meet Savannah. No doubt you already know the rest of the story. Welcome to my new mentor.

We brought Savannah home for a trial run on Sunday, January 27, 2014. The pet adoption agency requests that prospective owners spend a couple of weeks with a dog before making a final decision, to make sure it's a good fit. From the minute she walked through the front door, Savannah was both curious and cautious. Obviously, she detected another dog's scent even though Hannah had been gone for months. Joni and I had a pile of new toys waiting for Savannah, as well as a new crate for her to relax and sleep in.

Our house guest was friendly but not overly affectionate. We figured that was due to the chaotic and uncertain events she had already experienced in her life. Savannah had been found running loose about forty-five miles north of our city, with a nasty gash on her hind leg. It was healed, although she had a permanent scar to remind us of her injury.

After the two weeks were up, we filled out the paperwork and arranged a final in-home visit so the agency was convinced we were "worthy" parents. (I'm glad they didn't use our boys as references.) What were the odds that Savannah would wind up with us? In keeping with the great Burchett family tradition, our new puppy match happened while we were making other plans.

All of the Burchett dogs have been either rescued or adopted. Our eldest son, Matt, and his wife, Holly, adopted their golden retriever friend, Bailey, in Nashville when they were first married. Hannah's friend, Sadie, found her forever home with middle son, Scott, and his wife, Caroline, before their two children arrived. One day when our youngest son, Brett, was driving in Waco, he spotted five puppies running along the road. He stopped to round up the pack, but only managed to catch one. It was love at first sight, and Brett named him Trigger. A few days later, Brett took the pup to a

veterinary clinic for a checkup, where they discovered Trigger had the often deadly parvovirus. I could hear the sadness in Brett's voice when he called with the news. "At least he knew he was loved," he said with a quivering voice. There was never a doubt after that comment that I would reach into my wallet to cover the hospital stay. For the next ten days, Trigger was on an IV that saved his life. Today he is thriving as Brett's best buddy. As you can see, we know a thing or two about doggie adoption in our family.

The word *adoption* is one that the apostle Paul included in his letters to the early churches. In Romans he uses the example to powerfully illustrate how God views us.

All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when *he adopted you as his own children*. Now we call him, "Abba, Father." For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. And since we are his children, *we are his heirs*. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.

ROMANS 8:14-17, EMPHASIS ADDED

Paul knew his Roman audience well, referencing their custom of adoption. In that culture you didn't have to be born into a family to be an heir; an outsider could be adopted into the family and receive the benefits of a blood relative. Adoption was meant to preserve the family, and there were no age restrictions—the adoptee could be a child or an adult. In each case, the adoptee's debts and obligations were erased, and the adoptee received a new identity.

That was our first order of business with our new canine friend Savannah. Her foster name “Savannah” was just too close to Hannah, so we began brainstorming other possibilities. Joni and I have a friend named Maggie who greets everyone with a smile and a cheerful, “Happy Day!” That seemed to match the personality of our adoptee, so with our friend’s amused permission, we settled on Maggie.

There was only one problem with the new moniker. Our puppy would not respond to her new name. It wasn’t unexpected. After all, she had been dubbed Savannah by the adoption center. Perhaps she had a different name before she found herself lost in the Texas countryside. Now we were trying to saddle her with a third name in less than a year of life. No wonder she was confused!

We concentrated on teaching the puppy her new name. “Maggie, come!” We gave her treats when she came when called and praised her profusely. We did all the things the dog training websites suggest to introduce a rescued puppy into a new environment. No matter what we tried, Maggie seemed to choose if, and when, she would respond to her name. It was frustrating to see her look in our direction when we called her and, a moment later, wander off with apparent disinterest.

Later I realized I had just learned my first lesson from my new mentor. I do the same thing with God. I was given a new name when I put my faith in Jesus as my Savior. My new identity, mentioned several times in the New Testament, is “child of God.”

To all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become *children of God*.

JOHN 1:12-13, EMPHASIS ADDED

If you live by [your sinful nature's] dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are *children of God*.

So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as *his own children*. Now we call him, "Abba, Father."

ROMANS 8:13-15, EMPHASIS ADDED

You are all *children of God* through faith in Christ Jesus.

GALATIANS 3:26, EMPHASIS ADDED

Because we are his *children*, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father."

GALATIANS 4:6, EMPHASIS ADDED

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has become a *child of God*. And everyone who loves the Father loves his *children*, too.

I JOHN 5:1, EMPHASIS ADDED

So who am I? Expatriated Buckeye? TV sports director? Author of a modestly successful book? Husband of Joni? Father of three outstanding young men? Ridiculously proud grandfather? Member of Costco? All those things define me to some degree. But the one thing that is true about me that I find almost impossible to comprehend is that I am *a child of God*. Just like Maggie, sometimes I answer to my new name and sometimes I just wander off thinking, *You must not be talking about me*.

There is power in believing in a name. Many years ago, for

reasons I still don't understand, I was cast as the lead in our high school senior musical. I had never acted and was not a trained singer. And yet that stellar résumé somehow landed me the role as Don Quixote in *Man of La Mancha*. Go figure. The play is based on Miguel de Cervantes's seventeenth-century novel *Don Quixote*. The drama unfolds as a play within a play, performed by Cervantes and his fellow prisoners as he awaits a hearing with the Spanish Inquisition. Cervantes takes on the character of "mad knight" Don Quixote.

It was fun and challenging to learn page after page of dialogue as well as doing my best not to mess up "The Impossible Dream." I enjoyed transforming into an old man on stage and donning the armor of the knight errant.

As I became immersed in the character of Quixote, I began to understand that the gentle and naive protagonist saw the world through eyes of grace. He perceived what people can become and not what they are at the moment. When he meets a prostitute named Aldonza, Quixote sees her as a lady, treats her with respect, and gives her a new name—Dulcinea.

Aldonza's reaction? She lashes out with fury and hatred as all her past junk pours out. Aldonza agonizes that her mother doesn't know which of her many lovers might be Aldonza's father. She rages about men who have used, abused, and abandoned her. And now this man calls her a "lady" and gives her a new name and identity. Aldonza hates what she has become, but even more she hates the fear of believing she could change and possibly face another crushing disappointment. At least her identity in a questionable vocation is familiar. And yet Don Quixote sees her as a soul created with value who can be redeemed.

Gradually, Aldonza understands that Quixote is genuine, and she begins to believe what the old man says is true about

her, that she does have value. When the “Quixotic” world of the man of La Mancha is destroyed and he draws his final breath, Sancho Panza, the faithful squire, addresses the grieving woman as Aldonza.

She gently corrects him. “My name is Dulcinea.”

Her identity has been changed by an agent of grace.

That’s what happens to those who place their trust in Christ. God gives us a new identity and He calls us by a new name.

His child.

We also tend to fight back and remind God of what we used to be and all that is wrong about us now. But Jesus patiently reminds us of our new identity. He tells us that we have been changed. That our spiritual DNA has been rewritten. That we are a new creation in Him. That we are holy. Saints. When we believe what Jesus says is true about us, it will change how we live our lives.

A righteous and beloved child of God. That is not an “impossible dream,” but a theological truth.

I am a flawless child of God. Not because of anything I have done, am doing, or will ever do. It is because of what Jesus did for me on the cross. Whenever I start wavering, I need to pause and remember my name.

Maggie will learn her name with repetition and praise and reward. We are making real progress. Our dog trainer gave us a great tip. “Never use her name for shaming or punishment. When you call Maggie, she should expect to play, get a treat, or to be loved. Every time she hears ‘Maggie’ it should be a party.”

I love that image for my journey with Jesus. When He calls my name, it is a party of grace, not of shaming or punishment. I am His beloved child. When He calls my name, it is for my good.

Dave Burchett, aka “child of God.” That has a nice ring to it.

