

The Healing Power of Adoring Jesus

If we sit sideways in the oversized leather chair—the one that was already faded and cracked before we got it—two of us can fit. Caleb's little body, tucked into last season's mismatched pajamas, presses beside mine as we all sit around the fire before the children go to bed, and I wonder just what might come out of this kid's mouth tonight.

He's still a mystery to me, this child. He was a toddler when we adopted him and thus has no memories of his life before becoming a Hagerty. He smiles and pops his collar like Nate and spends hours using his sisters' thread to string up plastic toys and Legos so he can hang them from the second-story banister. He's goofy and loud and all things boy, but some days, the clouds hang low behind his eyes. They threaten to disrupt his young-boy light-footedness. He has a history that one day will be fodder for his conversations with God, but right now he's not ready or able to talk.

I think my son is a mystery to himself, too.

Those clouds of loss and grief brood some days, and he can't wrap words around what hard things he feels, so he grumbles. Something hurts. It's that dull ache again, but how does a young child process the kind of life-loss he faced before he even walked?

Each of my children processes their grief in different ways. One crawls into my lap almost every week and says, "I'm just having a hard, hard day." She makes the connections to her past without me. Her grief is tangible to her. Another cries in secret while I spend months readying myself for the small piece of her heart that she'll sanction for exploration when she's ready to talk.

But Caleb, he climbs trees and scouts for hawks and makes pets out of field mice, and one day he will discover that bravery is found in a bare heart. Until then, I wait with him. And we adore together. We take a phrase or sentence of God's Word that demonstrates who He is, and we tell it back to Him and to our own souls.

One evening, as Caleb's 7-year-old body sidled up next to mine on the leather chair, we were adoring God based on Luke 2, the part when the heavenly host of angels announce God's joyous Christmas secret to poor shepherds.

"God, you didn't give your secrets to just the wealthy or the kings," Caleb said. "You told them to people nobody cared about."

Caleb isn't yet old enough verbalize his grief, to ask God questions about why his story has unfolded as it has. But he could recognize himself in the biblical story of others who lived a seemingly forgotten existence and yet were noticed by God. Through adoration, Caleb could begin to try on a language about a God that described His love and His eye on the unnoticed. His words of adoration are leading his heart, making a way for him to process what he will one day feel and experience more directly. This is the crazy, transforming power of adoration. We use our words to praise God and in the process find ourselves getting healed of false perceptions of Him.

Caleb and I are teaching our souls to look up at God in wonder and awe, to give Him the praise He deserves and loves, even when we don't feel it. This is, perhaps, one of the most critical parts of adoration: even when we don't feel it.

In adoration, we take a phrase or sentence of God's Word, we see what those words say about who God is, and we speak them back to Him and to our own souls. We pattern our words towards praise, in the midst of whatever we are feeling.

Our emotions can tell us a lot about how we see God, but if our emotions are left unfettered or unexamined, they can become a barrier to adoration. When we choose to practice adoration anyway, in the midst of whatever we are feeling, our words lift us over that barrier and into a deeper connection with God. That's why we start our adoration right where we are—no platitudes or Christianese that paints a gloss over reality. We start from the true grit of life, whether we're grumpy or overwhelmed, tired or angry. Adoration says, "Yes, my heart is just barely willing to praise, but that's okay. I'll start here."

Adoration is a concrete way to remind our souls of who God is, according to His Word. We take our eyes off of what we are not and where our circumstances are lacking and form words around His beauty and His Truth. Adoration waters our friendship with God. He loves when we use our mouths to praise Him, and we train our hearts to look at Him, rather than what we're not, when we adore. {eoa}

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