

*The following is a letter we emailed to our siblings at the beginning of our adoption journey.
We've included their responses at the end of the letter.*

Dear Family,

We wanted to let all of you know about potential changes in our family and ask for your support and prayers. That sounds foreboding, but it's not supposed to—this is a happy letter! Sending a letter via email probably seems really impersonal, but we didn't know a better way to let everyone know at the same time, considering that there are 8 of you that live all over the planet in different time zones! We hope you'll feel comfortable emailing or calling us with questions, and we hope that this will open conversations now and in the future that will help strengthen our family relationships.

What an introduction! We'll try to explain what is happening clearly and briefly (ya, that's gonna be hard for me, Janae.) We also want to be really open and honest and hope you'll understand that some of the things we've experienced in past few years have been challenging and somewhat sensitive in nature. It's not always easy to talk about things that have been hard, but we love and trust our family and know that these thoughts and feelings are safe with you.

Parenting Emma and Vincent has been a joyful journey. We are grateful everyday to be their mom and dad. Pregnancy and delivery certainly had challenges though. After Vincent was born several doctors advised against future pregnancies because of our problems with preterm birth and Janae's complications with blood clots. We tried to shelf thoughts of having other children for many years, but the desire to love and care for more never really left our hearts. When Per (Seb's dad) was diagnosed with cancer, and later, when his health deteriorated, we began to ask ourselves if there was any way that we could be parents again. Watching a beloved parent suffer and leave this life is a pretty big wake-up call—it certainly made us think about things in our lives that were really important, made us reexamine what we truly wanted. One thing we discussed during that time was that when we reached our parent's age our house would potentially be a very quiet place. Who wants to live in a quiet, empty house? Not us!

At that point we began talking to doctors again to see if there was any way we'd be able to carry another child and what the potential risks would be to a baby and to Janae. We were stunned and excited to hear that our doctors were hopeful that Janae would maybe be able to carry a baby full term with the help of various new drugs that weren't really available when Vince and Emma were born. Our doctors made it clear that there were no guarantees and that there would still be obvious risks, seeing how things had panned out with earlier pregnancies. We were scared and hopeful all at the same time. We thought and prayed a lot and ultimately decided that even if we had another challenging pregnancy and delivery that the possibility of parenting again was worth the potential risk. That was over 3 years ago. Since then we've had to face the unexpected heartache infertility brings. Our doctors have since concluded that in consideration of our present circumstances conceiving again would require heroic effort medically (again, with no guarantees.) Honestly, it's been a struggle to face the reality of infertility, and sometimes it's been hard to watch people around us be able to have babies when we can't. At first infertility makes you feel broken. We want to be very clear on one account—there have been lots of babies born in both our families in the last few years and we want you to know that that makes us happy! In sharing our experience we worry that some of you may feel bad about the fact that, for lack of a better way to phrase it, "you can and we can't." We love our nieces and nephews and

rejoice with you when new little ones come into our extended family. At this point we are pretty comfortable talking about our infertility and feel like we've come to a place where we've accepted it and can move forward.

So, moving forward...

We just can't close the door on the idea of parenting more children. We've tried. Heavenly Father just keeps patiently encouraging (and sometime full-out kicking us in the rear) to keep our hearts and parenting options open. Last April we began the process through to adopt a child. It felt that as soon as we made that decision life got busier and more demanding and many things tried to deter us from our goal. Although we've always felt drawn toward the idea of adoption this experience has brought us brand new and unexpected challenges. Sometimes we joke around and say, "If people had to go through the same process to 'qualify' before conceiving biological children that it is necessary to go through for adopting children, then there would be far fewer children born into this world!"

Now our lives are full of classes, interviews, documents, medical exams, home visits, and a never ending pile of paperwork. It's been an eye opening and heart opening experience. Sometimes we feel excited, sometimes overwhelmed, and oftentimes pretty vulnerable. Apparently it only takes 2 people to bring a biological baby into this world, but when you adopt it takes, like, 50. No joke. Little did we know that in the course of applying to adopt we'd also need the help of our parents, siblings, co-workers, friends, the mailman, the neighbor's dogs...

Just kidding, the neighbor's dogs are off the hook. To summarize, our caseworker and potentially the birth parents of our future child want to know pretty much everything about our lives—and that includes you. As part of the process we need information from each of our 8 siblings to submit in our home study file. Don't worry, we won't need anything weird, like toe nail clippings or passwords to your bank accounts ☺, we just need you to fill out some information and send it to us as soon as you can. Although this whole process has been extensive we just keep remembering that somewhere out there is a birth mother and father who are preparing to entrust us with the most precious gift imaginable. We love and respect them already and are willing to do whatever we need to earn their love and trust in return.

Like we mentioned in the beginning, we hope for more than your willingness to fill out the questions and return them to us—we really hope that you'll pray for our family and for the birth family of our child. It's also our hope that you'll welcome this child into our family with exactly the same love and warmth you've always extended to Emma and Vince. We know you will. We are happy to share this journey with you. If you have questions we'll do our best to answer them. There is just so much to share, but this letter has already passed the point of being "clear and brief." We'll try to keep you involved and updated. We'd appreciate it if you'd talk with your kids in positive and enthusiastic ways about what adoption means so that they can understand what an amazing, miraculous thing this is. We've included an attachment in the email with this letter that helps explain adoption to children, but it's also pretty informative for adults. We hope you know that we love you and appreciate the love you've always given very generously to our family. This is just such an exciting way to spread a little more love around!

Janae & Sebastian (& Emma & Vince)

"We are THRILLED to hear this news! We know you two are amazing parents and Emma & Vince would be wonderful siblings! Of course we would love any child that joined your family, because we know they would be joining one of the best families we know-yours! They would be one very lucky child and would be so loved and needed by your family and all of us as well.

Love you sister and am so, so happy and excited for you and what your future entails! Love you!"

"That is great! We have known a number of people who have adopted and it has been a success for them. Good luck!"

Hi Janae and Seb,

We are really excited for you and your family and will pray for you all. Thank you for the wonderful letter that was, I am sure, humbling to write please know that we would do anything for you and your family and appreciate you sharing personal details into your struggles and challenges. We love you very much and I am sure that the entire family will embrace a new little one that comes to your family just as quickly and lovingly as everyone did for Sam*. I was worried a little bit that family would not know how or would possibly treat him differently but I was quickly proved wrong as everyone including you and Seb did and do love him just the same as all the rest.

Please let me know if there is anything else I can do. Love you.

* Name changed for privacy. Janae's brother's son (not biological) who joined the family through marriage.

Janae and Seb

I am so happy for you all. I will love this baby as much as any of my nieces and nephews. Our children were very excited and had lots of questions about when the baby will be here and what he or she will look like etc. We will pray for you all and wish you the very best!!!

Thank you for sharing such special news! It has brightened our evening. I hope you know that you all are such wonderful examples of trusting the Lord and being so much like He is.

Just so you know the time spent waiting for another baby/child was well spent. You all have blessed our lives and our children in ways that maybe wouldn't have been the same had you had a family of 7.:) We will pray for you and your future little boy or girl.

Dear Janae, Sebbe and Emma, Vince

Your letter was deeply touching in so many ways. Thank you for sharing this with us. You are such great examples to us in Christ like love and service. You are already in our prayers and will continue to be so, now with a special focus for our faith and thoughts on your behalf and, as you expressed, in behalf of those involved in this process, especially the birth family out there who's life will be forever blessed by your sincerity and willingness to care for and extend your love to them and to another child and welcome [them] into your family unit.

All our love

Seb and Janae,

I just wanted to throw in my support along with everyone else. Erin and I look up to you so much as parents and hope to emulate what you have and are doing in raising children. I sincerely hope that this works out as it should. I know that it will be a priceless blessing to the soul that gets to be raised in a home like yours.

Love you and hope for the best.
