

### *Nolan Family Story*

Have you ever really thought you had life pretty well figured out, only to discover that God had an altogether different plan mapped out for you? We have experienced this a few times in our walk with Christ. Whether it was leaving a punctual paycheck on a mega church staff to surrender to His will of full-time evangelism, or canceling scheduled dates (that seemed to be our “bread and butter”) to follow God’s plan for us to be a part of the Casting Crowns LifeSong tour in 2005-2006, where we were trusting God to meet our every need financially throughout these six months without a steady paycheck. As I reflect back on the many times God has “thrown us a curve ball” in the plans we had for ourselves, none of them even compared to what we could have imagined for ourselves. His ways have always been better, always much sweeter, and although they consistently required more faith and utter dependence on Him, it was always clearly what was best for us and our family. This journey began no different, in that it came from way out in ‘left field”, totally surprised us, and was nothing that we were ever expecting.

In the early Fall of 2006 as I was growing deeper in my walk with the Lord and finding my mind more and more focused, my heart more willing to obey, and my spirit completely open to receive His guidance, I began hearing the sweet whispers of His Holy Spirit in this area of adoption. At first it was something that I just knew I simply could not be hearing correctly. I would lay out those deals to God that said, “Okay, God, if this is really something you are trying to show me, You are going to have to keep it right in front of me, hit me square between my eyes, and don’t let me miss it!” A funny thing happens when I pray this. He always does just exactly what I ask and slaps me right in the face with His reality (which is quite often different from mine)! Everywhere I would turn, whether in a Great Clips hair place with my kids, listening to the radio, talking to friends, and always during my personal quiet times with Jesus, He was making it more and more apparent that He was in fact prompting me to pursue a precious little girl on the other side of the world through adoption.

Of course, I knew this wasn’t something I was going to do alone, so I began to take this whole new idea to Tony. For those of you that know Tony, you know that we had already dialoged at great length about the issue of having more children back in 2006 and really decided we were DONE! He said his quiver was screaming for room! So, I knew by the “deer in the headlights” look that I received at the first mention of this, that if God was going to really call us to do this, He would have to show Tony clearly just as He had done for me. I committed to the Lord to allow Him to speak to Tony and that I would not try to convince him myself through my own manipulations (because we all know how good we wives can be at that). I knew that my husband has a deep desire to obey God and would yield to what the Holy Spirit led him to do. So, I began to pray even more specifically and wait for God to move.

One of my biggest concerns or questions was “could I really love another child from the other side of the world like I do my three biological children?” I cannot even describe to you what God began to do in my heart over a brief period of time, as I took

this concern and laid it at His feet. As I would pray for each of my children every morning, I began to sense a deep desire and compassion for a little girl I had never met. I began to find myself praying for her, loving her, and caring about her as I do my biological children. I have heard of this happening when an adoptive mother meets her child, but God was doing something in my heart that only He could do during these early days of my journey. He was cultivating a mother's love and yearning deep within my heart for this precious treasure He was calling me to pursue.

Months went by and I began to see subtle changes in Tony's heart, as God began to open his spirit. By little comments Tony would make, I could tell that he was contemplating the whole idea more and I knew he was also giving much time in prayer over it. One of the things I noted was that he had been adopted on Christmas Eve (what a Christmas gift for a child), and he made reference to the fact that it would be neat to bring home a little girl on Christmas. Who really knows if that will ever happen (on Christmas), but I did begin to pray that God would solidify this decision in our hearts (or Tony's because I was convinced already by this time) around Christmas. I didn't share this prayer with Tony, but kept it between my accountability partner and dear friend, Lori, and the Lord.

To make a long story short, on Christmas morning 2006, in a small bag, was a "baby" card. It was signed by Tony and each of my three children and it basically read, "I am ready to go and get the little girl God has for us!" WOW! Needless to say, there were a lot of joyful tears and it was a moment God made Himself very real to all of us as He gently orchestrated even the smallest of our steps and granted me a desire of my heart, by confirming this call in our family at Christmas. It was incredible to be able to share the impact of this gift in my heart as I shared with my family the prayer I had offered to the Lord and how He answered it right down to the day!

So, the journey officially began for our family on Christmas Day 2006. Two hearts unified in a decision to obey a call from God, that transformed into a family's deep passion for a little girl we have yet to see, but believe with all of our hearts she has been predestined to be a significant part of our home, and we are just honored to be a part of God ultimate plan to bring her Home!

We started the New Year of 2007 in hot pursuit of our little girl in China. We began the paperwork with an agency and felt confident things would be smooth sailing as we followed God in this new uncharted path. Yea, right, smooth sailing. We knew better than that. What growth would there be in that? The first bump in the road for us was that this particular agency refused to work with us. When we wouldn't compromise our integrity and give them the grey area answers they were looking for, they said they just couldn't help us. So, after the first small amount of money out the window and finding ourselves back to square one on the whole agency search, we were all a little baffled and discouraged. I tried to hold it together the day all this unfolded. I comforted my oldest daughter who was especially distraught over the news because, like

me, she was quite sure that we were to be heading to China for our little girl. I found great peace in being able to tell her with confidence that God knew what He was doing. I gave her the illustration of the games we play that involve a maze. As you move the little character through the maze, it doesn't see what you are doing as you run him into one dead end after another, but from your perspective, high above the maze, you can see the final destination and exactly what it is going to take to get there. I shared with her that this was how God was doing with us. He already knows where our little girl is and He is guiding our steps to take us to her. Obviously, this particular agency wasn't going to take us to her, so He had to close the door. We would just have to wait for Him to show us what is next.

The next morning in my personal quiet time, I was reading in Psalms 19 and it said, **"The life maps of God are always right, and they always lead to joy!"** It was as if God sat down beside me, wrapped His tender arms around me, and said, "you have comforted your child, so now let me reassure you, as your Heavenly Father. I am guiding your every step, I do know right where you need to go, and it WILL lead you to joy!"

From then on, I knew she would be called Joy! Through this situation that seemed like a dead end, God gave me the beautiful and significant name for our daughter, and He guided us to the agency that, in my opinion, is the very best out there. We have met some amazing people, been used by God in lives of others that we would have never met otherwise, and been blessed beyond our wildest imagination, and we aren't even to our daughter yet!

He is so good! He is so faithful! His life maps are always right and we are following them every step of the way... to Joy!

Now, we are probably in the other hard part, known in the adoption community as "The Wait" and my refuge and peace are found in knowing that this was His plan to begin with, so when He is ready, He will bring our paths together.

I am learning just how "not" in control I am of everything! I am learning the depth of love my children can have for someone they've never met simply because God is working in all of our hearts, and I am seeing God stir the hearts of those around us and use our journey into the "unknown" to challenge them to do the same. He has such a bigger plan than just us "rescuing" a little girl from the plight of being an orphan and I just want to hang on for the "ride" and watch Him bring about His agenda in my life and His Kingdom, one step at a time.

Our faith has been tested, our perspective has been challenged, our finances stretched, and our trust in the Lord strengthened.

If you are a waiting family, guard your heart, for out of it comes the issues of life. During the wait, it is imperative that we protect ourselves from bitterness, impatience, and the deep desire to control. We must see that God is the One who is ultimately working (even the wait) for our good and the good of our children. I think our perspective, which comes from our heart and mind and what we choose to think on, will determine what we not only get from the wait and the growth we experience, but also what God can do through us during the wait.

Some of the best advice we received was, "Don't give up" and "Follow what God has called you to do, no matter what". I believe it was simply quoted of my husband from the mouth of a friend, "What's true about you is what God says about you, not what anyone else says about you, your past says about you, or an agency says about you."

And, of course, in all of this, we received other advice, "Go to Ethiopia because you will never be able to go to China" BUT GOD SAID, "China"! And we were redirected by God's sovereignty to another agency that is absolutely amazing, God gave us our daughter's name and tested (and strengthened) our faith in His leading, and we are heading to China for Joy!!!