

* “Our babies are a complete, undeserved blessing. God used this experience to teach me to desire Him more than I desired to be a mom.” – Sallie Dean





THE WAITING

"I knew that Psalm 84:11 said, 'No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly. So why did it feel like He was withholding?' said Sallie Dean. "How long would we wait for a child? These are the questions I asked as my husband, Caleb, and I struggled with infertility.

NOT HAPPENING THE WAY IT SHOULD

"I experienced a lot of protection from God as I grew up in a Christian family in Houston. Grace, conflict resolution and forgiveness were modeled for me by my parents. I realize now how fortunate I am to have parents who love Jesus and read God's Word.

"One of the defining moments in my walk with Christ was in college. I lived with several girls and experienced true, authentic community for the first time. My faith in Christ became my own, and community was so important as I tried to live differently from the world around me.

"Caleb and I married in 2008. Early in our relationship, we were on different pages regarding starting a family and struggled with fully trusting the Lord with that decision. I wrestled with our different points of view and how I could do best in respecting Caleb as a spiritual leader.

"I look back at my journal and see the transition from 'should we have babies?' to 'we are finally on the same page,' to 'wait a minute, this is not happening the way it should.' I experienced depression and anxiety early in our marriage, and that served as a catalyst in deciding to release some control over our plan to have a family.

"Our struggle with infertility was a very low season for me. After waiting so long to be on the same page, now we can't get pregnant! What in the world? I continued to journal and pour out my heart in complete dependence on God.

GOD HAS NOT FORGOTTEN

"Through the Women's Bible Study at Watermark, I met another person who had waited for a baby. She and another friend talked to me about how to pray when God isn't answering the way I wanted. I thought about how I was defining comfort and what it meant to wait on God's plan.

"I sought the Lord in all of these things, and He was faithful in my waiting. I prayed for unity with Caleb. The Lord helped me by changing my prayers from 'give me what I want' to 'help me be content exactly where you have me.' I realized that God gave me this wonderful marriage, and I was only focused on the next thing. I learned how to be 'all in' just where I was.

"God used this time to give me a greater sensitivity to other hurting people. I started engaging with those who were quiet at things like baby showers and ended up meeting many women who were in a season of waiting for either a husband or a child.


"As I began openly sharing my story, I received notes of encouragement from friends reminding me that the Lord hears me and has my good in mind. On Mother's Day, when it felt particularly real that I was not a mom yet, I got flowers from a friend. That was a wonderful reminder that God had not forgotten.

UNDESERVED BLESSING

"In 2011 I became curious about adoption and started talking to people who had adoption as part of their story. Caleb and I went to conferences and researched the whole thing. Our community group played a huge role, asking hard questions, praying for us and walking with us through our fear of the unknown. The Lord gave us tender hearts, and we were unified and sure about adoption.

"After choosing an adoption agency, we did the paperwork and home study. The process was finished July 6, and to our surprise, we were matched with a birth mother on July 16. Six days later, we were there for the birth of our twins.

"I looked back at my journal in the weeks and months before that and noticed that on May 29, I was wavering in my trust in the Lord. As I prayed the words of Ephesians 3:20, I wanted to have faith that God could do immeasurably more than I could imagine. I kept forgetting that the Lord had my good in mind. Indeed He did, along with the good of our brave birthmother and babies. A few months later we would have twins. How cool is that?

"Our babies are a complete, undeserved blessing. God used this experience to teach me to desire Him more than I desired to be a mom. I learned I could share my dreams with the Lord and know He is trustworthy. I asked God many times how I could hope to become a mom but not be brokenhearted if it didn't happen. I learned how to fix my eyes on Jesus rather than my present circumstances. I am so grateful that He fulfilled me during the waiting." 

For information on Women's Bible Study at Watermark, see the ad on the back panel. To learn more about Shiloh, our ministry to women and couples who are experiencing infertility and/or miscarriage, see the announcement on the inside of Watermark News. To find out about Tapestry, our Adoption Ministry, see the ad on the back panel.

09.15.13

"I asked myself over and over, 'Why me? It just wasn't fair. I felt isolated and angry at God.'" Jen Haney



* WHY ME?

Jen Haney broke down and cried right there in the doctor's office. She always dreamed of filling her home with five happy, healthy children. After two years of trying to get pregnant, she and her husband, Patrick, turned to a specialist for help. Several rounds of tests finally revealed the answer.

"No one wants to talk about infertility, especially when it's on the guy's side, as was the case for us," said Jen. "It seemed like everyone around us was pregnant. We felt very alone."

After unsuccessful surgery and treatments, Jen struggled under the weight of sadness and anger. "I was grieving something I planned but would never happen – the two of us having a biological child. I asked myself over and over, 'Why me?' It wasn't fair. I felt isolated and angry at God."

Patrick knew they needed help getting on the same page emotionally. "As far as infertility goes, my response was, 'Why shouldn't it be me?'," said Patrick. "I had done a lot of work with at-risk kids and had seen some very difficult situations. I knew God didn't owe me anything. Jen felt frustrated that I didn't feel the same way she did. Our different responses put an emotional strain on our relationship."

Although their community group was supportive, Jen wanted the support from other couples that had been down the road they were on.

"I wasn't sure I wanted to talk about it," said Jen. "I was scared there was something wrong with me because I was so angry. But at Watermark, God connected me with other women who had struggled with infertility and had experienced the same feelings of disappointment and anger. We spent time together in God's Word and I gained biblical wisdom from others who had similar experiences. I learned that it was OK to feel angry, but it wasn't OK to stay there. I discovered more and more about trusting God through this season."

Having a community of friends to talk to about infertility was a turning point for Jen and for the Haney's marriage. "God used that to take the stress off of our relationship," said Patrick. "She relied on Christ and others in community as her source of support, rather than solely depending on me."


After years of struggling with infertility, the couple decided on domestic adoption. "Adoption felt like a light at the end of the tunnel," said Jen. "It's a long process, but it was also exciting. We got the call in October of 2012, that our child would soon be born. We were in the labor and delivery room with the birth mother, who was so loving and gracious. Three days later, we took our daughter, Ellie, home. She is 10 months old now."

The strength God provided through their struggle with infertility prepared Jen and Patrick for the battle they would face next: cancer. A routine exam revealed that Patrick had testicular cancer. Immediately, he was confronted with a long list of 'what ifs'.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. (John 14:6)"

"What if I only have six months to live? What if I'm not around to see my daughter grow up? Of course I thought all of those things," said Patrick. But the funny thing is that neither of us panicked. We were able to trust God."

After a successful surgery and radiation, Patrick emerged cancer-free and with a renewed strength in the Lord. "I knew it was true that Christ was walking with me, but through both cancer and infertility, I got to live out that truth. Although we've both been through suffering, the Lord never left us. I look at my wife and daughter today and say, 'Lord, you got it right'."

The Hanyes say that their story really isn't about adoption, cancer or infertility. It's about learning that God was with them regardless of their circumstances. "The plan God had for us wasn't what I thought it would be," said Jen. "Suffering became part of our story. But as I worked through my anger in community with others, I realized I was not alone. God was with us the whole time, writing the story He wanted for our lives. Even when I could not feel it, God was walking along with me. That's where I found peace." 

news

**EQUIPPING
OPPORTUNITIES**

DETAILS AT WATERMARK.ORG

"In my quiet time in the morning, my goal is not to get something from God. The only thing I want to get is a right view of God, and then the right view of myself and my circumstances come into place."

Finding Identity

For Tiffany Wilkins, life isn't defined by her circumstances. The joy of adoption and the pain of miscarriage are a part of her life, but not who she is. "God is constantly helping me know that I need to find my identity in Him alone."

Tiffany grew up in a single-parent home where she went to church, but never really understood her need for a Savior. "I always just tried to be better than everyone else. I kind of saw myself as the best of the worst. I was better than others, so I didn't think I was that bad."

After college, Tiffany moved to Dallas where she found her niche in the party scene. Thursday through Sunday, Tiffany spent her time going out with friends and trying to fit in. One day a friend invited her to Bible study, and though she wasn't interested at first, her friend's persistence paid off. They were studying King David, and for the first time in Tiffany's life, something "clicked."

"When I read about how David was both a sinner and a man after God's own heart, it just blew me away," she said. "I thought, 'I'm such a sinner, too, so maybe God can love and forgive me.' That was the moment I surrendered to Christ."

After immersing herself in Bible study and church, Tiffany still found herself looking for love in other places, she said. That's when she met her husband Garth.

"I knew we were different, but it wasn't until after we got married that I was like, 'Oh my gosh, I have married someone who is not on the same page as me,'" Tiffany said. But less than a year into their marriage, Garth also trusted Christ as his Savior. The couple started going to a community group at Watermark. "I'm not sure why it went that way. It's like, even in my disobedience the Lord used what Satan had planned for harm, for good."

It wasn't long before they started dreaming about having a family. Tiffany, who was always interested in adopting, wanted to adopt a child right away. Garth wanted to try to have a biological child first. The couple quickly became pregnant, but soon miscarried. Then Garth to agree to start the adoption process.

They decided to adopt from Russia and began the paperwork. After waiting for about a year, Tiffany received information in the mail about



Vlad, Garth and Tiffany Wilkins

an orphan host program sponsored by Buckner, her adoption agency, called Angels from Abroad.

"I read the statistics about older children in Russia," she said. "Less than 10 percent have a chance for a normal life. Ten percent commit suicide within the first three years of leaving the orphanage. Forty percent turn to alcohol and drugs, and 40 percent turn to prostitution and crime. After looking at those pictures of all the little faces, it wasn't any question. Of course we wanted to take one!"

Initially, the couple wanted to adopt a little girl, but decided it was best to let the agency choose the child. "They knew us and the kids living in the orphanages well."

It wasn't long before they received their answer – they would host 10-year-old Vladic in their home.

"It was the best three weeks of my life," Tiffany said. Within a year, they adopted Vlad (now 13) and brought him home from Russia.

"Throughout the whole process we were never fearful, never worried," she said. "But we really had the hardest time adjusting when we got back. And I felt like junior high all over again with the other parents. Being a new mom and not knowing what to do, I was really insecure."

Tiffany said she and Garth went through a difficult period in their marriage. They found it hard to schedule time to be together, and endured two more miscarriages. "The third miscarriage was very difficult," she said. "I had begun to place expectations on God and what I thought life would begin to look like; it was the loss of a child."

Tiffany said she grieved for about a year and finally let go of the idea of having a biological child. She said the Lord used

Shiloh, a ministry at Watermark for couples experiencing infertility and miscarriage, to help her through the process. "I just had to surrender to God. Our family doesn't look like other people's families. But I have to remember that this is what God wants our family to look like, and it doesn't matter if we look like everybody else."

During this time, Tiffany poured over God's Word daily and found special comfort in the last five chapters of Job. "They helped me have the right view of God and his sovereignty in every detail of life," she said. Also, watching her son grow and change, and understanding how much God loves him, reminds her how much He loves her, too.

"Through every struggle I've been through, it's always been about me and God," she explained. "Everything that happens in life has either been orchestrated or allowed by God, and I just have to rest in that. The hurt and pain isn't caused by God, but He's allowed it to bring me to a different place. And I trust him so much more now because of that."

Earlier this year, Tiffany became pregnant but miscarried again in the first trimester. The day before it happened, she received a phone call from her adoption agency asking her to coordinate this summer's Angels from Abroad orphan host program.

"I definitely feel like the Lord gave me this opportunity to soften the pain and remind me that He has a specific plan and purpose for my life. I don't want to minimize the pain of the loss of our unborn child. We are still grieving. But adoption is a huge passion of mine and a calling the Lord has for me."

Tiffany finds comfort – and her true identity – when she turns to the Lord daily, reading His Word and studying His character more than anything else.

"In my quiet time in the morning, my goal is not to get something from God. The only thing I want to get is a right view of God, and then the right view of myself and my circumstances come into place. This life is very short and I lived it way too long in an unsundered state. There is no life or peace there. I want to live in a constant state of trust and surrender. If I don't, I might miss something great that God has for me."

– written by Jenny Pope





THE REAL GIFT

"I never would have scripted suffering into my life, or chosen many of the hard things that have happened," said Kirk Lanier. "But suffering comes to everybody, and God has helped me grow in wisdom as a result. In my finite mind, I haven't always been able to grasp God's goodness, or understand why things happen. But I've learned to choose to trust God in the midst of tough times. I can see now that God has been good to us the whole time."

When Kirk Lanier met Kim in 2005, he was intrigued. "Here's this beautiful woman, clearly on fire for the Lord," said Kirk, "and I hadn't experienced that for a long time. I'd been a believer since college, but was always pretty isolated. When I married the first time, we went to church but there was no truth-telling going on. Nobody held me accountable. It was easy for me to be totally absorbed by my career, rather than finding my significance in the Lord. That's why, after nine years, the marriage ended in divorce."

Kim is quick to say that her life hadn't always looked like it did when she met Kirk. "It wasn't the failure of my first marriage that brought me to my knees," said Kim. "It was the years following the divorce. Painful dating relationships and emptiness kept me wondering if there was something more to life. After 15 years of suffering, I heard the gospel for the first time at a Bible study and learned that Christ was the only way to Salvation. I'd lived with guilt for years and was ready to accept the Truth about Christ. I left my old life behind, and that was painful. But Christ flipped my life right side up."

After what Kirk describes as an "ideal courtship," the two married in September, 2006. They both built some accountability and community into their lives before saying "I do," seeking counsel on everything from when they should marry to the baggage each one might bring to the relationship. But Kirk says when the honeymoon began, so did the conflict. "I tend to be passive, and her tendency is toward fear and control. We'd hunker down and dig our heels in when there was a disagreement. I knew we needed input from others, because there were times when I would clearly go against what God had designed for our relationship."

At no point did the need to resolve conflict become more urgent than in August of 2007. Kirk and Kim got the news they would not be able to have children. "I felt like I was going crazy," said Kim. "I was sad, grieving and depressed that we wouldn't have a child the way I'd always hoped. Kirk seemed to have absolutely no emotion, which made it all the more painful and created a big wedge in our marriage."

"I viewed my role in marriage as the strong one. Expressing vulnerability was not valued by people in my life in the past," said Kirk. "It was a blessing that we were in an authentic community group at the time. The guys in the group gently told me that my response to Kim wasn't a good one. I'd felt alone for most of my life, and thought I had to figure things out on my own. God used those friends, and the Celebrate Recovery Ministry at Watermark, to create a place where I felt

"I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD." (Psalm 27:13-14)

listened to, loved and cared for. I learned that I didn't have to be 'strong' for Kim, and there was value in being vulnerable with my wife."

Kim says God used community in significant ways at every step through their journey. "Our friends fasted and prayed for us, and showed us where we needed to grow in our relationship," said Kim. "They helped me discover a place to serve the Lord, and be a spiritual 'mother' to other kids, even as I mourned not being able to have a child biologically. For me, learning to fully surrender to God and the plans He had for me was a breakthrough. I had to reconcile a lot before my heart could be open to the idea of adoption."

Kirk had done a lot of reconciling as well. "For a long time, I had focused on the 'wrecks' in my life," said Kirk, "rather than how I was being refined by every experience God led us through. I didn't want to be 'the couple who couldn't have kids.' That wasn't my choice.

continued

THE REAL GIFT continued

But God used the whole journey to draw me deeper into biblical community and show me how to further to submit to Him. Then, He changed both of our lives in ways we could have never expected when Lily Ruth Lanier came into our lives through adoption.”

Kim agrees that adopting Lily was “the icing on the cake” in a journey that’s taught her much about God’s love. “A lot of people tell us that God was good to us because we were able to adopt Lily,” said Kim. “And although I’m grateful for her in ways I can’t express, I think that’s pretty warped theology. God never stopped being good. Even when I didn’t get my way, God was still having His way. God was always good to us, and suffering forced both of us to trust God for Who He is, not for what He does for us. That’s the real gift.”