

GOD GAVE US CHILDREN!

Have you ever wondered if God can be trusted with your deepest desires? Did you ever waver in following Him for fear that you risked the preferred future of your daydreams? If so, then read on, for my story is irrefutable evidence that God is faithful to His promises.

Psalm 37:4 Delight yourself also in the Lord, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.

When we trust God and choose to follow Him, He takes care of us. He truly cares about our dreams and desires.

To fully grasp my story, you must know that growing up I had only two dreams: to marry and to have children. I know that those are not dreams that are encouraged in young girls in our society today, but nevertheless, I fully expected to finish college, get married, have children, and stay home with them until they went to school. I pictured myself teaching after they were in school, and being home when they were home. I never imagined the plans that God had for me, and probably would have panicked had I been given a glimpse.

Still, God interrupted my plans in college by calling me to Siberia. My serious boyfriend at the time was not interested in leaving his family, but the call for me was undeniable. As soon as I set my heart to follow God, He began orchestrating events to get me there. In February 1994, at the age of 23, I moved to Moscow.

My dreams of marriage and children did not die as God began using me in Russia. Periodically I would struggle with depression as I heard of friends marrying, buying houses, and having children. Every time I would ask God when it would be my turn, He reminded me of the promises in His word. Also, He reminded me of His answer that very first time I asked back when I said yes to His will. (Part of marriage testimony)

In January 2009, after serving the Lord in Russia for 15 years, 9 of that in Siberia, God finally gave me my heart's desire to be married. Kirk was definitely God's choice for me, and the answer to prayer, but I was already 38 years old, seemingly too old to think of starting a family. And five years later it certainly seemed like an improbability. Then, in early 2014, we received the letter that solidified our plan to pursue adoption. My sister shared of a mutual friend whose son and girlfriend desired to put their child up for adoption, and Kirk and I decided to pursue it. We were too late for that child, but then and there we determined to apply when we returned for itineration in 2016. Our course was set.

By February 2016 we had determined that God would have us adopt through social services, and we tried to start the application process. However, we quickly learned that we could do nothing until we returned to the U.S. in August. Our hopes to get the process underway were dashed, but at least we knew where to begin. From the outset, our timeframe to complete the adoption seemed on par with the Red Sea crossing of the Israelites. It would take a miracle to decide on a child and

complete the adoption in under a year, but we were full of faith. Still, we had accepted the idea that we needed to consider an older child, and were fully prepared to accept a child under 10. How naïve we were! After arriving back in the U.S., we completed our application and home study for adoption in record time. But, due to our travel schedule, we couldn't complete our training hours until mid-October. By the third day of training we understood just how optimistic we had been in considering an older child, and determined that we shouldn't take a child over five. When I called to tell our caseworker, she shared in no uncertain terms how impossible it would be to be chosen for a toddler in the timeframe allowed. By that time, we had just nine months left on our itineration, and needed to settle on a child in less than six.

It was at this point that our faith wavered, and we turned to the wisdom of man. A friend of mine had shared with us the contact of a Christian consulting firm just as we were going through the training, and Kirk liked what he saw. They claimed to match and complete adoptions in an average of 6 to 10 months. I too thought that it couldn't hurt to throw a wider net. Regardless, it would take a miracle. It didn't take long though for us to feel uncomfortable with the cost, risk, and expectations of an infant adoption. And, it seemed as if new obstacles appeared weekly. Our chances of adopting diminished with each passing week, but our faith remained strong as all visible signposts disappeared.

By January, we had done all that we could do. All that was left was to trust God and wait. When it seemed all hope was gone, God began to move. January 14th we were scheduled to fly to Ohio for services when the "worst ice storm in decades" was forecast. Our Saturday flight was cancelled on Friday in expectation of its arrival. To say that it was less than expected would be an understatement, but the damage was done, and we stayed in Oklahoma. Because of that "ice storm", I was in town on Wednesday, January 18th, and I met a girlfriend at Starbucks. As I was pouring out my heart about the utter human impossibility of us being able to adopt a child, I noticed a missionary friend meeting with a lady not far away. Minutes after telling my friend that we would literally have to know someone in order to get a child, my missionary friend got up to leave. As they passed our table, I was introduced to the woman, who I later learned had recently adopted our kids' mother. My adoption journey came out after learning that she was also involved with the Oklahoma foster care system. Unbeknownst to me, she had been pouring out her heart to our mutual friend concerning her daughter's two kids, about whom a decision needed to be made. Her and my missionary friend had just been praying for God's will. Much later she shared her amazement at how quickly God answered. God orchestrated events to put us in the same place, at just the right time, to answer the prayers of two families, and provide for two beautiful children.

Two days later I spoke at the section 9 Women's Ministry rally to which she and her girls had received tickets. It was the first time she had been in years. Still unaware of the story that God was weaving, I spoke of Jochebed, Moses' mother, and how she responded in faith, taking what she had in her hand and giving it to the Lord. Not once, but twice, she entrusted her beloved baby to another in order to give him a future. She couldn't have known the impact that her sacrifice would have not only on his life, but also on the future of their people. God used the situation for good, although at the time, it had to be heartbreaking. At the end of my message, the section 9 women prayed over us concerning our desire to adopt.

The next Monday, I called the woman at the number she had given me at the rally. For the first time I learned about two precious toddlers needing a home, and was offered the opportunity to be considered. Kirk and I were daunted at the thought of taking on two toddlers at once, but we felt that God's hand was in this. (Just the day before a lady had actually told Kirk there would be two. Perhaps that helped him be willing to take the risk.) By the end of January our names had been presented to social services, and on February 4th we met our kids for the first time. For Kirk it was love at first sight! It took me longer, as I was afraid to allow myself to get too attached until we knew for sure. February and March we rode an emotional roller coaster as social services determined how best to proceed, our candidacy was far from certain. In the meantime, we spent as much time with the kids and their family as circumstances allowed, and prepared for their hopeful arrival. Finally, a decision was reached in our favor, thanks in great part to a believing caseworker and judge who fought for their family's right to choose us, as well as our fitness as prospective parents. On April 3rd they were brought home, at the very end of the time we had originally allowed for placement. (Our itineration schedule had dictated an early April placement as the very latest time we could accept a child. Since our work is overseas, we couldn't just wait for a child indefinitely.)

From April through the end of June we waited for the news that we were officially in trial adoption. Those were months of both joy and uncertainty. By faith it was mainly joy, accompanied by the stress of a steep learning curve. At the end of June, as we headed back from School of Missions in Springfield, we received the call. The paperwork had gone through; we were officially their designated parents. After that, things went quickly. We retained a lawyer and requested that the normal six month waiting period be waived due to our need to start the visa process. In less than two weeks a court date had been set. On August 2, 2017 Kaleb (28 months) and Katelyn (18 months) became legally ours. God had provided not one, but two toddlers within one year.

Although the wait for placement seemed long and excruciating to us, two months we learned was actually an incredibly fast placement for social services. And for those unfamiliar with the foster/adoption process through the state, four months from placement to adoption is extremely rare. If you start from the time we first learned about them on January 23rd to their adoption on August 2nd, it was only a little over six months from start to finish. As my husband likes to say, with God you are either waiting or you are running to catch up! Our adoption was finalized almost one year to the day that we first turned in our documents to the Canadian County DHS office. God had done the impossible, and in the way He had originally promised. Our only regret is that after completing the training, we didn't just rest and wait for God's provision rather than trying to make things happen by casting a wider net. So much stress could have been avoided, not to mention money saved. But thank God, His faithfulness is greater than our mistakes!

He CAN be trusted!