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### The Path God Wanted

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## The Path God Wanted

BY JENNIFER BURRILL

**I**n January 2012, I officially began my adoption journey. I had spent many years praying and planning for this life event, and knew it was the path God wanted for my future. I signed up with an international adoption agency to adopt from the country of Kyrgyzstan. For six months, I worked on the various documents needed, getting things notarized and apostilled\*, and completed the lengthy home-study process. Shortly after my paperwork arrived in the country, Kyrgyzstan closed adoptions due to government corruption. I switched to Russia and went through the lengthy paperwork process once again. Within days, Russia put a ban on all American adoptions.

After these two major setbacks and almost a full year, I was back to the beginning, having made no progress toward an adoption. After some research, I decided to sign up with an American newborn adoption program. I spent several weeks communicating with my international adoption agency, asking for a return of all refundable expenses. Finally, I received a response — an email stating that they were filing bankruptcy, taking my investment of \$26,000 with them. I had paid for an international adoption in full, and, since I was counting on those funds to move forward, was devastated to learn it was gone.

When I was tempted to doubt that this was God's plan for me, I was reminded that he is in control. I was amazed as each adoption bill became due to find that God provided what was needed just in time.

Over the course of the next year, I was matched three separate times with birth moms. In each case, the birth mom changed her mind. With each new disappointment, my hope and courage wavered.

After lots of time and money lost, I still seemed to be back at the beginning. I spent many hours walking and talking with God, asking him to help me trust. I knew God wanted me to surrender the whole process to him, yet my

desire for control kept getting in the way. One night, as I walked around the Andrews campus, I told God I had lost hope and didn't want to continue this journey for nothing, but if he asked it of me, I would do it.

About 45 seconds after my reluctant surrender, my phone rang. On the other end of the line was a friend. She asked me for an adoption update, and I told her of my discouragement. She told me, "I don't have words to say because I can't imagine your heartache. But I think you need to hear 'not to give up hope; God has a plan.'" As we talked, I learned that her call was not an accident; it was a miracle. Her husband had dialed a number completely different from mine, yet God allowed them to be connected with me, just when I needed to hear his message of hope.

In April 2014, I received a call from my attorney. I had been chosen once again — this time, by a birth mom for a baby boy due in May. After so many setbacks and broken promises, how could I trust another birth mom? I tried to remember God's message of hope, but was afraid of yet another disappointment.

I talked with the birth mom about once a week, and enjoyed getting to know more about her. She assured me that she was going to move forward with her plan for adoption.

Still, I didn't trust it. Once a mother meets her little baby, things can change — it's her right, and she should change her mind if she's not sure she wants to follow through.

She finally was able to make an appointment for an induced labor, and wanted me in the delivery room. I treasured this time with her. I knew my son one day would appreciate anything I could tell him about this kind, courageous woman who gave him life.

At 11:33 a.m., my son, Timothy Simon, was born.

The attorney was scheduled to come the day after Timothy was born. Once the birth mom and I signed the paperwork, the consents would be irrevocable. I asked the birth mom if she wanted to have Timothy brought to her room before she signed. She said that was fine if I wanted it, again putting my needs before her own. When I handed Timothy to her, she stared into his face with such love mixed with pain. I asked if she wanted me to leave. She said, "No"; she wanted me to stay.

I sat in a chair next to the birth mom's bed as she held Timothy and sobbed. My heart broke for her. It was obviously so hard, yet she was so brave. At this point, a huge part of me wanted this woman, whom I had grown to love, to change her mind in order to relieve her heartache. I sat next to her and cried tears of my own, and I prayed, "Your will be done..." I asked God to bless the birth mom with peace if she was to move forward.

When the attorney arrived, I went to a room and waited. About 15 minutes later, the attorney came to me and said, "She signed. It's your turn." It took me just a couple minutes, and Timothy was legally mine. But my heart ached for the birth mom; I had to say goodbye. I immediately ran down the hall and found her as she was leaving to drive herself home. I walked her to her car, helped her put her belongings in the back, and gave her a long hug. We both cried.

She has a place in my heart forever.

My adoption journey has helped me understand the gospel in a tangible way. Ephesians 1:4–5 says: *Long ago, even before he made the world, God chose us to be his very own through what Christ would do for us... His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by sending Jesus Christ to die for us. And he did this because he wanted to!* (TLB)

God's love for us is so great that he will never stop pursuing his adoption plan — giving up his own Son in order to make us part of his family forever. He showed me that to be an adopted child is to be a wanted child. It is an honor to be God's adopted daughter.

My journey has been difficult, but I'm thankful that it was. Not only can my journey show Timothy that the Creator of the universe cares about him so much that his heavenly Father would direct my two-plus-year journey (literally around the world) right to him, but I also have a wonderful story to share with Timothy about the unselfishness of his birth mom. He is wanted and loved.

Today, as I look into Timothy's sweet little face, I am in awe — of God's personal interest in the three of us (me, Timothy and his birth mom), of God's mercy to give me such a beautiful, yet bittersweet, experience, and of the responsibility I have to raise this little boy for God's kingdom.

I am blessed.

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Jennifer Burrill is director of residence life, and director and dean of Lamson Hall at Andrews University.

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\*An apostille is a form of authentication issued by the U.S. Department of State to documents for use in countries that participate in the Hague Convention of 1961.



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