

## *Hope for a Healed Child*

“The compelling journey of a family led by the Spirit and healed by faith; a page-turner from page one. This story is captivating...”

—Nicole Young, author of the Patricia Amble Mystery Series

What a great book! I couldn't put it down. Mara was so vulnerable and real! Thank you for sharing your journey of hope and faith. God is so good! Nothing is impossible to those who simply believe. I pray this book gets into the hands of many who need a miracle and hope!

—Pastor Kara Diaz, Word of Life Church

“What a story! Wow, to think how many people and their kids are going through the hell this family went through! This book is going to be a Godsend to them.”

—Deborah McDermott, author of *Autism Healed: One Woman's Fight to Save Her Sons*

“This book is absolutely extraordinary! IT WILL CHANGE LIVES! It blessed me beyond what I can really explain in words. It is the perfect formula of turn-the-page storytelling and hope-delivering testimony. Filled with such transparency and boldness, at the end of the book I was almost sad it was over because the journey through the book makes me want to keep going.”

—Liza Bobe, Educator and founder of Delusional Faith

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*Some names and details have been changed to protect privacy.*

*Hope for a Healed Child*  
One Mother's Daring Journey of Faith



**Mara De Los Reyes**

Foreword by  
**Deborah McDermott**

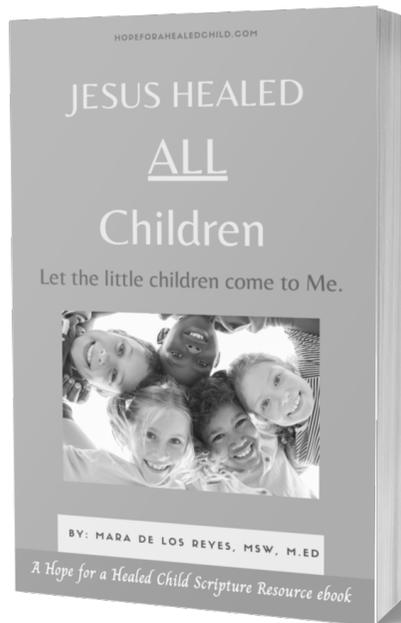
## *Hope for a Healed Child*

How one mother dared to believe a different reality than her  
son's regressive illness



*Hope deferred makes the heart sick,  
But when the desire comes, it is a tree of life.  
Proverbs 13:12 NKJV*

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# Dedication

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*This story is dedicated to my husband and best friend, Isaac, who has always encouraged me to write a book. Thank you for believing in me. Who knew my first book would be this story! I'm incredibly grateful for your steadfast faith and unwavering convictions in the areas that matter most. I also dedicate this story to our children.*

*To Xzavier—you were healed and redeemed to fulfill the BIG and beautiful purposes and plans that God set out for you to accomplish before the beginning of time. May you cherish all of life and shine brightly as you discover what those are.*

*To Roman—may your bold, confident faith, warrior spirit, and tender heart change the world for the goodness of God!*

*To Angel—may you always seek knowledge, understanding, and wisdom, and may you be led straight to the Lord's love.*

*To Sebrina—may you always know the deep, deep love of the Lord and may it wash over you like a river all the days of your life.*

*I love you.*

*And finally, I dedicate our story to all the children who are suffering from any illness or disease—may you, too, be set free to fully live out the plans which the Lord has designed for you in order to thrive—healthy, healed and whole. And may you mothers grab ahold of truth and be released to become all that you were meant to be, for such a time as this.*

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	9
Foreword.....	11
Preface.....	13
<i>Part I—The Journey.....</i>	<i>15</i>
Chapter 1: Emergency.....	17
Chapter 2: Storms & Dances.....	19
<i>Part II—The Onset.....</i>	<i>43</i>
Chapter 3: The Issue of Blood.....	45
Chapter 4: Transfer.....	63
Chapter 5: Be Still & Know.....	79
Chapter 6: Shadow of Turning.....	85
Chapter 7: Companion.....	93
Chapter 8: Confessions & Despair.....	99
Chapter 9: Colorless Spectrum.....	117
Chapter 10: Break Down.....	131
Chapter 11: Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) Symptoms Revealed.....	145
Chapter 12: Adding Insult to Injury.....	155
Chapter 13: Conclusion of the Matter.....	167
<i>Part III—The Way.....</i>	<i>175</i>
Chapter 14: Ears to Hear.....	177
Chapter 15: Miracles.....	195
Chapter 16: Brighter and Brighter.....	209

Epilogue.....	219
Recommended Resources.....	223
Vaccine Research Resources.....	225
My Prayer for Children and Parents.....	229
Connect with Mara De Los Reyes.....	230
About the Author.....	231
Scripture Resource Ebook.....	232

## *Acknowledgements*

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If God wasn't who He is, this book could never have been written. Though our story is His healing power, the over-arching theme of this book is the Lord's loving, gracious character and His absolute goodness, all the time, every time! No matter what.

Thank you to Andrew Wommack and his ministries for getting gospel truth into the world and touching our lives so profoundly as a result. To all the AWMi and Charis Bible College prayer ministers, God bless you for believing with us and others!

To Deborah McDermott and the people who share their healing journey testimonies—we will be forever grateful you were bold enough to spread the power of God into our lives, creating contagious faith!

To the Adao's and the 100X Acceleration community, I'm grateful for taking one step after another to walk more fully into a healed heart, a renewed mind, and a kingdom revelation in order to take territory for God! To those who became friends and supported me in this project, thank you! To Jill Pastore—I'm especially encouraged by your friendship and the agreements we made in prayer which have allowed us to inspire others to enter freely into their own divine design.

To Diana Bigham, my mentor and friend—thank you for sharing your spiritual wisdom and breathing vision so generously to equip me to have a true understanding of parenting in freedom.

To Liza Bobe—your words over my writing, and all my endeavors for the Lord, are so affirming, heartening, and courage-building. Thank you.

To Ben and Kara Diaz—without your amazing pastorate over our lives, we wouldn't walk in as much grace and freedom as we do. Thank you for loving our family for exactly who we are, where we are, and constantly inspiring us to grow deeper as we encounter the Lord!

To my sister, Nik, thank you for your honest feedback as I wrote, and for holding my experience gently. And to my brother Mort, your acceptance and never shutting down my story as I told it to you have meant the world.

To my mom, you've always been my cheerleader. And to Dad, I'm sorry you didn't get to read our story, but I know you see the full goodness of God now. May all my parents be blessed and stirred closer to the heart of God.

And to each person who may find themselves in the pages of this book—we were sinking in darkness that was way bigger than us. Thank you for your big and small words of faith and encouragement in the day-to-day of parenting, homeschooling, marriage, and life; I am grateful.

## *Foreword*

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I met Mara in 2019 at an AWM (Andrew Wommack Ministries) Summer Family Bible Conference. While signing copies for my book, *Autism Healed*, Mara introduced herself and told me how her younger son, Xzavier, had recently been healed of Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD), and how deeply moved and encouraged she was by the video testimony of my sons being healed of autism.

Since both our boys had suffered from sensory issues, I could relate to Mara's enormous joy and relief in seeing her beautiful little boy completely healed. We rejoiced, and later she returned to introduce Xzavier to me and my son, James, snapping a few photos of us together.

Xzavier's bright eyes and shining smile belied the years of suffering and distress he had endured.

Although I was so delighted for the family, it wasn't until I had read Mara's book that I began to understand the incredibly tough and torturous journey they had been on before they discovered the truth that God had already provided healing through Jesus Christ at the cross.

Armed with a revelation of the true gospel and numerous testimonies of miraculous healings on the AWM Website, Mara and Isaac, her husband, stood at a crossroads: Pursue compensation for vaccine damage or pursue healing...I thank God for their faith in choosing the latter!

From Petichiae (red blood dots on the skin) to dangerously low blood platelets, their world spiraled into chaos and distress: aggressive hyperactive behavior, prohibitive di-

etary interventions, severe sensory issues, and general health deterioration.

Mara will take you on their journey from a works-oriented and legalistic religious mindset to an understanding of grace—that we are saved by faith and not works.

At an AWM Gospel Truth Seminar, all her preconceived beliefs were challenged, and her perception of God completely changed, birthing faith for a healing that had already been provided. She says, “My eyes were big, my ears were open. I was hungry, and what I was hearing was the best food that ever existed in a dry and parched land.”

I am sure that this family’s journey from distress and despair to hope and miraculous healing will encourage and inspire you.

—Deborah McDermott, author of *Autism Healed: One Woman’s Fight to Save Her Sons*

# Preface

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*Dear Moms (Parents),*

*Are you aching for an answer to your child's sickness? Have the symptoms of illness ravaged your home and family, torn through your day-to-day life like a tornado, and left a crater, desolate and empty, between you and your child, all your children and your spouse? Have you cried yourself to sleep? Wailed aloud at the heartache you've felt in the loneliness and confusion? Are you sick and tired of feeling sick and tired of not knowing why this mess permeates you, your child, your life? Has the desperation of not knowing what to do for your child or even how to manage your household caused you dark pain? Made you wonder where to turn for support or answers? Have you tried everything...and found nothing?*

*I've been there—lived that life of desperate mother. I've searched for answers; looked for them in religion, the medical field, Google searched on websites, tried what felt like every natural supplement; grocery shopped and prepared food for the correct diet; considered the extremes and exhausted known resources.*

*If you can relate, I'm here to tell you, I've got good news! I found the answer that healed my child's ailment, restored his health and wholeness, reunited our family, repaired our marriage, redeemed relationships, and put back to normal what somewhere along the line went haywire and turned us down a shadowed path.*

*I'm telling you my story in love, humility, and encouragement. I'm here to put out my baton of hope and urge you to grab it and run ahead; to encourage you not to look back to the dark times of today, but to race into the light that beckons you toward truth, the answer you've been searching for. It's been present all along. And I'm blessed and privileged to walk with you now, believing for the restoration of your child. Of your family. Of you, as a mother or parent, to become a whole person again, to have a renewed life. For that is the very essence of my story.*

*My son was healed and restored to who he was meant to become. If you are eager, truly hungry—longing from the inner core of your being for change, read on. This book was written for you. Woven into the difficult, the painful, the tragic, are amazing cords of hope that will lift you higher than you might have imagined you or your child could go. May you soar on the wings of hope for a healed child.*

*~Mara De Los Reyes*

# *Part I*



## **The Journey**

*“Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.”*

*Psalm 119:105 NKJV*



## Chapter 1



# *Emergency*

I gripped the steering wheel of the gray Suburban as fiercely as someone dangling off the side of a jagged cliff and navigated traffic on the busy metro freeway. My thoughts darted inside my head, fearing for my passenger.

“How does he look, bud?”

My voice shook. My legs felt like rubber as I pressed on the gas, adjusted the rearview mirror, and strained to see what was happening in the baby carrier strapped to the seat behind me. Only two tiny, teddy-socked feet were visible.

“He’s okay, Mom. It’s okay,” my nine-year-old said in a steady voice, trying to reassure me from the other captain’s seat in the back. He had wanted to take along some Matchbox cars, but I had shouted at him in my panic, “No! We have to go *now!* C’mon, load up, and hurry!”

I willed my tears to submit but they snuck past, disobedient, briefly blurring the road as I sped toward the hospital. Pushing the worst-case scenario out of my head, I repeated under my breath, “Please, God, be with my baby.”

My blood spotted, polka-dotted, blue-bruised baby.



## Chapter 2



### *Storms and Dances*

*“God sets the lonely in families”*

*Psalm 68:6 KJV*

#### **Desires of the Heart**

**A**t the age of twenty-five, I found the Lord in a way that became real in my life. I was battling an addiction to alcohol and marijuana at the time—the coping mechanism I had learned from the people around me. My eyes had been opened to the danger of my choices a few years earlier when my older brother died in a drinking and driving accident when he was twenty-seven and I was twenty-one. It could have easily been me with the lifestyle I was living. Thankfully, I was seeking more and the Lord came right where I was, rescuing me from a dark trench of emptiness. Through His grace, I quit cold turkey, put my whole heart into the Bible and a non-denominational church family, and never looked back.

From the time I was a little girl, I had wanted a family. This was the desire tattooed on my heart; one I knew without

## Hope For A Healed Child

a doubt would come to pass yet took much longer than I had hoped. Approaching my thirties, I prayed more urgently and with greater boldness for my husband. Holding God to His promises to give me the desires of my heart if I delighted in Him, I fought prayerfully to forge the future I envisioned.

A year later, I met my husband, Isaac, at church in Arizona. He was very attractive and spiritual, a single dad whom I admired. What drew my attention to him most was his affection toward his two small children. I watched how he tenderly reached for and held his little daughter Sebrina and the way he gently carried his toddler son Angel. I noticed how he'd place his hand on their backs in a nurturing manner, guiding them in a kind, fatherly way. His integrity as a father toward his children was captivating.

We were an unlikely couple to many people. I was an English/Hungarian/French girl from Michigan, he a Mexican/Indian guy from Sonora, Mexico. I had two master's degrees, he had taken college courses to become an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT). I worked for the state in child protection. Isaac worked for the U.S. Postal Service. I tended to be on the more serious side and was drawn to his sense of humor that so easily made me laugh (Isaac means "he laughs"). Both of us enjoyed real, meaningful conversations about God and life.

## Unity

God, in His most creative and unexpected way, deepened our friendship. Isaac believed I was steady, cared whole-heartedly for him and the kids, and would be able to withstand some of the challenges that were sure to surface

when we merged and became family. I knew he had a firm foundation, and in that belief I could walk faithfully.

On the day of our wedding, billowing clouds loomed overhead, and the winds of a monsoon storm churned in the atmosphere. I was thirty-two years old and nothing on the outside could displace the excitement and joy inside of me. The trees blew and swayed, bending sideways like ballerinas. Jokingly, the pastor had laughed that Isaac was “electro-magnetic” as lights flickered and alarms sounded. Though the desert storm was moody and dramatic, inside a family was formed in all its unique beginnings. We lit the unity candle with the children, five and nine years old at the time. I knew at that moment I had not only gotten a husband, but also the gift of motherhood.

When the monsoon passed, we danced beneath the sparkling lights and stars, twirling and smiling. We had remained pure in our relationship, grounding our marriage in a lasting friendship first and foremost. Our ceremony and celebration became a cherished memory—a touchpoint in difficult times, embedded in our hearts. We came to view that monsoon on our wedding day as a foreshadowing of the storms and dances that would become the story of our life as one.

## **Untraditional**

Just four months after getting married, another one of my life-long prayers was answered: I was pregnant! My husband was so excited when I told him that he wanted to immediately tell everyone. I was just barely pregnant and insisted that we wait until it was confirmed by the doctor’s

## Hope For A Healed Child

office first. But as soon as I got word, Isaac was ready to tell the world, ignoring me when I told him that some people wait until at least the sixth week or longer.

“You know,” I hinted, “to be on the safe side.”

“Well, we don’t need to be on the safe side because we already know everything is going to go great and God is blessing us with this baby. I’m going to call my mom and let her know,” he grinned mischievously.

“Are you sure?” I hesitated, second guessing if it was the right thing to do. After all, that’s not what most people typically did. I had a knack for comparing my situation to others. On the other hand, my husband had a knack for standing out and being unashamed and unique.

Smiling, he began to punch numbers on the cell phone while he relaxed on the couch.

“Ma!” he said in his typical Spanish-loud voice. He proceeded to share our good news with excitement and laughter.

*Okay, I guess we’re not doing things the way other people do it. Here we go!* I couldn’t help but smile as I felt his energy and enthusiasm about the baby and heard him relaying that to his mom.

My husband’s insistence to speak out loud to all our close family and friends the news of our coming baby gave me such courage and hope. I don’t know if he realized it, but his actions and words set forth faith. Instead of living in fear for the first six weeks of my pregnancy, I was able to imagine what it would be like to add a new baby to our family.

I had wanted a baby before I turned thirty-four years old and at thirty-three years and 11 months, my son Roman was born. Soon after, he became known to my heart as my

Very Special Treasure. I told him, “Angel and Sebrina are my Very Special Surprises, and they were there at our wedding, but you were too, baby. You were the twinkle in my eye!”

## Decisions

Shortly after having my son, I resigned from my supervisor job with child protective services. An increasing number of infant abuse cases were crossing my desk and it was hard for me to handle as a new mother. On the day I quit, I drove home with tears of gratitude and the un-regrettable joy of a woman who was married for just over a year, had a family and infant at home waiting for her. I thanked God for his provision.

## Hoping

*“Keep thy heart with all diligence;  
for out of it are the issues of life.”*

*Proverbs 4:23*

Almost a year and a half later we were on our way back from a leader’s retreat with our church. Red, black, and gray mountains loomed in the distance, shrouded in clouds, matching my faith at the moment.

I felt nervous to talk to my husband about having another baby. I’d brought it up here and there over the past fifteen months after our son was born. But he kept turning me down. Finances and bringing more kids into a world in turmoil were on his list of reasons. Likely, dealing with the complications of having joint custody was the added chal-

## Hope For A Healed Child

lence in our lives which just made his answer an easy “no.” I prayed silently.

*God, please help me be calm and use the right words when I talk with him. Please allow Isaac’s heart to be open to having more children. I find such joy in my children. I want so badly to have more together. Give me the peace I need to stay calm in this conversation. Above all, help me surrender to Your will and to my husband’s. Amen.*

Somewhere along the lines of church discipleship, I had learned to end every prayer with, “if it’s Your will, Lord.” The premise was that I would ask of the Lord, and then He would determine if what I wanted was best for me or not. It felt like a safe place and a spiritual place to pray from. Later, I learned the detriment of the subtle flaw in that way of praying. I learned that partnering with the Lord and listening for His direction first was key, versus running out on my own to do what I felt was best and hoping it would be blessed. Much later, I understood the will of the Lord in all important issues of life are sprinkled throughout the Bible, and He didn’t intend to leave me guessing.

Truly, I desired another baby. If not now—never. Age thirty-five was a critical point; it’s not like I was in my twenties and could decide down the road when it was more convenient, affordable, or manageable. This was the road. I was on it, and it was ending soon! Even the doctor commented how thirty-five is an “at risk” age for pregnancy.

“Hey, babe?” I tentatively opened the conversation, picking at my cuticles.

“Yeah,” he said, maneuvering down the mountains on the Beeline Highway. I tried to gauge his mood as I looked at his handsome profile: charming laugh-lines crinkled around his brown eyes, chiseled chin, and baseball cap over his black hair. He seemed pensive.

“I wanted to talk to you about something.” I was trying not to build it up but didn’t want to blurt out my request and risk a fast “no” from him either.

“What’s up?” he questioned.

“So, what do you think about having another baby?” I smiled a big smile and put my eyebrows up, tilting my head as if to say, “Sound good?”

“Well,” he cleared his throat and paused for a long time, processing my question. “It makes me feel excited because I like seeing you pregnant. But...” And then, like I feared he would, he listed all of the practical and realistic reasons why another baby was not an option: finances, the difficulty of raising children, three being a lot of work and hard already, etc.

“I understand. But I really believe that another baby would be an amazing addition. I hear what you’re saying. But if I’m honest, I feel disappointed that we’re not in agreement.”

“I just don’t see it working, babe,” he said firmly, shaking his head. I could sense the stress he held. I didn’t want to push it any further. I knew my limits.

“Okay.” I looked out my passenger window. My tears smudged the scenery like chalk pastels on paper, mere dust remaining, like the residue of my heart’s desire.

## Hope For A Healed Child

“I guess we’re done then,” I said softly. Done with the discussion. Done having children. Done with asking. And reluctantly, I let go of the hope that my husband would agree to another baby for our family.

Several months after that conversation, I felt that it was less pressing. Over time, my longing for another child waned, tucked safely away in the deep recesses of my heart. I surrendered the desire over to the Lord and assumed it was not His will.

### **Disappointment**

Since the time we had dated, one of my husband’s biggest goals was to become a firefighter. He’d volunteered at one of the local fire stations and then several more years at the Metro Crisis Response Team downtown.

Finally, after multiple attempts at enduring the difficult agility test and passing the written portion as well as the oral interview, he received the call for and completed a second interview. We were thrilled and excited after years of preparation. Completely faithful that he would get “on” the department, we were shocked when he was not called back to begin the fire academy. It was a big blow. We both wrestled with the Lord to reconcile the outcome. Finally, to console our hearts, I convinced myself that it must have been a closed door from the Lord.

*“Hope deferred makes the heart sick...”*

*Proverbs 13:12a NIV*

I watched as my husband worked himself out of that disappointment; he was a doer. Thankfully, he could lighten any situation with humor and a good joke, which kept both of us going amid any trial. His amazing smile, spirited laugh, and dry humor often made me laugh and laugh. I totally “got” him in the ups and the downs. So to move forward, he threw himself into the next “thing.” He was good at projects, working hard and staying busy. Whatever he did, he put his whole heart into it. One of his favorite Scriptures was Colossians 3:23 (NIV),

*“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.”*

## **Insights**

I always prayed for our older two children, knowing it must have been difficult for them to go back and forth between two households. I asked God to keep them safe and protected. But one Sunday night after dinner when they rushed out the door, giving quick hugs and kisses, I heard crying. To my surprise, my one-year-old in his high-chair was upset that his siblings had left so abruptly. And it dawned on me how, up to that point, I had never considered how joint custody would profoundly impact our child who stayed with us.

Later, when Roman was almost two years old, Isaac encouraged me to get my real estate license. After some convincing, I went to school, studied, and took the test to contribute to the family. Admittedly, I did enjoy helping people

## Hope For A Healed Child

and appreciated the low stress of the part-time, non-social work job while I cared for my toddler. Around that time, we began investing in real estate. My husband enjoyed the variety, excitement, and uniqueness that each deal brought, and he loved meeting new people along the way.

### Impressions

When Roman was four years old, out of simple fear, we made the decision to homeschool. During that time, a series of news reports came on the TV that told of teachers who had inappropriate relations with their students. I couldn't imagine sending him to public school, or any other school for that matter.

A friend at church told us about the coming homeschool convention that summer. It was there that the Lord won my husband's heart over for homeschooling when he heard this Scripture from the keynote speaker on stage:

*“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.  
Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your  
soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I  
give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your  
children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you  
walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.  
Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your  
foreheads. Write them on the  
doorframes of your houses and on your gates.”*

*Deuteronomy 6:4-8 NIV*

From that point forward, he was fully convinced that educating our son was our responsibility, as was everything that involved his care, growth, and training. And “blink,” we were homeschooling parents. At that time, I also started an in-home daycare business and took in a few children several days a week. My son enjoyed the play and learning time with other friends.

### **The Unexpected**

When Roman was about five years old, we watched a television show about foster and adoptive children that pulled on our heartstrings. From that broadcast, we decided to become licensed foster parents. Surely Isaac’s experience with trauma when volunteering for the crisis response team and my education in social work and counseling, plus the years I’d spent in child welfare field could benefit foster children? We were so hopeful and excited to share our home and give our love to a little boy or girl. Entering into foster care, I held such abandoned trust in the Lord and anticipation to add to our family.

To our surprise, we got a radically different experience. The four-year-old little boy we picked up from the shelter was fine...for about three hours. Then the honeymoon was over. He began terrorizing our home and his trauma-triggers created upheaval in all aspects from sun-up to late-night hours. Lonnie was just a year younger than Roman. He came with hair down to his shoulders that reeked of a burnt smell which could not be removed after multiple washings. This was the effect of being exposed daily to his

## Hope For A Healed Child

parents' meth use. Privately, between my husband and I, Lonnie was nicknamed "the Taz" because of his relentless energy.

He was violent and threatened the other children in my in-home daycare. I couldn't even get through an entire cup of coffee in the morning, he had me on my toes. I'd take a couple sips, then run to protect one of the kids from Lonnie's tirades. Mid-morning, I'd microwave my coffee, take a couple more sips, then see matchbox cars or wooden ABC blocks flying across the room. And the cycle would go on until I hit the bed exhausted.

In the first two days, I questioned if we were doing the right thing by keeping him in our home. Thankfully, child protective services responded to our immediate need and assigned an in-home behavior coach to work with us. She called me by day two and we began intensely walking through what it would look like to keep him with us.

"From what you're describing to me, it sounds like he's a feral child," the coach said with a serious and ominous tone.

"What does that mean?" I inquired, keeping both eyes locked on Lonnie and the other children, my nerves like voltage.

"That means he's like a wild animal. It's highly possible that he was left alone for hours, having to fend for himself," she said with calculated pauses, seemingly for a dramatic effect. It felt like she was trying to scare me. "And kids like this, it takes years to get them unstuck from the trauma-cycle."

Picturing a merry-go-round unable to stop, I remembered, “Oh, yes! That’s true. The case worker actually told me he was left in his room, alone with no food, and the neighbors often reported his screaming and crying. He watched when his parents were taken by the police, handcuffed, and hauled away in a cop car.” Like juvenile delinquents, I thought.

We talked through whether we should keep him in our home, and I agreed to discuss it with my husband. Later that day, our foster care licensing agency touched base with me by phone.

Her shocking response cornered me like a common criminal.

“Well, if you don’t take him...it’s highly likely that we won’t be able to put any kids in your home at all...”

There was a long pause. Tired from vigilant supervision, I couldn’t think straight.

“Well...let me talk to my husband about it before I make a decision,” I sighed, defeated.

“You only have until 11 a.m. tomorrow. We are going to need to know by then so we can make arrangements if necessary.”

“Okay,” I sheepishly responded and hung up the phone.

When my husband returned from work, we talked it through, but I told him it was obvious where the agency stood. If we didn’t keep Lonnie in our home, they all but threatened that our foster care license would prove completely useless. That was hard to swallow after months of

## Hope For A Healed Child

preparing our house, our minds, our hearts, and our family. So we folded, being the “good” Christians that we were. After all, we were called to care for orphans and widows.

Working with the behavior coach over the next nine months, she came into our home and trained us as a family on how to handle Lonnie’s Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Attachment Disorder, possible history of sexual abuse, and more. I made a “safe corner” for him, selecting a specific place in the house to place pillows and blankets, anything soft for the moments that he was completely out of control. Instructed to gently bring him to the safe corner, there I would block him with a pillow while he kicked me, threw shoes at me, bit me, and raged. Flat-out raged like a beast. By the end of those fits I was sweaty, completely exhausted, and shaky. While he, on the other hand, continued to have the same high-level energy and ability to snap into vicious outbursts at any given moment.

In the midst of that trial, I became convinced that it was “naive Christian thinking” and pure foolishness to believe God would bless us so readily with a child who might fit right into our family. I persuaded myself that God had something to teach me through the trial. It wasn’t until years later that I learned what I could have done differently to intercede on Lonnie’s behalf and where the Lord was in all of that tribulation.

Each evening, late into the night, I cried on my bed and asked God, “Why?” Weeping and weeping, I felt brittle, like dried petals. At night I feared for my life and household and had visions of Lonnie coming into my bedroom with a knife.

Although we were plugged into our church family with small groups and support, I found myself on my own in foster care. People simply could not understand or relate. One friend said in a nonchalant almost scolding manner, “Well, that’s what you chose, isn’t it?” As if anyone would choose to be trapped in their own home with a child acting out explosive violence and abuse. I found consolation only among other foster parents in the congregation who empathized with the harshness of the situation.

Yet dutifully, I wore the role of foster mother like a soldier on a battlefield, few people knowing the truth behind my armor and face shield. Within weeks, I had closed my childcare business and put myself full-time into home-schooling Roman through kindergarten and foster parenting. It took months and months to get my bearings and pull my head above the waters of survival mode. The song Stronger became my anthem. The waves were taking me under, and I felt I had to bear it for the sake of Jesus. He’d eventually get me through, I thought, once I had suffered enough. This flawed thinking prolonged my situation.

I rocked Lonnie every night, his four-year-old body curled up on my lap while he sucked his thumb. I literally restored the trust that was lost in his infancy. Daily I prayed the Lord would provide accelerated healing. And each night, I’d wrestle with the heavy guilt of my motherhood and the way I was traumatizing my own son by allowing such brokenness into our home. Isaac and I would marvel in shock at Lonnie’s behaviors and reactions. “He’s literally broken,” we’d say with wide eyes, jaws gaping, and our hearts deeply

## Hope For A Healed Child

saddened that this child could have endured such abuse and neglect.

At Christmas time after my son turned six and Lonnie five, I began to break under the pressure of the trauma. I was getting calls from his childcare center daily. We took him there to receive some respite and sanity in our own lives, a small break from his overwhelming needs. I asked child services for more in-home support, but none came. Then finally, he was expelled from childcare, as if that's even possible. Under the strain of his daily raging, we finally asked that he be removed from our home.

As the team worked on getting him a new placement, a higher level of care, we endured as best we could. Learning from the behavior coach that the human brain is literally able to create new neuro pathways to correct negative patterns of past experiences and to make progress in healing, we sensed a slight glimmer of hope. After we'd spent months and hours of therapeutic preschool games at circle time lead by the behavior coach in my living room; time rocking him in the rocking chair; reams of art therapy pages; Love and Logic method parenting; and providing care that surpassed our understanding, finally we began to see small progress.

Then Isaac read a book called *The Blessing* by Gary Smalley and John Trent, PhD. He began to implement its principles, pouring positive identity words into Lonnie's mind and heart. The author quoted Scriptures from the Old Testament where the patriarchs blessed their children, laying hands on them. Those blessings were irreversible. And like supernatural power, we watched words do a miracle in our home.

“Wow, Lonnie! You’re like a strong lion the way you bounced that ball.” Over and over we listened to the audiobook and then implemented our own words of identity over Lonnie and each other. The atmosphere in our home began to shift as our words spoke a different truth, backed by prayer and Scriptures. We were amazed by the human spirit, its resilience and ability to recover from utterly destructive experiences.

Although not as quickly as I had hoped, accelerated healing did come. Within one month of speaking positive words of blessing over Lonnie and each other, we saw a radical shift.

And nine months after Lonnie arrived in our home, he was noticeably healthier and stabilized. So we asked that he remain with us and our foster agency fought on our behalf to maintain his placement. But by that time, all the paperwork had been put in place, the professional players had had their say and the plan stood. It was like trying to stop a freight train rushing down the track. The team made a planned decision to move him to a higher level of care, a therapeutic foster home, before implementing the long-term plan of returning him to his parents.

We never did learn how things turned out for Lonnie. One week after he left our care, the therapeutic foster mother informed me that the therapist no longer felt it was beneficial for us to have contact with him. And she cut us right out of his life, just like that.

We didn’t know at the time that all the training and support we received for our first foster son’s traumatic expe-

## Hope For A Healed Child

riences and intense reactions would prepare us for what was to come down the road in our own child.

### Faith Renewed

But at that moment in time, we took a pause in accepting new foster children. I felt we couldn't trust what might happen next. We slowed down to regain energy, recover from the trauma of our own experience, reflect on moments of gratitude, and strain to see where the Lord's hand was in all of it. I poured into my own children, especially my son who experienced it all in our home and loved up on him in the after math. We talked and processed what happened. We cried and we laughed.

After a couple weeks, I gained some closure as I cleaned Lonnie's bedroom—rearranging furniture and redecorating with a pink and mint patchwork quilt. Another week later, Isaac and I prayed and talked about taking another child into our home.

Then one night, nearly a month after Lonnie left, I lay in my bed, unable to sleep. I felt uncertain that I could trust what the Lord may bring us. I didn't want another storm. At the time, I thought He might want to keep pruning me, stretching me through hardship. I didn't want to willingly step into that scary struggle. And I couldn't handle opening a door to more strife and chaos. Most of the night I lay thinking, tossing and turning, questioning the Lord again and again, secretly in my heart.

*Lord, will you bring another Lonnie? Is that what you expect us to handle, God? Because that was too much. It nearly*

*took us under...Does God want me to keep suffering for the sake of these children? To lay aside my own family's needs? What about my youngest? Is he damaged? How can I be sure that the next child will be less traumatized? Less traumatizing?*

Then in the early morning hours before the sun arose, I heard a voice. It came from inside of me, but it was not my inner voice. Unmistakably, I understood. The Lord pressed upon me: I AM faithful. And immediately, hope anew blossomed in me. Reassured by my Father, I felt ready to move forward with fostering again.

True to that promise, we were called by child services and asked to pick up the sweetest, most adorable three-year-old girl who won my heart the minute I saw her. Her brown eyes were enchanting and immediately I saw past her shaved head (due to lice infestation) and into her joyful soul.

She abundantly blessed our lives for about eight months before being abruptly returned to her parents on my 40th birthday. Her best gift to me was the restoration of my faith in God to bring back beautiful things into our life after a long, hard desert season.

## **Unexpected Confession**

*“Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD,  
The fruit of the womb is a reward.”*

*Psalm 127:3*

That summer Isaac and I attended the yearly home-school convention. We were listening to the opening keynote speaker, who was telling his hilarious “turkey flies through the RV window while traveling with family of eight children”

## Hope For A Healed Child

story. We laughed along with the crowd at his comical anecdotes. Then he wove in the blessing of children and how opposite God's view of children is from the world's view.

He asked us, "If someone was handing out one hundred-dollar bills, at what point would you say 'stop'? When would you tell them, 'No, that's okay, I don't want any more hundreds'?"

He went on to explain that children are like that—a blessing from God. Why would we ever say "No" to the blessings of God? Describing how his wife wanted yet another baby, he told of the feedback (more like flack) they received from family. He used Psalm 127:3 as his central verse and it struck my husband's heart like an arrow. Bullseye! A direct hit to conviction.

He casually leaned over with new-found insight and said to me, "Maybe we should have another baby?"

With gut instinct, I immediately responded through slit eyes and clenched teeth, "*I am going to kill you!*"

I was forty years old. *Forty!* I was floored by his proposal.

Later, once I realized my husband was serious, we spoke to the speaker and verified that his wife was forty-six years old. *Okay...I guess age is not an issue in their eyes!* And my little seed of desire for another child of my own was suddenly exposed and being nurtured with water and sunlight. It's ironic how you find yourself at places in life you never thought you'd be.

After praying, we agreed to at least try for another baby. At that point, we had our third foster child in our

home, a one-and-a-half-year-old boy, Zayd. He was moved from his grandmother's house to ours due to his incessant crying and whining. It was draining on all of us. But we nurtured and watched him grow.

Almost exactly a year after my husband had suggested we have a baby, I became pregnant! Of course, I was thrilled—that original deep hope and longing that I had locked away was finally being released into realization, years later. God is so good. Isaac was beside himself when he learned we were having another boy.

During my pregnancy that year, my heart was mending as we started a new season. Zayd returned home in the fall and I was due early the following year. I prepared inwardly and outwardly for another baby of my own.

## The Gift

As soon as Xzavier was born, I cried tears of joy and celebration; my second baby, and my fourth child! Through his birth, the Lord showed me that He cares for all the desires of my heart, even the ones I had consciously “let go of” and chalked up as being unanswered prayer. The Lord revived what had been put away and lay dormant. Having a child at age 42, I vowed he'd keep me young.

Our youngest boys were eight years apart. That was a familiar age gap because Roman and his big brother were seven years apart. While I taught school at the kitchen table, “baby Zavey” as we nicknamed him, played in the play pen, the swing, and the jungle floor mat. I'd look up and see

## Hope For A Healed Child

him happily batting his arms and legs at hanging animals. Then several minutes later, he'd be totally crashed out and his brother and I would chuckle.

I'd never seen a happier baby. He frequently burst into giggles that felt and sounded like bubbles floating all around us. I'd set him on the bed and we had fun playing, pretending he was a rapper.

I'd chant, "My name is Zavey, and I'm a baby," then make rap beats and noises with my mouth. We'd all explode in laughter and watch how he'd fill the space around him with euphoria—expressive smiles, eyebrows up and pure joy; all part of his DNA.

At about eight months old, he crawled around the living room and over to the little nook where we kept baby books. Zavey would sit and flip through his tiny Baby Einstein books. He'd thoughtfully consider each page and the musical instrument on it before turning to the next. He loved his reading time and I'd watch in gratitude, the blessing of him.

I called him my "baby on the go" because we were busy with homeschool groups, park days, Angel's football practices, Sebrina's volleyball games, church, and other family activities. Everywhere I took him, people would exclaim, "Oh! He's so happy!" He could change the feeling in a room just by being in it—his smile stretching across time and space, seeping onto the hearts of others. Such happiness also earned him the nickname, "Bright and Shiny Sunshine Boy."

I made up a somewhat obnoxious, opera-sounding song for his first, middle and last name, which I sang out reg-

ularly to him. In Spanish, De Los Reyes means “of the kings.” So I added his royalty into the song:

*“Xzavier, splendid and brilliant, trusted and true;  
Nathaniel, you’re my gift of God, and I love you.  
De Los Reyes, born of the Kings,  
born of the wonderful, marvelous Kings.”*

One day I watched the boys playing together inside a large cardboard box, giggles bursting from both of them. Roman added his comedy into the scene, narrating and giving commentary on each thing his brother did. After a while he hopped up on the couch, gave me a hug and marveled with big loving eyes.

“I never saw a baby grow from scratch before, Mom.”

“Isn’t it special?” I smiled, resting in the peaceful contentment of that moment in time, unaware of the troubles just around the corner.

