



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 179– Beauty in Adopting with Cathy and Caili Sall Eryn Adkins & Vivian Mabuni

[Music]

Cathy: The beginning was hard because she was scared. She didn't know where she was. She didn't, you know. And the one thing that I wanted to do before I left for China is to know how to say, "I love you" in Chinese. And there was one point in time, she was just, we were home, and she was just screaming. And I was just holding her so tight and saying, "I love you. I love you, I love you" in Chinese. And then she would have nightmares, and I would just sing "Jesus Loves Me" to her, and it would just calm her right down.

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Eryn: So today is an exciting interview because we have a mother-daughter duo, Vivian. And this conversation, it's going to be a little different. I think what I kind of hope for is I want to get to know Cathy Sall, who is no stranger to Our Daily Bread Ministries. And she has brought her daughter, Caili, in to talk with us. But before we get into learning more about Caili, I want to dig into knowing Cathy's story and then how Caili came into Cathy's life. So Cathy, welcome to the *God Hears Her* podcast.

Cathy: Thank you. It's good to be here.

Eryn: So will you share maybe with us, what do you do right now with Our Daily Bread Ministries?

Cathy: I am a project manager, which I love doing. *God Hears Her* has been...the podcast and the blog has been my project for a long time.

Eryn: Since it started almost.

Cathy: Yeah, yeah, and I've loved every minute of it. I also do project management for the Our Daily Bread Publishing team.

Eryn: Oh cool.

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Cathy: And I am starting to get some like our quarterly newsletters, some fun other projects.

Eryn: How long have you been with Our Daily Bread?

Cathy: This is my thirteenth year.

Eryn: Wow.

Cathy: Yeah.

Vivian: I would love to hear, Cathy, some of your spiritual journey. Like what is your spiritual background, your spiritual journey?

Cathy: Raised in a Christian home. So grew up in the church, made profession of faith when I was right out of high school. Had a great group of friends that we all got along really well together. And we all kind of went to the same school, same church, that kind of stuff. They started all getting married, and I did not. And so it was a bit of a God, what are you doing kind of thing? But in the process, God had opened some opportunities for me to travel on mission projects. So I went to Russia twice.

Eryn: Oh wow.

Cathy: I went to the Czech Republic. I went to Ukraine. So, I was in Ukraine for six months. I was kind of testing the waters to see if God wanted me something more. And I realized that no, that wasn't it, which was okay. Met some amazing people on those journeys. Really grew in my faith on those journeys, really trusting God in...and learned as a part of a mission team, what not to do and what to do. Our first trip went with this team that was very much where US citizens were here to change the world and this, and it was a good learning experience. God taught me a lot and it's just a, you know what? This isn't how we do this.

Vivian: Right.

Cathy: This isn't what God wants us to do. So, those events were very life-growing spiritually for me. Especially when I went to the Ukraine too, because for six months I didn't really know anybody. I went by myself. And it was hard, but it was good. Met some really, really good people there, and they just live in hard...were living in hard times. And it's, you know, I felt so privileged in where I live and what I have and, but yet sweetest people, sweetest people and you know, would give anything for you.



Eryn: Really shifted your perspective. I would imagine.

Cathy: Yeah, yeah.

Vivian: So it sounds like your faith was increasingly more your own...

Cathy: Right.

Vivian: ...as you had to step out in faith.

Cathy: Yes, yes.

Vivian: And as you were kind of jolted from what was comfortable or...

Cathy: Right, yeah.

Vivian: You know, like...

Eryn: Yes.

Vivian: ...that seems like a lot of times for people when...

Cathy: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Vivian: ...their faith becomes their own.

Eryn: It seems like you were surrendered to God while taking risk and then learning to modify with the risk...

Cathy: Yeah, right, yeah.

Eryn: ...by listening to Him...

Cathy: Yeah.

Eryn: ...in your story.



Cathy: Yeah, and it changed my whole perspective on just how we treat people and how I interact with people. And it's like, you know what? I learned I can't judge anybody by what I see, because there's so much deeper stuff in people.

Vivian: I wish that would be something that everyone could learn...

Cathy: Yeah, yeah.

Vivian: ...at some point

Eryn: So you shared all of your friends were getting married, getting in relationships And as they're in that path of life, you are traveling...

Cathy: Right.

Eryn: ...exploring the world

Cathy: Right.

Eryn: So tell me more. Was there a point of which you stopped traveling to come home and get rooted, or?

Cathy: Yeah, so after I had spent the six months in the Ukraine, I came home, and I started more regular jobs. I had gone to college, just did a two-year, and then was working for a company and actually wanted to get to move up. And because I had only done two years in...in college, they actually paid for half of my tuition.

Vivian: Oh, that's great.

Cathy: Yeah, yeah, it was great. So I went to school part-time, and I worked full-time. And I just never really felt settled anyplace. I...I would move from different jobs like, about every two years. Our Daily Bread has settled me. It's...it's amazing, because I have literally, I think the longest besides Our Daily Bread, the longest I ever stayed with a company was six, maybe six years.

Eryn: Wow.



Cathy: But else it was for different reasons. I would leave. I did real estate for about three years, and I loved it. And God put into my heart that I can make a lot of money, but, as a single person, it's like, what do I do with it? You know, I have friends, I could travel all that kind of stuff, but it's just like God laid on my heart that I can do something more important with somebody in my life. And that's where the whole adoption thing started.

Eryn: So that's where it planted.

Cathy: Yeah.

Eryn: There was a seed planted in that moment.

Cathy: Yes, which is really crazy, because two things happened to me that were probably fairly close together. One, God told me very specifically that I was not getting married, and I had to work through that. And then people had said to me, Oh, you should adopt. Oh, you should adopt. And it's just like, I said, no, as a single person, I felt a child needed two parents.

Eryn: Yeah.

Cathy: And they're like, well, a child needs a parent. And then God laid on my heart that maybe I should adopt. And so one day...I have a friend who was a social worker for an adoption agency...went and had dinner with her and I said, you need to talk me out of something. And she's like, what's that? And I said, I'm thinking about adopting. And she looks at me and she's like, you really think I'm going to talk you out of that?

Eryn: Oh, that's a good friend.

Vivian: Wow.

Cathy: So that kind of started. After dinner, I went home. She worked for an org...organization called All God's Children, which is on the West Coast up in Washington. And she said, go to their website and just look at the kids. And I kind of had an idea of age range I wanted. Because of being single, I knew I had to work. So I didn't want a baby. I wanted an...somewhat a child between the age of like four and seven, four and eight, something like that. So they could be in school, I could still work, that kind of stuff. By the end of the night, I had picked Caili. I had named her.



Eryn: Oh.

Cathy: And I hadn't done anything else. But it's just like...it's like...there was...there was just...there was a number of kids obviously on there that, I could choose from. And she was the one. The crazy part of that is that, so this was on a Thursday night. On Friday, I called All God's Children. They said, you have to fill out an application, 200 bucks. So it's like, okay. And they said...and I said, I'll do that. And they said, well, if you really want to make sure somebody else doesn't take her, you need to put down \$3,000 dollars. And I said, I haven't even talked to my family about this. I said, I can't do that...

Eryn: Yeah.

Cathy: ...without knowing that they will support me.

Vivian: Sure.

Cathy: And I figured they would, but I couldn't do it.

Vivian: Right.

Cathy: I took that weekend, and I have a sister, and I have a brother and my parents. And I met with each family. My brother and sister-in-law had an adopted child from Korea.

Eryn: Okay.

Cathy: I have cousins, adopted cousins from Korea. I knew I didn't want to do domestic adoption. I knew I wanted to do international, and my choice was China, and with all that background. So by Monday, I had talked to everybody. They were all very supportive of me. Tuesday morning, I had to go out to Lansing for a meeting, stopped in Grand Rapids on the way back home for a home inspection, got back to the office, picked up my email. Now this is back in the time where it's like, okay, I had a cell phone, but they're not like the cell phones we have now.

Eryn: Right.

Cathy: And the agency had my cell phone number, had my email, said they would let me know if anything changes or whatever. So I got back to my office. There was an email from the agency that said, "We're sorry, but somebody else has chosen the girl that you had wanted to adopt." And I was devastated. I



mean, I was just like heartbroken. I knew she was mine. I just knew in my heart she was mine. And I said, I just don't understand why you didn't call me, why I had to find this out on an email. They apologized and so I called my friend who is my social worker, and I told her what happened. She's like, let me see what I can do.

Eryn: In that waiting, what was your conversation with God like?

Cathy: It was like, how can this be? God, I just don't understand. And I even went back to the website and looked at the kids again, and there was just, they weren't there. And it's just like, okay, God, maybe You're telling me this isn't. Maybe I was hearing You wrong, and maybe You don't want me to adopt. And if that's it, then I will accept that, as hard as that is.

Eryn: I feel like it's so common when you're taking a risk or...or making a huge step in faith, and then if it doesn't go in the direction that we thought it would go; we start to question.

Cathy: Right.

Eryn: Did we ever really hear God correctly?

Cathy: Right, yeah, yeah.

Eryn: So she...

Cathy: So she went to bat for me. On Thursday...so this was Tuesday. On Thursday morning, I got a call from All God's Children, and they said the other family was willing to give up so you can still adopt her.

Vivian: Wow.

Eryn: Wow.

Cathy: Yeah, and it's just like...

Vivian: In one week's time, poof.

Cathy: Yeah.



Vivian: Okay, this is unheard of timing-wise.

Cathy: Yes.

Vivian: I've...I've walked with friends through the adoption process, and it's years...

Cathy: Yeah.

Vivian: ...sometimes years, and this is remarkable.

Cathy: Yeah. I really thought it was done. And so it's just like, okay, God, I need to trust You, you know, in whatever happens along this journey. I need to trust that You are still walking beside me and leading me and guiding me.

Eryn: Yeah.

Cathy: So obviously, I was thrilled.

Vivian: Sure.

Eryn: Ooh.

Cathy: Then came all the paperwork and the timing.

Vivian: Sure.

Eryn: Was there ever a moment that you were like, okay, what am I doing? This is right, right? This is right. Yes, this is right.

Cathy: Yeah, it was. It always felt really right. One of the other little hiccups that I had was in the process of filling out all my paperwork, doing everything, China closed adoptions to single people.

Vivian: Right.

Eryn: Oh, wow.



Cathy: Now, fortunately all my paperwork was already over in China.

Eryn: Oh, wow.

Cathy: And so I didn't get...

Vivian: You kind of got in just in the nick of time.

Cathy: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Eryn: Wow.

Cathy: And it's like another God, another God thing. It's just, you know, it was just like, I can't even believe it. It took a couple months longer to for my process to...but had it all done in 11 months.

Vivian: That's really remarkable. Okay, so Caili. You're here.

Eryn: You're here.

Caili: Yeah, I'm here.

Eryn: How old were you when you were adopted?

Caili: I was five, yeah. I was adopted on May 8, and May is really...

Cathy: Gotcha day.

Caili: ...yeah special. It's Gotcha day. But it's also my grandma's birthday and so, so sweet. Cause I remember my mom telling me when she told, um, like the family the day she got me. And my grandma was like, this is like the best birthday gift I could ever have.

Eryn: Ooh.

Vivian: So do you have any memories of China then? Or what...



Caili: Um, yeah, a little bit. I mean, as I get older, it's a lot, definitely harder to remember those memories, but I...I remember eating like a lot of rice. I remember there's just like a lot of kids that were in the orphanage. And so to me, it always felt like I was just like a bit, especially with the food, like, mealtime, it would always feel, like, rushed. And so it's like you could try just to eat as much as you could, but also like kind of first come first serve whoever like gets it. And so I remember that was like a habit I kind of had to get out of once I was home. Cause I would always eat like a lot like fast as a kid. My mom's like you can slow down, and I was just like I didn't understand that. And I think that was just like something I had developed as a kid, just being in the orphanage, not even knowing.

Vivian: I mean, that totally makes a lot of sense. Were you able to keep in touch with anyone from the orphanage, or have you?

Caili: Yeah, two of my best friends that I was in the orphanage with got adopted too. I was the last one who got adopted. I always make fun of my mom, like, took you long enough. But...

Vivian: Cathy.

Caili: ...so, um, a boy and a girl. And so it was honestly just God's amazing work, just how things worked out. I don't exactly know, my mom knows more about how, like, they got connected, like, through social work, or like family of who was adopting us. And so like they knew we were like best friends in the orphanage. And so my mom was able to figure out where they were living or like getting adopted, where their family was from. And so the girl, she lives in Indiana, and then the boy he lives in Grand Rapids.

Cathy: Byron Center.

Caili: Yeah, Byron Center, yeah.

Vivian: Wow. So you've been able to keep up with them?

Caili: Um, yeah. I kept up with them growing up. It got harder, you know, once you get to high school and life is busy.

Vivian: Sure.

Caili: But it was really special because it felt like, especially as a kid, feeling different, having them...it made me feel that I could relate to some...



Vivian: Totally.

Caili: ...someone else, my friends.

Vivian: Yeah, that is really great. So can you tell us a little bit about just your own spiritual journey then and...

Caili: Yeah, my spiritual journey...I mean my mom raised me really well with being in a Christian home in the family. And honestly, I didn't really understand like my relationship with Jesus much, because I was going to a private school like through high school even. And so everything for me felt like it was just in a bubble, and it's like I didn't really know anything else. And so I feel like my faith really became focused and clear, like, it grew and was strengthened by my...I took a gap year after high school. And so I got experience in traveling. I did a mission for six months, and I did it through an organization called Experience Mission. And so, yeah, I joined them for six months. The first three months I was in South Africa, and then the second three months I was in the Holy Land, which is Palestine and Israel.

Eryn: Wow.

Vivian: Oh wow.

Caili: So. Yeah, it's...it's kind of crazy to think back that I did that. But honestly, my mom is like a big advocate for traveling, as you can see. And so, her just, encouragement and support is what, like, pushed me and made me realize that was something I wanted to pursue. And I didn't really know yet what I wanted to do in college. I didn't even know if I wanted to go to college. And so I was like, I should just take a break, you know. Like I've...I'm such a big like advocate too just for like, it's okay to take a year off. It's okay to take like even two or three, whatever...however long it takes. Like life...life doesn't have to be followed in these steps, you know. And I feel like it's...it's just whatever, you know, God is calling you to. And I felt without my gap year, without my experience abroad, I don't think my faith would be where it is without it, you know

Vivian: Yeah, it's that same kind of through line of that disruption that causes us to have to really evaluate like do I really believe? And what do I really believe? And that transference even with the best of environments, it's always fascinating because I didn't grow up in a Christian home. So when I meet kids who are Christians who grew up in Christian homes, it's like, how did your faith become your own? And that's always one of my favorite questions to ask. So yeah, that's really cool to hear.



Eryn: How is that watching her spread her wings and fly? Were you like, you go girl, or were you like nervous at all?

Cathy: I am so thrilled that she has this big worldview. And even, you know, going to Utah, it's like, really? But...but I also...but I also understand her personality and her desire to see more and to grow more and to experience life. And she's not in this little bubble of West Michigan...

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: Right.

Cathy: ... where everybody's a Christian. Well, not everybody, but there's so much more life out there and you...you grow, and you learn. I'm just so thrilled about that.

Eryn: How has y'all's relationship developed over time? I want to know the memory or the thought that just popped into your brain when I asked that.

Caili: When we were talking about that question, I...I was just...I made it kind of a joke comment saying that like one of the things our relationship is like, we'll just like argue if we're going to work out or not. And I'm usually the one dragging her to the gym. So it's supporting each other and, you know, how to...

Cathy: Encourage each other.

Caili: ...yeah, encourage each other.

Cathy: The beginning was hard because she was scared. She didn't know where she was. She didn't, you know. And the one thing that I wanted to do before I left for China is to know how to say, I love you in Chinese. And there was one point in time she was just...we were home, and she was just screaming. And I was just holding her so tight and saying, I love you, I love you, I love you in Chinese. And then she would have nightmares, and I would just sing "Jesus Loves Me" to her; and it would just calm her right down. I think we...we bonded really well right away. And what I'm loving now is we're beyond the mother-daughter thing. We have more of this friendship kind of thing. And I love to see where she has grown and developed on her own. And she, okay, I'm just going to brag on my daughter a minute, but so she...

Eryn: And for those who that...that can't see this, she just covered her eyes and her face...



Vivian: In the best way, yes, yes.

Eryn: ...in the sweetest way with a smile.

Cathy: But she...so being in Utah, they have a lot of the...the Mormon...

Caili: The LDS.

Cathy: The LDS.

Caili: Which is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

Cathy: Of Latter-Day Saints. And she met with missionaries there so she could understand what they learned. And then she has conversations with these people and how her faith is different from what their faith is. And it's just...I mean, that's just like, it's amazing.

Eryn: Yes.

Cathy: It's like, I didn't do that when I was her age, you know. And she's...

Eryn: Let alone at 32 or 42...

Cathy: Yeah, yeah.

Eryn: ...or 62. We know many people that don't do that.

Cathy: And so it's just fun to watch her grow on her own and become her own person. And we do...we get along most of the time really well.

Vivian: Except for when you don't work out, Cathy, right? Something like that. Well, I would be curious from both of you, advice that you would have from the perspective of an adoptee and an adoptive mom, just advice for families who are considering adoption. What would you recommend?

Cathy: To bring a child in that you don't know where they would have ended up and just loving on them. It's life-changing. It was life-changing for me. It's life-changing for Caili and the opportunities that she has now. And I know that there are...there are families out there that have adopted that have really had hard



experiences. But I would say it's still worth it. If you're even thinking about it and praying about it and, or God lays it on your heart, He will walk you through it. He will guide you through it. He will walk each step with you. And there may be times where you think that's where it's going, and God will stop you. So you...you know, you've got to listen to how God is directing you. But yeah, absolutely, absolutely start that. I had somebody that had suggested to me to foster first. And I said, I can't because I don't want to have to give a child back.

Eryn: Yeah.

Cathy: Once, I bring a child into my life. I don't want to have to give them back. And so, that's where adoption for me was...was a better step than...than fostering.

Caili: It's pretty simple, but it's harder. It's...it's, you know, it's like one of those simple things, that's harder to, you know, believe in and live on is just be patient. Like, especially from, I think, being adopted perspective. Like, there's just a lot. Like adoption is...it's so complex. It's...there're so many beautiful parts and so many painful parts to it. But it's, you know, it's...it's the whole beautiful story of adoption. And for me, I feel like being patient with your story as you grow up, especially as like a child, not knowing, like, for me, my...my adoption, like, I...I didn't know I was being adopted. And so that was one of the big things that, like, really, like, broke me. So, like, it was one of those things that, like, that's what caused my nightmares. That's what caused, like, a lot of crying. I think one of the things I realized as I started getting older and stuff is knowing that, even though I wasn't able to share my story, like, when I was younger, especially, like, high school, I was...it wasn't something that I wanted to share. Because I was, like, I wanted to be similar to my, like, classmates and stuff. And I wanted to fit in, and I realized I had to be patient with myself and realizing that, like, you will find the right people that will want to hear the story and just being patient and...and being gracious to yourself. Like, uh, like God gives us grace and like He extends it to us. So give yourself grace. And...and especially with college, like I...I had a really great friend last year who I really opened my whole adoption story kind of just to her. And it was just one of those special moments where I realized that like having to wait that long to kind of like let down those walls. Like it's...it's really beautiful and humbling to just like surrender that and knowing that like it's okay to like share something that's, you know, not easy to share. And um, yeah. One of my favorite Bible verses is Ecclesiastes 1, verse 18. It says, "The greater my wisdom. the greater my grief. To increase knowledge only increases sorrow." It seems a little like a downer Bible verse, but it's honestly one of my favorite. Because just with my gap year and...and just experiencing so many things I've experienced, um, and then my adoption story. Like there's a lot of sorrow and grief in it. But it's like, I see those not necessarily as bad things, but realizing, you know, like to me, when I gained those as strengths and as things that it's part of my story. I feel like I'm closer to the heart of Jesus, because I feel like He took on



the cross and...and paid for all that, you know, sorrow and pain. And so it just, it's like a humbling, a passage for me. So I try to live that out while I study in college.

Eryn: That's really beautiful,

Vivian: That is really powerful, Caili. You are an old soul, you know. Like, I mean, seriously, there's a depth and maturity to you that I don't think many 22-year-olds have to be able to hold in tension, both the joy and the sorrow and the gratitude as well as the loss and just those...that's a very complex...a lot of adults don't have that capacity to do that, do so. So I mean, I'm really quite blown away that you were able to articulate that and live that out in the way that you have, because that really displays the type of thinker that you are and how you're navigating and putting words to your life and your experience, so.

Eryn: Yeah.

Caili: Thank you. Honestly, I wouldn't be who I am without my mom, and...

Eryn: I was about to say.

Caili: Her old soul just rubbed off on me.

Eryn: I was about to say, Cathy, it's clear that you've created an environment where grief can live, and that it's allowed. How did you hold the beauty of a miracle in adopting and the grief and the pain that it comes from? Cause it's so evident that you had to have held it for her to see that.

Cathy: Yeah, I think part of that for me was just loving her. And always, I mean, always we say to each other, I love you. Growing up for me, my dad never said that to me. And I, in my mind, I said, she will never walk out this door without me saying, I love you. And giving her space to cry, no matter what age, I mean, there have been struggles with high school, you know, struggles where she was like, okay, you got to write a story of your family history.

Vivian: Yeah.

Cathy: And it's just like, you know, what do you do with that?

Vivian: Right.



Cathy: You know? And so just helping her, again, grieve through that and walk with her through that. And it's like you don't know your biological family, but you have our family. And so I think, yeah, just allowing her the space that she needs to...to just grieve and yet to have joy in...in being with family. By the grace of God, I think is for both of us. It's...it's just, He's been in the middle of it and...and that's been so very important for both of us.

Eryn: What I'm hearing you say, her grief was not a reflection of how she viewed and loved you...

Cathy: Right.

Eryn: ...which is why you were able to love her...

Cathy: Right.

Eryn: ...and be there unconditionally. Cause you...your confidence wasn't found in her acceptance of you...

Cathy: Right.

Eryn: ...and her processing. That's really beautiful, Cathy.

Cathy: Yeah, thank you.

Eryn: And Caili.

Cathy: One of the most beautiful moments for me was when she accepted God, when she accepted Jesus as her Savior. And it wasn't long after...I mean, I would say maybe two years after she came. And we were just sitting at the table, and we were...we had devotions or whatever. And I think she was asking me questions. And...and it's just like, do you want to ask Jesus into your heart? And she said, yes. And we prayed together. And...and it was just like, I can't believe this was happening to my child. And it was just, you know, and it's...it was just beautiful. That was a very special time for me. I don't know if she remembers it, but...

Eryn: Do you remember it, Caili?

Caili: No.



Eryn: No, you don't.

Caili: I think one thing too, with just having my own adoption story, it...it's made me appreciate and respect people who have their own story. Like, yeah, I love how every adoption story is different, but it's not just adoption. Like, I think it's so cool that, like, with living in Utah, I meet these people in college and totally different backgrounds. And it's like, raised differently or different religion, or different beliefs, and that's all part of their story. And I think it's just so cool to hear people's story. And it's...it's just something I...I think it's special that people should always remember to...to listen to other people and hear what kind of journey that God has given them, you know.

Eryn: That was a beautiful message from Cathy and Caili. I'm thankful we could hear their story. Well, before we go, be sure to check out our show notes for links to learn more about Cathy and Caili. You can find that and more at godhearsher.org. That's godhearsher.org.

Vivian: And if you like this episode, or you've been listening to the show for a bit, please leave us a rating and review wherever you listen to your podcasts. Be sure to share your favorite episodes with a friend.

Eryn: Thank you for joining us. And don't forget, God hears you. He sees you, and He loves you because you are His.

Vivian: Today's episode was engineered by Anne Stevens and produced by Jade Gustman and Mary Jo Clark. We also want to thank our listeners in Guyana for all their help and support. Thanks everyone.

Eryn: Our Daily Bread Ministries is a donor-supported, nonprofit ministry dedicated to making the life-changing wisdom and stories of the Bible come alive for all people around the world.

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