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For the Least of These

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dedication

I am profoundly grateful to my Heavenly Father for holding my hand through every experience written in these pages. He is also wholly responsible for piecing every part of this book perfectly into place.

To my unbelievably supportive and loving parents: I could never come up with enough words to express my appreciation to you. I have been so blessed to witness the amazing examples of sacrificial love, undeserved blessings, and whole-hearted obedience to God that you two have portrayed throughout my life. I have attempted to pattern my life after yours, Dad and Mom. I have tried to be to the children that God has placed in my path, all the things that you have been to me. You both continue to amaze me. When I count my blessings, being your daughter is at the top of the list.



donate

The Precious Miracles Foundation is financially supported by donations from individuals, families, and churches. We rely solely on the gifts of our supporters to provide food, clothing, medical care, education, and therapies for the children in our care. To find out more about how you can be a part of our support team please visit our website at www.preciousmiracles.org.

We are proud to be able to say that 100% of every dollar given to Precious Miracles is used to directly support the ministry in Ecuador.

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introduction

When I named my organization several years ago, I was not aware that I would see and experience God's supernatural intervention so frequently. In the years that followed the foundation's beginning, my life would be overwhelmed by precious little miracles. This is the story of some of them.

In September 2000, I went to Ecuador to start a home for abandoned children. My goal never was to open an orphanage but rather a home. The main problem I witnessed at the already existing orphanages in the Quito area was the uneven ratio of swarms of children to few caregivers. I chose not to take in a limitless number of children. I established a maximum capacity of 10 that later turned to 15. We maintained a 5:1 child to staff ratio around the clock. The children who were able to speak called me 'Mommy' and their caregivers 'Tia'. Our home would resemble a family in every way possible. For a little over four years of our home's operation, I lived directly on the premises. Then for the remaining three years I lived in an apartment and would spend only the days at the home.

The other major difference between our home and an orphanage was the desire to transition each child as soon as possible to his or her permanent family. We did not wish to raise the children until adulthood. Some of the children were returned back to their families of origin when the crisis that brought them to our doors was solved, and others were united with an adoptive family. Some children were adopted in the

country of Ecuador and some left to the U.S. or Europe.

The last major distinction between Precious Miracles and other orphanages in Ecuador was our willingness to take in the children with special needs. There are only two homes in the Quito area that will take in abandoned or orphaned children that suffer from some form of disability. Of the forty children that were cared for in the seven years, 18 of them were diagnosed with some type of special need. Precious Miracles was approved by the government of Ecuador as a non-profit organization in April of 2002, and I was named the Executive Director and President of the Foundation.

The definition of the word precious according to Webster's Collegiate Dictionary is: Priceless, beloved, cherished, darling, of great desirability, excessively refined. The meaning of the word miracles is: Amazing, remarkable, an extraordinary event manifesting a supernatural act of God. The name I chose for this home was most assuredly not a mistake.

Every child is precious in our Father's eyes; the child with two parents, the child who has been thrown away by his parents, the child who is healthy and thriving, the child who is disabled, the child who is loved and the child who is difficult to love. Every child is priceless, beloved, and of great value to our Lord.

The way in which each child arrived to our home and into our lives can only be described as miraculous. It was God's doing. The transformation that we witnessed with every one of the children was phenomenal. What each one survived, endured and tolerated is remarkable.

This book has my tears woven into every page. The seven years of my life, consumed and defined by Precious Miracles was a trying and emotional time, and writing this book was a heartrending task. I wanted people to hear these stories. I wanted people to know about the hurt and pain that goes on in the world and how God gives beauty for ashes.

God works miracles on a regular basis, and I have been fortunate to have witnessed so many of them. The children of Precious Miracles taught me many life lessons, and I wanted to share them.

The stories you are about to read are personal and very private. I have changed the names of several of the children, their birth parents, and their adoptive parents in an attempt to protect privacy. I have always believed that a past that has no place in a person's memory should only be told when necessary and with the utmost sensitivity.

Some of you may know some of the children in this book personally. And it's to you that I plead, do not see this book as a mystery to be solved. I ask that you not try to figure out which child is which. I have been an eyewitness to God's amazing grace, power, and awesome sovereignty. My goal in the composition of this book was to share those blessings with others and to give God the glory. My life has been forever changed by the smallest, the orphaned and the abandoned.

1



Catie

A Dream Come True

Stacey, do you think you could take another child for us?" I recognized the voice on the phone. It was Melinda, the Director of 'For His Children.' Theirs was an organization similar to what I had planned on establishing. Melinda and her husband, Clark were also American missionaries living in Ecuador who had begun a home for abandoned children. "I know you haven't gotten the government's approval yet," she continued. I turned and looked at 5 month old Paula blissfully moving back and forth in her swing.

We had been flying a bit under the radar with Paula. Because Precious Miracles had not been approved by the Ecuadorian government to operate as a foundation yet, I was technically not allowed to receive children in my home. But I had agreed to be a foster mother to Paula for "For His Children" and by doing so was not breaking any laws. "We have a little girl that needs some more one on one attention than we can give her," continued Melinda. "Catie is a child with special needs. She has cleft lip and palate."

Not knowing what that was but not wanting to sound ignorant, I readily agreed. I told Melinda I'd be at her place the next afternoon to meet little Catie, spend some time with her and then bring her home.

"I can do this," I convinced myself after hanging up the

phone. "I can take care of two baby girls." In the months prior, I had started to interview women for the Precious Miracles' staff, assuring them that as soon as the foundation was approved, I would call them. Just this week I had gone ahead with the training and orientation of a few of the ladies. It was an absolute act of faith, since I had received no indication that Precious Miracles was near its approval. After all, it had been 18 months since I had first submitted the paperwork. Wanting to be ready when the time came, however, I had requested that the ladies come to their day of training. The other half of the women would be here tomorrow to receive their orientation.

I planned my day out in my head. I would train the second group of women, drop Paula off at my mom's and then go pick up Catie. It was all falling perfectly into place. I figured I would proceed with hiring a couple ladies to trade off helping me during the day with my two girls. By nature I am a planner and extremely organized. I could not have planned the sequence of events more perfectly. I thought to myself, "God really is amazing!"

The next day went as planned. I had a successful training in the morning and then put together a diaper bag for Paula. I wanted to be able to devote all my attention to Catie while at For His Children, so I left Paula with her favorite baby-sitter. When I arrived at my parents' house, my dad was waiting at the door with a big smile on his face.

"I have news for you," he said.

"What Dad? What is it?"

"On the 23rd of April, Precious Miracles received the final signature," he said. "You're approved!"

Eighteen months after submitting the papers requesting permission to run a home for abandoned children, and finally the day arrived where I had received the official acceptance. What a day today was turning out to be! My parents and I hugged and sniffled a bit, our eyes wet with emotion. It was

finally happening. My dreams were coming true. I had a precious little girl who had stolen my heart, my second little girl was moments away from joining my family, and I had finally received the permission to help so many more children. I had no idea how many children it would be or how God was about to bless me.

With a big smile, I drove across town to For His Children to meet Catie. I was welcomed warmly by the staff there, and then led to her room. She was laying face down when I walked in. I was not prepared for what I was about to see when she turned around. The caregiver scooped her up and handed her to me and I caught my breath. This miniscule little baby had only one nostril. The rest of her nose and the left side of her lip were completely missing. Where her facial features should be, was just one gaping hole. She looked up at me and I looked down in her face and smiled. "Hi sweet baby," I said. The caregiver sensing my discomfort patiently explained Catie's condition to me.

"We have to feed her milk using a medicine dropper," she explained. Catie was eight weeks old and weighed seven pounds. "When she is 10 weeks old, if she weighs 10 pounds, they will do her first surgery to close up her mouth and fix her nose," continued the caregiver. I held little Catie in my arms and rocked her back and forth.

"I'll do my best," I whispered. "I'm not sure if I'm the best person to take care of you, but I can promise you that I'll try my hardest." I took Catie home and shortly afterward, my parents joined me with Paula. "I don't know if I can do this Mom!" I said. "I'm not sure I can handle two."

My parents prayed with me, and we thanked God for the new miracle that had arrived in my home. This became a tradition with every child following Catie. After praying they hugged me tightly and assured me that with God's help, I did have the strength to complete the task in front of me, and then

they were gone. I was alone with my two-month old and my five-month old.

Feeding Catie did prove to be a very difficult task. By the time she got hungry, I could not get the milk in her little tummy fast enough to calm the hunger pangs. She would cry harder and this would only make it more complicated for her to swallow the milk. I tried to be patient and keep at it. But she was crying harder and harder by the second and the milk was coming out her nostril. Soon, I too was crying.

“Sweet baby, please stop.” I cried. “I’m doing the best that I can. I need you to calm down because we’re getting nowhere!”

Catie looked up at me, and then as if she had understood my words, took a deep breath and stopped crying. I squeezed the milk in the medicine dropper again and tried once more. Soon I had the rhythm down, and she was feeling her tummy fill up. After almost an hour, she had her fill and was asleep in my arms. I leaned back in my chair and sighed. I closed my eyes and let my tense shoulders drop. As soon as I did, Paula who had been quietly sitting in a bouncy chair started to fuss.

“Oh my goodness,” I said out loud. “I truly am not capable of this. I can’t. I just can’t.” I laid Catie down in the playpen and went to pick up Paula. “Are you hungry?” I asked.

“Thanks for waiting to be hungry until your sister was done,” I smiled at her. She smiled back.

I didn’t get much sleep for the first few nights. I had help during the days, but I’d be alone at night. Admitting my limitations, I proceeded to hire staff for the nights as well.

As soon as I did, more children joined us. Our house was filling up rapidly. We would weigh Catie every day to see if she had gained an ounce. I knew that if her 10 week marker came around and she was not weighing the required 10 pounds, the surgeon would postpone the operation. “Please get fat,” I would tell her. It remained so difficult to feed her, and I was sure that she was burning up the calories as they entered her

body because she would get so upset and aggravated.

The day of her surgery was fast approaching, and I took Catie to the pediatrician, Dr. Castillo. "Please weigh her first," I asked him. He obliged and she weighed 9.35 pounds. That was close enough!

Catie's operation was performed on the scheduled date in the doctor's office. I was surprised that it was not being done in a hospital operating room. It was also much quicker than I had anticipated. She came out with her little face covered in bandages, and it was an upsetting sight for me. For the first week after her surgery, one staff member had to hold Catie constantly. She was only able to breathe out of her mouth, and this was not natural for her. Whether she was awake or asleep, she was in someone's arms so we could make sure to keep her little mouth open.

Catie's recovery was difficult for all of us. It was very complicated for her to eat with the bandages covering her little face. We had to wrap her arms at her sides so she would not pull on or rip the bandages off. She was in a constant state of discomfort. One night as I was headed to bed, one of the caregivers came crying up the stairs. Catie was covered in blood. I rushed her to the nearest hospital. Some of her stitches had come loose, causing her mouth to hemorrhage. In less than an hour I was home again with a very tired little baby.

Catie continued to grow and thrive and develop into a healthy, well-adjusted baby. The day arrived in which I received the news that a family was ready to adopt their little girl. When Catie's parents arrived at Precious Miracles, they were awe-struck by their beautiful, bouncing baby girl. Catie would join an older sister who was thrilled and enamored with her new playmate. After spending some time getting to know each other, Catie's mother turned to me and said, "We heard that you still have contact with Catie's birth mother. Is that true?"

"Yes," I answered.

“We would like to meet her. We think it’s important when Catie is older and asks about her history, that we have as much information as possible to give to her.”

“I’ll arrange it right away,” I assured them.

Meredith was surprised at my phone call. “It has been a long time,” she started.

“Yes, Meredith, I know it has,” I said, trying to maintain the calmness of my voice. The last time I had seen Meredith had been at her visit to my home. She had made three visits to see her daughter. On one occasion she asked me why I had started this foundation.

“What makes you love children that aren’t your own?” she had asked. I took the opportunity to share God’s love for us in sending us His Son. I explained to her that it was God’s love through me that I had for these children. We prayed together and I gave her a Bible. I smiled at the beautiful memory of how God used Precious Miracles as a way for me to testify to His love.

“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15).

“How is Catie?” Meredith asked, returning my thoughts to the present.

“Catie is doing wonderfully, and I’m calling to let you know that her adoptive family is here in Ecuador and they requested meeting you. Are you up for that?”

There was a long pause and then Meredith said, “Totally! I’d love to see my baby’s new family.”

The afternoon arrived in which Catie’s two families would meet. Catie was awake and happily sitting on her new mother’s lap. The proud family sat side by side on the couch.

I was seated in a chair nearby. Meredith entered the room,

and I could feel the tension. She remained calm and poised as she saw her baby in the arms of another woman. They talked for a while. Meredith explained her situation and her reasons for choosing another life for her daughter. Catie's adoptive parents described the country they lived in and the life they led with their older daughter. I sat quietly in the chair fighting to keep my emotions controlled.

"This is what it's all about," I thought peacefully. This is the cycle I wanted to see when I dreamed up this foundation. What a beautiful thing to take a child with a grim future and turn that life around. To be able to give a family the joy of having a child when they are no longer able to do so biologically was an added bonus. The greatest joy of all was to know that one more person was on her way to heaven because of the work of Precious Miracles. "I could quit now," I thought, "and everything would be a success."

I led our small group in prayer. I prayed for Meredith as she was saying her final good byes to her daughter. I prayed for Catie and her new family as they embarked on their new journey together. Then, photos were taken and hugs were exchanged and soon that momentous day had concluded. Meredith went on her way. I never heard from her again. Catie went with her new family and a few days later, they were on a flight leaving Ecuador. I got back into my car and dabbed my eyes with a tissue. I laughed at the thought I had just had about quitting. I really can't quit now, I thought. I have six children waiting for me at home. And so I drove off towards home and my beautiful family that was waiting for me.

and I share them to show how perfectly intended every one of our days are in God's plan.

Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them (Psalm 139:16).

For this part of the story, we will go back in time. I was a happy six-year old girl with curly brown hair, a dimply smile, and a carefree attitude. It was Sunday afternoon. My parents, older brother and I had just returned home from church. With my Sunday school coloring sheet in hand, I climbed the stairs into my toy loft. I carefully lined up all my dolls in neat rows along the wall. Then looking into the expressionless faces before me, I repeated the story I had heard that morning. My mom walked past my room and stopped when she heard my voice, wondering to whom I was talking. She stood quietly at my door listening. When I had finished the story, she said, "Wow Stacey, you have a lot of babies!"

"Oh!" I said startled that she had been listening. I then explained, "They're not MY babies. These are orphans. They don't have mommies, so I take care of them."

A few months later in December, while I was in school, my mom had a plan to clean and fix up my dolls. She took every one of them and "bathed" them, sewed up the clothes that were torn, and made other necessary repairs. On Christmas morning it was her turn to line them all up. They were clean and beautiful and they even smelled nice. She showed me what she had done and then explained that it was her present to my orphanage.

After receiving all my other gifts that morning, I crawled up into her lap and said, "Mom, my favorite present this year was the one you gave my orphanage!"

I believe God gives us glimpses our entire lives of what He

wants from us. These two scenes were previews to what my life would become. Twenty years later, I was still lining up children. These however, did have expressions on their faces and voices emerged from their mouths! And these did not necessarily stay put after I lined them up.

Also twenty years later, my mom was still giving priceless gifts to my orphanage. And every year they were still my favorite presents.



Six years after the doll/ orphanage scene, we find me at age 12 and in the seventh grade. My brother Zac was in the ninth grade. On a dark Friday night, Zac's two best friends, Luis and Cesar, were out witnessing door to door when they were hit and killed by a drunk driver. My brother's life was never the same after that. And although the tragedy affected me in a completely different way, my life was never the same either.

Cesar was a new believer, and before he had come to know Jesus as his Savior, he had fathered a child with his girlfriend Sofia. His daughter, Alexandra, was just two weeks away from her second birthday when he died. Cesar had full custody of Alexandra at the time of his death. Because of this, his family needed help with her care. My mom, always sensitively aware of other's needs, especially when children are involved, quickly offered to help. She had been a stay at home mom all our lives, and she asserted that she had the time to care for Alex during the daytime. This way, Alex's grandparents could continue their own jobs and not pay for day care.

So while Zac and I were at school, Alex was at our house being cared for by Mom. The first day I met her is permanently engraved in my memory. Her head had been shaved, and I thought she had cancer. She was excruciatingly shy and introverted. She