

Episode 2 Final Transcript (5/8)

Thanks for tuning into the the Newborn Promise Podcast, a production of Graham Blanchard Inc. You are listening to “Our Story Adopting Here and Aboard.” For todays show notes, transcript, and more information about Your “Newborn Promise Project”, please visit GrahamBlanchard.com

AUDRA HANEY: Well, hello to all of our listeners out there. I am Audra Haney and this is such an exciting day. This is our second episode and we are diving into our first guest interview on adoption with Erica Ho. We do know that we are in the infant stages of our podcasting, so it is such an honor to have you here and tuning in so early.

We spoke in detail about this in Episode 1, so please go back and catch that if you missed it, it is really our background and information on what "Your Newborn Promise Project" really is. When we were in the beginning stages of writing our pre-baby primer for husband and wife that we called "Your Newborn Promise Project" we were really struck and we were keenly aware of how the story of each family is just uniquely different. God's creation of life, and his design of family, while as natural as can be, is anything but commonplace. It's intentional. Each unit is intricately woven together, fearfully and wonderfully made. And, it is sometimes mysteriously flanked with twists and turns, with pain, with waiting, with loss, and with grief. And, those are some of the things we want to cover in this first series called “Building Your Family.”

Sometimes building your family involves unexpected calling. In the next few episodes, we want to pause and honor families whose story may involve adoption. And while adoption is a beautiful spiritual concept, it may very well be the blueprint God wants to use in building your earthly family. So whether you are looking into adoption or looking into support someone walking through the process, we think you will love our interview with Erica Ho. Erica not only works for the non-profit OneOrphan and has an extensive professional background in Orphan Care, but she is also the mom of four, two biological and two internationally adopted children. She has so much wisdom and so much insight, but more than anything, she has what we believe is God's compassion and heart for the orphan. So, we are excited to bring you this extremely rich interview with Erica Ho.

AUDRA: Erica, Thank you so much for joining us today and sharing your story with us.

ERICA: Thank you, it is so good to be here.

AUDRA: I know you have a lot of great stuff to share with us today, so we are going to just dive right in. You are so passionate about the cause of the orphan. How did God initially spark that passion in you?

ERICA: God began speaking in my heart before I really even knew what an orphan truly was, or what it even looked like to go to another country, or to see kids in foster care. God truly began speaking to my heart when I was really young, you know, maybe 10 or 11 years old. And, I actually started dreaming about someday adopting children. I didn't really understand all of that until I was an older teenager and began to participate in mission trips and kind of see a world outside of my own.

AUDRA: So after all of those years of dreaming about adoption, being involved in different adoption efforts, how did God begin to specifically speak to you and Calvin about your own adoption journey?

ERICA: We really felt God prompting us to grow our family through adoption after we had two biological children very close together. Our first two children are just 18 months apart. We definitely experienced some loss in the early years in our marriage, losing two babies while I was pregnant, two miscarriages, and that may not necessarily be what prompted us to seek the adoption path, but it just solidified in us how precious life is and how intentional God is when He creates life. And so after having two children, biologically we really started seeking God in what is next for our family, how is this adoption path going to look for us. We really began to move on that pretty quickly because God just continued to impress upon us that we were not to have any more children biologically, but we were to pursue our family through adoption. We both sought God in prayer and He continued to confirm those thoughts in our mind through other people and through different circumstances. So, it was really a sweet time of pursuing God and having Him answer those questions.

AUDRA: And, even though you guys did have that overwhelming confirmation that adoption was right for you, did you also have any specific fears about adoption?

ERICA: We definitely did. You know, we were parenting two babies at the time, a 2-year-old and a 6-month-old when we first started to fill out adoption paperwork. We were very open to whatever age child God wanted to bring into our family. We were open to different needs, but at the same time we would question ourselves thinking we only know how to parent babies right now and we are really exhausted right now. You know, those first few years of life, you don't get very much sleep. So, in the middle of exhaustion we definitely questioned ourselves and our call. Were we equipped and were we ready to start parenting more children?

AUDRA: And how did God help you overcome those fears as you moved through the application process, all the way up until the adoption?

ERICA: What was really neat was that as we began to say yes, even saying yes to a specific country which was Ethiopia (our first adoption process was in Ethiopia) we had just moved from New Orleans to the Nashville area. In New Orleans we didn't know anyone who was adopting, we didn't know anyone who was from Ethiopia, but through a series of events God had led us to chose to Ethiopia as the country we would adopt from and immediately I began to meet people who had been through that process and just eased a lot of my fears. It was just amazing the timing. We had said yes, not knowing anyone who had gone through this before and immediately we began to meet people who would speak truth into our life and ease a lot of the fears we had pretty quickly.

A: And you know, on the flip side of that, did you guys encounter any misconceptions along the way and how did you guys really process that?

E: We definitely did. We didn't necessarily encounter people that had a lot of issues with the race of our child, but they did have some issues with us parenting a child who was a different race than us, if that makes sense. And people would caution us that maybe we weren't making a wise decision to parent a child who has a different skin color or culture than us. They would ask a lot of really strange and discouraging questions at times.

And, God just continued to surround us and equip us with people of different cultural backgrounds who really spoke truth into that and reminded us that, you know, it wasn't imperative to be exactly like our son to be good parents to Him and that God would fill in those gaps if we were sensitive to our son's culture and strives and steps to understand his culture and incorporate into our parenting. So we definitely did face a lot of discouragement from people, one based on making a change culturally with our family. Also people were also very concerned about finances and even people discouraged us from adoption internationally, which I found really interesting and didn't expect. A lot of people questioned why we would go somewhere else while there were children here who need homes. So, we would continually affirm that, yes, there are children who need homes here, but we have to go where we are called and God was just gracious in that and in giving us words to explain that to them and also be understanding of their concerns as well.

A: You know, I think especially for couples just starting out, there are so many options when it comes to adoption. So, how did you and Calvin really hone in on what was right for your family and how did God continue to confirm that along the way?

E: We were very drawn to the idea of international adoption. For one, it has been something that was always on my mind. I have a missions background and have always felt called to the nations, to go out. So, the idea of having a rich cultural heritage in my family was just a beautiful idea to me and something I embraced. My husband is also Chinese, so I think just the makeup of our family and the influences we have on our family definitely caused us to look globally first. Additionally, just

my connection to Africa drew us to Ethiopia. We were also of the right age and demographic to adopt from Ethiopia. So that is something that plays into it as well, when families begin to look at what country or program might be right for them. Different countries have different age restrictions, they allow certain family sizes and income levels for where you can adopt. And, so once we kind of filtered through all of those requirements and narrowed down in the place we felt like God had moved in our heart toward. We were able to pick a program that was right for our family.

AUDRA: I think that is so great. Tell me about your family today. You guys have grown since your first adoption with Liam. Tell me about your decision to keep growing your family in this way.

ERICA: When we brought Liam home, he was about 7 months old and pretty medically fragile, but rebounded very quickly. He was such a tough little guy. And, our experience bringing him home was one of the most beautiful experiences you know that I can recall. It was hard and it was difficult but it was just beautiful and just full of God's redemption and grace, for our entire family. And we got home and we thought, we have to do this again, there are more children waiting.

We saw first hand what it is like to wait in an orphanage and although there are a lot of people there caring for those children, loving on them, it is just not the same as being in a family unit. So, we immediately filled out paperwork again and started the process to adopt from China and this time, we just wanted to be as open as possible to whatever God would lead us to. So, we pursued a waiting child special needs adoption through China and we saw our daughter's picture when she was 5 1/2 and she is blind. And, we had no idea what we were doing but when we saw her picture, God spoke to our heart in such a huge, confirming way that we said yes very quickly. And so just four months after Liam coming home, we started pursuing our daughter and brought her home 11 months later and so now we have 4 kiddos in the home.

AUDRA: And, your family is so beautiful today with the addition of little Lola. Your story is very unique because you intentionally pursued a special needs adoption. Speak to that a little bit and maybe to couples that might be considering a special needs path.

ERICA: The idea of a special needs waiting child adoption was completely foreign to us. We don't have first-hand, or we didn't, we do now, we didn't have a lot of first hand experience with any children who had disabilities or special needs of any sort. We sorta joke that we went into it blindly with our blind daughter. We just started learning all that we could about what to expect with her condition and with China you get information, but you don't get the full picture a lot of times until you bring them home and take them to specialists and things like that. So, we prepared and we did everything that we could to get ready. But, you know, never could have been truly prepared for what it would be like to begin raising her and begin parenting her.

And what we found is that special needs is such, you know, it is a category, it is a label and it is not who the child really is. And we have just found in Lola a little girl who is created so uniquely and so beautifully by God that there is nothing that we would want to change about her. There is definitely challenges and differences to raising a child who experiences the world a lot differently. On top of her blindness, she has ADHD, and some sensory processing disorders. But, the child that we brought home three years ago is not the little girl that we brought home today. The world has just opened up for her and with the help of services at school and brail; she is just a flourishing little girl who has the entire world in front her of.

AUDRA: I love that and let's go back a little bit because with every adoption there seems to be a hard waiting period, with most adoptions at least. Tell me about that waiting period, what that was like for you, and maybe for couples who are in a hard waiting period, just how God encouraged your heart during that time?

ERICA: Oh yes. Waiting is one of the most difficult parts of the journey, especially while you are in the wait. It seems like the most difficult part and then you come home and realize what the most difficult part really is. But, waiting is so hard on the heart. Our Ethiopian process took place at a time when both US Government and the Ethiopian Government decided to change the format and the requirements for how the process was done. And, this was good because it made a more ethical process in Ethiopia, which is one of the most important things is to have ethical representation when you are adopting internationally. But, that took us from expecting to receive our son's referral in 6 months to it taking almost 3 years from the time we decided to start that process.

And so, it was just months after month of checking emails all the time, and calling our family coordinator, and just aching to be able to see his face and know this little boy was that we were pursuing. That was such a refining time in our lives. God taught us so much about preparation and waiting on him and his timing and having our son home and now seeing in the past 4 years how he has completed our family and what a gift he is to us. Had we ever wanted to rush that or do anything to go against that plan that God had set in motion, just how we could have missed out on the gift of our son. Now, with Lola, the wait was very, very short and we went through that process like rapid fire, but at the same time once everything was done and we were waiting for travel, there was a lot of fear of the unknown in the months that we were waiting to travel. But again, God used that time to help us educate ourselves and prepare ourselves to parent a child that we felt very under-equipped to parent and God used that time to send some wonderful people into our life that spoke truth and helped us prepare to parent her well.

AUDRA: You know, and obviously, the need for great faith and leaning on the Lord doesn't stop when you have your child home. So, tell me what are maybe some of the unique challenging things that you've faced as a family and how has your faith and relationship with the Lord really seen you through those things.

ERICA: I tell people all the time that without the Lord's constant involvement in my heart and life, I probably would have given up parenting a few days ago or a few years ago. It was very difficult when our daughter Lola came home from China. She was 5 1/2 and she just really had no idea what it was going to be like to come into a family and she faced many challenges, not really being able to see what was happening when she was leaving and just really being kind of overwhelmed by all of these new sensations without being able to full embrace them. And, so we honestly for a time, probably for about a year 1/2, went into a tail-spin as a family while she processed through these different emotions. We had a lot of very difficult days with her not handling things well emotionally and having some rages and just different things that were completely normal for what she was going through but were very difficult to deal with as a family with several young children.

But, God again continued to send people into our lives that had similar experiences that should speak to us and remind us that there were tools to help us and to help her. So we did a lot of TBRI techniques with her and there were times where I would go to her bed at night and pray over her while she slept and watch her while she slept. God would speak to me in those moments that he doesn't make mistakes and He created Lola and he created me and he created me to be her mother. Although we weren't getting a very traditional start to that relationship, that He was going to honor that. God has been just so good. After about a year 1/2, things began to settle down in our house and a lot of things that we were doing for Lola for therapy really began to pay off. We saw her really transform. And, she does struggle. The struggle is not over but she does well and she goes to school and she is a joy at home. We have truly begun to see her and who God created her to be. So, yes, there is a lot of struggle and a lot of times it depends on the situation. But, we continually see in our situation, and many others that when you seek God and seek His will and you pray without ceasing, that He will be faithful to meet you in those difficult and dark places.

AUDRA: And Erica, you had shared with me that one of your favorite verses is in Isaiah 58:6-9. Really, not just as an adoptive mom, but as a mom in general you just mentioned that it was very encouraging to you. So, tell me why that verse is special to you and the significance that it has for your family.

E: It says, "If you send yourself on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed then your light will shine like the noonday." I know that is kind of a weird parenting verse, but for us, with the path that we chose and for our children, it has brought so much light into our family and into our life. There is just so much joy. And, the part that says that "your light will shine like the noonday," something that I've clung to as far as emptying myself over and over every single day, does not leave me depleted, but it does give me joy because of what the Lord has poured into me. It is a reminder for me also to be in the Word and to be filling myself with those things so that I have that light and that ability to be a light at the end of the day, after

feeling quite depleted from parenting these many special circumstances in my home.

AUDRA: You are listening to the Newborn Promise Podcast, a production of Graham Blanchard Inc. And today with are talking with Erica Ho about both her professional and personal experience with adoption. Erica currently works with OneOrphan a division of America World Adoption Association. Erica, tell us about your role with OneOrphan.

ERICA: I started working for One Orphan about a year and 1/2 ago after working orphan care many other places. And, one of the things that I love about what we do is that we take teams overseas and we give them a chance to get to know these kids and advocate for the needs of the staff and the children there. There is a lot of controversy over sending teams to orphanages, but I've always felt we do this in a really appropriate and respectful way and work with the staff in an effort to truly impact the kid's lives and the lives of the staff members. So, truly one of my most favorite things is to take these teams to open their eyes and allow them to come back here and share what is on their heart with their circles of influence which enables us to advocate for children who are waiting on a home. Advocate for different needs of the orphanages and allow people a change who maybe are not called to adoption, to plug into the these children's lives in a different way, and maybe through sponsorship or some other financial contribution.

AUDRA: You know, I think logistically, and unfortunately, a lot of people are just overwhelmed by the cost, whether that is the cost of a short term trip or maybe even the massive cost of bringing a child home. How would you speak to this idea of finances and how have you seen God provide along the way?

ERICA: I have this finances conversation I think on a daily basis now. My first response is always, "Hey, we adopted twice back to back being on one income at the time, also buying a house, you know, just a lot of different life stages were going on when we brought our two children home. And, we were on one income at the time, on a ministry income at that."

But, people really surrounded us and supported us in our call. And, I think that is a really important thing for people to know who are considering adoption or who know people who are planning to adopt is that it is extremely expensive, and it is unfortunate but there is a lot of different organizations, processes, legalities involved that make the process kind of expensive. We can all support each other in order to support and bring a child home. It is important for people to know that they are not alone in that and that it is okay for them to ask for support and fundraise and God is faithful in that and He provides in the most unexpected ways. And, for people who know people who are adopting, it's important for them to know that that is a way they can impact a child's life is through supporting that family who is adopting. The people that supported us during those processes are some of the most precious people to us and when they see our family complete, it is just such a

beautiful thing to know that that's just God's reminder to them of the part that they played in each of our children's lives. Additionally, You know there are other financial ways for people to plug in, for people who may not know someone who is adopting or wants to just make a commitment to a child that is not an adoption commitment. There are great organizations that do sponsorships and such. We do sponsorships and that allows people to have a relationship with the child through sponsorship, and also just greatly improve that child's quality of life.

AUDRA: Those are some really powerful points and just to close out our time, please just speak to that person or that couple. Maybe they've been praying, "Is adoption right for me?" What would you say to them and how would you encourage them based on your experience.

ERICA: I believe that most people who seriously consider adoption are receiving some kind of call or nudge from God. Serious consideration, most of the time will lead you to action. I would say, continue taking those steps forward and don't let fear, finances, or being ill equip ever stop you from continuing that momentum forward. There are amazing kids who might be the final puzzle piece to your family out there waiting. And they may not look exactly like you imagined them or what you imagined for your family, but just prayerfully consider what God might have for your family and the surprises and wonder that might await for you. I never want to over-romanticize the process, it is very difficult, but God has shown us his heart through adoption...he has show us how big He can be, and How big His arms are to hold you during each step of that process.

AUDRA: That is all we have for today. Thank you so much for joining us and please tune in next week as we discuss open and domestic adoption and hear stories from couples who have been through the process. And, just as a reminder, you can get today's show notes, Erica's bio, and related links at GrahamBlanchard.com