

DON'T MESS *With This* MAMA

Risking It All to Rescue Our Daughter



A TRUE STORY

MISSY MAXWELL WORTON

FOREWORD BY CHRIS OVERSTREET

Chapter 2

THE BATTLE BEGINS

*“Faith is the art of holding on to things in spite of
Your changing moods and circumstances.”*

—C. S. Lewis

Adoption agencies in Ethiopia were busy scheduling court and embassy dates to avoid delays during the upcoming rainy season that would shut government offices down for about three months.

Recently, there had been an issue rocking the adoption world that made international news. The media was saying that not all of the declared orphans were actually orphans—meaning that the children’s parents had died or abandoned them. According to the circulating story, some of these Ethiopian children, who were being portrayed as orphans, had been given up for adoption by their parents, in hopes that the children would be given a better life. The media made it look like the adoption agencies had manipulated these families by telling the parents that their kids would be raised in another country, receive an education, and then be sent back to help their families in Ethiopia. The media story was making it appear that the orphan situation in Ethiopia wasn’t as severe as it previously seemed.

The problem with that story is that as of the year 2007, approximations estimated that Ethiopia had more than 5 million orphans, including 1.5 AIDS orphans.¹ Not only was it unethical to try to convince potential future adoptive parents that forever families weren’t necessary but also the information about the possibility of the children returning to their home country was also inaccurate. When you adopt a child, that child is declared irrevocably yours. In Tennessee, an adoptive family can disinherit their biological children but cannot disinherit an adopted child. When Americans adopt, they adopt for forever, thus the term “forever-family.” That child, by law, is as much a part of the family as the biological children.

* * * * *

Hope was excited to tell Pochi that she thought she had a forever-family for Favor. She knew we belonged together, but she had yet to receive a definite “yes” from the Wortons.

Pochi made her point strong and clear to Hope. “Tell Missy that if she and her husband are serious about Favor then she needs to email me as soon as possible, telling me they are moving forward, or I will refer Favor to another family this week.”

“Okay, I’ll let her know that you need a definite answer,” Hope said. “I think Favor would be perfect for them.”

“Well,” Pochi declared, “if it is to be, God will make a way for them to be together. God chooses the families for these children.”

* * * * *

My heart grew anxious when I read Hope’s email relaying that Pochi needed an answer. I knew I couldn’t push Mark into an adoption, but it had almost been a week since we had learned about Favor. A decision had to be made soon, or we would lose her. I asked God how I might approach Mark. All that came to me clearly, however, was that I should not speak to him about the matter—I would give it to God instead. If adopting Favor was the path we should be taking, God would make a way. Not talking with Mark about Favor was a leap of faith, but I didn’t want to push my husband into something he wasn’t ready for. My heart ached. I wanted Favor so badly that my mind kept trying to figure a way to make the adoption happen, but then I would calmly lay it back down at Jesus’ feet.

The next couple of days felt like months. I had to leave the room on several occasions to keep from saying something about Favor. It was like being on a diet and having the best bakery in town in your kitchen. I could see it and smell it, but I couldn’t taste it. Favor was all I could think about, and to not speak about her with the most important person in my life felt downright miserable.

Three days had passed since God told me not to say anything else to Mark. Mark walked in as I was getting ready for bed and leaned up against his sink. He looked at the floor, then at me, then back at the floor.

“Are you okay?” I asked.

“I’ve been thinking...” Mark nonchalantly said.

“Oh, living on the edge,” I joked. Mark gave me “the look” and rolled his eyes.

There was a long, silent pause.

“I was thinking about a future discussion I didn’t want to have when I got to Heaven.” He paused and looked at me. “I can’t imagine getting to Heaven and hearing my Heavenly Father say, ‘Well Son, you totally missed it on saving the orphan, but hey, great job on that new backyard!’”

My eyes teared up and my chest heaved with emotion. I was watching a miracle unfold before my eyes.

“Let’s go and give a little girl a family!” Mark said with a smile. “I’m all-in on moving forward with this adoption.” I couldn’t wait to put my arms around him. I was so thankful that God had chosen us for her, and I was so grateful that I had stayed out of the way—for once in my life. I was happy that I had waited for Mark’s decision. I was also grateful to be married to a man who cared enough to stop and pray about things that he was uncomfortable doing. He moved forward in obedience because his first desire was to please his Heavenly Father.

* * * * *

It was now July 9, I didn’t have any time to waste—we wanted to proceed with our application before anyone else did. I contacted the necessary people to move forward with our adoption. First, I talked to Pochi, who reminded me that we would need to get a referral from Ethiopian Adoption International (EAI), the accredited international adoption agency that represented Covenant Orphanage. Accredited international agencies guide the family through the process of obtaining an adopted child’s visa following the rules of the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption.

So, my next move was to call EAI. Because I thought EAI’s role was to guide us, I was surprised by the conversation that followed. Instead of a warm voice on the other end of the line providing

useful information, the lady that answered began the conversation with silence, leaving me wondering what to do. After what seemed like a long time, she spoke up.

“Are you requesting a specific child?” Her voice was gruff.

“I’m requesting a specific orphanage,” I said. “I was told that you refer for that orphanage.”

I understood that the reason why adoptive families have to get referrals is to make sure the best interest of the child is protected. A referral from a credible organization is seen as a way to prevent a child from ending up with people who may not have good motives for adopting the child. However, I also knew that our intentions were nothing but pure, and based on our last experience adopting, I thought that an adoption agency would strike a balance between protecting the child and welcoming a potentially strong adoptive family to apply.

I was trying very hard to not upset this woman who obviously was having a very bad day.

“Okay,” she said. “What age range are you requesting, and do you want a boy or girl? Or does it even matter to you?” I was stunned. I couldn’t believe I was speaking with an adoption agency with these questions and their tones. I had spoken with animal pounds that had more compassion for adoption than this woman.

“Do you even know what you want, or does it matter?” she asked again, this time a little more agitated.

“We are wanting to adopt a little girl between five and seven years old,” I answered.

“I don’t believe they have any that age at this time,” she snapped back. I knew they did. I took a breath, trying to hold my attitude in check.

“Could you please check on that for us?” I asked.

“I can refer you to another orphanage. I’m sure we have a boy that age,” she said.

“Actually,” I said, “we would like a girl, and we would like to stay with the orphanage I requested.”

Suddenly her tone changed from harsh and unfeeling to a sweet grandmother trying to help me out. “Well,” she said, “is there already a child you know about that you would like us to refer to you?” I could taste the sugar in the air.

“We know Pochi,” I answered carefully, “and we feel God has brought us together for this adoption.”

As quickly as the sweet grandma came, she vanished. Now I was left on the phone with a creature from the black abyss. “Well,” she snapped, “I don’t care if God *Himself* told you. I will *NOT* be referring any little girl to you from them.”

My mind was spinning. *Did I just hear her say she wouldn’t refer a little girl? This made no sense! Everything about this was wrong. How would we adopt Favor if this was the only agency that represented Covenant Orphanage? Did this woman have something against this orphanage? Maybe she didn’t like me?*

“Let me ask you,” I calmly said. “How many families does your agency have waiting in line requesting a five- to seven-year-old child right now?”

“I don’t believe we have any at the moment,” she blurted out.

My emotions welled up inside and went beyond my ability to hold back any longer. “Yes, you do.” My voice started to break. “I’m right here on the phone asking for a child—and you’re refusing my request.”

The woman was very quiet on the other end of the phone. Finally she said, “I have a problem

with you requesting a certain child or orphanage. We are re-evaluating pre-identified cases and how we handle them. If you want this child, you'll have to find another agency.”

That was it.

I was shocked. Pochi had told me I had to call EAI to proceed with adopting Favor. I knew many people who had “pre-identified” cases, meaning that they had picked specific children through specific orphanages—without any problem. I didn’t understand what was happening.

I hung up, feeling like I was hanging over the Grand Canyon by a thread. I was unable to control my tears. I called Mark. As I relayed the news, he became more frustrated and angry. He knew if we would face a spiritual battle, then there must be something very special about this adoption for the enemy to step in so quickly to stop it. Mark and I prayed together over the phone. We decided that we should get Pochi involved.

I emailed Pochi, relaying to her what the woman at EAI had said. I had signed the email “Brokenhearted.” Pochi quickly responded with encouragement that lifted my spirit and strengthened my soul:

I don’t understand why she (the woman at EAI) has a problem with that. This is the fourth child we have referred this way through their agency. I want to tell you, this is not the agency. This is warfare, and we are used to it. This has happened to almost all our children at some time in their process. Don’t lose heart...God is on HIS THRONE! The enemy will always try to stop God’s purpose in each child but the good news is that he never was the winner—OUR GOD IS THE WINNER, ALWAYS! As it says in the Bible, “We are more than conquerors through Him that loved you.” That is what we know. If God speaks, be sure He will complete it. Missy, don’t lose heart and don’t give up. God is in control.

“Okay, God,” I prayed, “I find myself in another war. How do I win this battle?”

Prayer.

Prayer—the duct tape of Heaven! It’s how God worked His will when I prayed for Mark’s heart to open up for us to proceed with providing for and adopting Favor, so I began to pray. I prayed that this woman would be removed from her position. Then I got convicted and prayed that I would somehow find it in my heart to forgive her. I wanted to be able to work with her in harmony for the sake of a little girl.

The next step was to stand on His promises and wait.

Finally, on August 11—more than a full month after my inquiry—we received an email from EAI, from the same woman who had left me in tears. It wasn’t much, but it held a glimmer of hope:

We are still working on this, given that he is six and male, his chances of getting a family is not so good. I’d like to proceed but need the go-ahead from our coordinator in Ethiopia. I hope to have an answer soon.

I looked at the tag line after her signature. “One adoption won’t change the world, but it will

change the world for one child.” Was she messing with me? She was still referring to my little girl as a male. After all, it mattered to Favor that we would be adopting HER—not a little boy. I was nervous and a little put off that she couldn’t get the boy/girl description right.

I thanked her and clarified that we were still requesting a little girl. A few hours later, our response came:

I had thought it was a boy, but it doesn’t matter. Here is the message from our attorney that came a few minutes ago. He has talked with the director and they are in favor of giving the child to you. So go ahead!! You need to file an application.

I was so excited that I decided to ignore the “it doesn’t matter” comment. We had been given the go-ahead, and that night we shared the big news at dinner with our three children: Matt, McKenzie, and Shewit. It was official: the Wortons were adding another child to their family.



McKenzie, excited about getting a little sister, painted this picture of Favor.

Getting this adoption started was tougher than our last adoption, but we knew that, in the end, God would win this battle. This adoption had a divine purpose...it made sense that everything might not be easy. The enemy hates adoption because it is the mirror image and heart of our Heavenly Father. The bigger the battle, the larger the call of purpose and destiny is.

* * * * *

The months flew by, and Christmas was approaching. In record time, I had sent our dossier, which is an application file containing financial records, employment, health, background checks, police reports, and more. Everything that the adoption agency, orphanage, and government agencies needed to move to the next phase of our adoption was done on our end. We all talked about Favor being home in time for summer. After all, when we adopted Shewit, it took a total of six months until we had him home. I knew two trips to Ethiopia might make it a little longer, but not much. I had no idea that Shewit was a miracle adoption because of how smooth it had been.

Seven, then eight months passed, and we still had no word from Ethiopia or our agency. We started feeling like something was wrong. Then suddenly, nine months into this adoption, I started having a physical pain in my body that felt exactly like labor pains.

After two biologically-delivered children and one adopted child, I was well aware that my body had a quirky tendency to physically show symptoms that were happening in the spiritual realm. When I went into labor with my first two children, we realized that the labor produced hypertension, and the doctors worked to keep me from going into cardiac arrest during childbirth. Then, on the day of Shewit's court date, when he officially would be birthed into our family by law, I went into "labor"—complete with the symptoms of hypertension. The moment we heard we had passed court, the hypertension disappeared. I was having "labor pains" again, but the timing was wrong—I knew there was still so much that needed to happen.

I told Mark about the pains, and he said, "We must be getting ready to bring home our little girl."

"No," I said, "it's too early. We haven't been given a court date. Something feels terribly wrong, Mark."

"Don't worry," Mark calmly said, "let's just pray and put it in God's hands. That's what we've done so far and it's worked out alright."

Mark was right. How could I worry about this?

* * * * *

The following afternoon, I got a call from Cindy. She had received an urgent prayer request from Pochi.

"Missy," her voice broke, "it's about the orphanage. I fell to my knees when I read it. It's awful!"

My heart was in my throat the moment she had mentioned the orphanage. I don't remember hanging up the phone or even bolting out of the front door. All I knew was my feet couldn't move fast enough as I ran across my lawn to Cindy's home. Something horrible had happened – and I prayed that it didn't involve Favor.