Michelle: Almost a decade ago, a young, single, and pregnant mom in Montana faced a very difficult choice.

Tricia: She told us when she was nearing her due date—she was like, “I love her so much, but I want her to have a good family with a mom and dad.” She was struggling, as a single mom already, and she knew she couldn't give her baby everything she wanted. That is love, even though it was really hard for her, that she chose our family. She chose to give Alyssa this family, with this mom and this dad, and these other siblings, just knowing that we would love her.

Michelle: We’re going to talk about adoption today. Tricia Goyer is going to share the story of Alyssa, their first adopted daughter, who helped to blend their family from a biological family to a bigger adoptive family. That’s coming up on FamilyLife This Week. Stay tuned.

Welcome to FamilyLife This Week. I’m Michelle Hill. You know, one of the things that I really enjoy watching is how God develops someone’s story/someone’s journey over time. I’ve gotten to witness an adoption story that has continued to multiply, and multiply, and multiply over time—and that is with Tricia and John Goyer. Tricia and I have been friends, now, for almost a decade; and it’s been incredible to watch their adoption story.

As I sit here, right now, they have ten children: three biological children and seven adopted children. The first child they adopted, Alyssa, has had a big part in gluing and blending their whole family together. I want you to hear that story—the story of Alyssa. Here’s my conversation with Tricia Goyer.

[Recorded Interview]

Michelle: Okay; you’ve been here nine years.

Tricia: Almost nine-and-a-half!

Michelle: Nine-and-a-half years ago, I met you in this very studio.

Tricia: —in this studio! [Laughter]
Michelle: I was so excited; because I was like, “The author, Tricia Goyer?!—this is so exciting!” “Hi!”

Tricia: And you had read my book; so you were, immediately, my best friend at that moment. [Laughter]

Michelle: Yes; most importantly.

So then, when you moved here, and John started working here at FamilyLife®, I remember having one conversation with him, one day, and just saying how I liked to work with teenage girls. All of a sudden, your book ended up on my desk the very next day. I said something to him; and he was like, “You should call her for coffee.” I was like [pensive voice]: “Me?—call Tricia Goyer for coffee?”

Tricia: Oh, you’re so funny! [Laughter]

Michelle: And then, that started this amazing friendship.

Tricia: Yes; it’s been awesome.

Michelle: It has been awesome! And when we went for coffee, this little, tiny, beautiful girl, about—I think she was probably about two months old at the time?—went with us.

Tricia: Yes; yes.

Michelle: And I got to know Alyssa so well; I became her “Auntie.”

Tricia: “Aunt Shell.”

Michelle: “Aunt Shell” is what I was known as.

Tricia: “Aunt Shell-Michelle.”

Michelle: Yes; but she was your fourth child, because you had three others—

Tricia: —that were older.

Michelle: —that were a lot older! So you had Cory and—

Tricia: —Leslie and Nathan.

Michelle: —Leslie and Nathan; and then, you had this tiny little afterthought child.
Tricia: Sixteen years later, we just felt called to adoption and—newborn baby! [Laughter]

Michelle: So tell me about that. How were you called to adopt, especially when you were thinking you were launching your children off to college? You’re on to a professional career of writing and speaking and everything that calls for. And, all of a sudden, you end up with a tiny, little baby.

Tricia: Absolutely.

Michelle: How did you guys decide that?

Tricia: You know, I think Nathan was about seven when I first thought about adoption. I had read this magazine article about baby girls in China and that they were looking for homes. I talked to John; and he was like, “No; we have three kids. You have just started writing. We’re busy; no.”

And then, really, just—I think I mentioned it a couple times over the next, probably, five or six years. He just really wasn't interested.

Michelle: Yes.

Tricia: And then, I think, you know, just praying about it and just saying, “God, if it's Your will, You have to bring John around.” John just ended up saying, you know, “Are you still interested in an adoption?” God had just brought his heart around as he was reading God’s Word and seeing other adoptive parents. I think that’s so important! You don't want to try to force someone or push someone into wanting to get on the same page as you.

Michelle: Right.

Tricia: And so, really, we both came to the same page—that we were both still young; because, you know, we had kids in our—I was in my late teens, and he was early 20s. We were still both in our, you know, early 40s: “We’re young! We could do this again!”—

Michelle: Yes.

Tricia: —and “There are kids out there!”

We first filled out paperwork for China. That did not—they ended up closing the doors/the avenue that we were trying to go down. And then I remember just being so crushed; because I thought: “All these years, I've wanted to adopt and, then, the doors to China close,” and “God, I don't understand it.” It was that day that we got a call about this birth mom, who was specifically looking at our family to adopt.
Michelle: Why was she specifically looking at you guys? I mean, you weren't in that realm; you were looking at China!

Tricia: We weren't on the—we were looking at international adoption.

Okay; so I had spoken at a MOPS group, just about trusting God and how, you know—and about prayer and about adoption and about, “Maybe someday we'll adopt.” Well, I didn't know that one of the women in there—her sister-in-law was facing an unplanned pregnancy. She ended up telling her sister-in-law about our family, which I found out later, the birth mom—her name is Jenna—she's awesome! But she ended up going onto Facebook® and watching us for two months, just trying to figure out who our family is and what's going on.

Michelle: Yes; Facebook doesn't lie!

Tricia: Yes; Facebook! And it's so funny; because I'm so glad I didn't know, because I'd be like: “…baking cookies!” “Look at me cuddling the kids.” [Laughter] It was just like living our real lives on Facebook.

It was my friend that ended up calling, a couple months later, and said, “I don't know if you're interested in an adoption from just the birth mom, but I know someone who wanted to talk to you and your husband.” I'm like, “Okay; yes!”—and this was out of the blue.

So, you know, first we thought, “Okay; the doors are closed in China.” They said, maybe, it would be five to six years before this program opened again. It was that day, I was a weeping, saying, “God, I don't understand!” And then, just finally coming to the place, where: “You know the child that You have for us,” and “You know what's supposed to happen.” And it was that day that I ended up getting a call from my friend, telling me about this birth mom.

Michelle: The amazing way that God works. It's always in that “nth” hour, you know, when all of a sudden, we are down and out; and we think it's just not going to happen—

Tricia: Yes.

Michelle: —or we're waiting for the check to arrive—and then, all of a sudden, after we think, “God, where are You?”—that's when He's like, “This was the perfect plan all along.”

Tricia: Yes; and it was me relinquishing my thoughts of, “It had to be this way,” or “It had to be international adoption,” or “It had to be…”—it was like: “Okay; You know the child. You know the plan.” And God's like: “Okay; finally!—finally, you're ready to just be open to what I want.”
Michelle: So what was it about your family that Jenna saw and said, “I think they could raise my child”?

Tricia: I think she saw our interactions with our older kids; because we have really good, close relationships with our kids, who were like 16, 18, and 20 at the time. We’re involved, and I think she knew John and I had been married all those years. She really thought like, “If they did a good job with these older kids, maybe, you know, they’ll have the same type of love and care for my baby.”

And so she just reached out to us, and we met her. We went to lunch for the first time and just shared our hearts and shared, you know, who we are, as a family. She just met me first; and then, later, she met John. She spent a lot of time in our home. It was about a month before she was like: “Yes! For sure, you’re the family that I want.”

Michelle: Did you stay in contact with her during that month or even before Alyssa was born? Did you stay in contact with her?

Tricia: Yes; we stayed in contact with her. [She] and her daughter would come over and hang out and spend time; but we also had to tell her—it was during that time that we were moving from Montana to Little Rock. Right around the time of her due date, we were already planning to move; and so then, that was part of her other decision; because she wanted an open adoption.

We said, you know, “We would love to have you”—you know—“our daughter know you and this relationship there, but we’re going to be moving 2,000 miles away.” [Laughter] And so I think that was part of her decision, too—if she wanted to do that.

Michelle: Okay; talk to us about the open adoption. What kind of feelings go into that?—because, you know, I don’t have children, and I’m single; but I’m sitting [here], thinking, “If I bring this child into my home, I don’t want anybody else touching him or her.” So what was your process/your thought process as you were thinking through open adoption?

Tricia: Well, one of the things—because she knew we were moving—she asked that she’d be able to take the baby home for a couple days, which I’m like, “[We’re] never going to get the baby if she’s going to be taking the baby home!” She did—she took her home. She was at the hospital a couple days; she took her home for like three days; and then she brought her—

Michelle: Was that scary?

Tricia: It was scary. It was really—I was a nervous wreck. First of all, we’re packing to move across country, which was hard and stressful as it is; but then, you know, it’s like, “Is this going to happen?” because we were there at the birth. John was in the waiting room; I was in there when Alyssa was born. I was able to hold her and all these things—
and thinking, “I want this to happen,” but also knowing that the birth mom does have the right to make a different choice, if that’s what she chooses. So it was, “I want the best for Alyssa and, hopefully, that’s with our family,” but also knowing that that might not be what happened. But yes; if you ask John, I was a nervous wreck during that time! [Laughter]

**Michelle:** So she ended up bringing Alyssa back after a few days?

**Tricia:** Yes, we met at the church; that's where she passed her off to us. And she says she felt peace when she finally drove up to the church and walked through the parking lot. With a little baby in this carriage, she felt peace that she was making the right decision.

**Michelle:** And what were your feelings about it when you saw her pull up and then her walking toward you with this little baby?

**Tricia:** It was a mix; because I work with teen moms, also. You know, I'd been leading a teen moms’ support group for about ten years at this time. I had compassion—both for the birth mom, knowing how hard this must be—but then the joy and excitement of this new baby in our family. So it was—totally torn!—I had love and compassion for her but, also, excitement that we were growing our family.

[Studio]

**Michelle:** That was Part One of my conversation with Tricia Goyer. Isn’t it just neat to see how God changes lives, and how He has us all on different journeys?

Well, we need to take a break; but when we come back, we're going to hear how Alyssa was a catalyst in the Goyers’ adopting six more children. Stay tuned.

[Radio Station Spot Break]

**Michelle:** Welcome back to FamilyLife This Week. I’m Michelle Hill. Here’s Part Two of my conversation with Tricia Goyer on the topic of adoption.

[Recorded Interview]

**Michelle:** So, Tricia, as you’re moving to Little Rock, you have this brand-new baby. Were you thinking, at that point, “We want to continue adopting”?—or were you thinking, at that point, “We have this baby. We have a complete home”?

**Tricia:** At that time, we thought we had a complete home. We thought: “We’re doing what God asked. He asked for us to care for the orphans. We have this sweet little baby. This is easy!” [Laughter] It’s easy taking care of a little baby compared to, you
know, later, we’ve adopted from foster care, which has been a whole different challenge.

Michelle: That would be a whole other challenge; but I want to ask, as Alyssa continued to grow, did the birth mom—did Jenna—stay involved in Alyssa’s life?

Tricia: Yes; one thing was—when we talked about adoption, she said she wanted it to be an open adoption; because she has a little girl that's about four years older than Alyssa.

Michelle: Okay.

Tricia: She said she wanted her daughter to know Alyssa and Alyssa to know her daughter. We talked about, you know, once a year, visiting, face to face. Even though it's a long distance, we have made that commitment—once a year, that they could spend time together.

Michelle: Oh, that's why you go back!

Tricia: Yes; that’s why we go to Montana every year! [Laughter] Yes; and they have that. It’s neat to see; because, of course, when Alyssa was one, two, three, she really didn’t understand. We would always call her “Jenna.” Then, we would, you know, sometimes say, “Mama Jenna,”—then, it's just explaining that, you know, she didn't grow in my tummy; she grew in Jenna’s tummy.

Over the years, she’s understood that more. And then, as we've adopted other kids in the family, she's understood adoption a little bit more. But she loves that she has that relationship, and they'll—like we've Skyped before. Jenna will send birthday presents/Christmas presents. We’ll send presents to them, so it is a relationship. It's not like they talk all the time, but they just know each other. She knows that she has her biological mom out there and her older sister out there, and that we just keep in touch with them.

Michelle: Now, what is your relationship with Jenna?

Tricia: I think we’ve just built a friendship, over the years, where we’ve gotten to know each other. She’s my Facebook friend—I “like” her pictures; she “likes” my pictures.

Michelle: Yes.

Tricia: If Alyssa does something in a little video, I'll send her videos of what she's doing. Or, you know, when she first started taekwondo, I sent her a picture of her in her taekwondo uniform. I want her to know Alyssa, and get to know what she’s doing and what she’s involved in. It's just this friendship that's special. It's, also, just keeping that
road—so we know, when Alyssa’s older and wants to visit her—then they’ll know a little bit about each other.

**Michelle:** Yes; and, well, I can’t help but think that, when you said that’s a friendship that’s special, it’s so special because Alyssa wouldn’t be in your home if she hadn’t made a choice, first of all, to have Alyssa—

**Tricia:** Right.

**Michelle:** —and then, secondly, to place her in your arms.

**Tricia:** Absolutely; and she told us, when she was nearing her due date, she was like, “I love her so much, but I want her to have a good family with a mom and dad.” She was struggling, as a single mom already, and she knew she couldn’t give her baby everything she wanted. And so that is love—to love enough to make a choice, even though it was really hard for her. She chose our family, and she chose to give Alyssa this family—with this mom and this dad and these other siblings—just knowing that we would love her.

**Michelle:** Has she ever questioned that choice to you?

**Tricia:** No! And she’ll tell me that she’s thankful. At least, you know, every year or so, she’ll say, “I’m so thankful that you’re her mom and John’s her dad.” That makes me feel good, too—

**Michelle:** Yes.

**Tricia:** —that she doesn’t really regret that choice—that she can see Alyssa’s doing well and that she feels like she made the right choice, even though it was really hard. Another amazing thing was that her—Jenna’s—mom was in the room when Alyssa was born. I was there; Jenna’s mom was there. Jenna’s mom was holding Alyssa; and she turned to me and she said, “Congratulations, Mom.” I’m like—so, it’s not only Jenna, it’s other members of her family.

**Michelle:** It affects the whole family.

**Tricia:** Yes; and her mom ended up passing away just about a year after Alyssa was born. We cherish those photos that her mom was holding Alyssa, and got to see Alyssa and meet Alyssa, and meet our family, too.

**Michelle:** Yes; so how old was Alyssa when you and John started adopting more kids?

**Tricia:** She was almost three years old when we brought home two more kids. [Laughter]
Michelle: And that was a sibling group; right?

Tricia: And that was a sibling group: a two-year-old boy and a five-year-old girl.

Michelle: So how did that affect Alyssa?

Tricia: Um, you know, it was hard, because she went from—well, first of all, she was happy to have kids to play with; because her other siblings were older—[Laughter]—but it was hard. All of a sudden, it was these anger issues and a lot of disruption in our life. I think we did our best to try to just help her understand that they came from hard places. And even though she was little, she understood that: “We’re going to be their family now,”—that—“Sometimes, their family didn’t treat them very well.” We just tried to, even at a young age, help her understand.

It’s so cute; because then, we adopted, when she was like seven—we adopted four older girls—she’ll say, “When we adopted you...”—and she’ll tell them something—“When we adopted you...”—and she’ll go into some story; because she feels like she’s a part of that, too. [Laughter]

Michelle: She’s a part of it!

Tricia: Because even, when they were little—the three younger ones—we would show them the photos and: “These girls need a home,” and “Do you think we should adopt them?” It was our whole family deciding, together; it wasn’t, “Look what Mom and Dad are doing, and you have to deal with it!”

It was like—we prayed for them; they drew pictures for them that we took down during the first visit when we met them. Really, it was she felt—and she’ll still say: “When we adopted you...”

Michelle: She felt a part of it.

Tricia: She felt a part of it.

Michelle: I’ve got to say—I know you, and I’ve met your children. I know the family and, yet, I’m confused. Chronologically, can you lay your family out for us? Can you explain who you are?

Tricia: Absolutely; so we have Cory, who is 29; and he has two little kids—I’m a grandma, too! And then Leslie is 26, and she’s a missionary in the Czech Republic; and she’s married with a newborn baby girl.

Michelle: Aww!
Tricia: It's so adorable! Nathan is 24, and he's a college student; and then the four older adopted girls are: Maria is 18; Lauren and Jordan are 16; and Florentina is 14—and then, the next group of two: Bella is 11; Casey is 8—and then, Alyssa is 9.

Michelle: So that's how many kids?

Tricia: That's ten!—ten kids. [Laughter]

Michelle: So Christmas time at your house is just one big, happy family. You would have no idea if anybody just dropped in, because it's just—

Tricia: No! Yes; we'd have enough presents to go around, you know? [Laughter]

Michelle: Okay; I want to jump back, just quickly, to when you adopted Casey and Bella, the two-sibling group when Alyssa was young. Why, all of a sudden, choose foster care instead of going back to your original China?—why?—why adopt out of foster care?

Tricia: You know, moving to Arkansas, we saw the huge need of kids in foster care; and I think we just weren't aware of it. And then, coming to FamilyLife, we saw families that adopted out of foster care. We just saw that there’s this great need for kids that aren't newborn babies but that, maybe, have some challenges.

When we went to the training, I mean, they told us that there would be a lot of challenges with these kids. [Laughter] We just said, “You know, if we can open our home to kids, and show them love, and help them, and give them a home, then it would be worth it even though there are challenges.”

Michelle: How hard was that to process, thinking, “Okay; we’re going to take a child in from foster care, and we’re going to follow that child, most likely, to adopt that child”? How hard was that for you and John to process that?

Tricia: Yes; it was hard knowing that, first of all, they are coming from hard places; and how is that going to impact our lives?—our older kids’ lives?—Alyssa’s life? And then—when we saw a lot of anger—there was a lot of acting out when they were little. Really, it's really—you have to look at it, one day at a time, and doing your best.

Michelle: Yes.

Tricia: Because if you look at it like, “For the next year, we’re going to be dealing with these issues!”—[Laughter]—it’s going to be—it’s going to be hard. We, right away, found help through trauma therapy, which really was a huge help, just letting us know how to handle kids from hard places; because it was totally different than our biological kids—how we dealt with things; even Alyssa—how we deal with things. It's like whole new tools that you have to deal with kids from our places.
Michelle: Yes; *nothing* like what you would think parenting would be!

Tricia: Absolutely.

Michelle: It's a *totally* different way of parenting.

Tricia: It was.

Michelle: Totally *different* kids.

Tricia: Totally different kids; and just knowing that—for example, Bella would get angry if she got hurt—so she skinned her knee, she would just be *mad* and throwing a tantrum—and just teaching her what emotions were and pain—and “You can come to Mommy, and I'll take care of you.” She'd never learned that, when she's hurt, she can go and someone will comfort her, and soothe her, and put a Band-Aid® on, and kiss her boo-boo.

And it's all these things that kids, when they come from hard places—they might not know how to deal with emotions. They might not know, of course, how to calm themselves. They might not know that someone will be there to soothe them and help them; and so it was just *training* them in things that—you, when you have a kid from a newborn, you just comfort them when they're hurt.

Michelle: Right.

Tricia: But they hadn't had that.

Michelle: You know, when I look back over the last nine years that Alyssa has been with you, did you think, ten years ago, this would be your life?

Tricia: No; absolutely not! [Laughter]

Michelle: Where was your life heading? Where did you think it was—other than “Let's take the baby from China off the plate,”—where was your life heading?

Tricia: You know, we had—we were almost empty-nesters. Nathan was—I was still homeschooling him in high school; we had two kids that were out of the house. I was thinking: “Okay; we're going to be able to travel. We're still young!” [Laughter] We could—you know, “I could write a lot more, and travel, and speak more.”

I think what God has shown me is that: “This is a ministry. It's not just ministry *out there*, speaking at conferences, writing books; but in our home—loving kids, pouring into them, being a mom, and then John being a dad—is just as much ministry as it is going on the road and speaking to lots of people and being able to travel.”
Michelle: Well, and also, your second-to-last book that you wrote, the *Walk it Out* book—there’s a devotional to that; right?—also?

Tricia: Yes; YouVersion did a devotional that went with it.

Michelle: Okay.

So your second-to-last book, *Walk it Out*—I’m just thinking: “That’s how you guys have walked out God’s story for you. His love, for everyone, is just by walking it out, and walking that life, and: ‘Sure; yes! Let’s take in some kids. Let’s just love on them and show them the gospel.’”

Tricia: Right; absolutely. And it really is the point where, [with] so many things, John and I have sat down—like: “This is what God’s Word says. Are we going to do it?” That’s really what adoption was—like, “Are we going to, even though it’s hard, open our home/open our hearts?”

I think, you know, those things are in the Bible for a reason.

Michelle: Yes.

Tricia: It’s important to just do what God says, and it is radical. Sometimes, it’s not easy; but it’s good.

Looking at the kids now, and just seeing them interact with each other—and when I see, you know, Alyssa sitting on one of the older girls’ laps and they’re reading a story together—it’s like: “This is what God saw! Even in the moments when it was really hard, and I was wondering if we did the right thing, God saw those relationships being built; and He saw the healing that would happen. He even saw the connections that would be made between siblings, and I’m thankful for that. I’m thankful that He could see farther ahead than I could in some of those moments.” [Laughter]

[Studio]

Michelle: What a great conversation with Tricia Goyer! I enjoyed our conversation; I hope you did, too. And I hope you walked away seeing how God uses what we might not understand as maybe a little thing in our lives to open our hearts to the bigger things that He’s working out in our lives.

If my conversation with Tricia sort of pricked something in you—maybe just an idea, or maybe more of a, “Hey! I’d like to check more of that out on adoption,”—I want you to go to our website, FamilyLifeThisWeek.com; that’s FamilyLifeThisWeek.com. I’ll have a link there to the Christian Alliance for Orphans. It’s a great organization, and they will gladly answer any questions you might have.
Hey, my name is Michelle Hill; and I definitely have a problem with my phone! I can’t turn it off. If I forget it at home, my day is shot; and I check it all of the time—like at midnight! And it’s going off right now; can you hear that?—yes; okay.

Well, Arlene Pellicane is going to coach me and you to view our phones through, maybe, a biblical grid, and maybe/hopefully, relax our approach with our devices. I hope you can join us for that next week on FamilyLife This Week.

Thanks for listening! I want to thank the President of FamilyLife, David Robbins, along with our station partners around the country. And a big “Thank you!” to our engineer today, Keith Lynch. Thanks to our producers, Marques Holt and Bruce Goff. Justin Adams is our mastering engineer, and Megan Martin is our production coordinator.

Our program is a production of FamilyLife Today®, and our mission is to effectively develop godly families who change the world one home at a time.

I'm Michelle Hill, inviting you to join us again next time for another edition of FamilyLife This Week.

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