

Unfavorable Odds

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Season 1, Episode 2: Longing For Motherhood

Guest: Chelsea Patterson Sobolik

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Chelsea: Romania was communist until Christmas Day in 1989—but before that, the dictator was trying to compete with the Soviet Union—which the size of the countries are just totally different—but one of his policies was that women needed to have at least one child by age 25. If you didn't have a child by age 25, you would be brought in by the state for questioning, and given another year to have a baby. If you didn't, your family would be fined a tax. It was called the celibacy tax.

Kim: Wow.

Chelsea: I know. So, all of these babies were born because it was communist and no one had money or the means to be further taxed. The families couldn't take care of them, so they were placed into state-run institutions—which are just terrible and horrible for children and for babies. So, there was this orphan crisis in Romania—except they weren't orphans—they had parents.

Kim: Right.

Chelsea: When the Iron Curtain fell in Eastern Europe, the Western World kind of went in and saw—and all these children were in institutions. I was born in 1991 right after. My birth mother was very, very young—unwed—and just couldn't take care of me.

Kim: From the FamilyLife® Podcast Network, this is *Unfavorable Odds*. I'm Kim Anthony. *Unfavorable Odds* is all about finding hope and help in those seasons of life when things get pretty hard.

Now, Jesus has promised that we never have to go through those dark places alone—and on each episode of this podcast, we'll be talking with people who have done just that—they've navigated those places, and they draw their strength from Jesus.

As women, all of us process the idea of motherhood differently. Some little girls grow up thinking about it all the time—playing with their dolls. For others, it might not be something on their radar. But for Chelsea Sobolik, motherhood was a longtime dream that ended when she was a freshman at Liberty University. Chelsea has written about her longing for motherhood. In fact, that's the title of her book. I sat down with Chelsea a

while back, and we talked about her own experience of childlessness—how she has come to see her own journey through the lens of Scripture and why she still has hope.

Your mother—she was young.

Chelsea: She was very young.

Kim: She didn't have money. She didn't have a husband. No resources—but she had you.

Chelsea: Yes.

Kim: She knew—because of her circumstances, she would need to give you up.

Chelsea: Yes.

Kim: And she knew that you would be better off if you were adopted by another family—which I'm sure was—

Chelsea: I can't imagine.

Kim: —devastating. But then, enter the scene an American couple—Bobby and Christy Patterson. Tell me a little bit about the Pattersons and what their lives were like before they met you.

Chelsea: They got married—they were both 21 when they got married. They were so young and got married, and neither one of them were Christians when they got married. They were just living a very secular lifestyle. Part of—kind of—their conditions for getting married was they didn't want children. They really enjoyed their life. They travelled quite a lot. So, they just didn't want children.

Fast forward a couple years, the Lord brought them to Himself, and they came to know Christ as their personal Savior—but they still travelled. They actually lived in Africa for a year. My dad is an architect, and they lived in Togo for a year helping to build a church. So, they had this whole life for quite a while. Then, in their early 30's, the Lord changed their heart and they had a desire on their heart to have children. So, they tried and tried and couldn't and couldn't.

Kim: Okay.

Chelsea: My mom actually had a miscarriage. So, after a number of years of trying, they started a domestic adoption process which was just taking a *really* long time and—years—like years long time.

Kim: Yes.

Chelsea: They ended up watching a *20/20* documentary one evening on the urging of several people. Several people called them up and just said, “Hey, I think you guys need to watch this documentary. I don’t know why, but I think you need to watch it.” So, they watched the documentary on the Romanian orphan crisis, and they saw—again, when the Western world went into see what was happening, they saw images and saw live video of these children.

I’ve done a lot of work on adoption policy—and one of the things that is just heart-breaking is when you go into orphanages, and you go into the baby room. Babies don’t cry because they know that if they cry, no one is going to come and pick them up. So, it’s just this haunting—these images and these videos of these children.

Kim: It’s a haunting silence, in a sense.

Chelsea: Yes—which is just heart-breaking.

Kim: I think of the importance of children in their developmental process of being held—

Chelsea: Yes.

Kim: —of having that sense of connection and love and to be in a situation where there is no connection and knowing that your cries are not going to be responded to.

Chelsea: It’s so sad. But they’re watching—and the Lord laid on their hearts to go to Romania. So, about six weeks later, they were on an airplane to Romania—not knowing the language—not really knowing what’s going on. The Lord put the right people in their paths in Romania. They were in the country for about four weeks, and they—

Kim: So, they had planned to stay for an extended amount of time.

Chelsea: Typically, with international adoptions, you have to stay—and especially, almost 30 years ago when they were adopting my brother and I, it was very much—you pay the government a hundred dollars, and you get your paperwork tomorrow—or you can wait six weeks—and just kind of still operating under very communist-like tendencies.

Kim: Okay. So, tell me.

Chelsea: Yes.

Kim: You were not in an orphanage.

Chelsea: I was not.

Kim: You were still in your mother's arms.

Chelsea: Yes.

Kim: How in the world did they find you?

Chelsea: They were connected with some people in Romania who were helping. A lot of people were going to Romania at this time to adopt—

Kim: Because they saw the documentary—

Chelsea: Yes.

Kim: —they knew that these children were in need of families.

Chelsea: Yes—which was such a wonderful thing that they were going and adopting these children. They were connected with some people that were helping find children for adoption. Their prayer going over to Romania was, “Lord, please tell us when it's our child”—because there were so many children in need. They actually visited several children, and they did not feel led adopt those children. I don't understand God's hand in all of that, but they entered into a little apartment where my birth mom was. They got to meet her—which is just incredible to me—but they met her.

Kim: Was she on a list?

Chelsea: I don't know, to be honest.

Kim: Okay.

Chelsea: I don't know, but I was—I was two weeks old. I was so little—

Kim: Oh my goodness.

Chelsea: —I know. My mom told me even before she unwrapped all the blankets—because it was winter in Romania—so, it was cold—that even before she unwrapped all the blankets, she knew that I was her daughter.

Kim: The fact that they prayed that was a good idea because—

Chelsea: Yes.

Kim: —I imagine going over to Romania, seeing all of these children in need and not knowing, “Okay, Lord, I can't take them all. I want to”—

Chelsea: Yes.

Kim: —“but which child would you have us take home?”

Chelsea: Yes.

Kim: So, they adopted you.

Chelsea: They adopted me.

Kim: Then, they adopted your brother as well.

Chelsea: Yes. This is such a fun little, fun fact about our family. Nicholas and I are not blood related. We are actually 11 days apart, and we always joke. I was adopted legally into the family first, but he is 11 days older. So, we always have this debate of who is the older one.

After Nicholas and I were adopted, a couple of years later my parents wanted to adopt again. Romania had actually closed its doors to foreign adoption. They—over the course of a number of years—not all at once—but they adopted four more from Russia.

Kim: Four more.

Chelsea: Yes.

Kim: All from Russia.

Chelsea: Yes. I think it’s so funny and ironic and special that this couple who, when they got married, said they didn’t want kids, now have six.

Kim: Now have six kids.

Chelsea: Yes. You never know what the Lord is going to do.

Kim: You know what? We make our plans, but the Lord directs our paths.

Chelsea: Yes.

Kim: You grow up in a house filled with children.

Chelsea: Yes.

Kim: And you had this natural love for children.

Chelsea: Yes.

Kim: You had a desire to be a mom one day and have children of your own—but when you were 18-years-old, you became concerned with your health.

Chelsea: Yes.

Kim: What was the cause of your concern?

Chelsea: Yes—and if this is too personal, you can edit this out. I don't know if it's too personal for you.

Kim: Have at it, Chelsea.

Chelsea: Okay.

Kim: Have at it.

Chelsea: Okay. So, when I was 18, I hadn't had a period yet and went to the doctor just to have some testing on kind of why things weren't developing the way they should and what not. She told me, at that time, "We still don't know exactly what's wrong. We think we might know a general idea, but we don't know but...—but there is a strong possibility that you won't be able to have children. But we don't know. We're going to do more testing. Then, we'll let you know for sure."

Kim: What did you feel? What went through your mind as she was saying these words?

Chelsea: At that point—because it was still a possibility and we didn't know—I tried to just stuff it away and think, "I'll deal with this when it actually is a reality or not."

Kim: Only days after you heard this possibility, you head off to Virginia—

Chelsea: Yes.

Kim: —to Liberty University your freshman year. As most freshman are stepping into this space—excited about this new season of life—you are carrying in the back of your mind the possibility that you may never be able to have a child on your own when everybody else's biggest issue could possibly be just being a little homesick.

Chelsea: Yes.

Kim: What was that like for you? You talked about stuffing it and trying not to think about it. Were you successful at that?

Chelsea: No. Of course, as things come up—you know, to the best of my ability—I tried to make friends and do well in class and all the things a freshman is concerned about—

but I felt like I was carrying around this backpack filled—instead of with books—with just the weight of the world because it felt like this secret I couldn't tell anyone.

Kim: Did you ever have a thought about telling someone? Did you ever sit down with another young woman and have a conversation and say to yourself, “You know what I really want to tell somebody?”

Chelsea: I did. I just—at that point, it felt all consuming about me. If I told someone I might not be able to have children, I was so terrified that that's how they were going to view me for the rest of our friendship. I was really scared that they would think of me differently or that they wouldn't know what to do because—it really is quite unique to know that you might not be able to have children or can't have children as a teenager. Most people walk through that journey as a married couple, not as an 18-year-old freshman at college.

So, I just felt like—and maybe, there were, looking back—but at that time, I felt like there weren't safe people—

Kim: Okay.

Chelsea: —that I could say, “Here's what's going on,” and for someone to know how to respond.

Kim: So, Thanksgiving break your freshman year, you go home. You've heard this news that it is possible that you may not be able to bear children on your own—and you have more tests to take.

Chelsea: Yes.

Kim: Right before Thanksgiving, you're scheduled to see the doctor. What was the morning like leading up to your appointment?

Chelsea: I'm actually going to go back to the night before—

Kim: Okay.

Chelsea: —because I think—kind of—that stuffing of the feelings wasn't working anymore. I knew I was going to have an answer the next day. I—my thought was, “I need to prepare myself as best as I can.” So, I just kind of shut myself in my room, took out my Bible, and just wrote down every promise of God I could find in the book of Psalms. I had a piece of copier paper and was just writing into two or three pages worth of verses in Psalms that I felt like I could cling to if the news I thought I was going to hear was true.

That was probably the first time I really engaged with God of—“Please don’t let this happen. Please don’t let this be a reality. Please, please, please”—and just really begged Him. At that point, I didn’t have the awareness of my faith to say, “Not my will but Yours be done.”

The next morning, I was very quiet. My mom was trying to offer encouragement, and it just—bless her heart—it fell flat on my heart. I know she was trying so hard, but—

So, we get there. We do the rest of the test, and the doctor walks in. She—

Kim: Describe for me the testing you went through that day. You walked down the hall with a nurse to get an MRI.

Chelsea: Yes.

Kim: What happened next?

Chelsea: I did an MRI, and I actually did an ultrasound as well.

Kim: Okay.

Chelsea: I don’t know if people have ever done an MRI—but you are basically lying on your back, and you go in this small enclosed space.

Kim: Like a tube; right?

Chelsea: Like a tube—yes. It is very—I’d never done one—it was not a fun process—but I was laying there and weeping and feeling like it was so unfair that on my Thanksgiving break when everyone else was baking pumpkin pies, I was lying in a doctor’s office feeling completely alone and completely helpless.

Kim: And you’re weeping.

Chelsea: Yes.

Kim: For those who don’t know it, you can’t move. You can’t wipe away the tears, and you have to be as still as possible.

Chelsea: Yes.

Kim: So, in your anguish—in your devastation—you are forced to be still.

Chelsea: Yes.

Again, I still didn't know what was the outcome at that point, but I felt God's presence in that moment.

Kim: Did you?

Chelsea: And I can't explain it. I can't—but I felt Him with me in such a vibrant way. I almost can't describe it—but it was—I knew I wasn't alone.

Kim: He is indescribable.

Chelsea: Yes. I knew I wasn't alone even though I felt completely alone. I was alone in that moment physically. I was by myself in this other room, but I knew I was held.

Kim: Oh.

Chelsea: And that was just the sweetest, sweetest thing.

Kim: So, after the tests were taken, you were waiting for the doctor to come in and give you the results. What happened?

Chelsea: I knew as soon as she walked in what she was going to say—just the look on her face. I could only imagine what was going through her mind of, "I have to tell this girl this news." I knew as soon as she walked in what she was about to say.

Kim: That it would not be good news.

Chelsea: That it was—yes, it was not good news. She tried to build up to it as gently and kindly as possible; but she told me—she said, "The condition"—or whatnot that I was born with—I was actually born without a uterus which I did not know was humanly possible, but it is. She told me that—she said, "That means you can't bear your own children."

I, of course, started crying and, simultaneously, felt grief and numb at the same time. In some ways, I almost knew it was coming—but in other ways, it was kind of pen to paper, "This is what your life is going to look like." It just was the most surprising thing to be told at such a young age that my body was so different than other women's bodies—and my body could not perform what a woman's body was created to do. Just a million—a million thoughts and emotions went through my head. As you can imagine, a lot of insecurities came up.

Kim: Chelsea, you were 19 years old at the time. The same age your mother was when she had you.

Chelsea: In a very interesting way—and this came with a lot of reflection later—but in a very, very interesting way, I felt this connection to my birth mom because at 19 she

gave up a child. She was childless—not by choice in some aspects. She couldn't keep me for economic reasons; and at 19, I was told that I couldn't have children. So, in some very interesting ways, our stories paralleled in a way I never expected them to—just a really interesting tie between us.

Kim: That is a powerful comparison. It really is. So, for a while, only you and your parents knew the news about your diagnosis. You went back to school where you would continue to keep that secret—but the secret would become too much for you to bear on your own, and something happened at a college basketball game.

Chelsea: I was at a basketball game with the girls on my hall. The women's basketball team, actually, lived on my dorm at Liberty, so we knew them. We were all there supporting them and celebrating their victories. I was there—and all of the sudden, I couldn't breathe, and I couldn't catch my breath.

The feeling I'd been feeling since I came back to school after finding out—feeling alone in a sea of people—finally had physical ramifications. What I later learned was that I had my first panic attack at that basketball game. I went on to have a lot more.

I had a panic attack in Wal-Mart. Going out in public became quite difficult for me because I would be in Target picking up ice cream or something and see a mom with her children—and it became just really, really difficult to go out into public because I was grieving so heavily and so completely the loss of what I couldn't have. To see physical reminders of what I couldn't have was quite difficult.

Actually, the most difficult day I've ever had with this diagnosis was just a few days after the diagnosis. We went to church, and it was baby dedication at church.

Kim: Oh.

Chelsea: I got up in the middle of that church service and walked out and walked to the bathroom and just sat there and cried and cried and cried my eyes out. There were times where I would get up from class and go in the bathroom and cry, and the Lord gave me the sweetest lady at Liberty named Debbie. Debbie was a janitor, and she came in and cleaned the bathrooms.

One day, she saw me sitting on this bench just crying—because throughout the day, as I was just beginning to process this news, throughout the day, my heart would just be overcome with emotion because I didn't have a support system right after—immediately after. It was just me—

Kim: Yes.

Chelsea: —figuring this out. So, a lot of times I would be overcome with emotion and escape to the bathroom and this sweet lady—Debbie—would come in and pray with me

in the bathroom—just such a sweet, physical reminder of God’s care in those moments where I felt like I was all alone or I felt like no one knew or no one— I began sharing, but few people knew—and those people weren’t with me at all times of the day that—

Kim: Right.

Chelsea: —they could hold me when I cried or to be with me when I saw a pregnant woman at Wal-Mart and just those moments that no one really thinks would be difficult—but for me, they were just very, very difficult.

Kim: So, every day, throughout the day, there could be a trigger—

Chelsea: Yes.

Kim: —and it could come in the most unexpected way at the most unexpected time.

Chelsea: Yes.

Kim: The emotion just floods your soul. What a testament that Debbie did not enter the room, see you crying, and say, “Oh, let me leave. Let me let her have her moment”—but she leaned into your pain.

As I listen to that story, it guides me to a place where I need to be aware of what’s going on in the lives of other people around me because I don’t know what type of impact I can have if I just take a moment out of my busy schedule and stop to see what’s going on—stop and place my arm around a young woman who is devastated for whatever reason.

What did that display of love do for you, and how did that help you to see God in your story?

Chelsea: I loved the fact that she was the least likely person—

Kim: The least likely person.

Chelsea: —on that campus. She wasn’t a peer. She wasn’t a professor. She was the lady that was coming to clean the bathrooms, and the Lord chose what we would view as the least among us to be the one that showed me kindness and grace. I think that was so special and sweet looking back. I’m Facebook friends with her, and we keep up—but I think it’s so special that that was the woman that God chose.

Her putting her arm around me and praying was such a physical reminder of God’s arm around me and that the Spirit was interceding when I felt too weak to pray for myself. You know I didn’t realize in the moment what a grace of God and a kindness of God to give me Debbie was. It was such a sweet, sweet thing for Him to do.

Kim: Wow. Now, you talk about your struggle to tell people—

Chelsea: Yes.

Kim: —what you were going through. Is infertility a taboo subject?

Chelsea: Yes. Our fertility or lack of is such an intimate part of ourselves. I said earlier—and I'll say it again—I was terrified that if I told someone I can't have children, that is the lens that they would view me through for the rest of my life. I didn't want to be different. I didn't want—I didn't want to have a “thing”; you know?

Kim: Yes.

Chelsea: I was so, so scared. And I think a lot of women struggling with infertility or miscarriage—I've actually chatted with a decent amount of women who have the same thing that I do, and that fear of being different or that fear of failure—“Am I a full woman if I can't have children? Am I going to be desirable to a man one day to marry?”—and all these different things flooded through my head all the time.

I think a lot of people struggling with childlessness—and I've been very intentional in my conversations to not say infertility but to say childlessness because that broadens the conversation. There are birth moms that have chosen adoption for their children. There are women that have gone through abortions and are childless. There are infertility, miscarriages—just the whole gamut of ways people don't have children. So, I've tried to be really intentional in how I talk about that.

But I think a feeling a lot of us do feel is kind of shame—if we bring it up, what will people think? Will they think of us differently? Will they think we've made a mistake? Will they think—insert a million other insecurities—but people don't really know what to do sometimes—

Kim: Right.

Chelsea: —when you don't fit the mold of how things are supposed to go.

Kim: In your book, you said, “One of the things that makes childlessness so difficult is that a woman's fertility or lack thereof typically is viewed as an integral part of her identity.” Tell me more about that.

Chelsea: Look at how God created man and woman. His original design for a woman was to be the one to carry children and to bring life into the world. We know in Genesis 3 that sin entered the world and that affects everything including our bodies—but we know how God originally created a woman. Of course, we know sin exists—but when

our bodies don't line up with how God created a woman, it can feel like God made a mistake or messed up.

We know that's not true—intellectually. God does not make mistakes. But the road from the head to the heart is the longest one. I think, in some ways, when we are dealing with fertility issues, we're almost working against a paradise lost. We know what it's supposed to be, and we don't have that. So, when we struggle with fertility issues, it feels like a core part of us is missing. Again, we find our complete identity in Christ—

Kim: Yes.

Chelsea: —but there is a very real suffering in that.

Kim: Chelsea, on page 37 of your book, you write: “Some of the greatest pressure to being a mother can actually come from within the church. Christians have a tendency to take good things and fashion them into ultimate goals—hence, the elevation of motherhood into the ultimate goal of womanhood. Oh, how it breaks my heart. Being a woman is so much more than being a wife and mother.”

Now, there may be someone out there who hears that passage and they are thinking, “Finally, someone is saying what I've been thinking all these years,” because they've been hurt by the expectations of the church. What do you suggest that our church families do to better acknowledge the importance of all women who were created in God's image—especially those who may never become a mother or a wife?

Chelsea: Yes. I think you just touched on it just now where you said, “All women are created in God's image.” I think we need to expand our conversations on that. It's really interesting. I've actually had a lot of single women reach out to me about my story because I think they identify in that unfulfilled longing and desire.

When we elevate being a wife or a mother to a place where it was never intended to be—both are very good gifts—they are God-ordained—the family is a God-ordained institution. It's a good gift—but it is not what we were created for. It was not all we were created to be. When we talk as if it is, it's really harmful to the women who are never going to get married or never going to have children. I think we need to expand what it means to be created in God's image as a woman.

Being a person and being a woman, we are created to glorify God. We can do that in so many different ways, and we don't need to be married or a mother to do that. In some ways, I think God takes those people with unfulfilled desires and unfulfilled longings—the woman that so desperately wants to be a mother and to have children or the woman that so desperately wants to have a husband and those desires, if we let the Lord come in and into our hearts, can show the world how we handle life when we don't get what we want.

We can use our trials and our unfulfilled desires to show the world something better and to show the world—"I am created in God's image for His glory, and even though I have things in my life I don't like, He is better. He is better than a husband. He is better than a child. He is so much better." Being a woman is so much bigger than having a husband or being a mother.

I think the church can really help out when we kind of have those conversations—those frank, honest conversations—of—I put the statistic in the book that one in ten couples struggle with infertility. Statistically, at least one couple in almost every church is going to struggle with infertility. We really need to change the conversations on singleness and childlessness to be aware of those people and the trials they are going through because they do affect so many people.

Kim: I love what you said, when you said, "It's an opportunity to take those unfulfilled desires and show the world something better." And that something better is Jesus.

Chelsea, was there ever a time where you felt that God had abandoned you?

Chelsea: Yes. As I mentioned earlier, I grew up as a Christian and thought I had all the right answers—thought I knew what was going on—and then, this happened. For the first time in my life, I did not have an answer for what was going on—me being good could not get me out of this situation. I did not know where God was in that trial. I almost walked away from the Lord to be completely honest. Just the emotion that overcame my heart—it felt too hard.

Kim: Where were you in life? Were you still at Liberty when you wrestled with, literally, walking away from God?

Chelsea: Yes, I was still at Liberty—and I thought, "I'm going to give the Lord a chance to prove Himself." I actually went through the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. I almost thought, "I'm going to read—again—what it means to be a Christian and think through this—through the lens of something really big happened—and I don't like it."

I came to the part where Jesus says to the disciples—basically, He is telling them what it means to be a Christian. He says, "If anyone follows Me, take up your cross and follow Me." I don't understand. I might not understand on this side of eternity why part of my cross feels like it is too hard, but as I continued reading through the Gospels, God promises us we're going to have trials and tribulations, and that our life is not going to be perfect—but He also promises that He never forsakes us.

Initially, there were moments where I thought, "What is going on? Where are You? What? Why? Why? Why? Why?" But as I studied and as I came to a crossroads in my faith of—"I might walk away. I might throw my hands up and walk away, or I can see what God says." It is God's grace that I pressed into the Scriptures.

I realized a deeper truth that I'm not the first one to suffer, I'm not going to be the last. There might be—there will be things in my life that come up that are going to continue to be hard. And I almost feel like Jacob in the Bible that wrestled with God and left with a limp. I feel like I'm going to have a limp for the rest of my life because I've wrestled with the Lord in the darkest hours. My limp is the fact that I can't have children, but God is so much bigger than my suffering. That's just the sweetest thing to cling to.

Kim: What you said a little earlier really hit me, "I can throw up my hands and walk away, or I can stay and see what God says."

Chelsea: Yes.

Kim: Now, you set out on a journey, and you wanted God to prove Himself to you. What did He prove?

Chelsea: That His presence is so much deeper and richer and kinder than any trial we're ever going to walk through.

One of my favorite passages in the entire Bible is the closing of the Bible when we are told the final story. We read in Revelation—God is with His people, and we're with Him. He's going to wipe away all of our tears. So we have a hope to look forward to—but on this earth, too, God promises—He *guarantees* that He is never going to leave us nor forsake us and that because of Christ's blood, we can talk to God at any moment and to avail ourselves the gift of prayer.

These are very, very basic things about the Christian faith, but when you really learn them and grasp them, they are the richest truths in the whole Bible—that if God promised us something, we can turn that promise back to Him and remind Him of what He said. I can say, "God, You promised You wouldn't leave me. I feel forsaken in this moment, but I know that You won't leave me. So, help me. Help me in these moments to remember that underneath me are the everlasting arms and that You are beside me." He is the great high priest who can sympathize with us.

Kim: Yes.

Chelsea: Just so much about the character of God and who He is.

Kim: Who God is, is what it is all about. He took you from a place of knowing Him to *knowing* Him.

Chelsea: Yes.

Kim: And most of the time, if not every time, in order for us to truly know God, we need to go through some things; don't we?

Chelsea: Yes. Kim, if I'm honest, I never would have chosen this story for myself—but it is what God used in my life to get to know Him. Again, I really have been broken, but I've gotten to know my Father and that outweighs any gift of a child. Lord willing, I will be a parent one day through the gift of adoption, but knowing God is better than anything I could have. So, while I wouldn't have written my story this way, God knew better—and He knew what it would take. He knew that He was going to be with me in those moments. So, I wouldn't change a thing.

Kim: So, eight years ago, you discovered that you would not be able to bear children on your own. Fast-forward, God has brought you into a place where you have had opportunity to advocate for children on Capitol Hill. Tell me what you did and how you got there.

Chelsea: Yes. I had the pleasure of serving as a legislative assistant for a member in the House of Representatives—and I got to work on adoption and foster care policy. I got to help write laws that help make adoption and foster care better.

Kim: Amazing. Amazing.

Chelsea: One of the sweetest gifts I've ever been given. My day to day—I got to meet with advocates from organizations or meet families that had adopted, and they told me where the holes were in legislation. They told me how expensive it is to adopt, or foster care children told me what it was like to age out of foster care and not have a family.

The sweetest thing about working on Capitol Hill on these issues was—it had a human face. It had people I met. My own family—Lord willing, I'll adopt one day. My future family had a face to it, so, it wasn't this obscure policy, but I got to really dive in and help create policies that make it better and easier.

Kim: So, God had taken these different elements of your life experiences and took you to a place where you would be able to affect many, many children. Only God—only God can do that.

Chelsea: Yes.

Kim: When was it that you crossed over the line from a place of despair to a place of hope? Did it happen because you felt differently, or was it because you chose differently?

Chelsea: I really do think time helps all wounds. I have scars now from my wounds, but time does help heal those wounds. When I was at Liberty, I actually went to see a counselor. She helped me see things over the course of three years—it took years—but she really worked with me and helped me see my life as bigger than my fertility. So, yes, as time went on, it was more of a feeling—but it was also a choice.

A couple years into it—I did have a very deep grieving process—but a couple years into it, I also didn’t want to be the girl that couldn’t have children, and that was the biggest part of me. My trial is a big part of my life, but it’s not all that Chelsea is—and I didn’t want to be defined by my sorrow.

Kim: I love that.

Chelsea: I wanted to be defined by the hope we have—and Christians should be the most hopeful people. Yes, I still have days that are very, very difficult—but we don’t grieve like other people do. Again, yes, we need that grieving period, and yes, it’s important—but we also have a rich, deep, real hope. So, in some ways, yes, it was a feeling that came over time—but yes, it also was a choice for me of—“I don’t want to be defined by this. I think there is a bigger and better story to tell other Christians in the world about the hope we have.”

Kim: For years, you feared that you would never meet a man who would love you or who would marry you once he knew that you would not be able to bear children on your own. When you were dating Michael, you had a discussion—

Chelsea: I did.

Kim: —on your condition; and you were prepared for him to walk away.

Chelsea: I told Michael that we would be unable to have our own children and that if we were to build a family, it would be through adoption. It was really interesting, Kim, for so long after I did begin sharing my story with pastors or friends and whatnot, people would tell me—“If a man really loves you, this won’t matter to him.” I told Michael, and it actually did matter to him. He took a couple months to grieve and to mourn.

Kim: A couple months?

Chelsea: Yes. And it was very difficult for me because I thought in my head, “If he loves me, it won’t matter; it won’t matter.” He was not only wrestling through childlessness—he had no contact with adoption—so he is kind of processing through that as well. We were still dating through this time and one evening we went to get a cup of coffee, and we sat down.

It was chilly outside. We sat down and he said, “Chelsea, I’ve been thinking, I’ve been praying, I’ve been talking to mentors and people older than me”—and he said, “I’ve come to realize that raising a child is so much bigger than raising a child that looks like me, but it’s raising a child that looks like the heart of Christ.”

That’s what it’s about—is stewarding someone else’s soul to come to know Christ and to come to look like Him. I knew, at that moment, he was the man I was going to marry. Even though we both have had hard days, he gets it. He gets that life is bigger than

someone that looks like us. While that's a sweet gift and a God-given desire, it's not ultimate.

While he did process, he—we just celebrated our one year anniversary. We did get married.

Kim: Congratulations.

Chelsea: Thank you.

Kim: As I think back to the interview with Chelsea and the fact that as a freshman in college she learned that she was permanently infertile, I wondered how I would handle that kind of news—how would I respond—but then, I think about how God gives us grace in the moment to respond rightly. You know what? Chelsea is a wonderful picture of how to lean into God's grace in a way that her future is now one of hope. What about you?

Maybe, you find yourself wrestling with bad news. Are you leaning into God's grace? Are you relying on Him? Where's your hope? Is it in your circumstances, or are you trusting in God's plan?

If you want more information about Chelsea Sobolik or her book, *Longing for Motherhood*, check out our show-notes—and the place to go is the *Unfavorable Odds* page at FamilyLife.com/podcasts.

If you enjoyed today's conversation with Chelsea Sobolik, I hope you'll consider subscribing to the podcast. You can search for *Unfavorable Odds* on iTunes or Stitcher or wherever you go for podcasts.

On the next episode of *Unfavorable Odds*, I want to introduce you to a mom who was at a playground with her children—and little did she know that her life would be changed forever.

Kate: He came to my family and friends who were in the waiting room after the surgery. He told them, "I'm pretty sure she's going to come off the ventilator that we inserted for surgery and beyond that, hope is discouraged."

Kim: I'm Kim Anthony. Thanks for listening to this episode of *Unfavorable Odds*.

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