

Unfavorable Odds

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Episode 32: Buried Dreams

Guest: Lindsey R. Dennis
Air Date: December 14, 2020

Kim: Take me to the doctor's office with you and Kevin during your 20-week visit.

Lindsey: It was March 27, 2013. It was two days before my birthday. We were hopefully going to find out—just be able to see our baby on the big screen. We hadn't had one of the big ultrasounds. We were just hoping that the sonographer would not slip and tell us the gender. We wanted to be surprised.

I remember going in and my husband there and the sonographer there. We were just chit chatting. She's got the jelly on my belly. We're seeing our baby on the screen. Then she starts to get quiet. Her chit chatting just seemed a little on edge. Finally she leaves the room for what feels like a really long time. Prints out a piece of paper of a picture and leaves the room. At this point we have no idea what's going on.

Kim: She said nothing

Lindsey: She said nothing, no. She's, "I'll be back."

It felt like an eternity. I think both Kevin and I thought, "Something is wrong," but neither one of us could bring ourselves to say that to each other. They were just still hopeful.

Our doctor comes back in. She holds my hand, and she says, "Lindsey, it's not good." I just immediately start crying. She says, "We can't seem to find your baby's skull."

Kim: From the FamilyLife® Podcast Network, this is *Unfavorable Odds*. I'm Kim Anthony.

Unfavorable Odds is about finding hope and help in those seasons of life when things get pretty tough. Jesus has promised us that whenever we walk through those dark valleys, He's always with us. We will never have to go it alone. So on each episode of this podcast, we'll be talking with people who have learned *how*, during those dark times, to draw their strength from Jesus.

There are some people who have the ability to filter their experiences through the Word of God in a way that moves His truth from the head to the heart. Lindsey R. Dennis is one of those people. She experienced the loss of not just one, but two newborn

daughters. She humbled her heart before God as He taught her how to celebrate in grief and how to suffer in grief.

Lindsey has worked for Cru International for over 15 years. She's written a book called *Buried Dreams: From Devastating Loss to Unimaginable Hope*. I talked with Lindsey about some of the surprising ways God turned her tragedy into a testimony of what the love of Jesus looks like in the midst of suffering.

Lindsey: When we get to our high-risk doctor, he says the same thing, "We can't find your baby's brain and her skull, and there is no cure. Your baby can live until they are born but won't be able to live outside the womb."

It was just like everything fell apart. [With Emotion] I didn't even know that there was such a thing as being able to have a baby that could live inside your womb but couldn't live outside. I immediately thought, "Okay, we'll just celebrate this baby's life. We need to find out the gender." We immediately asked, "Can you tell us the gender?"

We found out it was a little baby girl. Then of course my heart broke all over again as a mom and a woman. "Here is my daughter on the screen and we're going to have to say goodbye to her. How are we going to endure the next 20 weeks of pregnancy?"

We knew that we would carry her. I knew as soon as the doctor said that your baby wouldn't live outside the womb that the next thing would be to tell me my options. I knew that there were no options. That life would be an option for us.

I looked at the screen and I saw my little baby kicking around. Apart from the things she was missing, it's like she looked like a normal baby. I just knew, "God, we are going to trust you on this part of our journey even though it seems so impossible right now."

Kim: Now Lindsey there's a name for the condition. What was the diagnosis?

Lindsey: She had what's called anencephaly, which is where the brain does not form. Therefore, the skull does not form and will not form. There's no cure for that. We had never heard of this term. We had never heard of anyone walking through what we were about to walk through.

We felt in that office just a deep devastation but also a deep presence of God; that He was with us in this. We really believed—I think in that moment, many of the things that we had been rooted in in our faith was just flooding back of "God, I might have thought that Your goodness means circumstantial goodness." But I knew in my heart that the road for every believer is not a promised road of just our idea of blessing and our idea of good things; that His goodness was in this story somehow.

I didn't necessarily feel it in that moment. But I trusted apart from my feelings that He was with us. My husband did as well. Both of us just clung to one another and prayed in the midst of our devastation.

I remember that first week. We would wake up and I would fall apart again. "This wasn't a dream. This is real. This is what we are walking and how are we going to celebrate this little baby's life."

Kim: I love that you chose to celebrate her life even though she was not outside the womb. It still boggles my mind that a baby can survive in the womb and not be able to survive outside. It's like *you* are protecting her. You know the way God built us as women, your body was actually protecting her little life.

Lindsey: Yes, I felt this momma bear instinct in me to just cherish this baby and fight for her any way that I could. I felt like, "This is my opportunity." I was a first-time mother, and this was my entrance into motherhood. It was totally different in a way that I never even could have imagined it being different. I felt like, "I don't know how long I'm going to have with her"—at that point we didn't know if she would come early on her own—"but I want to embrace this part of motherhood that I'm getting to have with her."

We wanted to honor her life. Part of us probably wanted other people to know her. "If we're only going to have her for a little bit of time, we want other people to know her and celebrate her. We want to cherish these memories that we're going to get to have with her even though they're only going to be in the womb."

Kim: So you did invite a community of people to celebrate her and to help walk through your pain. How did you ask them to pray for your baby girl?

Lindsey: I remember my pastor's wife at the time asking us, "What do you want to do?" after we had told her.

I remember saying, "I just want to celebrate her. I want her to get to experience things that we would want our little girl to experience." We went to a church at the time that a lot of people were cast members at Walt Disney World. I said, "I want her to meet the princesses at Disney. I want her to be loved and celebrated." We did ask people to pray that God would heal her and that God would sustain us on the journey. I think those are our biggest prayers.

Kim: Did you ever wrestle with the goodness of God through all this?

Lindsey: Yes, I did have questions along the way. But really, at that point, I think I had wrestled so much with His goodness in my singleness.

I had come to the conclusion at that point, probably because He provided Kevin in my life, too, that I was like, "Okay, I remember when God did provide Kevin in my life and I

was at the end of the aisle and I did think, ‘If you would have told me at 21, I wasn’t going to be married until 32, I would have been so impatient and mad,’” I guess I was married at 33—I remember thinking, “God, he was so worth the wait. If I knew that this was what was waiting for me, I think I would have trusted You more.”

Kim: I love that.

Lindsey: I just think God had rooted some trust in like, “I can trust what He’s doing in the unseen parts of my story.” Largely using that wrestle with singleness to root those truths in my heart so that when we found out about our daughter, we named Sophie, I did not wrestle much with His goodness then.

I wrestled with other things like, “Can He heal? Who is He in the midst of sadness and sorrow when life doesn’t go how you thought it would go?” But I really believed that His goodness was intertwined in our story in some way.

Sometimes I think the things that we’re struggling with, it might feel like—even when I was single—“Is this is trivial? Does He care about my heart in this? Other people are dealing with harder things.” But He roots things in our heart in every season of our lives. Everything we’re struggling with is deepening our foundation of trust in Him. We can’t be anywhere that we’re not right now. He wants to reveal Himself. He’s not doing it just for that season. He’s doing it to strengthen and deepen our faith for a lifetime.

Kim: Right, I love that.

How did you manage being around other women who were pregnant with a healthy baby when you knew that your pregnancy would end with the loss of your child?

Lindsey: I wish I could say I dealt with that well, but I did not. That was the trigger for me. That was the thing that caused me to question the most and ask the most “Why?” Like, “God, I know that You’re in this. But it feels unfair and maybe a little unkind that I would have to walk this and other people in front of me don’t.”

I was hesitant to go to maternity stores. I was hesitant to have conversations with the other person at the register at the grocery store because I knew as soon as they noticed my belly the questions would come. That was very hard for me.

In pregnancy it’s like I have this idea for how I wanted the pregnancy to go, who it would produce, and how this baby would add to our lives, and here God was saying, “Will you surrender your ideas for your story?”

I didn’t even know I had all these ideas for my story until they began to look different than what I thought. “Oh, that was my expectation that is now what felt like crushed. This is my dream that feels like it’s buried now. How do I trust You for this part of my

story? Maybe there's more hope in the grief. Maybe there's joy in the grief. Maybe there is some unexpected joy in the midst of what appears to be just loss coming."

Kim: Maybe there's hope.

Lindsey: Maybe there's hope.

Kim: You have touched on the fact that there were people in your lives, friends, family, who helped you to celebrate, who walked with you in your pain. I love how you describe them. You called them "beacons of light" and "holders of hope." They were there for you and Kevin. In your book, you go into the definition of hope. Will you talk about that for me?

Lindsey: Yes. I would say hope is the anticipation of what's to come, but also trusting in what has already been given right now. Hope is not in our circumstances. But hope is in the One who holds our circumstances. I think we want to hope; we want to trust in our circumstances. We want to trust in "When this pain is over..." or "When this part of our story is different...."

Something that God was beginning to peel back in my heart was "Will I trust in Him alone? What is this hope that doesn't disappoint?" In Romans, He talks about the hope that doesn't disappoint. I remember thinking, "Gosh, I am so disappointed. You're telling me that there's this hope that doesn't disappoint but what does that mean when life is so disappointing."

I know in my head and my heart as I read the Bible that hope is in Christ. But experientially, I didn't know how to put the two together. I was dealing with life's disappointment while also hoping in God alone.

That was the journey that God began to take me on is "What does it look like to hope in Him alone?" That can actually give me hope *in* my circumstances; not necessarily when those circumstances change. But that He can give me His hope in the circumstance, because I can trust that He is going to make all things new one day. But also that He is going to redeem my pain even now. That He's in the process of that redemption of the losses in this life even in the midst of them right now.

Kim: Right, right. Instead of trying to *escape* your situation, you really embraced it. I believe it's because of that that you were able to come to know God in new and unique ways. Let's talk about some of the *fun* ways you celebrated your daughter's life.

Lindsey: Yes. Our friends actually created this secret Facebook group where they had people sign up to help us celebrate. We didn't know this at the time we just—every week somebody would say, "Hey, are you free Thursday? Let's go do this." It became this thing.

I remember telling Kevin, “I think that someone’s planning something.”

He’s like “You think?”

Kim: Now did Kevin know?

Lindsey: He didn’t know but he figured it out way before us. Neither one of us knew.

I remember one day we were just told to meet at the Magic Kingdom at Disney. They presented us each with a shirt. Kevin had one that said, “King Kevin.” I had one that said, “Queen Lindsey.” On my belly it said, “Princess Sophia Kyla” with a little tutu that had been made—a yellow tutu that just fit right underneath my bump so it felt like she was wearing a tutu. [Laughter]

Some of my good friends were, what we say, “friends with the princesses,” which is how you keep the magic alive. They looked very similar to the princesses. [Laughter] They took us back to meet them.

We had front row seats for the parade. All these people in the parade knew about us. I just remember sitting at that parade and every character that came by was pointing to my belly. I felt like Sophie was sitting on my lap. [With Emotion] I felt like, even to this day, those memories are with Sophie.

Kim: Yes.

Lindsey: They’re not just me and Kevin observing and experiencing it. They’re just really Sophie experiencing it. Even my—the princesses they talked to us, but they really just talked to her. The fairy godmother brings out all this fairy dust on my belly. [Laughter] It was such a magical day. I just feel like it was even a taste of this “happily ever after” that God promises us.

Each celebration really in so many different ways—there was extravagant ones and really simple ones where a friend brought over stuff to bake cookies with Sophie—I remember that being so powerful to me because I loved baking cookies, but I had never thought of making that memory with her—God used it to say, “Okay, listen, Lindsey. I know the memories you want to make that even you don’t have the capacity to think of, and I’m providing people to help make those happen.”

I love boy bands. [Laughter] Shameless. My brother works for the music industry and has these connections. Boyz II Men and 98 Degrees were coming to town and having this new tour. I think it was also New Kids on The Block.

Kim: That was boy band heaven.

Lindsey: I know. I know the words to every boy band song. [Laughter]

My brother had these connections and was able to get us basically front row seats to this concert and also a meet and greet to 98 Degrees. I—we made t-shirts. My t-shirt had headphones over my belly that said in the middle, “I’ve got a temperature and it’s 98 Degrees,” or something like that. [Laughter]

There’s this part in the show—I mean we’re in the Amway Center in Orlando, Florida and there’s, I don’t know, 20,000 people there—there’s this part in the show where they call people up—98 Degrees does—to serenade. I had heard—I wasn’t necessarily supposed to know this, but I might be called up.

I really do like to be the center of attention. But I like it when I choose to be that, not necessarily when I’m pulled up into it. So I was so nervous. I get pulled up onto the stage, and they serenade me. It was this pure—like we were laughing. It was just surreal. I felt a little embarrassed. What do you do whenever you’re serenaded by this boy band and it’s a love song? Your husband is off the stage at the bottom, and you’re on the big screen.

You’re the pregnant woman. I was 28 weeks pregnant, I think, at the time. I felt a little silly but also, I felt, “This is so fun. God is giving us these deep and meaningful memories but also these fun memories.” I look back and I just laugh. I think how sweet of God to provide such laughter in the midst of such sorrow. Only God can do that. I don’t think I cried at all during that whole evening with my husband and the boy bands.

There are just such fun things that God used His people to really lift our arms to hope. We did not have the capacity to come up with these creative things or even the time. Yet, our friends forced us to make the time. Like, “Okay, can you be available at this time?”

“Okay, what do we need to move around?” I don’t think we would have made the time or done the things that we did with her apart from the body of Christ surrounding us. Really, they helped us walk this journey. They were holders of hope.

I remember usually we would celebrate on Thursday her turning a new week old in my womb. That’s usually when we would have our celebration time. As Thursday would come, I would start to feel more sad. The couple of days before that day were—just tended to be more heavy. Then as soon as that day would come our friends would just lift us. It felt like it enabled us to get through another week and to be reminded of why we were carrying her, reminded of the hope of Christ and that He’s doing something.

Especially as the weeks continued and the weight of what was coming was just so heavy on our hearts, God really provided people to infuse His joy and His life into great sorrow.

Kim: During those weeks you also celebrated Mother's Day. Tell me what your husband, your sweet, sweet husband, did for you.

Lindsey: He wrote a book for me. We had these bears that—bear that we made that had Sophie's heartbeat in it from our doctor's office. It could go in a Build-A-Bear. We had this little bear we called the Sophie bear. He decided to create a book called *The Little Looking Bear*.

The Little Looking Bear was the Sophie bear positioned as if she was missing something so she was looking in all of these places for what she was missing. I remember opening the book up and looking at it. It says, "By Kevin Dennis."

I was like, "What?! You wrote this," and immediately started crying because Mother's Day, of course, was so heavy. It was my first Mother's Day and, "Lord, how are you going to infuse hope in this day because I am so sad today. I really just wish it would end. Yet I really want to cherish these moments with Sophie. This is my *only* Mother's Day with her."

The whole book was about this bear looking for something and I'm thinking, "How is Kevin going to resolve this because she is missing her brain and her skull. What is he talking about in this book?"

He goes through all the different animals and things we have in our house where the Sophie bear looks for things. It's just a sweet little book. At the end she realizes that she has everything that she was looking for because she has us and she has Jesus.

It was so kind of God to use my husband to just remind me in such a sweet way and such an appropriate way on a day that was so heavy of this is Sophie's face and that she's not missing anything. Maybe in the world's eyes she's missing so much, but in Christ's eyes, she has everything she needs for the life that God's called her to. I might not like it, but I can trust it.

Kim: As Sophie's birth got closer, you were meeting with your pastor and there was a question that came up. Do you remember what that question was?

Lindsey: Yes. He said to us, "If Sophie didn't have her condition, what would be different in your story?" I just started crying because I thought of all the things that would be different.

Of course, I wanted her to have a different story. I wanted all of us to have a different story. But thinking about that, Sophie would not be Sophie without the story that God had given her.

Sophie would not be the one celebrated across the world. She would not be the one moving the hearts of her parents to eternal things like never before. She would not be

the one helping other women choose life for their children. She would not be the one encouraging other people in their suffering through just her celebration and our story. There's so many things we would lose.

I had been thinking of all the losses that were to come. I had been thinking of all the things we were going to lose with her not being here. I hadn't really thought of all the things we had gained and all the things that God was doing in the midst.

That question, again, just moved my heart to hope. Like, "God, can I trust You with Sophie's story being Sophie's story?" A different story would be a different Sophie. I would welcome that into my life—a different story—but at the same time, I want to embrace what is.

But I'm so grateful that he asked that question. I think it just gave me perspective that I was losing because that was very close to when we were about to have Sophie. It was just such a *necessary* question for my heart to hear because I was thinking of all the coming losses. "Okay, we're about to say goodbye to our baby girl. How am I going to walk through this loss upon loss upon loss?"

Kim: Now you mentioned how there were hundreds of thousands of people who were walking this journey with you. Talk about how that happened. How did God make that happen?

Lindsey: After I—I started a blog as soon as we found out about Sophie's condition. It was a blog that I had had in my mind called *Vapor & Mist* before even finding out her story. I had this grand idea that once I became a mother I was going to start writing. Like, "I'm going to have all this time once I'm parenting a little child, so I'll write."
[Laughter]

But the original intent of that blog did not come to fruition. It took a new direction. I originally just started writing to let our friends know about her condition. Then within a day there was thousands of hits on my first post.

I remember thinking how I had prayed before even, I think, being married that if God ever gave me children that they would have a greater impact for His name than I ever could. God reminded me of that prayer as I looked at the stats climbing and just thinking, "This is not what I meant, Lord, when I prayed that. But maybe You're doing something different than what I can see. Maybe You are answering this prayer and allowing her little life to shine before men in ways that I would not even dream."

People from all over the world were commenting and following her story. [Laughter]
Even since I've had people come up to me and be like, "Oh, are you Sophie's mom?"

Kim: Oh, how sweet.

Lindsey: I mean what a wonderful thing to hear as a mother. They don't even know my name, but they know Sophie's name.

Kim: They know Sophie.

Lindsey: That has brought some of the greatest joy to my life to see that people know her and not me.

Kim: Your due date comes. Your due date goes, and your doctors decide that they will induce labor.

Lindsey: Yes.

Kim: Take me back to that day.

Lindsey: Yes, I was induced and not progressing in labor. I remember people were sending verses to Kevin, knowing what was coming. My womb protected her. The waters of my womb protected her. I just couldn't release her to the world. Knowing that—even though ultimately I knew that God was the one protecting her—I felt a sense of control, I guess, if you will.

I remember someone sent a passage in Isaiah to Kevin right in a heightened part of my labor where Isaiah says, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you," and "the rivers, . . . will not overwhelm you." I remember thinking, "the waters of my womb," and thinking that God was speaking not just to me but to Sophie. Like, "When she passes through the water, I will be with her, Lindsey." Like, "You can trust me." [With Emotion] "You can trust me. However she comes, you can release her."

That was just another—there were so many releasing moments in our journey of "Okay, Lord, do I still trust You?" I think He's always asking us this: "Do you still trust me? Do you still believe that I'm good? Do you still believe that I'm with you?" We're always being asked that question, and we're always needing to respond with an honest response of "Yes, Lord" or "No, Lord, so help me know how to respond."

Even now it's been seven years. Almost seven years, I still find that I'm being asked that question, "Do you trust me Lindsey?" Is my answer still, "Yes?" Is my answer still "Okay God, I'm going to trust you in this season of my life?"

It became apparent that my labor was not going to continue to progress. For her safety and my safety my doctor wanted to do a C-section.

Kevin and I were able to have just some quiet moments before I went into the OR. They let us play a playlist during the OR, worship music, which I was in and out of hearing it. We were just ready to see her, ready to see past "What would God do?"

Our friends and family packed the viewing room where they could see. I mean they put more people in there than I'm sure was allowed. I think there was like fifteen people in that viewing room for four. [Laughter]

Kim: Didn't you also have people in the lobby praying?

Lindsey: Yes. There was like 40 people in the lobby, the main lobby; like 30 people in the family and friends only. They had prayer walks around the hospital. It was—there was no way that God was not going to be in her birth. God just used different things—nurses that were believers that had heard our story.

There was a nurse who had followed my story on the blog and had hoped that I would deliver there. Here she was my nurse. God was just reminding me each step of the way, "I'm with you. You can trust me. I'm in this. I've not abandoned you. I'm in the details."

I had heard—this song was playing when they told me that they were about to pull her out. That word in the song, "labor"—there was a word in the song—just said, "labor," and then Sophie was pulled out of me and she was alive. We were like, "Okay, she's alive." There was a split second where I saw she was not healed. I was disappointed for just a moment. But just seeing her alive, even allowed that disappointment to wash away in that moment. You couldn't bring her to me fast enough. [With Emotion]

Kim: What was that like to see her and then to be able to hold her?

Lindsey: It was the most amazing moment of my life. My heart was just filled with love. I thought I loved her in my womb, but then to see her, all of her. My heart—it was like an explosion of love is the only way that I can explain it. I loved all of what she brought into this world, all of what was lacking. I loved here was my daughter and I was getting to see her. I was getting to hold her and then we heard her cry.

Kim: You heard her voice.

Lindsey: I heard her voice. We didn't know how long she would live. We just cherished every moment with her. It was such a surprise to us that she lived not just for minutes but for hours and then hours.

I went back to the song that was playing during her birth. There's this song. It's called "The Best is Yet to Come." There's a line in the beginning that says, "the labor pain that brings forth a newborn," and Sophie was lifted out of my womb right when it said, "labor pain that brings forth a newborn," and this playlist was on random. ["The Best is Yet to Come"]

When we went back to the song, Sophie lived for ten hours and they were just precious, precious hours. We filled the hospital room with people—again, more people than they

would allow us. I was alert, though extremely tired, but just able to cherish holding her. We sang “Happy Birthday” to her, and we had a cake for her.

Kim: You had a cake. [Laughter]

Lindsey: We had a cake. I said, “We have to have a cake. We have to sing ‘Happy Birthday’ to her. We have to have a cake with lots of sprinkles and lots of color.” We sang to her. It felt like—our pastor told us it almost felt like this was normal celebration of new life.

I do feel like God was gracious in that to give us—we knew what was coming but it didn’t overwhelm us. There were moments where it did, but we were able to really be present in the moment with her.

After she passed away, I just remember telling Kevin about this song. I had asked everybody in my loopy state, “Did you hear the song? Did you hear the song?” Nobody heard the song. They just thought I was crazy. [Laughter]

The song is called “The Best is Yet to Come.” It really is a song about eternity. I just felt like, “Oh, God, even in her birth, You were pointing me to eternity. Even in her birth, You orchestrated a song to remind me after she had passed away, ‘I’m with you. This story is bigger. I’m bigger. You can trust me for eternal things.’” [With Emotion] I will cherish those ten hours with her. They were precious. It was precious to get to hold her and know her and allow our family to hold her and know her and see her.

Of course, I wished for so much more time. But I’m so grateful. The time God gave us with her was so unexpected. I really feel like He enabled us to embrace it and have sweet moments together as a family. [“The Best is Yet to Come”]

Kim: What was it like when you and Kevin had to bury your dream, had to bury Sophia?

Lindsey: You never expect to bury a child. I mean that’s not on anyone’s “Maybe that will happen in my life.” I really do feel like God met us in that space. It was devastating to see your baby in a little casket and to have to bury that. But God also, again, lifted our eyes to hope in that space through the letters we had written, through songs we sang. We covered her casket with butterfly stickers that were notes from family and friends that couldn’t be there. We put our handprints on her casket just to fill it with color and life.

I walked away so sad, but also with little glimpses of heaven of “Okay, God. You’re here. You’re with us. The grave is not the end. I’m holding on to that right now because it feels very much like the end right now.” That ushered us into—before we were experiencing a lot of what they call anticipatory grief where you’re anticipating loss and that ushered us into I would say true grief. Now how do we move forward as a family

when we feel like we are missing someone and we are missing someone. What does that look like now?

Kim: When I first started reading your story and I knew a little bit about what had happened, I thought it would be a story of sadness throughout. Honestly, that's what I thought. That's what I expected to read. [With Emotion] But when I started reading about the celebrations and you just listed the various things that happened week after week after week celebrating Sophia, I found myself rejoicing. [With Emotion] I found myself laughing and crying.

There was this range of emotion. I didn't walk away from hearing Sophia's story with sadness. I walked away hopeful. I walked away thinking about my Savior, thinking about God and all that He has for us. That best is yet to come.

It was just amazing to see how God allowed you and Kevin and all of your friends to turn this situation around to be such an honoring experience for you, for Sophia, and I believe it honored God as well.

Now six months after Sophia was born, you found out that you were pregnant again with your second child. What was that like for you emotionally?

Lindsey: Anytime anyone loses a baby, they call it the loss of innocence in pregnancy, where you experience a pregnancy; where you experience loss. So the next pregnancy there's just much more fear.

That was true for us. There was this loss of innocence for me in pregnancy of "Okay, there's new life coming. I'm so excited about this, but I'm also so nervous." Now, I'm in a community of women who have lost children so I know also all these other ways that I could lose a child.

That fear was very gripping. I was very hopeful, but I feel like I was just waiting. Like, "Will this child live? Can I trust You, God, for this pregnancy? How do I navigate the emotions of this?"

We were all still grieving Sophie and my *body* was still, having just gone through a full pregnancy, I was in a much more weary state. Kevin is naturally the more optimistic one in our family and he was very hopeful. He carried that hope for me. But I was very nervous, excited and nervous.

Kim: Now was what Sophia had experienced a genetic disorder that you would have to be concerned about your next child?

Lindsey: Sophie's condition—there's not much research on anencephaly and what there is—there's not much connected to being genetic and most of the time it's an anomaly. Most women go on to have healthy pregnancies again. There was—we had

gone through all the checks that—had met with a genetic counselor and everyone seemed to say, “This doesn’t happen twice so go have another baby.”

Of course we were eager to have another baby. We were eager to walk through our grief well with Sophie. We knew that grief—we would always miss her and be grieving her in some way. But we were still very hopeful for another child coming into our life.

Kim: Right. Because of the history you were sent to a specialist right away. What did they find?

Lindsey: We went back to our same doctor that we had been going to with Sophie once we were high risk. They knew that we could find out this particular condition at 12 weeks pregnant—was the earliest we could find out.

We went into that appointment very hopeful. We made a little video for our baby that we would show them later of our first time going in to see them and saying, “We’re hopeful for a good report.” I just remember adding, “But regardless of what happens we will love and cherish you for as long as God gives us,” even not knowing what would unfold. We went into that doctor’s office. We had grown to know and love everyone there and they loved us.

Robin our sonographer sat down with us. She starts to look around, and she gets quiet which was we knew something was off. She prints off a picture for us. We’re trying to decipher it. We had become pretty good at looking at ultrasound photos and figuring out everything. It didn’t look quite like Sophie, but it looked like something was off.

They took forever to come in. We found out later it was because no one wanted to come in and tell us what was happening because they knew how devastating it would be. Our doctor comes in and he says, “Okay, it’s not anencephaly, but it’s called acrania. It’s where the brain has formed but the skull has not, and it will play out the same exact way.”

You know where it felt like God was present in that moment we found out Sophie’s condition, it felt so dark in that office. It felt like this agonizing devastation that we didn’t even know we could feel more devastated. We just wailed and just were in shock. “How are we going to walk this again? Now I *know* what it’s like to lose a child.”

There was something about the not knowing—that I didn’t know what it was like to say goodbye to a baby—there was something about even—I don’t want to say innocence, but for lack of better word, innocence of that that enabled me to move forward in that. But now the knowing was unbearable and also the knowing—we were 12 weeks pregnant—that knowing I would carry this baby. “How would we endure the next however many weeks of her life?” was almost too much to bear.

I didn't want it to look the same as Sophie's story because we didn't imagine doing that a second time. I wanted her story to be different, and it was different. Our second baby's story was different simply because the circumstances were so different and our hearts were in such a different place. But we were totally broken and in a state of shock.

Kim: Did you question God and why He would allow this to happen a second time?

Lindsey: Yes. Those questions that did not come with Sophie began to come out like crazy with Dasah. I wondered—my biggest question for Him was His kindness. At that time, my best friend was pregnant; my sister was pregnant. I was like, "This is God's redemption. I'm going to be pregnant with them with a healthy baby. I get to be pregnant with my best friend and my sister. We get to have healthy babies together," and here I was about to lose my second baby.

I wondered, "God, I don't even know who You are in this. This doesn't match up to how I *thought* You worked." We're so weary in our grief. We felt like we were just starting to walk and come back into some sense of a new normal. Then it felt like the rug was pulled out from underneath us. So the questions began to roll, and it felt like a very dark, dark time.

Kim: What were some of the things that concerned you most about going through—going through this devastation another time?

Lindsey: For me I thought, "Will people still rally around us?" We desperately needed people. It seemed like people just carried us through our story with Sophie. Would they still? Would I keep trusting God? I was worried I guess about my faith. Like, "Is this going to break me? Is this going to break me as a mom as a wife as a follower of Jesus? What will I be like on the other side?" And also, "How will I say goodbye to another baby?" [Crying] That was terrifying to me.

Also, "Will we have more children?" There was this loss of this hope for how our family would form that we didn't really have to deal with, with Sophie, because there was hope that "Okay, we'll go on to have more children. We'll always miss Sophie." But now it was like the crushing of "Will we have a family?" We haven't had to wrestle with that. "Will we have children?"

There were so many questions.

Kim: What did you name your second daughter?

Lindsey: We named her Dasah. We shortened the Hebrew word, "Hadassah," which comes from Esther, the Hebrew word for Esther. I have always been struck by the passage where—I think many people are—"for such a time as this." Who knows that God has chosen Esther for such a time as this?

It was so confusing for us as to why God would ask us to walk through a story like this the second time, like virtually the same story twice. We just kept coming back to “for such a time as this.” Like, “Who knows but God has chosen Dasah to come into our life for such a time as this.

“There’s maybe a one percent part of me that trusts that You’re doing something. I’m going to hold onto that and be reminded of that and also be reminded that You held us through our story with Sophie. If You could do that and I couldn’t have imagined how her story would unfold, then You *must* want to do something in this story. I have to trust that You’re going to do something in this story too.”

Kim: As you took that journey with Dasah, I could see where you did come to this place where you confirmed that “Yes, God is worthy of worship.”

What do we miss out on when we try to escape the darkness rather than worship God in it?

Lindsey: I think the darkness is often where God reveals Himself in ways that we otherwise could not have known. I think we miss knowing His love and knowing the depths of the pain that He bore on the cross when we want to skip out on the pain.

There is something beautiful about learning to sit in the pain that God helps us see how He suffered with us and how, yes, He agrees that this world is broken. It makes us long for His coming. It makes us long for Him more.

There are—different people showed up on our story with Dasah. People still—they rallied around us. They rallied around us in different ways. As a family we chose to celebrate her life through having family time. We did special simple family things with her because we thought, “We don’t know if we’re going to get to do family time with children so we’re going to make those memories with her.”

“We’re going to wrestle with our questions with God and we’re going to dive into ‘Where are You, God, in the midst of suffering and who are you in the midst of suffering and how do you see our pain and you see our tears?’”

I think that He has treasures for us in the darkness. I think any gem in this world is found through digging in darkness and in dirt—

Kim: That’s true.

Lindsey: —and in difficult places. We just so easily want—so quickly want the easy road. I will say now on this side that I would not know God in the way that I know Him today without the darkness.

Kim: Tell me about Dasah’s birth.

Lindsey: Dasah was born on November 13th of 2014. Again, we filled the hospital with lots of people. We were at a different hospital this time. Again, we prayed. We really prayed that we could take her home. That was our prayer. We weren't really praying for healing for her. I mean we had prayed for that, but we really were praying that maybe we could take her home and that she would live for days. It was much darker. I was very nervous about having her.

We had another C-section, so we were able to have that scheduled. There was some just kind of knowing when she would come and wondering how long she would live. Our doctors and nurses were just so wonderful. Everyone wore—my friends call themselves the “Supporting Cast”—it stands for “come alongside them.” That’s what they were the entirety of her life. But nurses had buttons on that said “Supporting Cast” like they’re part of the supporting cast.

The hospital was filled with people. Our friends were singing praise songs in the lobby. The atrium would just kind of reverberate throughout the hospital. We were heard afterwards that doctors and nurses were bringing people saying, “You’ve got to come see this. You’ve got to come see this.”

We had prayed that God’s glory would fill that hospital.

Kim: Yes, yes.

Lindsey: To be honest, I didn’t necessarily feel it in the space I was in with Dasah. But afterwards someone literally told me, “It felt like God’s glory was filling the hospital.”

I said “Okay, God. You were answering that prayer.”

It felt very different for me with Dasah in our arms. But she was born, and I had made a blanket for her because I wanted to do—I made a hat for Sophie—I wanted the first thing that wrapped her up to be something made by me. I wanted it to have her stains on it so that I could keep it. [Laughter]

They brought her over to me and she was like talking—little sounds coming out of her mouth the entirety of her life pretty much.

Kim: Oh, my goodness.

Lindsey: Sophie was really chill and sleeping. Dasah was a very lively baby. I would say she was like Kevin. She was like a little mini Kevin.

Kim: You could immediately see the differences in their personalities.

Lindsey: I could see their personalities, which was so kind of God to give me little glimpses into who—Sophie, I think, was going to be just like me, and Dasah, I think, was going to be just like Kevin—even in how they looked.

She lifted up her head to look at me. I was able to nurse her. Which that's something I wasn't able to do with Sophie. That was just this beautiful experience. There were sweet little moments God gave us. Again, we brought everyone into the room and sang "Happy Birthday" and had a cake.

But I was also trying to cram a lifetime of experiences into however long they gave us with her. I didn't have expectations with Sophie's life, and I had expectations with Dasah. Here's all the things I wished we could have done with Sophie, and now I want to do them with Dasah. There was some anxiety with that.

Our time with her—it did feel less peaceful at times. I remember we were in the hospital room and people were coming in and out. We had had Sophie in the middle of the night so there was less people. Dasah we had during the daytime. It was starting to feel chaotic and like we weren't getting to cherish these moments. A friend was like, "What do you want people to be praying for downstairs? They're asking."

We said, "Can you be praying for peace? It doesn't feel very peaceful right now."

She said—she was our friend who was doing photography for us and capturing every moment. I think we have like 2000 pictures from her hours of life. She said, "In the moment I sent that prayer, just within a couple of minutes, peace came upon your room."

I just thought, "Okay, God. You are present with us in this part. You are here with us in this celebration."

It was very different with Dasah but it still was so sweet to get to hold her. Actually, whereas our family only got to see Sophie really one time, they were able to come and be with us a couple of times.

God just really gave us some extra moments with Dasah. She lived for 12 hours. She was born at 8:25 am and she passed away at exactly 8:25 pm. I didn't realize it at the time. But a friend of mine reminded me that Romans 8:25 says, "But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

Hope had been the theme for us with Dasah. I just felt like, "God, You are speaking to us even through her short life in the timing of what we are hoping for is not here in this life, and we can trust You to redeem this pain and meet us in this part of our story." That felt just almost too much to bear for much of the time.

Kim: As you look back on your experiences, how do you believe God uses sorrow and suffering in our lives?

Lindsey: I think they are the way to true joy and hope. I don't think that we can know true joy and even peace without the hands of sorrow and suffering. Because I think sorrow and suffering are often what we fear. When we walk through it and we see God meet us in it, it allows us to have peace knowing that He will walk with us in any season of sorrow and suffering.

It allows us to have joy because we're not looking for joy in our circumstances. We're truly discovering how to find joy even when our circumstances dictate otherwise; even when they say, "There should not be joy here."

I think that's what even people began to see in our story that there was *joy* in places there should not be joy. There's *hope* in places where there should not be hope. There's *laughter* in places where there should not be laughter. There is a deep sense of God's presence even in the depth of pain.

With Dasah it was so dark. Yet even in the darkness God revealed His light and what does it look like to know Him in dark places, in dark spaces and to walk with people through darkness. There are times and seasons to pull people out into a spirit of celebration and joy, and there's time to sit with people in great darkness. That reflects His beauty and His love. That reflects aspects of His character that we can only know in those spaces.

Sophie's story tells us a lot about having joy in the midst of pain choosing to celebrate life in the midst of sorrow. Dasah's story taught us really how to grieve and how to lament.

"Will we trust God and believe that God is great no matter what unfolds in our life?" There was glimpses of that with Sophie. But Dasah took me to a whole new level of that for both Kevin and I. We did pray that God would heal her but our prayer became so much more, "God, glorify yourself. Glorify yourself. Glorify yourself. Teach us what it looks like that we will follow You no matter what. Let our lives and our story reflect that You are worthy." And I wanted to know God like that.

One of the verses that had been the verse for my life was where Paul says, "I count everything as loss compared to knowing you. For whose sake I would lose all things and be found in Christ." [Paraphrase] That in *whatever* we walk through, that we would know Christ and be willing to count everything as loss—I had prayed that prayer over my life when I was a teenager. Here I was saying, "God, are you worthy?" Paul knew something about Your worthiness that he could say, "I count everything as loss compared to knowing You."

God took us on a journey of really wrestling with His goodness, His worthiness and asking people to sit in the pain with us. Sophie's was such a story of celebration and Dasah's was like we were in a dark spot and we needed people to come sit in the dark spot with us and help us know God, but also help us sit in the darkness. You know we live in a broken world where the whole creation groans with longing. Here we were. We were really groaning, and we needed people to groan with us.

In the midst of hard circumstances, do we just quickly question Him or do we say, "This is an opportunity to see Him and know Him in a way that perhaps we've never known Him before? Lord, maybe I don't know *hope* the way that You talk about it. Maybe I don't know this hope that doesn't disappoint in the way that I want to know it. I *want* to know who You are."

I think when we come to know Jesus, He takes us on this lifelong journey that goes into eternity with Him of knowing Him more deeply. That's what we sign up for. "This is eternal life that they may know You, the only true God," and that is a lifetime of knowing where we just barely even scratch the surface.

Kim: What's your life like today?

Lindsey: Today I have a four-year-old son who came into our life through adoption about 14 months after we lost Dasah. We decided to pursue adoption not knowing if we could ever have a healthy baby and knowing that that was not something we were ready to step into again even if I could. We brought him at birth. He is a joy and a delight and also high, high energy little boy. [Laughter] He has taught us so much. God has used him in our life so greatly. We are just so grateful to get to be his parents.

We also have an almost two-year-old daughter who came into our lives through birth. We decided to take the risk and try again. Still we had gone through many tests after we had Dasah and still it was very inconclusive. We both felt like we would regret if we didn't try again. We both knew we did not regret carrying Sophia and Dasah to term and knew that if we had to walk through this again, we would not regret it. Even though there would probably be a new level of devastation, but God would meet us in it.

She is a healthy, also high energy, rambunctious almost two-year-old. She is a sweet combination of Sophie and Dasah and now—she is. Jaden's like mini me. Her name is Briella. It's a combination of Sophie and Dasah's middle names. She's just a gift. I really can't believe God has given us these four sweet babies.

Again, it's not the story I would have chosen but it's not the one I would have had without the story that God's given me. You can't really make those decisions or figure out what I would choose because it's like what I would choose at the end of the day is God's story for my life. It's different than my story. I think come heaven I will realize to the degree how much better it is to have lived His story for my life rather than trying to live my own.

I miss Sophie and Dasah so much. I can't wait for us *all* to be together in heaven. But I'm so grateful for these two living children who make me pull my hair out and also make me laugh so hard and make me love so hard. I just can't believe God's provision for us. They are not—to me they are not proof of God's goodness—they are a taste of His goodness to come.

But really, God's goodness to me in our journey with Sophie and Dasah was more rooted in my heart through seeing His death on the cross, that He could not be more good to me than He was 2000 years ago and that any circumstantial goodness He gives me is a sweet little cherry on top in this life. But His ultimate goodness is found on the cross.

I'm just so grateful that He's chosen to give sweet blessings along the way. To be honest, even looking at Sophie and Dasah's life, I can see now six and seven years later just how good He was to give us them.

It can feel at times that His goodness—we can just say He's good when our circumstances are good or He gives us the living children—but Sophie and Dasah were *good* gifts to me as are Jaden and Briella. I can't wait for God to wipe away the tears and redeem all the pain.

It's fun to watch Briella and Jaden say Sophie and Dasah's name and know their big sisters. I pray that Sophie and Dasah will be reasons that they come to know Jesus; that their stories in life will continue to impact their little siblings.

Kim: As I prepare for my interviews, I like to know *just enough* about the stories so that when I'm reading each book, I can be surprised by what happens next. Before I read Lindsey's story, I actually prepared my heart for the sadness I expected to *overflow* the pages. But I was *totally* caught off guard by the incredible amount of joy and celebration that ensued.

The way Lindsey and her husband Kevin showed value to their sweet little daughters in the womb was something that I had never heard of before. When I read these vivid descriptions, I laughed, I cried, I was in awe of God and I thought, "Why not? Why wouldn't a couple want to celebrate their unborn child with such fervor?" Lindsey discovered hope, joy and laughter in a place they aren't normally found. In the darkness, God revealed His light.

Here are some things that Lindsey did that I think can be applied to all of us in any situation. The first was to trust God with the process. We don't serve a haphazard God. His plan and His timing is best, even when we don't understand it. When we trust Him in the process, we will grow in our faith and also in our relationship with Him.

Then Lindsey said all gems in the world are found in darkness. Now this *really* stood out to me. Because many times in life, it's in those dark and scary places that we learn our most precious lessons.

Those lessons add color to our lives, clarity, brilliance. They prepare for us an eternal weight in glory beyond all comparison. They create a luster in our lives as we're able to better reflect Christ. Rarity because of the unique way Christ molds us through our challenges. And a hardness that creates in us the ability to resist the abrasions of life.

Lastly, like Lindsey and Kevin believed was true for Sophia and Dasah, we can all be hopeful because in Christ the best *is* yet to come.

Thanks for listening. If you want to find out more about Lindsey R. Dennis or her book, *Buried Dreams*, check out our show notes on the *Unfavorable Odds* page at FamilyLife.com/podcasts. There you'll also be able to listen to the other podcasts on the FamilyLife Podcast Network.

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I'm Kim Anthony. Thanks for listening to this episode of *Unfavorable Odds*. This wraps up season four of the podcast. Stay tuned for season five coming soon.

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