*Tales of the Ones He Won’t Let Go* Story

Session 1

“Forever Family: Who Will I Trust?”\*

**Marilin and Marlene’s Story**

*What is going to happen to us?* wondered Marilin. It wasn’t the first time in her young life that she’d asked such a question, but this time it felt more urgent. Perhaps because she knew more. When she was very little she didn’t think about ever being separated from her sister. They were twins. They had been together since birth. They would always be together. Right?

Marlene stared off in the distance at some kids playing soccer. She was worried too, but she was trying not to show it. She heard Marilin’s deep sigh and she reached for her sister’s hand. “Something will work out,” she said. Silently she prayed, *God, please work something out*.

Fifteen was supposed to be a happy milestone in the life of a Mexican girl. Both of these newly-turned-fifteen-year-olds hoped this time wouldn’t turn into a bad memory.

**Beth’s Story**

*[Show MapOfMexico1.]*

*So young*. Beth found herself looking back at some old photos of the time when she had first met the twins. It was just four years ago, but it felt like a lifetime. So much had happened since then. She saw herself in the photos—a twenty-something mom of three little ones, a missionary living and learning on the field in Monterrey, Mexico, a wife, a daughter, a sister. And also the adopted *tia*, or auntie, of two beautiful girls that she and Todd had fallen in love with.

Her mind snapped back to the present. She could hear Todd’s words he had spoken on the phone just that afternoon echoing in her mind: “Do we lose the girls forever, or do they come home with us—today—forever? We have to decide now.”

A critical situation had suddenly arose. There was no time to make plans and gather loads of wise counsel. They had to decide *today*.

**Marilin and Marlene’s Story**

Marilin and Marlene already felt like Beth and Todd were family. For the last four years they had spent a lot of time with the Guckenbergers—weekends, holidays, and many family events. Beth and Todd were always there for them—celebrating school victories, birthdays, and even just little moments that would have seemed trivial to an outsider, but meant everything to them.

“Do you think . . .” Marilin started to ask, but her voice trailed off.

“I don’t know,” Marlene replied, knowing what her sister was thinking. “We can’t expect that. I don’t know what to expect.”

She went back to staring at the soccer game for a while, but felt too distracted and anxious to focus on anything. “C’mon,” she said to her twin, “let’s go for a walk.”

**Beth’s Story**

I wanted to be in the driver’s seat. This road was getting out of control, and I wanted to be in the front, able to watch for every turn and plan accordingly. I wanted to be certain.

But all I could be certain of that morning was that the best stories happen not when I’m in the driver’s seat, trying to wrestle with control, but when I take the back seat—when I let go and close my eyes and trust the driver.

So I sat down on the couch and asked God to talk to me. *I am listening*, I told him. As I listened, I could feel the fear subside. Once the fear stopped clouding my brain, I heard his direction. *Go. Go get them*.

Once you hear God, you have two choices, to obey or disobey. I went over to the orphanage where the girls were living and said to Todd what I knew God was steering us toward. Together, we said yes, and immediately I was the mom of twin teenage girls.

**Marilin and Marlene’s Story**

*[Show HappyTwins1.]*

“We were so happy,” Marilin remembered later. “And so relieved. We wouldn’t have to move; we wouldn’t have to be separated. It was weird, for Beth and Todd to all of a sudden be our parents and to instantly have a family. But it was good.”

The very next day they all piled into the family car and went to the local pet shop. The girls wondered what Beth/Mama was up to.

“Each of you can pick out a fish,” their new mom said. Without much explanation, she bought a tank and all the accessories for an aquarium. Each of them took time to find just the right fish. Marlene picked out one that was a little smaller than the others, but it had a beautiful tail and pretty colors. Both girls were excited to have their own pets.

**Beth’s Story**

When we got back to the house and the fish were settled in their new home too, I sat all the kids down and talked to them about the changes in our family life—changes that had already happened and ones that we couldn’t even imagine yet.

“It’s like the fish,” I said. “We all look different and are different sizes, but we have to share the same space. We have to work to see how we are more alike than different, because we are family now.”

It was a beautiful moment that ended with hugs and promises to swim well in the same tank together.

*This is going to work out just fine*, I thought.

That lasted about three days.

**Marilin and Marlene’s Story**

Marilin made it into the door first after school that day. She was tired and plopped down on the couch. Marlene followed close behind.

“Did you feed the fish yet?” she asked Marilin.

“No—you saw me. I just got here. I’m tired. It’s your turn anyway.” Marilin was feeling grumpy. It had been a long day and her new little brothers had been getting on her nerves that week. But her moment of quiet was not going to last.

“Oh, no! No! Marilin!! Marilin, come!!!”

Marilin ran to see what Marlene was screaming about.

“My fish!” she wailed. “My fish is gone!”

**Beth’s Story**

I knew something was wrong when I pulled up to the house. Marilin came running out before I had even gotten out of the car.

“Josh’s fish ate Marlene’s!” she blurted out.

*Oh, Lord*, I prayed. *Help!*

Inside I found a crying Marlene and a pitiful little brother who felt bad somehow for what was no fault of his own. I talked to them and confessed that my analogy of the fish in the tank to the hopes of our family broke down in some places. There were tears, but there was also laughter. It’s still a story we tell and laugh about today.

In many ways, we all grew up together, through the girls’ high school and college years and the little ones’ toddler and elementary years. It took a lot of eye-closing in those years, a lot of trusting the driver, to make it through. It took me believing that our God the Rescuer had a story for us all.

I told them all many times that there was a cost and a benefit to our family makeup (which changed and grew significantly over the years), and they needed to focus on the benefit and not pout over the cost. That’s how this would work.

That was fourteen years ago, and now no one can imagine our family any other way. God-directed paths lead to stories we tell long after the events have passed. It might be scary when you first close your eyes or let go of the handlebars, but we can always

trust our driver. He will never let us go.

*[Show BethWithGirls1.]*

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\*The *Tales of the Ones He Won’t Let Go* stories are inspired by true events and real people. In some cases, names were changed to protect identities and details of dialogue and actions were imagined. Photos do not necessarily represent actual story characters.