FamilyLife Today® Radio Transcript

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Seeing with Eyes of Faith

Guest:	Lacey Buchanan
From the series:	Through the Eyes of Hope (Day 1 of 2)
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Bob: When she was pregnant with her first child, Lacey Buchanan experienced an ultrasound procedure that no expectant mother wants to experience.

Lacey: I was lying there doing an ultrasound, and the tech puts the wand on my stomach and she says: "Oh, yes! There's a cleft lip and palate." She brings the doctor in, you know, and he's trying to explain it to us. They said cleft lip and palate, but then they added: "Well, there's something different about this. We don't really know what's going on." I think that was the most *terrifying* part of it all—is to hear, "We don't know."

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our host is Dennis Rainey; I'm Bob Lepine. How does a mom calm her own heart when she hears news like that in a doctor's office? We'll meet Lacey Buchanan today and hear her story. Stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. We're going to get a chance to introduce our listeners to a pretty remarkable mom today.

Dennis: Indeed. Lacey Buchanan joins us on *FamilyLife Today,* all the way from middle Tennessee.

Bob: —from a town that is best-known for what? Do you want to tell them? Tell them what the town she's from is best known for.

Dennis: No, let's let her! So, what's your town best known for?

Lacey: The only thing my little town is known for is the Short Mountain Moonshine. [Laughter]

Bob: There you go.

Dennis: I just wanted her to say that! [Laughter] We're not peddling, here, on *FamilyLife Today.* [Laughter]

Lacey, we'd like to welcome you to the broadcast. You're a mom of two.

Lacey: Yes.

Dennis: Your husband's name is Chris.

Lacey: Yes.

Dennis: And you guys have a childhood relationship that goes all the way back to your teen years. You guys have now been married for how long?

Lacey: We've been married for nine; together for fifteen.

Dennis: She has written a book called *Through the Eyes of Hope.*

I just want to start out kind of at the core of the message here. The term "Happy Birthday" usually has all kinds of cheerful meanings to it. For you and your husband, it has a little different meaning; doesn't it?

Lacey: It does; yes. The day that our son was born, we were excited and anticipating his birth, just like any parents would—our first child. At the same time, we were very anxious and nervous for his arrival; because we didn't know a lot of things. We didn't know if he was going to live / we didn't know if he was going to be okay if he did live—we didn't know what we were facing.

Parenthood is a very hard journey anyway. So adding extra challenges on top of it—we were young—I was 23 when I gave birth to him. It was scary!

Bob: And you did know, heading into the delivery room, that you were facing some unusual circumstances.

Let me go all the way back to you guys finding out that you were expecting, because that happened a little ahead of schedule; at least, in your schedule; right?

Lacey: Yes; for sure. I received my acceptance letter to law school; and then, within the same week, received a positive pregnancy test. Everybody said, "Oh, you're not going to law school now." I am kind of stubborn and I think, "Well, yes, I am!" Because I was young and naïve—right? —I thought, "I can do this!" And I did, but it's not the way I would have planned it, for sure.

Dennis: But you ended up getting your law degree, so you're an attorney today.

Lacey: I did; yes.

Dennis: But, in the meantime, that pregnancy was filled with surprises. What was the first one?

Lacey: The very first surprise, just right after we found out we were pregnant—we found out, early on, that we might miscarry. We were pretty devastated, really.

Bob: And what was the indication that you might miscarry?

Lacey: My hormone levels to sustain a pregnancy were dropping rather than rising. Obviously, I didn't; because I wouldn't be sitting here today telling this story.

Bob: Right.

Lacey: Yes.

Bob: So, you got past that initial hurdle—that initial scare.

Lacey: Yes.

Bob: But there's some anxiety that goes along with that, I'm sure.

Lacey: Sure.

Bob: I'm sure that was a challenging season—the pregnancy for you.

Lacey: It was; yes. It was really scary; and everything after that was, sort of, very normal. We started to let our guard down—we thought: "Everything's fine now. Everything's going to be okay. This is very normal; this is very typical." Then, we found out later on that it wasn't.

Bob: How long into the pregnancy?

Lacey: Eighteen weeks.

Bob: And what did you learn?

Lacey: We learned that our child had a fetal anomaly. Now, what that entailed for the child—the doctors couldn't tell us. All that they could say was, "Something's not right." That was probably the most terrifying thing; because, as a mom, I thought: "If I could just find out what's going on, that gives me a little bit of control. Maybe there's something I can do."

Of course, that was a false sense of control; but it felt very out of control, because it was all of these: "What ifs?" "We just don't know," "It could be this, and it could be that."

So there was really no way to prepare, and it felt very out-of-control.

Bob: Are you an optimist?

Lacey: I am!

Bob: So, when you hear “fetal anomaly,” do you think, “It will be okay”?

Lacey: If you asked me *then*, and you asked me now, I think I would have different answers. Now, when I hear “fetal anomaly,” I think my response is: “Oh, tell me about it! Let’s figure out how we can work through this.” I want to give other people hope, because I’ve been there.

Then, at the time—and it being my child—it was very devastating, because nobody wants to hear that there’s something wrong with your child.

Bob: Yes.

Lacey: I was very young, and I didn’t *know* exactly what even a fetal anomaly was; you know. It was all a learning curve and a learning process. Although we kept hope—the optimist in me kept hope that everything was going to work out and everything was going to be okay—it was still much more terrifying to me then than I think it would be now.

Bob: Did your mind go to worst-case scenarios?

Lacey: It did, but I never stay there long.

Bob: Right.

Dennis: But you did have a moment, just while watching TV one night—*Sixty* Minutes—where you felt like God perhaps warned you or perhaps enlarged your heart just a bit—

Lacey: Yes.

Dennis: —to receive this kind of news.

Lacey: Yes; yes. Before we ever found out there was anything wrong with the child, I was watching—well, I wasn’t watching / I really don’t watch TV—I use it for background noise. I had it on, and it was a story of a father who pushed his disabled son in marathons so that his son could experience things and see all of these beautiful sceneries. It was just one thing he could do to give his son some experiences and just sort of make him feel *alive*. I watched that, and with all the pregnancy hormones, you know, I just sobbed at this show. I thought: “Oh, that’s so inspiring! That’s so amazing! The lengths that a parent would go to for their child—just the exhaustion he must feel and what he pushes himself to for his son.”

I sat down after I watched that show and just wrote a quick little letter to the baby in my womb. I still have that little letter tucked inside of his baby book.

The gist of it said, you know: “I don’t know what the future holds for us; but if you had a disability / if you had anything wrong with you, that wouldn’t change anything about my love for you, because you are my child and I am your mother. I will always love you.” Again, that was before we ever knew anything was wrong. We had *no* indication that our little boy was going to have a disability.

Dennis: And you had a number of phone calls, messages, and interactions with medical technicians that really began to move you even to a deeper level of concern. Wasn’t there an encounter with someone who was performing some tests on you?

Lacey: Yes. I was lying there, doing an ultrasound. We had many, many ultrasounds—so we’re getting this ultrasound. The tech just sort of panics, and jumps up, and she’s: “Wait, wait, wait! I’ve got to go get the doctor!” I am panicking. Then she kind of peeks her head back in the door; and she says, “Everything’s okay!” and she runs out again. I am like, “Yeah, right!” [Laughter]

So she runs and she gets the doctor, and she comes back in. She’s showing the doctor this scan. Of course, I can’t tell anything about what’s going on. I can tell the baby’s heart is beating; so I’m like, “Okay; well, he’s okay.”

She sees what she calls an “amniotic sheet”—and that’s where the placenta breaks down in a little, small spot. One end of this sheet is connected to the placenta on one side, and the other end is connected to the placenta on the other side. It sort of makes a sheet / it’s just a band—it’s not dangerous. But we didn’t know, at first, that it was a sheet; because if it’s attached at both sides, it’s fine. If it’s attached to the placenta on one end, but loose on the other, it can be very dangerous to the baby; because it can attach *to* the baby. Wherever it attaches to the baby, it cuts off blood flow.

Thankfully, it was just the amniotic sheet. The doctor figured that out—ruled out any sort of danger. We were sort of: “Whew!”—you know. Again, sort of thought we were off the hook.

Dennis: —until the next episode, which occurred when?

Lacey: I don’t remember exactly when in the timeline—because, again, we had *so many* ultrasounds—but eventually, we were asked to come back in for an ultrasound. This time, we *knew* that they had seen something; but they didn’t tell us what over the phone. They wouldn’t say anything over the phone except: “We need you to come back in. We’re concerned.”

Of course, panic mode sets in for us—right?—at this point. We’re going in for the ultrasound and, almost immediately, the tech puts the wand on my stomach and she

says: “Oh, yes! There’s a cleft lip and palate.” We’re like: “On the baby?”—you know—“What?” She’s like, “Yes.” And she’s kind of trying to stay—you know, downplay it a little bit for us and stay calm—because we’re kind of panicking here. She brings the doctor in, you know; and he’s trying to explain it to us. We were just devastated; you know? We kept getting by, narrowly / getting by—you know: “Everything’s okay. Here’s a panic moment, but everything’s okay.”

And then, finally, we hear this devastating news that everything is *not* okay: “There is something wrong with your child.”

They said cleft lip and palate; but then they added: “Well, there’s something different about this. We don’t really know what’s going on.” Well: “What does that mean?” They are like, “We don’t know.” I think that was the most *terrifying* part of it all—is to hear, “We don’t know.”

Dennis: Sometimes not knowing is far more difficult *than* knowing.

Lacey: It is for me anyway; yes.

Dennis: Yes. I mean, the ambiguity of all the uncertainty—especially if you’ve been hit with one thing after another—to create fear in the heart of a young possible mom. I just can’t—I can’t even imagine that!

Bob: And to hear: “fetal anomaly”; then “cleft palate” and “We don’t know.” Did you have any medical people suggest termination?

Lacey: You know, we never did. I’m kind of surprised by that, because you hear it happen so often today with things much less severe than my son’s; but nobody ever suggested it to us. I think a lot of that had to do with some of the doctors that we had who were very—they knew where we stood. Obviously, they knew that we were passionately in love with our child and that it wasn’t going to happen.

Also, it was one of those things, too, I think—like they didn’t really know what was going to happen. I don’t know if maybe—and this is just my own speculation—maybe they were afraid to suggest that when there wasn’t something obviously—I don’t know, contract me to say: “Well, there’s something wrong; so let’s abort. We don’t know what it is—

Bob: Right.

Lacey: —“but let’s…”—you know?

Bob: Well, and a cleft palate is not a small thing; but it is something that can be treated.

Lacey: Cleft palate is totally repairable; yes.

Bob: Right. So that's not something that you would recommend termination for—I wouldn't think.

Lacey: Not typically.

Bob: And you say the doctors knew where you stood.

Lacey: Yes.

Bob: You knew where you stood.

Lacey: Yes.

Bob: Was there ever even a moment?

Lacey: There was *so not* a moment for us that, after Christian was born, and somebody suggested that that should have been the course we took, it blew my mind! Our thoughts were: "Please let this child be okay. What can I do to make this child be okay?"

Dennis: Take us to the day of delivery.

Bob: —because the diagnosis was unknown—

Lacey: Yes.

Bob: —until Christian was born; right?

Lacey: —the full diagnosis. They knew cleft lip and palate, but something was just off and different; yes.

The day of his birth, we had, I would say, between 20 and 30 people scrubbed into our room. It was absurd the amount of people.

Dennis: Did that take the joy [out] of the birth?

Lacey: No; it didn't. There was still joy. I remember walking into the hospital that morning. We had to be there really early; you know? The excitement of getting to have my child and hold my child was still—I would call that overwhelming compared to the fear. There was fear. I mean, I would be silly to say there wasn't. There was a lot of fear, and there was a lot of anxiety about what was going to happen; but overall, you know, I was thinking: "I'm going to get to hold my baby today. I'm going to get to see him. I'm going to get to be his mother today." So that was the overwhelming sense.

I was thankful for all of those people in the room, because we didn't know what was going to happen. They were preparing for every scenario—that kind of made me feel better.

Dennis: So, when you gave birth, how long before you held Christian?

Lacey: It was about eight hours, I believe. I was very medicated. They give you lots of medication after a C-section. They wouldn't let me get up out of the bed until like all of the spinal had worn off and, you know, I could feel my feet again, and that kind of stuff. That took *hours*. His NICU was one-third of a mile from my room.

Dennis: Oh, wow.

Lacey: So getting there, right after I had a C-section, was no easy task.

Dennis: So what about Chris, your husband? Did he have a chance to see him before you did?

Lacey: The only time Chris saw him was after he was born, and they cut the umbilical cord. They knew he was breathing. They took him over to his little incubator to do his APGAR test and all of that, just like they would any child. Chris got to go see him then, while they were still finishing up on *me*. Then, after that, Chris stayed with me until I was able to go; because he wasn't exactly stable just yet, they said.

Bob: Right.

Dennis: Right.

Lacey: So they wouldn't really let him.

Dennis: So what did Chris tell you?

Lacey: Well, I'm still lying there, you know, and Christian's screaming, which is beautiful for us to hear. Chris is sitting by my head.

I send him over to check on Christian, like, "Go make sure he's okay,"—because, of course, I'm helpless—you know, they're sewing me up. I'm just like: "Hurry up! I want to see my baby. Hurry up!" All of a sudden, I started hemorrhaging; and all of these doctors around me started yelling. I'm getting nervous about what's going on with me. I call Chris back over and I'm like: "Chris, what's going on? Am I okay?" He's kind of checking and looking for me; and, you know, we're trying to figure it out.

In the middle of all that, I'm like: "Chris, did you see Christian? How's he doing? Is he okay? What's going on with him?" I said, "His birth defect's not as bad as they thought; right? I mean, I got to see just a quick glance of his face after they delivered him, and

it's not that bad." He was sort of just somber. He looks at me and he says, "Lacey, it is worse." I didn't say anything after that—I didn't know what to say. Of course, you know, I'm being pulled in five or six different directions.

Bob: Wow.

Lacey: You know, he kind of has a tear running down his face. I'm just thinking: "What is he talking about? I didn't see that." That's really the extent of our exchange about it for the few hours after [his birth].

Bob: So when did you know what was wrong?

Lacey: So the first time I got to see Christian after he was born, they had wrapped his eyes and his head with gauze and bandages and stuff—so the first time I saw him, he had all of that on. I didn't really get to see his whole face for several days. So, finally, when he was about four days old, they had to do a surgery to put a feeding tube into his stomach; and so they had to take all of the bandages off. It had to be sterile—a sterile environment—to go into the operating room. That's the first time that I really saw him without all of his bandages. That was when I really got to see the extent of his birth defect and realize it was much worse than the doctors had expected.

Bob: So we can't show our listeners a picture.

Lacey: Right.

Bob: They can see it on the cover of your book. How do you describe what Christian's condition is?

Lacey: If you think of a cleft lip and palate, the children have a place from their mouth to their nose that's sort of missing skin and bone and things like that. So Christian has that, except it's in a different place on his face.

His cleft ran from the corners of his mouth—both sides / it was bilateral—up into his eyes. His eyes were also clefted. It just left the conjunctival tissue, sort of like the inside of our eyelids. So that's what you see when you see Christian's eyes—is just that sort of mucus membrane conjunctival tissue. And then, of course, he doesn't have the cleft on either side of his nose anymore, going up into his eyes; because he's had surgery to repair that.

Bob: Right.

Lacey: But the thing that people notice now is his eyes. Basically, like the non-medical way to say it is that he doesn't have eyes. It's not that they're there and they don't function—he's one of the few people who were born without them.

Bob: Fifty people in the world?

Lacey: It is fifty people in the world that have his cleft condition that clefted his eyes. There are more people who are born without eyes—or with small eyes is actually a more common condition—but having the cleft on the face that clefts the eyes is a much more rare condition—fifty or sixty documented cases.

Dennis: So when you saw his face—this is the baby boy you've been longing to touch and hold and cuddle your face next to—what were your thoughts?

Lacey: My immediate thought was for Christian's sake: "What does this mean for him?—as far as—

Dennis: Yes.

Lacey: "Is he blind?" I mean, it was sort of apparent that he was blind, but it was one of those things that I just didn't want to admit it in the moment—so: "Is he blind? and "If he's blind, what does that mean? What do we do about this?"—you know—"How do we get him well?" That was always my concern: "How do I protect him?" I mean, just laying eyes on him for the first time, it was just instant—you know, I already loved him before he was born and then, just even more so, getting to just see him for the first time.

Bob: You know, one of the things—as we've heard stories through the years of people walking down very difficult paths—one of the things that's become clear to us is that the time to become spiritually prepared for what is ahead is not in the moment.

Lacey: Right.

Bob: The only reason you could face what you faced when you faced it is because you had a walk of faith—

Lacey: Yes.

Bob: —that had been built into you from childhood.

Lacey: Yes; absolutely. I had been going to church pretty much my whole life. My husband and I met at church—at a church when I was 15. We were going to that church still when Christian was born. We had the same pastor—the pastor who married us was still our pastor. He taught me so much about the character of God that I feel like he was a *huge* foundation-builder for me that, when that time came, all of the things that he had said and all of the things I had learned from him—you know, they were coming back—and all the Scriptures that I had memorized.

And that's not to say I didn't struggle at times. It wasn't like it was easy for me to just say: "Oh, yes. God's got this!" It was difficult; but without that foundation that I had ahead of time, I don't think I ever would have gotten to the place I am now.

Dennis: I say quite frequently—it seems like increasingly—the most important thing about you, as an individual, is what you think about God / what I think about God. And then, how do we interpret life's circumstances against who we know and what we know about God to be true?

Lacey: Yes.

Dennis: Psalm 20 says, "May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble." One of the most repeated phrases in the psalms is, "God is our refuge and our help."

Lacey: Yes.

Dennis: If you don't think of God as being a loving God, in those moments when you're a mom looking into the face of a baby boy, [whom] you're now grappling with his being blind and you're wondering, "How's this going to roll out over a lifetime?" You've got to have a place to take your fear—to take your worries / to take your concerns—and cast them on Him, because He does care for you; and He does have a plan. He is a good God.

Lacey: He is.

Dennis: He is a good God.

In these situations—just in reading your story and reflecting on your life, you've been an inspiration—your love for your son—you and Chris—to a lot of people. Just like that guy on *Sixty Minutes* was an inspiration to you, as you watched TV that evening, your faith working its way out in, certainly, less-than-perfect circumstances, gives hope to a lot of people who are facing all kinds of circumstances.

Michelle: *FamilyLife Today* is brought to you by FamilyLife in Little Rock, Arkansas. And although FamilyLife is located in the United States of America, we understand that our cultures vary but the issues facing us are similar. We all have joys in life, we all struggle and we all want to love and be loved. And we want your family, your marriage and your relationships to succeed.

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I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our global broadcast manager Rhonda Street. I also want to thank our editor Larry Loraine. For Dennis Rainey and Bob Lepine, I'm Michelle Hill and I invite you to join us again for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

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