

[00:00:00.470] - Lisa Qualls

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[00:00:07.220] - Melissa Corkum

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[00:00:32.540] - Lisa Qualls

This devotional has contributions from 30 authors, all foster and adoptive parents who offer a window into their own lives and families. You're going to recognize yourself time and time again in their words. Faith, Hope, and Connection, a 30 day devotional for adoptive and foster parents is truly a treasure trove of wisdom and grace for foster and adoptive families.

[00:00:53.420] - Melissa Corkum

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[00:01:04.630] - Lisa Qualls

Welcome to the Adoption Connection podcast where we share resources by and for adoptive and foster moms. I'm Lisa Qualls.

[00:01:12.550] - Melissa Corkum

And this is Melissa Corkum. Don't worry, we get it, and we're here for you. Hey, friends! Welcome to Episode 136 of the Adoption Connection podcast. In honor of Father's Day, we're devoting the month of June to a series we're calling Dad Connection. In each of the five Tuesdays this month, we're featuring a different foster or adoptive dad. Here at the adoption connection, we value hearing from a wide range of voices and we're excited to bring these special dad conversations to you. If you missed the first couple in the series, make sure you grab your podcast app and go backwards. You don't want to miss any one of these five interviews.

[00:01:52.030] - Lisa Qualls

Well, I had the privilege of sitting down with Jason Johnson for this interview. Jason is a writer and speaker who encourages families and equips churches in their foster care and adoption journeys. Jason currently serves as the director of Church Ministry Initiatives with Christian Alliance for Orphans. In his work, he speaks and teaches at churches, conferences, forums and workshops on church based ministry strategies and best practices, as well as encouraging families that are in the trenches and those that are considering getting involved. Jason and his wife, Emily, live in Texas with their daughters, so I hope you enjoy this conversation.

[00:02:38.560] - Lisa Qualls

Jason, welcome to the Adoption Connection podcast.

[00:02:41.860] - Jason Johnson

Hey, thank you so much for having me.

[00:02:43.870] - Lisa Qualls

Well, we're glad to have you here. We're really enjoying setting up this whole month of interviews with dads, foster and adoptive dads. I think it's a really neat way to honor the dads and hear your voice because as we both know, we hear a lot more from the moms than we do from the dads, so thank you for being here.

[00:03:03.070] - Jason Johnson

Absolutely.

[00:03:04.000] - Lisa Qualls

So tell me, who makes up your family?

[00:03:07.470] - Jason Johnson

Yea, so most importantly, my wife, Emily, we are going on 19 years this summer and we have three biological daughters who are all kind of teetering on the ages of 16, 14, 12 and 9. So that's the direction that we're headed. And our youngest was actually adopted. She came to us through the foster care system and then a little bit beyond that, but still very much integrated into our family is a young girl who's now twenty one who we met when she was 17 in foster care. And her little boy at the time was one week old, he's now four. And there's a couple of other cute little girls that have come along the way, so her and her three kiddos are very much in grafted into our family and us into theirs.

[00:04:03.970] - Lisa Qualls

That's beautiful. I love hearing that. So how did you decide? I mean, you had your three girls. How did you decide to enter this world of foster care and also adoption?

[00:04:16.850] - Jason Johnson

Yeah, so I think our story was a lot like many others where it was, it was a "one day" story. You know, maybe one day, one day maybe we'll do this when X, Y, Z. When the time is right, when our kids are the right age. Foster care wasn't on our radar as much as just knowing that we would probably adopt one day. Now, I'll be honest with you, when our daughters were six, four and two, we had just planted a church not long before that that was not even two years old that I was pastoring, and so that was probably the biggest baby of them all. We had our daughters and then we had this growing kind of monster in our lives called the church and that was when my wife came to me and said, I think it's time for us. And frankly, and I know a lot of guys might be able to resonate with this, one of my first thoughts was "really?" Like of all the times and all the history of all the universe of time, like, I would actually think this is the absolute worst time for us to do this. So I say this often to men especially, I knew that this would be a part of our story. It wasn't so much of an if, but a when. And so it's not that my wife and I were in disagreement. I say it this way, we were reading the same book, but we just weren't on the same page yet. And that's one way I try to encourage couples, especially, who might feel like we're not on the same page so we can't do anything. We can't move forward. And I say, well, are you at least reading the same book? Like, are you both in agreement that this may be something for us? My wife is on page two hundred, and I was I was maybe still in the table of contents and but we eventually ended up on the same page.

[00:06:11.900] - Lisa Qualls

I love that. I love that story and I was going to ask you if you or your wife sort of took the lead in this. So you were in agreement that she was

[00:06:19.460] - Jason Johnson

She was a little further ahead. And we went to a conference early on in our church. It was an adoption conference, actually, it had the word adoption in the conference and we strolled into a breakout on foster care and that conference. And we spent an hour in that conference and we walked out of that breakout knowing that everything was about to change. Our family was about to change, our church was about to change, because if what this guy just said is true about foster care in our city, we can't pretend like we didn't just hear that. And that's when it was, you know, we're reading the same book, but how do we get on the same page? And it meant that she may be needed to slow down a little bit and I needed to speed up a little bit. I needed to be willing to say maybe, you know, I'll go to the orientation class or this. And I tell men this often as well, I grew up in a tradition that was very much about men lead your families and men lead your wives spiritually, and I always wanted to be that and do that. I always wondered, what in the world does that actually mean? And I found during that season, especially, that my wife was really leading, leading the call and the passion and it was OK for me to follow. And the older I get, the more I really respect the leaders who don't always have to be out front all the time. And I found during that season that one of the best ways for me to lead my wife was actually to trust to what God had put on her heart and be willing to follow her and see what God might do in my heart.

[00:08:06.730] - Lisa Qualls

That is, that's such a good word for dads. I think that there's this tension between what many of us have been taught for a long time, but the reality of what the Holy Spirit is stirring up in our hearts, right, and we have to bring this together.

[00:08:21.760] - Jason Johnson

Right, no doubt. And even so, do I, do I feel like it's still on some level my role to lead my family and leave my wife? Absolutely. But does that often mean that I'm unsure and I'm unclear and the best way for me to lead is to trust my wife and to trust the Holy Spirit in her? Absolutely. 100%. And so it's just redefined some maybe made up perceptions that I grew up kind of forming in my mind about what leadership looked like and and I tell you, it was really in that season of identifying when is the right time for us. And I'll never forget, after another cordial conversation, one night my wife came down and and she said, Jason, I need you to understand something. There's kids out there who need us now, and there's never going to be a perfect time to do this. It's just time for us to do it. And that's when she went upstairs and 15 minutes later, I followed her upstairs and I told her, you're right. I was using the age of our own kids as an excuse. I was using my business at the church as an excuse. I was using a lot of things as scapegoats and I often share as well that I found those weren't my real fears. My fear wasn't the age of my kids or my role at the church or money or time. My fear was me. It was really, do I have what it takes to sacrifice like that? Am I going to be able to do this well? And so I followed her up the stairs that night and I said, you're right, it's time and literally followed her up the stairs to tell her that. But also just kind of and I found this is what it means to lead right now in this moment is to follow. And I'll be honest with you, Lisa, we'll be at conferences or different events and kind of a husband and wife will come up and we'll talk and and they'll ask that question like, hey, we're not really on the same page and I'll share a little bit of that and I can just watch, like, the husband, like, glaring at me, like, stop saying that. Stop saying that now. But they're also very appreciative, like, you know what? You're right. I think a lot of men just know. They know deep in their gut and and I knew I just needed some help and knowing what it meant to lead in that moment.

[00:10:50.140] - Lisa Qualls

I think sometimes one of the unique challenges for a lot of Christian men is, you know, sure, there are the parts of us, all of us that are selfish and don't really want to change our lives or whatever. We already feel overwhelmed, but there's another thing that I think men carry, and that is they're the protectors of the family. And so that's a whole other thing that is complicated, you know. What do you think?

[00:11:18.310] - Jason Johnson

Gosh, you're reading my book, Lisa, because that was my thing is we had three little girls at the time and I felt like it was my primary responsibility to protect them from hard things, to set up a life for them where they could avoid anything that's hard and difficult and yet simultaneously, I'm a pastor who's preaching the gospel at a church that very much had a culture of we want to move towards hard things. We want to be the kind of people who move towards hard things because we believe that's what Jesus has done for us, that he moved towards us in our mess and in our brokenness. And then I would turn around and try to insulate and isolate my family from any of that and so that was that was a big thing for me, but second, we end up at orientation class at a foster care agency, and God knew that one of the things I was using kind of as a hold out was I want to protect my little girls. And a the instructor of the class, the orientation gets up that evening and you could tell she had a hard week, probably a caseworker managing a lot of caseload and also now having to show up on a Wednesday night to to lead an orientation. And she was, as most caseworkers can be, just spent. It's a hard job and so she starts off the class, the orientation class, telling us about the case of a little girl that had come across her desk that week that was just burying her. And it was a little girl about the age of one of my little girls. And you can imagine just the horrific week that this little girl has had that has led to her now having a case file and needing a home. And I found myself sitting there listening to the instructor share about this little girl getting angry, like, why isn't anyone there to protect that little girl? I would give my right arm to to protect my little girl from those things that that little girl needs to be protected from and you can just imagine in that moment is that it's as if God was up there just kind of puppeteering these thoughts in my head and saying, interesting, Jason. Are you starting to connect

the dots here a little bit, you know? I left that orientation class convinced that God had given me as a husband, as a dad, as a father, this good God given desire to protect. And what he was inviting me to do was to broaden the scope of application of that. Not just for my own kids, but also for other kids who, who needed as well, to be honest with you.

[00:13:56.880] - Lisa Qualls

Oh, so this leads me to ask, how has this shaped your life? How has being a foster and adoptive father changed and shaped your life?

[00:14:11.330] - Jason Johnson

It's changed what I do. I mean, it's literally changed my jobs, it's changed where we live, it's obviously changed the dynamics of our home, but I think on a broader scale, it's given me an entirely new perspective on the world around me. I just see the world differently. You can probably relate to this and many others who are listening that when you open yourselves up to some hard things and some dramatic things and some difficult things, it very quickly kind of pulls the veil down on the world around us and it shows us behind the scenes. And you go, wow, this is a far more nuanced and broken and yet beautiful world that we live in full of a diversity of people who are, for the most part, all doing their best, just trying. So I just see the world differently and what does that mean? It means that maybe, to be honest with you, many, many years ago, I may have seen someone on the street or in the grocery store and had a certain perception of them and drawing certain conclusions that I feel like now there's a level of empathy and a level of awareness. Where I see certain people in a completely different light or certain situations. You and I have talked about Dr. Karen Purvis before, and I'm going to butcher one of the things that one of the principles that she's communicated, you can help me with this, but when there's no, what does she say in terms of behavior is like is when we don't have the words to say

[00:16:03.420] - Lisa Qualls

It's an expression of a need.

[00:16:04.650] - Jason Johnson

Yeah, it's an expression of a need. Or when, we can look at behavior and we can see this child is telling me something. They're saying something to me. And I think that applies to adults as well, so I think it's allowed me to see the world differently. That has trickled into our kids. Our kids have grown up. I was using the young age of our kids six, four and two at the time as a reason why it wasn't the right time. We have now found they don't really remember a before and after. This is all that they have ever known. And there's been some really difficult things, but some really beautiful things. And so the only normal that they've ever known is we're a family who opens our home and we step towards hard places. I don't know the implications that will unfold in their lives as a result of that, but I've already begun to see some at least they see the world differently. They understand certain things that maybe other kids their age just don't even know are realities. And it changed our marriage. We've seen a side of each other and I would say for the most part of good side of each other that I don't know that we would have seen had we not entered into this space. I've seen my wife have a deep, deep and compassionate love for other young moms and their kiddo's that, nobody's forcing that. It would be a lot easier at times if we just said, OK, we're done, we're going to, it'd be a lot easier if we just tried to do easy things. But I've seen some really beautiful things in my wife and aside of our marriage that I don't know that we would have seen as a result and she's seen some of the same in me, right? Getting attached to kiddos who aren't our own or wanting to defend and protect when I see injustice. So I say it this way, I think that foster care and adoption and the world we've been opened up to has given us a gift. And the people that we've encountered and gotten to know and have become a part of our lives have given us a gift that I don't know we would have ever been able to discover on our own without them, if that makes sense.

[00:18:28.960] - Lisa Qualls

It does. I completely agree that once we understand on a deep level what trauma does to a child, to a person, what growing up without secure attachment does? We can look at anybody and say, OK, I can see this person struggling. And instead of it being like, this is a bad person or a good person, it's like this is a broken person, you know? And we, I know that in this journey of learning to parent children

with such needs, it revealed a lot of my own brokenness, so it becomes, I think we have more common ground with people, humanity.

[00:19:13.400] - Jason Johnson

Yeah. That was one thing I didn't say for the sake of, I stop myself, but since you've gone there, I will say, I think you've hit the nail on the head. Another way that this journey has changed me is and our family is it kind of breaks down that dividing wall between us and them, right?

[00:19:35.290] - Lisa Qualls

Yes.

[00:19:35.720] - Jason Johnson

And it's suddenly it's just us, like, all of us in this together. The cracks in their lives expose kind of the deep faults in our own and we realize we're on this journey together. There's no us and them. It's just us together. And we're going to figure this thing out together. That's probably been one of the most profound changes. Going back to that idea that you just see people differently. You don't see it as that's a them and they're bad people or they're whatever, if they would just make better choices, right. Why are they so illogical? And then you understand, you know, what's logical to me is not logical to them, what's logical to them is not logical to me. Wow. Suddenly we're all kind of in the same, in the same playing field together. And we learn each other, we love each other, we lean into each other and we say, look, we need each other and all of our brokenness to walk together for any of this to make sense or for there to be any hope in any of this, frankly.

[00:20:48.480] - Lisa Qualls

Mm hmm. Yeah, I, I really agree with that. What do you love about being a foster adoptive dad? I mean, maybe you've already said some of the things you love about it, just the way it's changed you. It's changed your marriage, changed your family, but what else do you just kind of love about it?

[00:21:04.670] - Jason Johnson

Yeah, this may, I don't know why, but right when you ask that question, one of my first thoughts was and maybe some men will appreciate this, some dads who are listening, some husbands as well, just to be able to look back and with my wife and say, wow, like we've done this. Like, this is a part of our story. We've done some really hard, but rewarding and beautiful things when we didn't have to. I mean, we really could have gone all in on the narrative, the cultural narrative around us, which says pursue comfort and convenience and the goal of your life is to make good money and live in a good house and go on good vacations and have a good retirement and raise good kids and just be easy and avoid anything that's hard. And there's something rewarding now that we've gotten into our early forties and there's some stuff we can look back on to go, wow, like we've planted a church. How crazy is that? And wow, we've been on this foster care journey, so I would just want to encourage even dads who very much and everyone but dads who are very much kind of bombarded with this cultural narrative of pursue success, power, money, significant prestige, to be able to just sit down and go, wow, how awesome is it that this is a part of our story and it will be forever. I love those glimpses every once in a while and probably like you, Lisa, and many others, our adoptive daughter doesn't come home every day and my first thought be, oh, there's our adoptive daughter. I mean, she's just our daughter. She's our girl. But there are every once in a while these glimpses where maybe she's sleeping or we're just sitting next to each other and I'm looking at her and I'm thinking, what a gift, what a tragic gift on one hand that any of this ever even had to happen, that this is a part of her story, but what a gift that I am deeply attached to a little girl and other kiddos and a twenty one year old and her little kiddos who we would have never known them had had we not entered into this journey. And our lives are so much richer and more fuller because of it. And I'll also say as you can probably attest to, I enjoy the conversations that it brings up. Sometimes totally randomly with people around us. I was standing on the sidelines of one of our daughter's soccer practices the other night and there was another dad standing there and I introduced myself and he already knew who we were, which is kind of terrifying, right? Oh, gosh. What have we said, what have we done? But he knew who we were because their family had adopted. And he said, yeah, I know, I know who you are and foster care and adoption. And and they were able to just share their story a little bit and I love some of the questions that come from people when they see us with our daughter and and they just see

something different. And so I love the conversations that it naturally brings up around us that, again, we wouldn't be having those connections with other people if this were not part of our story in our family.

[00:24:38.840] - Lisa Qualls

It's kind of remarkable to think, we could have missed this, like, we could have, we could have said no, we could have, you know, there's so many ways we could have missed this and I, and I'm not going to lie, there are days I think, well there are some things I wouldn't mind missing. But the people, my children, and then just our lives have changed so much. I mean, a lot of our friends now, the people we're so deeply connected with, we know through foster and adoption, foster care and adoption and just our worlds are so much bigger in a beautiful way.

[00:25:16.830] - Jason Johnson

Yeah. Yeah. You know, my wife and I were on a, we go on walks often in the evenings together and I don't even think we had made it out of our driveway the other day. And what we had left inside was just chaos, especially with with one of ours and just, and it's chaos that would probably would not exist in our home if this wasn't a part of our story, right. And we were walking down the driveway, hadn't even made it to the driveway yet and she says something to the effect of, if we had known how hard this was going to be before we said yes, I really struggle with whether or not we would have still said yes, but now that we know how much we deeply love this little girl and how that love kind of transcends all the hard and the chaos, I would say yes a million times over again. And it's just that tension that we always kind of hold with us of again, life would just be a whole lot easier if we avoided anything that's hard and difficult, but how much more fulfilling and meaningful has life been because we chose a different path? And those are hard, that's hard. There's some dark nights of the soul at times for a lot of parents, but if we can be really good at just preaching to ourselves that following Jesus into some hard places, into some traumatic places doesn't guarantee that it'll be easy. As a matter of fact, on some level, Jesus almost suggests, hey, follow me and it's actually going to be kind of complicated at times, but my promise to you is this, there's hope that in the end, it will always be worth it and it will not be in vain and it will not be wasted. And if we can just keep preaching that message to ourselves in the midst of that tension, then I think it will really help our souls be satisfied even in the hard and be hopeful in the midst of that hard that we get to participate in this process of renewal that God is in the business of and we may not see it all now, but, gosh, we are working towards a day when everything that's wrong will be made right. And that's a great life to live.

[00:28:00.230] - Lisa Qualls

I agree. You've given so much for our listeners and particularly for other dads listening, but is there one last message you'd like to pass on to other foster and adoptive dads or dads who are thinking about it.

[00:28:15.620] - Jason Johnson

For dads who are thinking about it, I would just find those places, identify what are your scapegoats? Like mine were the age of my kids, that I'm busy at church, we already have three girls who are going to get more and more expensive, can we afford more girls who are going to be more expensive, like, these were the things. And then I realized I'm not afraid of those things, I'm afraid of something in here in my heart and I'm afraid that I don't have what it takes to sacrifice like that, or it might require that I don't pursue certain things that the world tells me to pursue. So I would just encourage dads to identify, like, what's that thing you're holding out here as this is the reason why we can't and see if you can trace it back to something in you and then just say, God, what is this in me and how can we work on this in me? But for dads in general, I find myself going here often. Just again, the idea of success and the cultural narrative that we live in, which says your value and your worth and your significance are determined by production, like what you can produce and results that you can produce or performance. How well you perform at work, that you climb the ladder, and your bank account grows, and your power grows, and your your lifestyle grows, that your worth and your value and your identity are tied to your performance. And it may be slightly different for women. I have never, I'm not one, but I feel like perhaps for women value, identity worth, the cultural narrative says those things are tied up in appearance. Not just physical appearance, but the appearance of your home and your family and your marriage and you've got it all together and it's Instagram worthy, right?

And then the gospel breaks through that cultural narrative for men, which says identity and values are tied to performance and it flips it and says your identity and your value aren't tied to your performance, but they are fundamentally tied to the work of Jesus on your behalf. The performance of Jesus on your behalf. And that frees you from the need to prove yourself to anyone in terms of lifestyle or power or money or any of that stuff. You can just be free from that stuff. It also sets you up to be able to live an alternative narrative. Which says, rather than saying, I'm going to pursue comfort and convenience and isolate and avoid anything that's hard, we're going to pursue a different life. And then the idea of success, you and I have touched on that before that again, it's not performance, it's not outcomes, it's faithfulness. A lot of guys are fixers. They say, I see the problem. Let me edit and I'll fix it. And what a lot of these kids don't need, what these kids don't need are fixers. What they need are men and women, but men, I'm talking to you, who are willing to say we're in this thing together. I'm going to be faithful to you through the hard, through the good, but you're not going to be alone anymore. And I think God looks down on us and he doesn't say to us, well done, good and successful servant. I think he says to us, well done, good and faithful servant. I would encourage men to read Hebrews Chapter 11. I love it because the first couple of chunks of it talk about how by faith people saw great victories. They saw the walls of Jericho fall and the Red Sea split and we all go, yeah, that's the kind of faith I want. The kind of faith that produces positive results, it fixes everything. And then the last part talks about how by faith some were stoned to death and were sawn in half and were left in caves and holes and destitute. And we go, oh, I don't, like, clearly those guys were failures, but at the end it says all of them were commended for their faith. All of them. God is far less concerned with the outcomes of our faith. Some saw the walls of Jericho fall, some more stoned to death. And he's far less concerned with the outcomes of our faith, far more concerned with our willingness to be faithful. And I'm telling you, sometimes on this journey, it's going to feel like you're being stoned to death. And sometimes on this journey, you're going to see the walls of Jericho fall in these kid's lives and you're going to go, wow, look what God can do. And in all times, he says, you keep being faithful and trust me with the outcomes.

[00:33:14.030] - Lisa Qualls

Well, thank you so much for those good words. Thank you for being on the podcast. I'm just really, really grateful to you.

[00:33:20.810] - Jason Johnson

Yeah. Yeah. Well, thanks for having me.

[00:33:27.810] - Melissa Corkum

Hey, Lisa. Well, I don't know Jason very well, but what an incredible interview, and I just keep going back to what he shared about how the work that he has done to learn more about how trauma impacts behavior and parenting his child, whose adopted, and he said it helped me go from us and them to just us. And just what a beautiful sentiment and I can completely relate to that.

[00:33:58.630] - Lisa Qualls

Me, too, I mean, I often say that adoption and foster care just have made our lives so much bigger and so much richer. So I think Jason communicated that a lot in this interview, too. So we want to be sure you know that Jason has authored three books: Reframing Foster Care, Everyone Can Do Something, and All in Orphan Care. And he blogs regularly at Jasonjohnsonblog.com. So you can find him there. You can find all of this in the show notes for this episode, which is the adoptionconnection.com/136. Before you go, we'd love to connect with you on social media. You can find us on Facebook or Instagram as the [@adoptionconnection](https://www.instagram.com/adoptionconnection).

[00:34:49.000] - Melissa Corkum

Thanks so much for listening. We love having you. If you enjoy this episode, please leave a quick review over on iTunes. It will help us reach more moms who may be feeling alone.

[00:34:59.140] - Lisa Qualls

And remember, until next week, you're a good mom, doing good work, and we're here for you.

[00:35:06.340] - Melissa Corkum

The music for the podcast is called New Day and was created by Lee Rosevere.