

[00:00:01.390] - Lisa Qualls

Welcome to the Adoption Connection podcast, where we offer resources to equip you and stories to inspire you on your adoption journey. I'm Lisa Qualls.

[00:00:10.310] - Melissa Corkum

And this is Melissa Corkum. Don't worry, we get it, and we're here for you.

[00:00:19.050] - Lisa Qualls

Hi, Jamie. Welcome to the Adoption Connection podcast.

[00:00:22.770] - Jamie Finn

Hi, Lisa. I love being on your podcast, but also I love just any time I get to chat with you.

[00:00:29.010] - Lisa Qualls

Yes, me too, me too. Well, I'm really excited about today's episode because we're going to be focusing more specifically on the needs of foster families and a brand new resource that you are providing for them. We'll just say you have a new book.

[00:00:46.080] - Jamie Finn

Yes.

[00:00:47.370] - Lisa Qualls

It's not just any old resource. It's a long labor of love into the book.

[00:00:53.430] - Jamie Finn

That's true.

[00:00:53.430] - Lisa Qualls

But before we talk about your book, I'd love for you to take a little time and just tell our listeners a little more about who you are.

[00:01:01.500] - Jamie Finn

I always have a hard time when people ask what I do. The easiest definition is I do a lot of things that are in different ways related to the foster care world. So I am the executive director of Foster the Family, which is a nonprofit that serves foster families in practical ways, so we are providing immediate emergency support and supplies. But then where we really love to get involved is holistic long-term care. So a strong emphasis on support groups and mentorship and just that long-term care. So we right now have two branches, and we are launching 15 support groups around the country and just have lots of big plans to bring the support that we have really just come along side of foster families in our community and looking to bring that to other communities around the country. So that's sort of like the day job and then everything else kind of springs from there. So what I'm most passionate about is really encouraging foster and adoptive parents. I love to speak face to face to them; I love to teach God's word and the practicals of foster parenting and even trauma informed care; I love to show up on Instagram and just kind of get to know people there and share about our life there; and I host a podcast. And so I wear lots of different hats in the arena of sort of the foster care world, but it all centers around supporting foster families.

[00:02:47.250] - Lisa Qualls

And now you can add to that list that you are a published author.

[00:02:50.700] - Jamie Finn

I know!

[00:02:51.660] - Lisa Qualls

That does feel good, right?

[00:02:53.790] - Jamie Finn

It does. Sometimes I say I'm a writer and people are like, where do you write? And I'm like, well, Instagram, if that counts. But my heart is really to write. I love words and I love applying God's word and the truth that I've learned along this journey to be able to share with other people who I know are walking through the same hard things that I'd walk through and looking for the same direction, want to do this well, but really are just eager and desperate for direction and encouragement.

[00:03:31.410] - Lisa Qualls

Yes, that is so great. Okay, so tell me, who is in your family as of today? Because I know it changes from time to time.

[00:03:38.480] - Jamie Finn

Yeah, so right now it's my husband and I. We have four forever children living west are our oldest biological children. We have two girls adopted from foster care. And then right now, we have had our foster son for 15 months, and his worker brought over adoption paperwork yesterday. So we've had kids for much longer than him that we've said goodbye to. And this just feels like, oh, my goodness, how has it been 15 months? And it's been a very different experience for us because there hasn't been any parental involvement at all. So a lot of the roller coaster of the hard parts of visits and learning how to work together with biological parents and the court of like, okay, what's going to happen at this next date and all of that? It's been nonexistent. And so the past year has been except for a teenager that we had a few months ago and saying goodbye to a long-term placement earlier in the year. It feels like it's been like a slow year for us on the foster care front. So anyway, easy answer, we have five kids in our home right now, and within a few months, they'll be our five forever.

[00:05:00.930] - Lisa Qualls

Wow, and I think just your response there points to the fact that foster care is not predictable and it requires a ton of flexibility because every situation is so very different, right?

[00:05:15.020] - Jamie Finn

Yeah, exactly. I mean, we've had kids who, multiple therapist appointments and two visits with mom and two visits with dad and a periodic visit with grandparents, and saying yes to a placement means stepping into their entire story. And so that comes with all the different dynamics of their family. It comes with their medical needs and their different special needs. And you never know really what you're saying yes to, which is why I think it takes a really good amount of faith to, okay, we are saying yes, not really even knowing what we're saying yes to. You know, we're both friends with Mandy. She always says we put our yes on the table and then we wait for the question. So it's like the answer is yes. And then it's like, okay, what's the question? And so just that willingness to step into a child's story and a family story without knowing exactly what it's going to be. But this one has been unexpectedly very joyful and easy, for lack of a better word. A lot of the things that have caused heartache and anxiety and confusion over these seven and a half years of foster care just haven't existed for the past year, and I'm grateful for that because we did have a really hard goodbye right as we said hello to this baby. And so it just feels like I know God has a plan and the hard stuff, too, but it just feels like he was like, okay, this is just like a blessing, like this is going to be a joy and you're going to be able to give this little boy the family that he doesn't have right now. And it's going to be like none of the roller coaster and the heartache that we were on pretty intensely for many, many years.

[00:07:20.550] - Lisa Qualls

Yes, well, and I've been following you and now we've been friends for quite a while. You've walked through some hard things. It was funny when you were talking about we don't know what we're saying yes to. We became foster parents when we weren't even foster parents. We got our foster daughter.

[00:07:37.800] - Jamie Finn

You said yes for like, what, two days?

[00:07:40.900] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, for two days, and she stayed two and a half years.

[00:07:43.430] - Jamie Finn

Yeah, right.

[00:07:43.430] - Lisa Qualls

But the things I didn't know I was saying yes to, well, a teenager, she was already signed up for driver's Ed. Like, I had to get her there, just the dentist and the doctor and all these things, IEP meetings, everything, and I had no idea what I was doing, but it all worked out and I'm really thankful.

[00:07:59.910] - Jamie Finn

Yeah.

[00:08:00.890] - Lisa Qualls

Okay. Let's wind it way back. You said you've been in foster care about seven and a half years. How did you get into foster care and what did you think it was going to be like?

[00:08:11.100] - Jamie Finn

Sure. I very much thought it was this clear picture of these needy kids with bad parents who had never experienced love before or any kind of stability, and they would come into our homes and they would finally get to experience that. They would finally feel love and we would heal them quickly and send them back. And very much about the children, which, of course, it is, but only about the children. It never really even occurred to me in any capacity other than the fact that kids needed to be rescued from their parents, that there were even this whole family unit to be considered. So I very much had a perspective of short term. Bring these kids in, show them love, show them healing, heal them and send them on back and really left in the dust the families that they love, that they're loved by, that they had the whole beginning part of their story with. And so that was a huge shift for me. And it took me a while, and I'm grateful, on one hand, I feel sad when I consider how we missed out, how the kids that we cared for missed out, how their parents missed out on our support and our love and at least at the very least our heart for them and prayers for them. But I'm also grateful that God did it really quickly. A pretty drastic shift from they need to be rescued from and brought into our world to, oh, we get to enter their world. And that foster care really is not about kids. It's about families. And I didn't get that at all. I thought that foster care was about kids. And that's been a huge shift that foster care is about families, that foster parenting is about loving this kid in our home, but being very aware of the story that came before us and always thinking of the story that's going to come after us as well and how we can love that child well and the entire family unit while they're in our home, not just okay, you're brought into our little bubble, we're going to do right by you in our little bubble, but like, let's step out of our bubble and into yours. And it's honestly messier that way. It's a lot messier to step into a family story. But it's really, I think, where the mission truly is, where the work is, and where the joy is. So it's been a gift to have that shift. It served our kids well and their parents well and us well.

[00:11:09.750] - Lisa Qualls

Was there a particular moment when you realized, oh, this is different than what I imagined? And at first, was it a little scary for you or were you just like, oh, yes, of course this is how it should be?

[00:11:25.350] - Jamie Finn

Yeah, I know I had a really specific moment when my perspective towards my kids' parents shifted. So I just had this like, how could you? Why are you like this? Very much, throwing stones from a far, arrogant sort of mindset. And I think especially in our state in New Jersey, there's a lot of separation between foster parents and biological parents. And it's really hard to have empathy for someone that you've never seen, that it's just easy to other people to demonize people that you are not in relationship with at all. So I remember when I first learned the story of my first foster child's family, and it just opened my eyes to the fact that struggling these aren't bad people. These are struggling people who have their own stories and usually their own trauma and their own hurt and really shifting to a heart of compassion that sees them as a full person who had their own childhood and their own struggles. So I definitely had that shift that I'm grateful for, to see just the idea that every person has a story. And when you fight for compassion and empathy, you find it. It's not as hard as I thought it was going to be to feel love for people who maybe have hurt kids that I love or who are not being to their children what they need to be. When I see them as people and see their pains and see God's love for them, it really shifts everything.

[00:13:23.050] - Lisa Qualls

Yes, absolutely. And I see that a lot in your work on social media. You spend a lot of time talking about reunification and families, our kids families and all of that. And I think it's really important because many people don't understand that at all. It's a brand new idea.

[00:13:47.110] - Jamie Finn

We definitely lacked any sort of training or teaching in that it was something we had to learn. It wasn't something that was ever taught. It wasn't ever encouraged. And so the ignorance that we came in with, it was like, yeah, I'm pretty sure that a lot of foster parents are coming in with that same level of goodhearted love for the kids, but just ignorance. And I feel for those parents.

[00:14:20.150] - Lisa Qualls

Definitely. So one of the things that's wonderful about your book is that literally, you wrote the book that you wish you had. Would you say that's true?

[00:14:30.220] - Jamie Finn

Oh, my goodness. I know that's a cliché thing that authors say, but I really do feel that. I really do believe that.

[00:14:37.400] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, I know when we have lived this life in this world, I remember when I was setting up the structure for the connected parent and thinking, okay, I need to make it so easy for people to find what they need. And so I need to structure it in a way that when you're totally stressed out, you can think, okay, what do I need here? And you can find it. Because I can remember being on my knees in front of my bookcase with a child who was raging and crying out of control and literally, like, pulling the books off the shelves. What do I do? What do I do? What do I do? Anyway, so you did write a book that you wish you would have had, and can you tell us just a little bit about how it's organized, how people are going to be helped by it, not just by the content, but how they're going to be able to use it?

[00:15:25.350] - Jamie Finn

Sure, so the book is structured topically, and I really created a long list and did a lot of crowdsourcing with other foster parents, too, of like, all right, what are the things, what are the hard things that you've gotten tripped up on that you weren't prepared for? And so the book is 18 chapters. That is simply kind of the 18 hardest things that I think that we can face. And I wanted it to be able to be read, there's a lot of storytelling, there's a lot of me in it and personality. It's not like clinical book at all or theology that's just kind of written out. It's very readable, I hope. But also my hope is like, okay, visit start up again next week. I haven't had to do this for months. All right, let me go back and sort of refresh my heart on these encouraging things. So I hope that what people experience is, oh, I can sit down and get drawn into this because there's lots of stories and humor even and emotion. But also when I hit something that's challenged, I can go and find that topic and have a refresher for my heart. I hope that it's like a chat with a friend. Like when you call your friend and you're like, okay, I'm meeting mom tomorrow, remind me all the things. That's what I do with my friends, like, remind me the truths. I know these things, I need to hear them again. And hopefully I can be that, like, stand in friend of, okay, something hard is happening, just found out child is being reunified. All right, let me find that chapter. Let me put these truths deep in my heart because I'm struggling right now. So that's my hope.

[00:17:10.570] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, well, I love that because that is what we all want is a mentor, someone who's gone before us, who can say, okay, take a breath. This is what you need to do. It's so valuable. So in those chapters, 18 topics, 18 chapters. If you had to choose one chapter, a lesson that you most needed as a parent that you had, nobody who could tell you, and you just sort of had to figure it out on your own, what would that one chapter be?

[00:17:44.250] - Lisa Qualls

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[00:17:51.010] - Melissa Corkum

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[00:18:16.350] - Lisa Qualls

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[00:18:37.210] - Melissa Corkum

You can grab your copy from Amazon. It comes in paperback or Kindle version. Search for Faith, Hope, and Connection, or head to the show notes for this episode for a quick link.

[00:18:52.090] - Lisa Qualls

And you just sort of had to figure it out on your own. What would that one chapter be?

[00:18:55.820] - Jamie Finn

Yeah. So for me, I think the big one is sort of what I hinted at before, it's just our kids' families and the sacred nature of God creating the family of his heart being for the family to be restored. That foster care is about protecting children, certainly, but it's also really about the restoration of the family. And I think the research behind that and the stories that we hear from former foster youth and adoptees behind that and the theology behind that is all so rich. And yet I never had it gathered in one space. And so there are definitely a number of chapters that revolve around family and the importance of family, the importance of restoration, not just reunification, not just like, okay, this is the goal, but how can we have a heart for the family and being brought back together? But I think the one that I constantly need to keep going back to, and I teach this often when I'm at multiple events throughout the year I'm teaching this message, and I'm so grateful I get to teach it so often because I always start to feel a little bit like a hypocrite as I'm teaching it. And so I'm like, I need this again, I'm talking to myself, but is the chapter about self care. And I read a number of books about foster care and adoption and trauma informed parenting and all of that. And I don't think I got it. I don't think I got how hard it was going to be on my body and my mind and my heart and my marriage. All of that just in this book that is about other people's children and families to lean back into, okay, but what does it look like to have really wisdom driven, love motivated selfcare that I think is what fuels all that our kids need from us. And so the book is practical. It's very theological. It's very like, okay, what does my heart need? For me personally, if I have, like, a foundational, this is my why, and this is why I'm doing this, then the practicals flow from there. And so there's so much of just like, what does God's word say about this stuff? What does scripture speak to these really hard things? But I felt like it was important to also have this, like, okay, there's all these things kind of these calls of how we should think and feel and be and do. Let's also step back and what does it look like to have the physical strength to also do these things? So that's the chapter that I think I need the most now. The chapter I needed the most seven years ago was about family. I needed to hear about family and all of that. The chapter I continue to need is the one about taking care of myself.

[00:22:16.790] - Lisa Qualls

Okay, so just to give people a little tiny taste, give us one self care tip. Now, everybody's different, but give us one thing that you do that really helps you.

[00:22:29.140] - Jamie Finn

Yeah. So I think, first of all, I'm going to give two.

[00:22:32.780] - Lisa Qualls

That's okay, I love it. You can give three!

[00:22:36.470] - Jamie Finn

First of all, I think it's a perspective shift that we don't see selfcare as something that we do, as a checklist. We see selfcare as a complete perspective shift that our bodies and our hearts and our souls and our brains have needs that cannot just keep being put off. And so the same way, we wouldn't say, like, I don't think I'm going to take my kids to OT today or I'm not going to go to this IP meeting that we just don't allow ourselves to say, I don't have time for my body and soul and all that to be strengthened for this work. So I think that's one thing. And then really practically for me is, and this is everyone's least favorite is waking up really early. And again, it's counterintuitive. I'm not talking about getting a pedicure. I'm talking about looking at what it means for you to take care of yourself. And for me to take care of myself means starting my day in God's word, it means starting my day with caffeine, and it means starting my day with quiet. And I can't tell you how many years I was woken up by screaming. Woken up by kids already escalated, already violent with each other, and stressed. Well, now I'm setting the tone because I'm regulated and I'm calm and my soul is centered and I have vision and enthusiasm for my day. And my kids, one at a time, are meeting that mom, and that mom is sort of like co regulating them into the day of like, we're going to enter this day with peace and connection. Again, that shift. It's not like, oh, a glass of wine at night, even though that is one. It's something as counterintuitive as waking up at 05:00 A.m.. How does that feel like taking care of yourself? Well, because you're a whole person with all of these needs. And for me to wake up at five means I'm starting to meet those needs really proactively. And when I'm doing well, it also means I'm exercising. So waking up then is exercise, too.

[00:24:50.660] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, I definitely learned fairly early on in motherhood that I needed time in the morning that was just quiet and before all the chaos and the work started. Protecting everybody and taking care of everybody. And that's a really well established habit for me now, and I love it. I love my quiet morning so much.

[00:25:13.510] - Jamie Finn

Yeah, I hate waking up just like everyone, but I love my quiet morning. And so it's one of those, like, lining up your decisions with what is actually going to bring you the joy that you're seeking and the peace that you're seeking?

[00:25:29.870] - Lisa Qualls

Right, so do you go to bed early in order to get up early? Are you very good at sleep?

[00:25:34.370] - Jamie Finn

Well, that's the thing.

[00:25:35.570] - Lisa Qualls

That is the hardest part.

[00:25:37.500] - Jamie Finn

When I'm doing well, I'm going to bed before ten and waking up at five and exercising. When I'm not doing well, it's later. And then it's harder to exercise and I feel better when I do, so it's hard to make decisions the night before that the payout comes the next morning.

[00:25:58.320] - Lisa Qualls

Yes.

[00:25:58.990] - Jamie Finn

But I think that I've been driven to that point by the chaos and how hard mornings can be to a point where it's pretty well established that I'm like, this is worth it. This is hard, and I'm not great with delayed gratification, but this is just so clearly what I need and what my family needs.

[00:26:19.310] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah. I always think of the quote, I think it's from the book Atomic Habits where he says, be kind to

your future self.

[00:26:27.590] - Jamie Finn
Mmm, so good.

[00:26:27.940] - Lisa Qualls
So, the night before when I'm thinking, oh, I really want to stay up and watch the show or I really don't want to set up the coffee tonight, all those things. Just be kind to yourself. You're tomorrow morning self.

[00:26:39.930] - Jamie Finn
Yeah, exactly. That's so good. I love that.

[00:26:42.750] - Lisa Qualls
Yeah. So in your experience and in mine, we definitely see a lot of foster parents who start out they start out strong with a lot of energy and enthusiasm, and then they burn out.

[00:26:57.320] - Jamie Finn
Yeah.

[00:26:57.740] - Lisa Qualls
So what do you think foster parents need? And we probably touched that already.

[00:27:03.000] - Jamie Finn
Sure.

[00:27:04.130] - Lisa Qualls
In order to really stay the course.

[00:27:07.250] - Jamie Finn
Yeah. So I think this conversation of self care is really important. There's a chapter in the book about community, and I think that's really important. And I hope that I address it in a way. Some people have really rich community, and some people need to be envisioned for how they can seek it out, even if they don't have it. But that, I think, is another non negotiable that so many of us kind of put on the back burner of, I don't have time for that, that's less important. And yet that is part of what carries us. I mean, if we're taking care of ourselves and in these really thriving relational communities, that answers so many other things down the road and often like the being kind to your future self in community as well, you put in the effort for relationships. Those relationships also carry you later. So I think that's a big piece of it. For me, and I see this in my work relating to foster parents and, you know, leading support groups and all of that as well is, I think that we like to think that foster parents get tripped up in their hearts, in their emotions. So the whole, like, I would get to attach and kind of guard your heart and all of that, but what I see as really the battleground of foster parenting is in our thinking. And our kids need our hearts. I mean, these are kids who sometimes need twice our hearts because loving them and when there's a faulty attachment already, it takes twice the work, it takes twice the effort. So the idea of holding back some of our affection and attention so that we protect ourselves, that is the opposite of what our kids need. I think it's really important that we go all in with our hearts, that we seek to give our love, our nurture, our affection, but that we really hold the battleground of our minds closely. And even that verse guarded our heart go into this in the book a little bit. But that entire passage of scripture is about our thinking. It's about our minds and our thoughts. So we make it about our affections, where really what we need to be guarding is our thinking. And I think for foster parenting, that is really hard because we're really good at worst case scenarios and we're really good at what if and seeing how situations might play out without the Grace of God that's going to be there when they do. We're also really good at wanting things and daydreaming about them. And, oh, maybe this will happen. And I think it's really hard to be all in for reunification and have a heart for restoration if you are daydreaming about adopting your child. Those things just don't go hand in hand. And so I think for our own sake, for our anxiety and our fear and all of that, it's important that we guard our thinking, but also just for our, quote unquote, success as

foster parents, it's really important that we guard our thinking, that we aren't motivated by fear, we aren't motivated prematurely by adoption or any of those things. So my encouragement to foster parents is always, watch your thinking, shut down those thoughts, put on different thoughts. We can stop our thoughts in the track, in their tracks and put a different thought over that. I go into that in the book, and I think that that's been the most powerful tool for me as a foster parent is not ever controlling my feelings about that. Like, I want to love my kids fully and I want to jump right in, but really working to control my thoughts and be thinking the way that it's true and noble and pure and trustworthy. So that's been really powerful for me.

[00:31:27.450] - Lisa Qualls

Yes. That's so important, and really that's where like memorizing a really basic, simple scripture or just repeating to yourself, I don't want any thoughts on yours, Lord, whatever it is, I want your dreams, not mine. But it is a lot of willingness to not grasp for anything which can be really hard to do. You have to hold your hands completely openly.

[00:31:53.530] - Jamie Finn

Yeah, that's so good. And I think that even tied back into the community piece that we have people that we can go to with our raw thoughts and they can help speak things to us that we may not be naturally going to. Okay, so now I have this put off. I am not going to go down this worst case scenario of what could happen at an unsupervised visit, but I don't have the strength right now to even find the put on. I don't have the strength to even know what I should be thinking or praying towards and so inviting other people into our thoughts and feelings so that they can help us also.

[00:32:33.390] - Lisa Qualls

All right, so where can people find your book and when is it being released into the world?

[00:32:38.820] - Jamie Finn

Yeah, so February 15. It is going to be released everywhere, but right now it's available for preorder, and we have fun like preorder gifts with everything. So Amazonfostothefamilybook.com has all the links for purchasing the book. It's where you can sign up for the preorder bundle and it also has the book tour dates because I'm going to be traveling a bunch and sharing with foster parents and face to face. I love doing that. I love being able to get to meet people and hug people and hear their stories. And then also I love to be able to teach God's word to people. So I'm excited about that. It's going to be, I think, 20 cities.

[00:33:27.810] - Lisa Qualls

Wow. That's amazing. I'm really excited for you. That did not happen for books that came out during Covid. I will be happy for you, for sure.

[00:33:39.710] - Jamie Finn

Yeah.

[00:33:40.890] - Lisa Qualls

Okay. And we haven't actually said what is the title of the book?

[00:33:44.740] - Jamie Finn

Yeah. The book is called Foster the Family. Oh, I'm going to have to learn the tagline. I told you this is my first interview for the book, but I think it's encouragement and direction for the Christian foster parent.

[00:33:55.550] - Lisa Qualls

Okay.

[00:33:55.870] - Jamie Finn

And that's really what it is. It's hopefully direction from God's word and encouraging truth for foster parents.

[00:34:03.190] - Lisa Qualls

Yes, so if someone goes on Amazon, all they have to do is search Foster the Family.

[00:34:07.640]

Yup, Foster the Family.

[00:34:09.570] - Lisa Qualls

Okay, where can people find you?

[00:34:13.350] - Jamie Finn

Yeah. So I am everywhere at Foster the Family Blog. So Instagram, Facebook and www.fossothefamilyblog.com. I also host the Real Mom podcast. I also have a line of clothing and goods that's directed towards people who essentially have a heart for vulnerable children. So foster parents and all of those involved in this world, that's called Goods & Better. So that's goodsandbetterstore.com.

[00:34:43.730] - Lisa Qualls

Wonderful, well, we will have links for all of those things for your book and all your social media places. So those will be in the show notes for today's episode. So I just want to thank you so much for being on the podcast and sharing your book. We're just super excited about it.

[00:35:01.930] - Jamie Finn

Thank you, Lisa. Thanks. I know we've been talking about this book for a long time, so to finally be talking about it on your podcast means it's actually coming into the world.

[00:35:11.510] - Lisa Qualls

Yes.

[00:35:12.180] - Jamie Finn

Thanks for having me.

[00:35:15.210] - Melissa Corkum

Before you go, we'd love to connect with you on social media. Our new Instagram handle is @postadoptionresources or better yet, join our free Facebook community at theadoptionconnection.com/facebook.

[00:35:30.390] - Lisa Qualls

Thanks so much for listening, we love having you. And remember you're a good parent doing good work.

[00:35:38.310] - Melissa Corkum

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