

[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.

[00:00:10.290] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:00:18.390] - Lisa Qualls

Hi, friends. Welcome to episode 169 of the Adoption Connection Podcast. Long before we had a podcast, Melissa and I were both bloggers. I started my blog, One Thankful Mom, way back in 2006 really just as a means of keeping our family and friends up to date on the progress of our adoptions. Well, that blog grew into many other things speaking and eventually, of course, the writing of The Connected Parent with Dr. Karen Purvis. And so it was a really foundational part of the work that I do now. Each month, Melissa and I dedicate an episode to sharing something from our archives, because frankly, we've got a lot of content that is just sitting in our blogs that, of course, you can still read, but we want to share some of that with you. And what I'm sharing with you today is a compilation of things that I've written and spoken at various events, so I hope you find it encouraging.

[00:01:19.810] - Lisa Qualls

Have you ever been shipwrecked? Have you been caught in a fierce storm with waves so wild that you feared for your life? One day you were following God, doing your very best to obey all he asked of you, and the next it seemed your boat was sinking. There was a season in my life when it seemed our family was sinking and I could barely hold my head above the shockingly cold water. On Valentine's Day 2006, a friend called to tell me that she and her husband were adopting two little boys from Ethiopia. Something happened during that phone call. A door opened just a crack and a glimpse of possibility for our future. We dipped our toes into the water of loving vulnerable children and sponsored a child at an orphanage in Ethiopia. A picture arrived in the mail of a little girl with tears in her eyes, dressed in a frilly white dress. The sad story of Kalkidan's life was written in two paragraphs on a piece of paper. This picture hung on our refrigerator, and we prayed for this little girl. As my husband, Russ, and I talked and prayed and researched, God opened our eyes more to the needs of orphans. We were not perfect parents to our seven biological children, but we were good parents who loved Jesus and loved our family. We had something beautiful, and we wanted to share that with other children. We began the adoption process, filling out mountains of paperwork, meeting with our social worker, getting fingerprinted. We decided to request two little boys younger than our youngest child. We knew that this would be just right for us. Then our friends traveled to Ethiopia to meet their two sons. While there, they went to the orphanage to meet Kalkidan and take her a small gift from us. They were captivated by this beautiful child, and they were alarmed when the nurse told them her hope that we would adopt Kalkidan. We didn't know it was possible for us to adopt a child with HIV, but God did, and he began to write a new chapter of our lives. This little girl began to burn in my heart. I wept to think of her orphaned and very alone. Russ and I talked and prayed, and soon we found ourselves in the complicated process of adopting three unrelated children through two different agencies simultaneously. We traveled to Ethiopia in February of 2007. One day we were a family of nine. The next morning, we stepped through the blue gates of the orphanage and our lives changed forever. Kalkidan was five and a half, lively and eager for our attention and treats she tried to dig out of our pockets. She jumped into our arms as if she had always known us. While this seemed hopeful, we later learned it was a protective strategy. Kalkidan felt safer when she could win strangers over with her brilliant smile and affection. On that same day, we also met our sons, a nearly two year old shy toddler and a tiny five month old with huge brown eyes. This was the day we'd waited for and now our arms and our hearts were full. It quickly became apparent that we had a high energy and challenging child. As the days passed, our concern over Kalkidan grew. We knew we were likely to have a very difficult time when we got home. On that first trip, we also met another little girl who touched our hearts. We returned to Ethiopia and she joined our family in August 2008 when she was ten years old. God writes the best stories, and sometimes the best stories are hard stories. Sickness comes before healing, suffering comes before relief, darkness comes before dawn. Kalkidan came to us after suffering many losses in Ethiopia, severe neglect and abuse, the pain of illness, and the fear of abandonment. A relief worker saw past her rags to her radiance and enrolled her in a program for street children. There she was diagnosed with HIV and eventually taken to an orphanage. When we

brought her home, we knew there were challenges ahead. Yet we were confident in our parenting skills and that we've done all the right things to prepare. But Kalkidan was so wounded, so traumatized, her brain had been rewired to see her world as threatening. Our once busy, sometimes chaotic, loving, and generally happy family was plunged into chaos. Our days revolved around her behavior and shielding the more vulnerable children. Our family was in shock. The children who were old enough to escape began spending less time at home. Our College students stayed on campus more. Our homeschoolers spent more time with friends. Unfortunately, our littlest ones lived in the sphere of trauma, daily. I was spending each day trying to keep everyone safe. Many days, Russ had to come home from work to help me as I struggled with Kalkidan's out of control behavior and tried to take care of everyone else. We were parenting our children with everything we knew and every bit of energy we had. As the months turned to years, things became increasingly difficult. We had a hard time admitting it, but we were not surviving as a family. We were barely holding on. Nearly unable to leave the house with our children, we withdrew into ourselves. We felt shame over our inability to bring healing to our child and our apparently insufficient parenting skills. Despite our 20 years of parenting experience, we were drowning. You're likely familiar with this verse: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." - James 1:27. Many adopted and foster children are in distress. They are suffering, and when we are called to care for them, to embrace them as our own, we join them in their distress. It's messy and their pain spills over into our hearts, our families, our reputations, our entire lives. This is the brutal privilege of fostering and adopting children in their distress. Even when we felt so alone, we knew the Lord was with us. We begged Him to send help, and he answered our prayers with a Jesus loving, smart developmental psychologist from Texas. She had hope for children like ours, so we grabbed her hope and held on for dear life. Together with Dr. David Cross at TCU, Dr. Karen Purvis had developed a method of caring for children who had experienced adversity called Trust Based Relational Intervention. After 21 years, we dove into learning a whole new way of parenting. The methods that had worked well for the children born to us were not effective for Kalkidan or our other new children. Without the foundation of secure attachment, we had to start at the very beginning of building trust. We needed to disarm their fear responses by showing them again and again that we would meet their needs. This was not a quick fix. Dr. Purvis called this investment parenting because parents must devote so much time, energy, and personal connection to build trust. While there were early successes, it can take years to help a child heal and build attachment. From Dr. Purvis, we learned the importance of empowering our children's bodies, connecting with their hearts and building trust, and then correcting their beliefs and behavior. A solid balance of nurture and structure became our goal. We began using simple scripts to direct our children toward optimal behavior while not overwhelming them with words. We focused on their sensory needs, and as we learned these and many other tools, our hope grew. This was not a smooth journey, however, there were many times when we were exhausted and fearful. It felt like we were going under. One night, after a particularly hard day, Russ and I lay next to each other holding hands, and through tears I whispered over and over, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." - Hebrews 13:8. Which brings me back to the Apostle Paul and the storm that broke his boat apart. When we were struggling under the weight of Kalkidan's challenges, there were people who questioned whether we had really heard God when we adopted. Maybe this had all been our idea and not God's will at all. In response, the Apostle Paul immediately came to mind. He was fiercely devoted to serving God at any cost, yet he was shipwrecked more than once. And let's not forget, he was beaten, stoned, hungry, thirsty, and imprisoned. The underlying question is one many of us have asked, if I seek God and obey him to the best of my ability and that leads to suffering, does that mean I wasn't in God's will in the first place? Not one of us would question whether Paul was in God's will. There was a purpose in the suffering he experienced, and this comforted me. The family we had been was shipwrecked. The storm was so fierce, we didn't know if we would survive as our ship was broken apart. But in the midst of the waves, God carried us safely to shore. He gave us a new lens through which we saw Kalkidan and a whole new way of parenting. The more we learned about parenting, with trust and attachment as our focus, the more we wished we had parented this way all along. Secure attachment is the foundation for all relationships and a reflection of the way our father loves us. We became a new family, shaped by adoption. There was a time when I grieved the family we'd been, but I see the beauty in who we've become. We've learned to love in hard circumstances and to have empathy for people who are struggling. Our worlds are so much bigger because of a tiny girl with big dimples named Kalkidan.

[00:11:43.700] - Lisa Qualls

Well, friends, thank you for letting me share this with you. Many of you know that we lost our daughter Kalkidan seven years ago in a very terrible car accident. Kalkidan was my greatest teacher. Because of her, I was forced to learn and grow as a mother and as a person in general, and I will always be grateful. I hope these words have encouraged and helped you today. If you have not already read my book, *The Connected Parent* that I wrote with Dr. Purvis, I would encourage you to pick it up. There are many stories in my book and that book is basically a lot of what I learned from parenting Kalkidan.

[00:12:25.630] - 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.

[00:12:40.630] - Lisa Qualls

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

[00:12:48.910] - Melissa Corkum

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