

[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.

[00:00:18.750] - Melissa Corkum

We often have opportunities to be guests on other podcasts, and we've had some great conversations. We would hate for you to miss them.

[00:00:26.330] - Lisa Qualls

Because we're taking the month of July off from recording new episodes, we thought it would be the perfect time to share some of those interviews with you right here on our podcast. This is one of our favorites. We hope you enjoy it.

[00:00:40.350] - Jamie Finn

This is Jamie Finn from Foster the Family, and this is The Real Mom Podcast. After a very long break, we are back with The Real Mom Podcast. It is season two, episode one of season two. And today I am talking to Lisa Qualls, who is one of my very favorite people to learn from, to listen to, to hear from. She checks every box: foster, adoptive birth mom, biological mom, former foster youth. And she is just a wealth of wisdom and a beautiful source of learning, what it looks like to follow Jesus as a foster and adoptive mom. So here is season two, episode one of The Real Mom Podcast. Today, I am talking to Lisa Qualls, and Lisa isn't easily defined by any of the normal labels, so I'm just going to jump right in and ask her to sort of define herself. Hi, Lisa. How are you?

[00:01:47.630] - Lisa Qualls

Hi, Jamie. I'm doing really well, thank you.

[00:01:50.590] - Jamie Finn

Good. All right, let's go through the different labels that you could put ahead of mom and child and all of that.

[00:01:59.410] - Lisa Qualls

Okay. Well, I am a mom by birth. I gave birth to a bunch of my kids. I'm a mom through international adoption, and I'm also a foster mother. And to get even more interesting, which maybe we'll talk about a bit, I'm also a birth mom and a former foster youth. So there you go. That's pretty much everything.

[00:02:18.490] - Jamie Finn

So this is going to be a privilege for me because I feel, to be honest, this whole podcast, the point of it all along was for me to basically get to talk to moms like you and learn for myself. So you really come, you have a very well rounded perspective. You really have a full understanding of all of the different roles in what we're doing. How did that affect your journey into all of this? I'm sure in a huge way.

[00:02:50.600] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, in a huge way. Honestly, becoming an adoptive mom in some ways is really a God thing. That God had to reach into my heart and change a lot of my feelings and beliefs about adoption because I had been so wounded by it. My son was born when I was a young teenager. I did not willingly place him for adoption. There wasn't an adoption plan. He was born at the very, very end of the 70s, which gives you an idea of how old I am. But anyhow, when you watch This Is US, that's like the age of my son. And so open adoptions were starting, but not through Catholic Children's Services. So it was closed. I had a little bit of information, but it was profoundly devastating and shaped my life in many ways. So there was a time when I felt sort of positive about adoption. Then I went through a very long time of feeling very angry and very wounded by it. So when we actually began our adoption process, it came as such a huge surprise for me because I was always very passionate about children, and some of our closest friends decided to adopt from Ethiopia. This was back in 2006. And so the crisis there was very large I mean, it's still quite significant, but it was at the beginning, more of when people were

beginning to adopt from Ethiopia. And it came as such a surprise. I actually knew that I would probably lose some friends in my part of the adoption community, the part that was advocating for adoptee rights and for birth mother rights. I mean, these were my people. And my closest friend at the time was an adult adoptee, wonderful relationship with her parents, pretty good reunion with birth family. But she said to me, when I told her, I said, you know, I think we're going to adopt, she said, Wow, you're crossing over to the dark side.

[00:05:01.650] - Jamie Finn
Wow.

[00:05:02.630] - Lisa Qualls
Yeah. And that's how it felt in a lot of ways. God redeemed and restored so much. It's a long story, but it's very powerful about how God did not allow me to stay in my bitterness and my woundedness. He brought me to a whole new place where it wasn't at all difficult to love my new children. It was this idea of becoming an adoptive mom was a stretch.

[00:05:31.670] - Jamie Finn
Wow. Yeah. And I think that is one reason why your voice is so important and so well rounded. I mean, the reality of crossing over to the dark side, it shouldn't feel that way because we should so all be on the same side of this. And I think it's voices like yours that are helping bridge that, which is really beautiful and important. So I'm guessing that the journey into foster care wasn't really expected either.

[00:06:08.070] - Lisa Qualls
It wasn't at all. In fact, we thought we might be foster parents someday. And I actually had always had this desire that maybe we would foster a pregnant teen or a young teen mom, and foster she and her baby together so that we can help them have what I did not have, and help her learn how to be a mom for her baby. But that was something we thought might happen way down the road. And we had gone through a terrible loss of losing one of our daughters in an accident. And we were still very much in grief, and in some ways we still are. And I remember thinking someday when we've processed more of our loss and our grief and we're okay again, then maybe we will become foster parents. But in the meantime, I started a ministry at my church to support foster families. And in that process, I got to know some of the workers for the department, and they asked if I would bring a teen daughter home for one night. A teen girl

[00:07:09.390] - Jamie Finn
One night? One night.

[00:07:12.030] - Lisa Qualls
Yes. And she came for a night, and then she stayed for two nights and then two weeks. And then if we had not said yes, she would have been moved again to another town about an hour and 45 minutes away, which would have put her nearly 4 hours from her home, and she would have had to be in a third high school. And we just felt that that would be such a really hard thing for her and that by then we got to know her a little bit, and we were feeling good and felt like we could definitely parent her for a time. And the other thing is, she had already been in care for, at that point, in about nine months. And so in the state of Idaho, the guideline is 15 months. And so we thought, well, this will probably be six months or so. I remember Mike Barry said to me, he said, Lisa, whatever they tell you, at three years, and she's been with us two and a half years now, so we love her.

[00:08:13.470] - Jamie Finn
Wow. Yeah. I love that because I think it's important that we don't say yes to things that we can't handle, that we know isn't really what we're called to. But every time I say that, I find myself saying the opposite also, which is, this isn't about us being comfortable. It's not about what we think we can do, that God calls us into the scary and into things that we never thought. And sometimes that small obedience of, sure, she can stay one night, two years of you having such an immense impact on a girl's life. When you adopted your children, that what were their ages? I mean, this is the first time bringing a teenager into your home, I'm guessing.

[00:09:02.490] - Lisa Qualls

Yes, but our kids, some of them were older. We went to Ethiopia at the beginning of 2007 and brought home three children. We brought home our little boy, who at that point was 23 months. Our baby was five months, and then our daughter Kalkidan was five and a half. So she was living with HIV, and at that time, kids with HIV or anybody with HIV had to fill out a waiver to get a visa to come into the US. And so the process and adoption was that we were able to go and meet her, but then we had to submit another whole packet of paperwork to prove that we could care for her health needs and different things. And then we had no idea how long the wait would be from the time we met her and went home to when we actually were able to go back and get her. And it turned out to be faster than actually we expected. The boys came home in February, and she came home late May.

[00:10:02.530] - Jamie Finn

Okay. And it's just so funny to hear you say, I didn't think I would ever adopt. And then it's international adoption, three children, special medical needs. Yeah.

[00:10:17.150] - Lisa Qualls

We met our other daughter when we were there, so at the orphanage, we met another little girl, and so we went back for her a little over a year later, and she came home at ten. She was over ten when she came home.

[00:10:29.220] - Jamie Finn

Okay, so you brought four children home within a year?

[00:10:35.510] - Lisa Qualls

It was more like 16 months or something.

[00:10:38.920] - Jamie Finn

And your family jumped from how many children to how many?

[00:10:42.300] - Lisa Qualls

Well, at home at that point, we had seven at home, and we added four. Yeah.

[00:10:48.350] - Jamie Finn

Okay, so let me ask what I know everyone is thinking, which is, why did you do that? Take me through the journey of, okay, we already have seven children, but we feel like this is what God is calling us to. I mean, how does that get placed in your heart and what does it look like to step out in obedience to that?

[00:11:12.970] - Lisa Qualls

Well, it's kind of funny because I was a home schooler. I was homeschooling all my kids at that point, and of course, I had teenagers and they were getting older, but my youngest was three in 2006. And I remember thinking, wow, life feels pretty okay. I didn't have babies, I wasn't nursing, I wasn't up at night, nothing like that. And I thought I literally was thinking, I wonder what God wants me to do. Which sometimes seems funny because I was homeschooling and I had seven kids, but I felt that there was something else. And honestly, I consider going to midwifery school at that point. I had a friend who wanted to do that, and I had done some study and training years before when we lived back east, and I really considered it. And then I got this phone call from my friend, and it just blew our world right open when she told us that they were adopting two little boys. And I felt like this burning passion in my heart that this was something that we could do and we should do. I was already home full time caring for so many kids, and I loved being a mom, and it was something I felt I was pretty good at and life was pretty stable. We had this really loving family. We thought this is something we could offer to other children, we could bring children into our family, and it would flow with what we're already doing, is what we thought.

[00:12:42.900] - Jamie Finn

Yeah, I was going to say, that doesn't sound like how it probably actually played out.

[00:12:47.150] - Lisa Qualls

No, that's not quite how it played out. But we decided to adopt two little boys younger than our youngest daughter. We wanted to stay in birth order. It made sense to us. And our youngest two were girls, and we thought, you know and also, we had heard that girls were more requested, and we're like, well, we like girls, we like boys. We have lots of each. So we decided to request two little boys, and it was fine if they were siblings, unrelated twins, anything. It turned out they were unrelated. But in the meantime, we began sponsoring a little girl at this orphanage for kids living with HIV. And that little girl, our friends went to meet her and take her a gift, and they were just really struck by her, and she was so amazing and beautiful and dynamic would be a really polite way to put her energy. She's a super high energy kid. And the nurse there at the orphanage told my friend that they were hoping we would adopt her, which was we didn't even know it was possible to adopt a child with HIV at that point. So we had a huge learning curve. And honestly, we knew that it would probably be too much for us, but we were compelled by God. I mean, I feel like the Holy Spirit spoke deeply to us that this little girl needed us, and that we were meant to bring her home and make her part of our family. So we did.

[00:14:18.850] - Jamie Finn

Wow. It was literally just obedience to God and following him. I've thought, before, my husband and I are having conversations about what our family looks like now, what it might look like in the future, and if we would have said yes, if we fully understood what we were saying yes to. Do you ever think that and I know I'm glossing over about half of what you're saying that I want to ask questions about, but you have experienced loss. But even just besides that, there's no way you knew exactly what you were signing on for. How do you process through believing that the Holy Spirit spoke to you, what you should do, and then what life has been sometimes, which is difficult and painful and beautiful.

[00:15:17.070] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah. Well, we actually have had a very difficult journey with our daughter Kalkidan, and her needs were extreme. And we felt really prepared. We've been parenting for 20 years at that point. Our oldest daughter was 20. We did all the training. We read the books. I have a background, my degree is in psychology. I have a background in mental health. We really thought that we could handle anything, and the truth was we couldn't. But for God giving us strength, we would never have survived. And she required a lot of intervention. We tried many therapies with her. We traveled with her. We went to Seattle, which is about 300 miles round trip every other week for therapy. For two years, we traveled to Nebraska for EMDR therapy. We did a lot of things, and even with all of that, we ended up needing to choose residential treatment for her. And I felt like that was the greatest failure of my life at that time. I felt like I had failed her, that I'd failed the adoption community. I'd been blogging and promoting adoption, and at first I wasn't very open about our struggles, and then I became more and more open while still trying to guard my children's story.

[00:16:42.830] - Jamie Finn

Right.

[00:16:43.430] - Lisa Qualls

But residential treatment, it felt like such a blow. But honestly, it was a gift from God. I mean, our daughter found so much healing there and grew in her faith and ended up coming home having really all of us having healed quite a lot. So I forget where we started on that question, but...

[00:17:05.810] - Jamie Finn

Yeah, just following God when you don't know where it's going to end up.

[00:17:10.510] - Lisa Qualls

Yes, probably. I would say that our greatest joy is knowing that even in all of our failure and all of our weakness, that we are doing our very best to follow God's calling on our lives, that he called us to something really hard. But he's good. He's a good guy and he knows what we're capable of and what we're not. And we have had so many times when we have clearly not had the strength to go on. But God gave us what we needed in that time, and he did bring people to help us and surround us. And

we're very thankful for our community and people who came alongside Kalkidan and then later our other daughter just needed support and help. And so we've been really blessed by that.

[00:18:07.490] - Jamie Finn

Yeah, I think we've talked before and you said, it's such a lie that God will only give us what we can handle. And I think if we believe that if we don't have a very good sense of scripture, because God tells us when we are weak, that's when we are strong. And to believe that we won't ever be brought to weakness, that we're somehow not in God's will if things aren't going smoothly and sweet and we really aren't having a very biblical perspective of who God is, God doesn't just give us what we can handle. Because then it's in our weakness and when we really meet our ending point, that we see our need for Him. I mean, I have a fairly large capacity, clearly not as large as yours, because I hit that point, too, where, oh, five kids and home school. Anytime I feel like we've got it down, I feel the need to okay, now what are you calling us to God? Because I know that it's not this settled feeling. We don't live in a settled feeling ever. And I found that it takes a little bit more, maybe to bring me to my breaking point, but that God has sort of called me to a life of bringing me to my breaking point. And that it's really beautiful there.

[00:19:32.920] - Jamie Finn

I mean, that's where I most experience Him and learn about Him and grow and that the heart is what is often most beautiful. Can you talk a little bit about just a little bit more about what you were sharing about residential treatment? That's something that we haven't broached really at all here. And I think anyone who's new to the community may be shocked by it. You just said it felt like the biggest failure to you. And when I was this, I'm going to save the world by adopting and I would have seen it as a failure. And I've learned so much more about how deep the wounds of some of these children are, and how related it can be to just being in a family. Can you elaborate whether it's just from your background, your expertise, but also your experience of what brought you to that and how you stepped into that?

[00:20:35.450] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, so one of my best friends that I met through adoption, she is an adoptive mom also, we used to always joke, well, they're not in jail or residential treatments, we're doing good, right? And to us, those were the two worst things we can imagine right now. That I've been in the adoption world and worked with so many families and supported families, the truth is, neither of those are the worst thing in the world. They're hard and they're sad. But sometimes I think God works in the hard and the sad, right? He works in the deepest, darkest places. And for me, we just could not keep the kids safe. We couldn't keep Kalkidan safe, we couldn't keep her siblings safe. We'd done inpatient psychiatric treatment twice. And after the second inpatient time, we just knew. We knew that we could not safely bring her home. And so at that point, we decided we would accept residential treatment. And we've been working with a psychologist who was sort of guiding us with our family. He wasn't working directly with the kids. He was really working with Russ and me and helping us. And he kept saying to us, you know, somebody is going to get hurt. It is not safe the way things are, and you need to change things before that happens. And fortunately, nobody did get physically injured, but there was a lot of hurt. And the residential treatment program where we were able to have Kalkidan was really okay. It was still super hard for me to let go of being her mom and let these people parent her. Wow, that was so hard. But the model of basically trust based relationships and the love that they have for the children, and the quality of the program really made us feel better. But even though it was the strangest sense and these are hard words, to admit. But it was the greatest relief, in a sense, to have to not be in this battle every single day with Kalkidan, of trying to help her regulate and protect everybody. So it was a relief and it was a tremendous grief, because we were giving up our daughter to these people in this program. We had to trust them. And I found that to be very hard.

[00:23:18.270] - Jamie Finn

How did she process through it? How does she feel in this? We believe this is the best thing for you. I don't even know the question I'm trying to ask because it's so deep and heavy. Everything that you had to wrestle through.

[00:23:38.670] - Lisa Qualls

Well, and especially when what you've, we've been working on for so long is, you are ours. You belong. That's right. We'll never give up. You will always be our daughter. And then to take her to a residential program she was angry and hurt for quite a while. She really was. But it wasn't really all that long before even she could begin to see that she needed the help that they were offering her. And we were working closely with them. We would go for family weekends. It was in Montana, in Helena, and we would go for family weekends. We would do Skype counseling appointments, we would do phone calls. So it's not like we dropped her off and took a long break. It wasn't like that at all. We stayed very connected. And I think the biggest, hardest thing for her was being able to overcome her truly deep terror of trusting family. She had been so wounded and so abused and so neglected, and she was terrified to trust us and believed that we loved her. And that was the huge hurdle that she had to get over before we could really begin forming secure attachment with her.

[00:25:10.070] - Jamie Finn

So if you could share really quickly, just to anyone who is in crisis right now with their adopted children, what would you say if you were sitting across from someone who was in crisis?

[00:25:25.850] - Lisa Qualls

Well, I do this a lot with some of the parent coaching and things that I do. I think, Oh, gosh, that's such a long answer. We could talk about that for a long, long time. But one thing I talk about a lot with Moms is, first of all, how they are doing. Because when we are completely living in this high level of crisis, we get very depleted. And then, how do you turn anything around when you are so exhausted, so depressed? Sometimes a lot of women experience depression and anxiety, so I try to talk with them about how they're doing. But the other thing I talk a lot about is safety. Like, is their family safe? Are the other siblings in the home? Are the other children safe? If they're not safe, something has to change. And I don't know what that answer might be. It might be respite care. It might be a different kind of therapy. It might be like a kinship situation where a family member steps into help for a time, but we have to keep our children safe. And that's sort of the very beginning where we start.

[00:26:37.900] - Jamie Finn

That's good. I feel sometimes so limited. My experience is very limited, and I know that there are so many foster and adoptive moms who are in crisis, and I think it's been a gift for me to just get to know, like, I know you and others and have my eyes and my heart open to the reality of so many other parents. But I think that so many parents feel alone and feel the shame, like you were talking about before, of, you know, I failed here. And in my community, it's often more having to disrupt a placement and what it looks like to have to or to say no to adoption as a foster parent. But I think that just hearing another person have to walk through it and to hear that there is no perfect ending and there's no, like, picture perfect story. But to see someone else walk through it and to see how God was faithful, I think can be really faith building. So tell me now, a lot of this is what you were walking through in the past. What are you learning now as you continue to be a foster and adoptive mom?

[00:28:09.090] - Lisa Qualls

Well, because Kalkidan went to be with the Lord, I feel freer to share her story than I do my other kids, but we're still in some deep stuff with our kids. Children experience horrific, traumatic things, even when they're very small sometimes. And even if it happened pre verbally and they can't express it and store it in their brain as an implicit memory that maybe they can't speak about, it's still there. And the trauma that some of my kids experienced, it is with them. Even though we're working hard on therapeutic things, so we still feel there's no danger in our family. And so that brings everything to a different level. Everybody is safe, but that doesn't mean it's not hard. And so we're still really in the thick of a lot of it, to be honest.

[00:29:10.570] - Jamie Finn

So I love to listen to different podcasts, read different books and all that about interventions and therapies, but that's not really what this one is about. I want to know how are you processing through all of that? I could ask you, what therapies are you pursuing and all of that. I want to know, how do you process through the fact that it's been hard for a long time and it continues to be hard? What does that wrestling with God sort of look like for you?

[00:29:39.730] - Lisa Qualls

Well, I will say that in the deepest, darkest, hardest places, I have felt Jesus the most near. I have never felt that he's left me. And Russ and I have really clung to the Lord, and it's not been easy on our marriage. It's not been easy on our other children. But God has been so good to us, and really, I always say that when we cannot hold on to Him, we do not have the strength. It's okay because he's holding onto us. He is not letting go of us. He's not leaving us. And so we've just clung to a lot of truth. And the truth is that God calls us to care for the widows and orphans, and he calls us to love the hardest people and the things that are hard. I just don't think God calls us to easy. And we touched on that earlier. But I was talking with a mom, a pastor's wife, at a retreat where I spoke just recently, and she said they've adopted two children from foster care. And she said there are people in their churches say to them, are you really sure you're in God's will? I mean, this just seems way too hard. And I said to her, I said, you know, they need to read the Bible. Yes, great heroes of our faith have been called to the hard, the hardest. And so I think we just cling to that truth, and we cling to the knowledge that we do not know the end of the story. We are in the middle of it, and God knows the beginning to the end, and he knows what our efforts, what fruit will come to bear, we don't know. And we have to accept that that we don't know and be willing to know that he is loving, and that he has a plan. This is not random. Nothing is random for me. He has a good plan.

[00:31:38.830] - Jamie Finn

So good. That is so good. And that truth applies to it. I don't care what your situation is. You could be a mom who's getting licensed and never, or you could be in the deepest, darkest, as you keep saying. That is the truth. And that applies to all of us because it's bigger than us. It's not defined by our situations or our struggles.

[00:32:03.050] - Jamie Finn

So I always have a hard time sort of switching gears here because we're kind of wading through the heavy. But we're going to switch gears. We're going to talk about you just as a woman, as a person, not just as Miss Foster-Adoptive Mom. So I want to know about you. What are you doing? Reading, watching, listening to. So what are you doing right now? Oh, my goodness, I am so excited.

[00:32:29.010] - Lisa Qualls

Probably the biggest thing I'm doing other than parenting my kids, is I am finishing the manuscript for my first book, and the manuscript is due this spring. It is done to the point that someone will be reading through it and giving me some advice, and then I'll be making edits, and they'll be submitting it to my publisher.

[00:32:51.690] - Jamie Finn

Okay. You have to give more dirt on this book.

[00:32:56.430] - Lisa Qualls

Okay. This book, I was so honored, incredibly honored to write with Dr. Karen Purvis.

[00:33:03.350] - Jamie Finn

Which how is that a thing? I just can't believe that you are releasing a book with of course, Dr. Karen Purvis is no longer with us. So even just being able to hear her voice again, we'll such a gift for us. Then to hear your voice as a parent. And how did this even come to fruition? My mind is blurred.

[00:33:27.030] - Lisa Qualls

Well, way back, I think it was probably in 2011, one of my readers pointed me to Dr. Purvis and I discovered her work and started really hunting for videos and things to watch, more than anything. I read *The Connected Child* as well, but I felt like, gosh, that doesn't seem to touch on how hard my life is in this situation with my kids. Anyhow, I started writing about things I was learning from her and ended up meeting Michael and Annie Monroe, who were doing the Empowered to Connect conferences, and they were speaking with Karen, Dr Purvis. And through my relationship with them, I ended up speaking with them for Empowered to Connect for a period of time and got to know Karen while I was doing that, because there were just a small number of us speaking. And I had this idea for this book because I had at my fingertips, but I was so blessed and I knew it. I had Dr. Karen Purvis

that I could talk to. We were working with one of the most phenomenal adoption therapist, Deborah Gray in Seattle, and she has wonderful books. I had these resources that I knew not everybody had. And I wanted to share. I was sharing a lot on my blog. But as much as I loved and respected them, they're professionals. I was living it right in my home every single day. And I thought, what if we could bring this together into one book where we've got the voice of a mom who's actually living it every single day, and the voice of the professional, of Karen, who's a scientist, who's developed this incredible method of trust based relational intervention? What if we could put that together? So one morning at breakfast, I just pitched it to her and I was nervous. I had no idea what she would say. And she said, that's a great idea. And I was sort of like, do you mean you want to do it? We started working on this book, and honestly, I feel like it's such a gift that we're finishing because in the midst of that, I was parenting in really hard circumstances. My kids were struggling. Karen was diagnosed with cancer for the first time, and so we started writing. And then things slowed down, and then she went into remission, was doing much better. We were writing a lot more again. And then we had an accident. We lost our daughter, and I was very injured in the accident, too. And so, but that almost compelled me more to finish the book. And so we were working on it and then her cancer came back. We were working on the book up until, well, I was getting emails, we were talking probably in the winter, but her cancer progressed more quickly than any of us expected, and she passed away before we had a signed contract with a publisher, which was really stressful. And I'm so thankful that Harvest House took it on. And we were able to, with some help from her assistant, we were able to pull together a lot of her work that to tie together the loose ends. And it's nearly done. And what's really beautiful is that her family wants to be published. This is her last written work. And so it really is an incredible honor, but I hold it very like I need to do a good job.

[00:36:59.470] - Jamie Finn

Oh, my goodness, so more like sacred.

[00:37:02.810] - Lisa Qualls

It really does.

[00:37:07.290] - Jamie Finn

And you touched on what I hear is the most common critique from parents, which is, this is great, but she didn't live it. I've heard, well, Karen Purvis never blah, blah, blah. And so to be able to bring both perspectives together, I think is going to be a huge gift to our community. I'm always excited when voices that I love to hear write books, but this is different. This feels different. This feels like that we've been needing and waiting for. So you don't have a title, do you?

[00:37:35.970] - Lisa Qualls

Well, we did have a working title, but I've given it a lot of thought and I want to talk with the publisher and see just a little bit. But basically the main part about it is this is The Real Life Strategies for Connected Parenting. That's not the title, but that's the gist of what I want people to know. And I screwed it up. I was not always perfect. This is really living.

[00:38:03.710] - Jamie Finn

Oh, I'm so excited.

[00:38:05.770] - Lisa Qualls

Me too.

[00:38:06.290] - Jamie Finn

All right. A little less exciting and relates much less to me. What are you eating?

[00:38:12.010] - Lisa Qualls

Well, we are talking just days before Thanksgiving, so we're not eating anything super exciting right now, but we are about to. And my adult kids are starting to roll in my kids ranking age now from 31 down to twelve. So we have some of our adult kids coming home. And the biggest new thing is I think I'm going to try Joanna Gaines homemade stuffing recipe. I just found it a couple of days ago. And that's going to be the new thing on the table, I think.

[00:38:38.790] - Jamie Finn

Nice. And I guess with how many kids you have, you're not inviting like, aunts and uncles and grandparents. I mean, you guys take up a table.

[00:38:47.230] - Lisa Qualls

Well, we don't live near any of our family. Our closest family is in Seattle, so that's about five and a half hours away. But we will have our kids bring friends and it's always a big yeah, everything's big in our house.

[00:39:01.110] - Jamie Finn

Well, and as you have, like, a fluid family, I'm sure it just gets more and more fluid. It will show up.

[00:39:08.630] - Lisa Qualls

It really does. It really does. So I just have to remain very flexible. If it gets to be more than about 15, we will do buffet style. You can do 14 around the table pretty well, but once it goes over that, it gets a little hard.

[00:39:22.620] - Jamie Finn

That's fun. My brother, we're both foster and adoptive parents, so we sometimes have eleven or twelve. Right now we only have eight, but the oldest is nine. We actually feed the kids around the table, send them downstairs, don't come up, leave us alone. And then we all get to sit around the table together.

[00:39:42.060] - Lisa Qualls

That's great. That's fun.

[00:39:44.010] - Jamie Finn

All right. What are you reading?

[00:39:47.590] - Lisa Qualls

Right now I'm reading *Half Broke Horses*, but I think it's Jeanette Walls. She wrote *The Glass Castle*.

[00:39:54.450] - Jamie Finn

Okay. I do know that she wrote *The Glass Castle*.

[00:39:57.030] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah. Great book. And this, she wrote is her grandmother's story. And I wasn't sure I was going to love it, but I've definitely been pulled in. It's very interesting.

[00:40:07.280] - Jamie Finn

Okay. Are you a fiction reader more than a nonfiction? I found that they send you their books a lot and you end up reading. Okay. I've read 400 books on foster care and adoption. Now. Do you end up reading a lot of nonfiction?

[00:40:24.310] - Lisa Qualls

I read a lot of nonfiction. Actually, to be honest, I'm listening to *Half Broke Horses* because I find I enjoy fiction. I can listen to fiction. I listen to a lot of nonfiction, too, but nonfiction, for the most part, I want to be holding the book and underlining, depending on what it is. So fiction is more of a pleasure, and so I listen to it when I'm exercising or driving, things like that.

[00:40:52.220] - Jamie Finn

Fun. Okay. What are you watching?

[00:40:55.210] - Lisa Qualls

Well, Russ and I were very hooked on *Madam Secretary* on Netflix. Have you seen it?

[00:41:00.210] - Jamie Finn

No. So who is that? I can picture who it is. Who is the female actress?

[00:41:06.730] - Lisa Qualls

Do you see her name? Tia Leone. Is that her name?

[00:41:09.170] - Jamie Finn

Okay. She's a great actress.

[00:41:15.210] - Lisa Qualls

Yes. And the actor who plays her husband is great, too. And it's really interesting because she's the secretary of state, but they have a great marriage. And where do you ever see that on TV? Where do you ever see that? So we really enjoy just the dynamics in their family and yeah, it's a great show. I like it. I'm always hesitant to recommend because I recommended in my newsletter, my email newsletter, I recommended The Crown, and the very next episode was wildly inappropriate, the only inappropriate episode in the whole two seasons. And I was like, oh, my goodness, I cannot believe I just recommended that.

[00:41:52.120] - Jamie Finn

It's such a hard thing because everyone has different standards. I've been recommending Instant Family because you have to see it. I think that you love it, but right away, I started getting all the language and all the content, so right away I'm like, okay, do a video. Don't bring your children. Actually, do square alerts to tell you the content. It's so hard because when you enjoy something, you tell other people about it. But yeah, I've gotten backlash on recommending things many times.

[00:42:22.460] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, if you're really sensitive, you won't like, Half Broke Horses either. But it's memoir. Well, I guess it's more biography, but it's a true story. So it is what it is, right?

[00:42:33.010] - Jamie Finn

Exactly. You can't edit that out. Okay. And what are you listening to?

[00:42:38.150] - Lisa Qualls

Well, books. When I'm alone, I listen to books. I don't like to make my kids wait so I can pause it over and over. I don't want to have earbuds in my ears when the kids are around. So if the kids are around, I listen more, honestly, I like to listen to worship music, a lot of it. It keeps my head in a good space. New Wine by Hillsong.

[00:43:01.620] - Jamie Finn

Oh, I don't know that.

[00:43:04.780] - Lisa Qualls

Then there's another one. Oh, goodness. I'm not going to be able to tell you who it is. I won't be able to remember. I'll just break into song right here. I love there are so many songs I love, honestly.

[00:43:19.410] - Jamie Finn

All right, we have to do this again because this is one of the hardest conversations that I've had, because I'm glossing over every question I want to ask you, because there is just so much to your story. But I'm so glad for what you were able to share today. Can you tell my listeners where they can find you and actually wait... Fun facts before you do that, when I first started blogging, I wrote something and it went viral, and then I started the blog, and I think that I reached out to you, and said, yeah, I would love to guest post, you're a blog that I read. And your blog was the very first blog that I ever did a guest post on.

[00:44:06.780] - Lisa Qualls

I'm so honored. That's so great. Now that you're wildly famous, that's pretty cool.

[00:44:13.870] - Jamie Finn

I remember thinking, Oh, my goodness, these women. Because at the time it was Two Thankful Moms.

[00:44:19.410] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, very briefly. Very briefly.

[00:44:21.510] - Jamie Finn

Okay, well, then it was and I'm like, Oh, my gosh, these women that I totally love and follow. So tell us where listeners can follow you.

[00:44:33.030] - Lisa Qualls

Okay. They can find me at OneThankfulMom.com. That's my blog. I've been blogging there since 2006. So every once in a while, someone will tell me they've gone back and read the entire thing, which I should do myself, because I'm sure there are things I would change or edit, for sure. So onethankfulmom.com. I'm [onethankfulmom](https://www.instagram.com/onethankfulmom) on Instagram. I'm [onethankfulmom](https://www.facebook.com/onethankfulmom) on Facebook. And then this last spring, I started a new website called TheAdoptionConnection.com. You have to have the word THE at the beginning. And I did that with my Adoption Connection partner, Melissa Corkum. She is an adult adoptee as well as an adoptive mom. So together we form the Triad, which is kind of cool and fun. But anyhow, we started that and that's more of a resource site. So we're developing courses there. There's parent coaching, and we also have a podcast called The Adoption Connection. We would love for people to come listen to that too.

[00:45:33.620] - Jamie Finn

Yes, and you might find me on there too.

[00:45:37.110] - Lisa Qualls

You will you will definitely be hearing Jamie if you come to the Adoption Connection podcast.

[00:45:42.010] - Jamie Finn

Great. Lisa, this was such a great conversation. I feel just so encouraged and you really built my faith, not just by your story, which is unique and beautiful, but really just by your perspective and how big your God is. That's what carried you through this all. So thank you so much for sharing with us and thank you just for your beautiful heart.

[00:46:08.950] - Lisa Qualls

Well, thank you for having me. It's really been a joy.

[00:46:13.630] - Jamie Finn

Thanks so much for listening to this episode of The Real Mom podcast. You can find us online, www.realmompodcast.com, or on itunes and subscribe. You can find us on Facebook, [facebook.com/realmompodcast](https://www.facebook.com/realmompodcast), or Instagram at [realmompodcast](https://www.instagram.com/realmompodcast). Thanks so much for listening.

[00:46:35.830] - Melissa Corkum

We hope you enjoyed that conversation as much as we did. Even though the podcast is on summer break for July, we are still meeting at least weekly in The Village, and we'd love to have you join us. To find out more information, visit theadoptionconnection.com/VILLAGE. As a valued podcast listener, we'd like to offer you half off of your first month. Just use the Code podcast when you check out.

[00:47:01.030] - Melissa Corkum

Before you go, we'd love to connect with you on social media. Our new Instagram handle is [@postadoptionresources](https://www.instagram.com/postadoptionresources). Or better yet, join our free Facebook community at [theadoptionconnection.com/facebook](https://www.facebook.com/theadoptionconnection.com/facebook).

[00:47:16.030] - Lisa Qualls

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

[00:47:24.310] - Melissa Corkum

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