

[00:00:00.250] - Lisa Qualls

Hello, friends. This is Lisa today, and I am so excited to share the news with you that our new book, the book that Melissa and I have written together, is just about to be released into the world, and by the time you listen to this, it may already be available. Our new book is titled *Reclaim Compassion: the Adoptive Parents Guide to Overcoming Blocked Care with Neuroscience and Faith*. If you've been following us for long, you know that one of the things we're most passionate about is helping parents reclaim compassion for themselves and for their children. And for some parents, that means overcoming blocked care. Today I want to share with you the first chapter of the book. So sit back and listen, and I hope that as you listen, you will be encouraged and that you might find that this book would be useful for you.

[00:00:59.730] - Lisa Qualls

Part 1, The Experience of Blocked Care. Amanda loved being a mom. When she and Sam married after college graduation, they dreamed of having a large family. By their 10th anniversary they had two daughters, ages six and eight, and a four year old son. When they learned of the need for foster parents in their community, they decided to become licensed to foster and thought they might one day adopt. After their first few foster placements, their social worker approached them about two young boys in the foster care system who were available for adoption. Amanda and Sam were thrilled to be selected as the permanent placement. Finally, they would have the large family they'd always dreamed of.

[00:01:43.090] - Lisa Qualls

They knew the boys had experienced adversity in their short lives. Fortunately, Amanda and Sam had read all of the recommended books and attended a couple of highly recommended weekend training events for adoptive and foster parents. Amanda even joined some Facebook groups for foster and adoptive moms.

[00:02:01.200] - Lisa Qualls

When the boys arrived, it seemed like everything was going pretty well, with the exception of sleep. One of their sons hardly slept at all, which meant Amanda found herself perpetually exhausted. But as the weeks went on, things began to get worse. Their son started getting very upset over seemingly small things. His crying turned into meltdowns unlike any she had seen before, and he became aggressive toward his siblings. It got to where Amanda felt as if she'd entered a war zone.

[00:02:31.490] - Lisa Qualls

She pulled out the adoption books she had previously read and scanned them for help. She also posted in a Facebook group and got lots of encouraging advice. Amanda understood from her research that her son wasn't a bad kid, but rather was acting out of fear due to early adverse experiences. She knew she had to keep focusing on building trust with him and helping him heal, and she found a trauma-informed therapist to work with their family.

[00:02:59.770] - Lisa Qualls

When her son was upset, he said he hated her, and it seemed to be true. But she continued to be loving toward her son, even though he seemed to reject her over and over again. Amanda was working harder to parent than she ever had before.

[00:03:15.470] - Lisa Qualls

As the months passed, the angry words from her son hurt less. She became more used to his verbal assaults. In fact, she was better able to let them roll off her and wouldn't let them pierce her heart as she had before. If she tried to give her son affection and he pushed her away, if she tried to give her son affection and he pushed her away, she would tell herself it didn't matter.

[00:03:40.070] - Lisa Qualls

But even though she tried not to let him affect her, Amanda found herself feeling anxious when she heard him waking in the morning. She still hoped one day everything would be better. She fed him well, participated in therapy, met with teachers, and took good care of him. But her heart just wasn't in it anymore. She realized she was counting the years until he would graduate from high school and

move away to college.

[00:04:05.310] - Lisa Qualls

Sometimes Amanda wondered who she had become and how she had gotten there. How could a mother not like her child? She felt ashamed that she just wanted him to go away. She didn't think anyone would understand, so she kept all these thoughts and feelings to herself, feeling stuck and hopeless.

[00:04:25.430] - Lisa Qualls

Why Does a Parent's Heart Shut Sown? Like Amanda many parents we work with through our post adoption services get to this place of apathy toward their child. They still love them, but liking and enjoying them has become exceedingly difficult.

[00:04:42.570] - Lisa Qualls

When we prompt parents to be honest and they realize they can trust us, they will put words to it. One mom told us,

[00:04:50.620] - Lisa Qualls

We adopted our daughter from foster care when she was two years old. We believed she just needed love and all would be right in the world. We soon learned that no amount of love and care would be enough. And it still isn't. And she is almost 17. The shame I feel for not liking her has been debilitating. Being in the same room with her makes my stomach tighten and I get nauseated. I love her very much, but have pretended to like her for years. Thank you for letting me know that I'm not alone!

[00:05:24.070] - Lisa Qualls

But most of the time, these parents stay silent and withdrawn. The shame they feel is overwhelming, and it leads to a sense of isolation and feelings of despair. Why does this happen? Why does a parent who loves their kids and is doing their very best find that their heart has simply shut down toward their child? To get to that, we'll first need to take a close look at ourselves in Part 1.

[00:05:51.090] - Lisa Qualls

Chapter 1, "Recognize Your Motivations and Expectations." Before you begin the process of reclaiming compassion for yourself and your child, it's helpful to reflect on the series of events that brought you to this place. We'll get to what happened in your nervous system. But before we do, we ask you to explore your motivations and expectations for adopting.

[00:06:14.870] - Lisa Qualls

Motivations. Think of something hard you've done in your life. Not something that happened to you, but something you chose to do. Maybe it was getting a degree or running a race. Maybe you decided to start a business. Maybe you've even done something really hard, like getting sober or bringing your marriage back from the brink of divorce.

[00:06:36.270] - Lisa Qualls

In every case, something prompted you to consider the goal, and it was powerful enough to move you to make sacrifices to make it happen. Maybe the action you had to take required you to establish a budget, work while taking classes, or learn how to manage employees. Maybe your goal required daily meetings or saying no to things you had previously relied on. Or maybe getting to where you needed to be took months of weekly counseling appointments with your spouse. Whatever it was, whatever it took, you decided it was worth the sacrifice.

[00:07:10.410] - Lisa Qualls

Now let's talk about adoption. Typically, adoption doesn't just happen. It takes a huge commitment and loads of determination to jump through all the hoops and fill out stacks of documents. Coming up with a required amount of money is no small task either, but you did it. You traveled around the globe, or maybe just across town, and you adopted your child.

[00:07:31.310] - Lisa Qualls

We would venture to guess, if you're reading this book, that adoption has been hard, likely even much harder than you expected. You may wonder how everything could have gone so wrong. You may doubt you were cut out for this. And while you may not say it out loud, you may wonder if you made a huge mistake.

[00:07:49.530] - Lisa Qualls

Think back to the very beginning. For some of you, you'll be thinking back several years. For others, you may need to go all the way back to your childhood. When was the seed of adoption planted in your heart? What happened to make the seed grow? What sacrifices did you make to bring your child home? We imagine you made lots of them. You must have believed adopting your child was very important.

[00:08:14.430] - Lisa Qualls

You may have adopted because you had a strong sense of justice, or it was simply the right thing to do. You may have felt moved by the suffering of children living in difficult circumstances. You may have experienced infertility and chosen adoption to grow your family. Or you may have thought adopting would be an adventure and you were up for the challenge. Here are our stories of how we came to adopt. Melissa...

[00:08:38.960] - Melissa Corkum

~Our adoption journey started with my husband, Patrick. He had known from a young age that he wanted to adopt. On our first date, he said two things to me: I'm dating to find a wife, so if at any point, you know you can't marry me, let me know. And I know I want to adopt. So are you okay with that? I couldn't yet say that I knew Patrick was the one for me. But as an adoptee wired to always see the bright side of things, I figured I couldn't be against adoption. After getting married and having two kids by birth, when our thoughts about adoption turned to action, we felt called by God to provide a home for children who were harder to place due to special needs or age, and were already waiting for families. Lisa...

[00:09:23.180] - Lisa Qualls

~I had always been passionate about caring for children in need. I went to college to get a degree that would let me work with kids, but I didn't think I would become an adoptive mom. The seed of adoption was planted in me when a close friend called to tell me she and her husband were adopting two little boys from Ethiopia. Hearing this, it felt like God opened a door so wide that we hardly had to pick up our feet to walk through. After that I could not stop reading about adoption, praying about adoption, and reading blogs about it. When my husband Russ, and I finally decided to move forward, I was a fiercely determined woman, filling out paperwork at a rate that surprised everyone. Our plan had been to adopt two little boys. It was a good and sensible plan, but God had something else in mind. In the end, we adopted two little boys and a little girl in 2007 and returned to Ethiopia to adopt another daughter a year later.

[00:10:20.950] - Lisa Qualls

When we reflect back, we are reminded of our original motivations. For Melissa, it was to provide a home for a child who was harder to place. For Lisa, it was to embrace a child who needed the love and care of a family. We both also believed we were fulfilling God's exhortation to care for orphans. It was helpful for us to identify our motivations in order to refresh our resolve to be the best parents we could be, even when we were discouraged and experiencing blocked care.

[00:10:52.030] - Lisa Qualls

Can you remember back to the very beginning of your story? You had a compelling reason. What comes to mind? Here are some of the motivations other parents have shared with us.

[00:11:04.690] - Lisa Qualls

~If you're a really good Christian, you're going to do this thing.

[00:11:09.750] - Lisa Qualls

~I just wanted to help kids in need in foster care. We now know that does not always go so well because you're not always able to help in the ways that you imagine yourself being able to help.

[00:11:22.090] - Lisa Qualls

~We were ready to be parents, and, you know, there were kids that needed families, and so, okay, we'll do it. I mean, we really didn't overthink it.

[00:11:33.070] - Lisa Qualls

~We felt like we were self centered, 30 somethings. We realized we needed to move on and begin this family. That's how we got there.

[00:11:42.930] - Lisa Qualls

~this is hard to admit, but I felt that if I only adopted once, that I wasn't really an advocate or I wasn't really a believer of adoption. I felt that to be a really committed person to adoption, I needed to do it twice.

[00:11:58.470] - Lisa Qualls

Again, understanding your motivations for adoption is important because it may help you persevere. You may also discover your initial motivations no longer hold meaning. This may require you to explore new motivations that inspire you to press on.

[00:12:15.210] - Lisa Qualls

Expectations. Have you ever had one of those moments when you wonder, what have I done to my family? What have I done to my marriage? Or what have I done to my life? We have, and we're here to tell you you're not alone. Like us, you had expectations of what life would be like as an adoptive parent. But your relationship with your child may be turning out differently than you expected. Reflecting on the gap between your expectations and your reality can shed insight on why blocked care happens. Melissa ...

[00:12:52.990] - Melissa Corkum

~When my husband and I adopted in 2009, our agency's required training focused on two things: children with institutional behaviors and parenting transracially. We blew through our adoption training because our son hadn't spent time in an institution, and he wasn't going to be the only Korean in our family. I also saw myself as a happy adoptee, so I naively thought I could raise happy adoptees. Because I had lived the adoptee life and knew what it was like, I didn't feel like I needed a training to tell me how to parent an adoptee.

[00:13:27.010] - Melissa Corkum

~Our son came home like a human tornado. I think he had opened every drawer and cabinet and pushed every button in our house within an hour of being home. As time went on, I realized I had zero tools other than yelling and timeouts, which had worked just fine for our first two kids. It didn't take long for me to start feeling powerless and frustrated. Every morning when I would hear his steps thundering down the hall, I would cringe and wonder why we had thought this was such a good idea. It didn't help that anyone who didn't live with him thought he was the cutest kid ever, and people were always joking about taking him home with them. This added to the sense of shame I already felt.

[00:14:08.440] - Melissa Corkum

~When we adopted three unrelated older children from Ethiopia in 2012, we thought we were more prepared, especially because earlier that year, we had learned about connected parenting and even become Empowered to Connect Parent Trainers. You would have thought I'd have learned after our first experience that it wouldn't be so easy. But as new parent trainers, I had also renewed my expectation that we had the skills and knowledge we needed. We expected our children to respond positively to our attempts at connection, but we underestimated our children's drive for self protection, which made it incredibly difficult for them to develop secure attachment to us. Eventually, we had to seek out long term respite for one of our kids. Then our oldest two packed their suitcases at the ages of 16 and 17 and left for Job Corps, a residential education and job training program, with no intention of returning home.

[00:15:03.600] - Melissa Corkum

~For my husband and I, our family - and hearts - felt broken in every way. In terms of my expectations of adoption, there was a big gap between what I thought our family would be and what our reality was. It turns out, on top of everything else, I had unknowingly suppressed fears of abandonment and rejection from my experience of being left on an orphanage doorstep as a newborn. Those fears chose the not so opportune time to rear their ugly head as I tried to parent our Ethiopian teenagers, only to be rejected by them again and again.

[00:15:40.030] - Melissa Corkum

~Dr. Karyn Purvis, Lisa's coauthor of the popular book *The Connected Parent: Real Life Strategies for Building Trust and Attachment*, wasn't joking when she said, to bring a child to a place of healing, you must know the path yourself. I never expected this journey to require so much processing of my own history in order to improve the relationships with my children. Lisa...

[00:16:05.010] - Lisa Qualls

~When we added four children to our family through adoption, I fully expected it to be a tough transition. Our new children were leaving behind everything they knew in life up to that point, and they had every reason to be frightened. We felt it was important to help them feel safe, and I was confident we could do it. After all, we had been parents for 20 years, and we were good at it.

[00:16:27.850] - Lisa Qualls

~I won't say caring for our kids was always easy, but I truly loved being a mom. My husband and I were not perfect parents, but we were good parents who loved Jesus and loved our children. We knew we had something beautiful, and we wanted to share it with children who needed a family.

[00:16:45.490] - Lisa Qualls

~In 2007, Russ and I traveled to Ethiopia to bring our three young children home. It quickly became apparent to us that one of our new daughters was a very high energy, challenging child. As the days passed, our concern over our daughter grew, and we knew we were likely to have a difficult time when we got home.

[00:17:06.330] - Lisa Qualls

~We soon learned that fear doesn't always look like we think it should. Our daughter's fear emerged as out of control rages, screaming and hurting her siblings. Our little ones began hiding in the closet when the screaming started and nobody felt safe in our home. I was scared and at a loss.

[00:17:26.670] - Lisa Qualls

~Nothing we knew about parenting had prepared me for this level of chaos. Prior to our daughter coming home, I had expected I would be a good and loving mom, and because of my love and hard work, this would be enough to help my children heal from any past wounds. Instead, there were many tears at our house, including mine. No matter how hard I tried to build connection, nothing seemed to ease her fear. The resulting behaviors made it difficult to keep trying. Many days I felt like a failure. The gap between what I expected and my reality was vast.

[00:18:06.570] - Lisa Qualls

We've seen over the years that though every family situation is unique, many of the effects of blocked care and ensuing feelings around them are not. Our expectations as parents played a role in the struggles and emotion we faced. Other parents have echoed similar sentiments, telling us:

[00:18:25.570] - Lisa Qualls

~Because of the enormous amount of attention and therapeutic parenting our son needs, he is going to be our one and only. There was a time when we thought we would bring a brother or sister home, but not anymore. There are days I feel cheated out of the real Mommy experience, the one where your child is attached to you without you having to fight for it.

[00:18:48.090] - Lisa Qualls

~I never thought I would struggle with liking the child God had so providentially given me.

[00:18:55.130] - Lisa Qualls

~I had checked all the boxes of things I thought we needed to know. I had researched until I thought we were prepared. Apparently, I was wrong. I want meaningful connection with all my children. I know they're young, but you can still have deep relationships and meaningful relationships with children. Particularly in our last adoption, I feel a disconnect that there is not a meaningful connection. The connection I want to have is not what she wants to have, but I'm trying to find ways to connect to her because of this gap for me.

[00:19:28.870] - Lisa Qualls

~The lack of tranquility and peace and the stressful interactions in my home was so stressful. Keeping all of that inside really rocked my boat.

[00:19:39.290] - Lisa Qualls

~I am sure I thought I had everything within my own capacity to do whatever was needed. It took us getting to a really hard place, like a pretty dark place in our family, before we even thought we needed support and humbled ourselves enough to go and get it. It was a big gap.

[00:19:57.950] - Lisa Qualls

We know that the gap between your expectations and reality can cause feelings of shame, fear or resentment. Parenting has a way of bringing our weaknesses and sinfulness bubbling to the surface. We can run from the discomfort, blame everyone around us, or soothe the pain in unhealthy ways. Or we can embrace parenting as the holy and sanctifying work it is and let God overhaul our hearts.

[00:20:25.030] - Lisa Qualls

We believe God is always at work in our lives. He uses people and circumstances to teach us and open our hearts to ways he can use us. The Holy Spirit speaks to us in ways we can't explain, and stirs our hearts. Remember who you are as a child of God. You can trust that your life is not a collection of random events. God has a plan and is intentionally working to lead you in ways to help you become more like Him and put his love on display to the world. Remember these truths when you feel the most defeated.

[00:21:05.830] - Lisa Qualls

In our book, *Reclaim Compassion*, each week ends with reflections and practices for the week. I want to share just briefly one of the reflections for Chapter 1.

[00:21:24.890] - Lisa Qualls

Day 1: Find Joy. This week, we want you to focus on intentionally finding joy. In her book *Attaching in Adoption*, Deborah Gray writes about self care tools for parents who are weary or burned out from the needs of their children. She writes, when parents have begun to be too worn out, it is often because they have spent too much time doing tasks and have deleted the fun or enjoyable things in their life. She gives a list of favorite suggestions from parents in her practice. We call this simple practice 50 Points of Joy.

[00:22:02.070] - Lisa Qualls

This week, we want to invite you to make a list of items that bring you joy. These can be big things, like getting a massage or going out to dinner. They can also be small things, such as lighting a candle or sipping your favorite tea. This list should continue growing over the coming weeks as you think of more things to add. Each day, try to complete seven or eight points of joy, putting check marks next to them as you go. Try to get 50 check marks on the list each week. Feel free to check off the same item more than once in a day, or even across multiple days. If it brings you joy, it absolutely counts.

[00:22:41.650] - Lisa Qualls

Imagine how this will renew your hope and strength, intentionally drawing your attention and focus each day to the things that feed your soul and fill your heart. It may be hard to do at first, but we found this practice to be powerful for renewing hope and compassion in our own lives and in the lives of the

parents we work with.

[00:23:04.650] - Melissa Corkum

Here are some examples from Melissa's list: taking a morning walk. Drinking a cup of ginger tea. Smelling a citrus essential oil. Eating something salty and crunchy. Drinking grapefruit flavored sparkling water and eating popcorn while watching a movie with Patrick. Reading a novel. Texting a friend a note of encouragement. Going out to a farm to table restaurant. Hanging out with friends. Going to bed in clean sheets.

[00:23:34.370] - Lisa Qualls

And here are examples from Lisa's list: sitting on the front porch for five minutes with a mug of tea or coffee. Lighting a candle on my bathroom counter as I get ready in the morning. Listening to an audio book or podcast while cooking. Getting together with a friend for an hour. Putting a vase of flowers on the kitchen counter. Taking my dog for a walk. Watching a movie that makes me laugh. Reading a book for pleasure, not adoption related. Taking a few extra minutes at bedtime to put a favorite essential oil in the diffuser. Video chatting with my adult kids and grandbabies.

[00:24:15.570] - Lisa Qualls

As you can see, we're not talking about complicated or expensive moments of joy. Most of these are small moments or simple acts woven into our daily lives. When you're in the midst of a hard day and just trying to make it through, joy is probably not the overwhelming feeling you have. But identifying what brings you joy and intentionally creating space for it in simple ways is a gift you can give yourself. From a physiological standpoint, intentionally adding joy back into your day can calm your nervous system, which can help you feel more compassionate and kind toward yourself. We can't change our kids behaviors or their reaction to us, but we can change the way we care for ourselves.

[00:25:04.210] - Lisa Qualls

Well, friends, I hope you have enjoyed listening to chapter one of *Reclaim Compassion*. This book is written from our hearts to yours. We hope you will find it so helpful. Please check it out. We'd love for you to read it. We'd love for you to leave us a review, particularly on Amazon. But more than anything, we hope that this book will renew your hope in your journey as an adoptive parent.

[00:25:34.650] - Melissa Corkum

To order the book, or find out more information about our ongoing coaching and support for overcoming blocked care, please visit ReclaimCompassion.com.