

[00:00:01.215] - Lisa Qualls

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

[00:00:09.075] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:00:14.175] - Lisa Qualls

Hi, friends. Welcome to Episode 119 of the Adoption Connection Podcast. Today we have some guests where we're going to be talking about marriage in particular. So, Melissa, you and I know each other pretty well now, but just so that everybody else can hear a little bit of your story, how long have you and Patrick been married?

[00:00:34.425] - Melissa Corkum

We have been married, it will be 19 years in June. And you're going to hear JJ share this in the interview, and she said, "we got married as babies!" And then she shared that they got married at 22. Well, Lisa, you and I must have gotten married as really itty bitty babies because I was 20 when Patrick and I got married. He was a couple of years older, but you and Russ were also 20, right?

[00:01:00.285] - Lisa Qualls

We were. We were. We were 20. We will celebrate, get this, our 37th wedding anniversary in June, like that just seems incredible. And but we tell each other, especially when times are hard, sometimes I just have to look at him and say, "look, we grew up together." We basically did. We've been together since probably right around the time of my 17th birthday and most of my life has been with him. So marriage, of course, is very, very important to both of us. You're really going to enjoy hearing from our guests, Currey and JJ Blandford. Currey is a pastor, podcaster, and entrepreneur. He is on staff at Life Church, where he and his wife JJ have served for the last 11 years. JJ is a licensed clinical social worker and a TBRI practitioner who works with foster and adoptive families to restore hope and help bring healing. Together, they have two biological children and they welcomed their son through domestic adoption three years ago. They serve as support group leaders with replanted ministries, and they're also empowered to connect parent trainers.

[00:02:05.415] - Melissa Corkum

Even if you're not married or co parenting, I actually still think there's a lot in this interview. They talk about their journey to adoption and even some things are learning as a family towards the end. So you might want to tune in anyway.

[00:02:22.995] - Lisa Qualls

Well, hello Currey and JJ, welcome to the Adoption Connection Podcast.

[00:02:28.005] - Currey Blandford

Yeah, excited to be here. Thanks for having us, Lisa.

[00:02:30.885] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, we're really happy to have you here too. I had the opportunity to meet both of you, I think, last fall, back in another lifetime ago when I came and spoke at the replanted conference in Chicago area. That was wild because I rented a car and I had to drive from Chicago, from the airport through the craziest construction to get to where you were. And I live in a small town in north Idaho. So it was a bit of a stretch, I would say.

[00:03:01.875] - Currey Blandford

Yeah, that's a wild drive. That is a-

[00:03:03.945] - JJ Blandford

Even if you're a resident here, it's a wild drive. I can't imagine showing up from out of state.

[00:03:09.675] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, it was it was a bit much. But once I was there, it was great it was a wonderful conference and I'm just so thankful I was able to be there. So we were talking about the way that you could serve our families, our listeners. And one of the topics that comes up again and again is marriage. And how do we hold our marriages together under the unique stresses of foster and adoptive and kinship parenting. So, but let's start at the beginning. Can you tell us just sort of your story of maybe a tiny bit of your marriage when you got married, how you met, and then how you came into the adoption world?

[00:03:51.585] - Currey Blandford
JJ is a better storyteller, so, I think she should tell.

[00:03:54.495] - JJ Blandford
Um, yeah, we actually got married when we were babies, we were 22 and I had always believed that I would have an adoptive family. And so that was early on in our relationship of I believe this is a call that God's given me, and so before this gets serious, like I want to make sure that that's OK with you. And so, we started our marriage with adoption kind of at the plan. We weren't actually planning on having biological kids, just that call to adoption was so strong. And so we'd been married about four years and decided to pursue international adoption. And we were looking at adopting from Ethiopia, and shortly after we began that process, found out that we were pregnant with our first biological child.

[00:04:54.855] - Lisa Qualls
Surprise!

[00:04:56.505] - JJ Blandford
So, we found out that we were pregnant in 2009.

[00:05:02.455] - Currey Blandford
Yes.

[00:05:03.415] - JJ Blandford
And put that journey on hold. The goodness of God in that is that we had a lot to learn about adoption.

[00:05:15.255] - Lisa Qualls
And life and parenting!

[00:05:18.165] - JJ Blandford
Yes, we had a lot to learn about a lot of things. But part of the reason we were pursuing international adoption is we weren't really ready to welcome a birth family into our family. I can only speak for myself, but probably had a bit of white savior complex of we are going to save some children from another place and by becoming a parent, not only did it give us additional years for education and to kind of grow in our understanding of what adoption is, it also was an opportunity to have our hearts refined and to grow in knowledge of the importance of openness, the beauty and the hardship of welcoming a birth family into our family. And so, we had our first bio child in 2010, decided we knew adoption would take a long time if we could have another close sibling. Let's try to do that. Had a second baby in 2012, and when our kids were three and five, we started a domestic adoption process.

[00:06:34.875] - Lisa Qualls
So you switched from international to domestic. Do you want to touch on that? Just a little bit.

[00:06:40.365] - Currey Blandford
I guess when we were adopting from Ethiopia, a lot of it honestly was to not have to deal with birth parents and openness. And as we got more educated, we realized how important that actually is. And we were swayed to to start a domestic adoption because of that.

[00:07:00.705] - Lisa Qualls
That's really unique. I'm glad you're sharing that, because I don't think people often want to admit that

they're hoping if they adopt internationally, it'll be a little bit like wiping the slate clean, which we all know is absolutely not true. I mean, and my, we adopted from Ethiopia in 2007, and a lot of those kids now are re-, they're finding their families, their commun-, I mean, Facebook, you know, communicating with their family. So it's really not what I think some people expected. But in this world, connections are there and we know the connection in the heart and the brain is there, too. So that's, I'm really glad you addressed that. So, OK, tell us a little more about that story.

[00:07:47.775] - JJ Blandford

Just to that point, I think there is so, there can be so much secrecy or shame with adoptive families. And so we have chosen to be open with our story just because we want to acknowledge, like if we're asking other people to do the work and to address their own stuff, that we want to be really honest and open, that we've had to do work. We didn't just arrive at this place. It's been a it's been a rough journey.

[00:08:16.215] - Currey Blandford

Yeah, we've learned a lot and in a lot of hard ways too, so.

[00:08:21.825] - Lisa Qualls

Right, and really, that whole thing was rooted in fear. Right?

[00:08:25.260] - Currey Blandford

Yeah, totally.

[00:08:27.075] - Lisa Qualls

I didn't know we're going to talk about this, but let's touch on that some more. What do you think parents are afraid of when they, when they try, when they choose an adoption path, hoping that they won't have to have contact with that birth family?

[00:08:40.185] - Currey Blandford

I think there's a lot of misunderstanding about what openness even is. I think there's a real lack of education on openness in general. And I think people are worried that the kid might, your child might want to be with their birth parents instead of you, right? Which is, yeah, which is something that you might have to deal with on down the road, but, you know, there's a lot of fear around, like, can they take the child back, you know, which is just not our legal system, especially domestic adoptions, you know, that's just not a thing. And I think there's fear of just awkward situations, honestly, and just having to, to navigate raising your child with somebody else. I think people don't want to deal with that, and yeah. So avoiding it, I think feels easier than actually stepping into the, to the hard things. And I guess I'll jump on my little soapbox here. You're only damaging your child with that mentality. They're going to, they need to know their story. Our three year old already, he just wants to know all the time, just like our our bio kids, like, "where did I come from?" "Who am I?" And processing some of these things. And so if you're afraid as an adoptive parent to process these things with the child, if you can't get over your own fear, it only exacerbates those issues down the road with your with your child.

[00:10:07.065] - Lisa Qualls

That's so good. We actually have an episode where I interviewed a mom who started with a closed adoption and because of her child's requests, ended up with a very open adoption. It's a beautiful story. And people listening, I will link to that in the show notes because it's a really beautiful story. But she and her husband had to overcome a lot of fear to go there for the sake of their daughter. But it's turned into a beautiful, beautiful situation, so.

[00:10:35.985] - JJ Blandford

Well, I think part of it, too, is we just like control and we like to think that we're in control. And so having a closed adoption allows us to feel that we're controlling things. You know, however, you got to adoption, there may have been some things out of your control. And so this feels like a piece that I can control this, and while I think we all know we don't actually have control of things, we like to pretend that we have control and that feels more comfortable. And so I think, you know, to choose

openness is to give to acknowledge that we don't have control and that we're, we're giving some of that away.

[00:11:17.085] - Lisa Qualls

So tell me a little more of the story of your son joining your family. And I know there are parts of that story that you do not share publicly, but share with us what you can and want to.

[00:11:27.145] - Currey Blandford

Yes, we've been in a domestic program for, I think, three years. It felt like about a million at the time, you know, and it was around December, well we found out he was he was ours in January. He had been born in December, there was about a seven week gap there between him being born and coming home, and, yeah.

[00:11:51.295] - JJ Blandford

I mean, it's one of those adoption stories we found out on a Wednesday, we told our kids on Saturday, he came home on Monday.

[00:12:01.165] - Lisa Qualls

Wow.

[00:12:04.075] - Currey Blandford

And we went in to visit him. We drove about forty five minutes each way, every single day to go visit him at the at the Cradle, our adoption agency in Chicago.

[00:12:12.835] - JJ Blandford

And so, yeah. Just this crazy, you know, sharing with family and friends, like surprised! And you know, and so there wasn't as adoption goes, they tell you, "Oh you're going to meet this birth mother, she'll be early," you know, you do all the things, and of course, that's not how it played out. Five days later, he was home. And so, yeah. It's it was wild, and as most adoptive families say, you know, it was the longest three years of our lives and we would do it again in a heartbeat to bring to bring him home.

[00:12:51.585] - Currey Blandford

Ironically, we don't have openness in our adoption, which is something that grieves us a lot. We pray for his mom a lot and think, we think about her a lot. And so it's hard to have gone through this journey of like realizing openness is important and then to not have that as an option at this point. At this point, yeah. But that's still we wish, yeah, we wish we could have them have some sort of a relationship, so.

[00:13:25.835] - Lisa Qualls

Well, and as my friend, Tanya, shares in that episode, the closed adoption was on the side of the birth mom. She chose it to be closed and their first connection was actually with the birth father, I think. I'm not, I can't quite remember, but, you know, and things can change. People grow. People change, right? And God is writing an amazing story, and so there's a purpose in all of it, I'm quite sure. And I have not seen your son in person, but he was in the really neat video that you guys did for Replanted last year.

[00:14:01.865] - Currey Blandford

Oh yeah.

[00:14:02.985] - Lisa Qualls

Adorable, yes.

[00:14:03.645] - JJ Blandford

Thank you.

[00:14:05.225] - Currey Blandford

He's cute. We also thought we would probably be a trans-racial family and that was not the case either. He could not look more just like our family, which I think has its own challenges and probably

will have challenges for him down the road, just not feeling like his story is maybe as understood as he, as he would like it to be. So, yeah, just there's always something to navigate, you know, so.

[00:14:30.065] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, it's all about expectations and having no control. Yeah, pretty much none. Yeah, I know that people listening are going to completely relate to that. JJ, you are a therapist and so you bring some unique things to this conversation. And what we are talking about today, in addition to all these amazing things about your story and your own journey of growth and development, we're going to be talking about marriage because you work with both in ministry and professionally, a whole lot of couples who are adoptive and foster parents and you are yourselves and you are all too familiar with some of the unique challenges that our families face. And, you know, marriage, how you say you take two sinners together and put them together for the rest of their lives, it's not going to be easy. And different personalities can make marriages more complex, but when you layer on adoption and fostering and sometimes infertility, so many things, I think marriages can really struggle. And so I want us to talk a little bit about what I'd like you to talk a little bit about the challenges that you see more specifically with adoptive and foster families in their marriages.

[00:15:49.505] - JJ Blandford

So what is interesting, I think, about our journey is we actually got connected to the Replanted community while we were waiting for our son to come home. We got to sit with other families who were having some conflict in marriage and family because of adoption and before we were ever there. And to sit with couples was really hard because so much of it was related to behavioral things in their children. We've also found a lot in the adoption community. Sometimes one person may be on board to foster and adopt and they have drug someone else, drug a partner along, and so that can create some conflict, and so. I mean, I think, you know, even if you're listening and you're thinking about this, to have a real honest conversation about, "are we actually on the same page? Are we actually ready to change the trajectory of our family and our life by bringing kiddo's from hard places into our home?" But then it's like, OK, we've if you're already there and you've made that choice, what's next? And so we actually had the opportunity to become empowered to connect parent trainers. We joke, but are pretty serious about, we want to help parents navigate kiddo's behavior so that that's one less stress in marriage because marriage is stressful, as you said, two people coming together. You add kiddo's to the mix and then you add kiddo's from hard places to the mix and it's just more layers. And so, within marriage, acknowledging, like the first step is acknowledging this is really challenging and it's OK that we're not all rainbows and sunshine at our house and that that's OK, we're not bad parents. We're not bad partners. We may just need some extra support or tools in our marriage and in our parenting to make things function better.

[00:18:05.295] - Currey Blandford

It's crazy, I mean, I just think, like all the I was just thinking about all the dudes out there, because I think with the foster and adoptive community, it's mostly women sort of like pushing things down the road, which I find which is hard for me because, you know, the guys are such an important part of this, too, and I think it saddens me. But it's amazing how many guys, like we talk about we're parent trainers, how many guys are like not on board with trauma informed parenting, and like, we have to have a lot of really confrontational conversations with people about being like, because if you're, you have kids from hard places, you're two sinners in a marriage already and you're not on the same page as far as parenting goes, like you do not stand a chance at making it, you know, that is a lot of of obstacles to having a happy relationship, not only with your spouse, but with your children as well, so.

[00:18:59.445] - Lisa Qualls

Right, and you may be able to keep your marriage together, but it may not really be the marriage you want. Right? Yeah, you're still married, but is it what you want and the way you want it to be? So before we move into some practical ideas for parents, what, are there any other challenges that you think parents face?

[00:19:20.395] - Currey Blandford

I mean, I think not dealing with your own stuff is part of the challenge, like, I think people rarely consider that even like going through infertility as a couple is very difficult. And I would say, my wife

being a therapist and all that, anybody whose journeyed through that, probably needs to do therapy to sort of process that trauma. I mean, that's that's a struggle for you. And I feel like, you know, when you have when you have your own stuff that is undealt with, when you have your kids who have trauma that's, you know, you're working through, and then you add a marriage and a family on top of all that, it just it stresses that that stuff that you haven't dealt with, like even harder than it, like than a, you know, a family that doesn't have kids from hard places in it. And so I think that's a major challenge that people don't necessarily address, like in parenting and in marriage, if you haven't dealt with your stuff, if you haven't processed your own traumas, and we all have stuff, you know, then then it makes it a lot harder and it just yeah, those stressors just keep piling up.

[00:20:30.445] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, we actually included a chapter in the Connected Parent about that, about understanding yourself because we bring ourselves into the parenting relationship just like we do into our marriages. And I think we can acknowledge that more clearly in marriage, like, yes, we come from different backgrounds, we're different people and there's going to be stuff we have to work out, you know, and we're willing to accept that. But I think when we come to adoptive and foster parenting, it's really sometimes too painful to feel like I'm part of the problem sometimes or I'm, not even part of the problem, but that I'm bringing some of my own hurts from my own life into this parenting relationship. And so I think we have to be very compassionate toward ourselves and toward the other parents that we serve that it's so, you're not unique in bringing some hard stuff into your parenting, we all do it.

[00:21:25.015] - Currey Blandford

Right, exactly.

[00:21:25.885] - Lisa Qualls

But it's really good to process and especially if anybody's in that waiting period. This is the time, I think, having a good therapist, a trauma informed therapist on board is so important for parents. And if you can do some of that before all the better, but most of us are already in the thick of it. So you got to do it in the mist of it.

[00:21:46.975] - JJ Blandford

Yes. And I think it's such an important point as parents to have a trauma informed therapist. We seek that out for our kiddos, but if your kiddo is working with a trauma informed therapist and your therapist isn't supporting that work, it is not going to be helpful. And so and it's not that they're a bad therapist or any of those things, but you, you need your therapist and your child's therapist to be speaking the same language so that you're working towards the same healing.

[00:22:21.625] - Melissa Corkum

Hey friends, we want to pause the interview to make sure you know about our free compassion challenge for the discouraged adoptive parent. This is an on demand video training so you can rebuild your compassion for your child and enjoy parenting again.

[00:22:34.405] - Lisa Qualls

In this free video training, we'll introduce you to Block Trust and Blocked Care. We'll help you understand why your child pushes you away, why you're not a bad parent because you're losing patience, and shed the feelings of shame and guilt. There is hope. You can regain compassion for yourself and your child. To grab this free training head to theadoptionconnection.com/compassion. Now, let's hop back into our interview.

[00:23:04.275] - JJ Blandford

You need your therapist and your child's therapist to be speaking the same language so that you're working towards the same healing. And so I think as adults, we don't always point adults to trauma informed therapists, and I think that's so, so important.

[00:23:20.625] - Lisa Qualls

I do, too. And on the theme of therapists, how good are parents at finding therapists for themselves, do you think? Horrible. Horrible. Do you talk about that, JJ?

[00:23:32.205] - JJ Blandford

Yes, I do. I'd love to talk about that. I, what I think is so interesting is for kiddos, you know, parents will start to see early signs, anxiety, depression, behavioral, and they want to be as proactive as they can, oftentimes. How can we curb this as quickly as possible? Yet for ourselves, we wait until we are burned up crispy and then we're trying to find someone, we may not have as much emotional energy to do that. I always tell people it's hard to find a therapist that you connect to.

[00:24:12.865] - Currey Blandford

Right.

[00:24:13.515] - JJ Blandford

And so if you're able to do that before your burned out crispy, it will be much more helpful and, you know, and there's all these barriers, I'm, as a therapist, I'm well aware. Your insurance dictates things, where you live dictates things, child care dictates things, and so there are so many obstacles to even get yourself to therapy, to find a therapist that you connect with. If you are listening and thinking like, "I'm noticing I'm more anxious during this global pandemic and my children are home and we're all working from home and all the things," like, today would be a great day to call. And if, if you're feeling overwhelmed, like, how do I find a good therapist, ask your friends. You know, you might be surprised how many of your friends might see a therapist or ask your doctor, what therapist do you recommend? Get a recommendation from someone you trust and start their, read their bio and if it clicks, give them a call. See if you could do an assessment, those sorts of things.

[00:25:26.215] - Lisa Qualls

I was going to say, so many therapists are now available online.

[00:25:29.225] - Blandfords

Yes.

[00:25:30.045] - Lisa Qualls

Mine included. And honestly, I would love to see her in person, but now I'm kind of thinking, well, maybe we'll do some telehealth and then occasionally I'll make the drive to see her in person. But now that we've all got used to doing things through telehealth and online, it really opens up even more possibilities, I think.

[00:25:54.375] - Currey Blandford

I'll just add to that, I mean, even if it's not a therapist per say, like I see a spiritual director and I found that immensely helpful. And so, you know, it doesn't it doesn't necessarily have to be one avenue per say. So that's a that's another place to go.

[00:26:11.685] - Lisa Qualls

Right, yeah. I think parents can look for therapists, they can look for a spiritual director. I think an older, wiser, adoptive parent or even a couple who's been married a long time, if we're talking about marriage. So there are options. I still think a therapist is an awesome idea, but we can use more than that because the therapist is available to us maybe an hour a week. And if we have a community that's available to us every day, that's really helpful and supportive. OK, so parents can seek help from sort of that level of professionals or caregivers. What can parents do on their own? What creative things can parents do to help strengthen, sustain, heal their marriages?

[00:27:03.015] - Currey Blandford

That's, it's a good question, that's a tough one.

[00:27:05.835] - JJ Blandford

I mean, I think, as we were talking before we started recording, you have to prioritize your marriage. And that means, you know, I think so often we hear, "we don't have time for a date night" or "it's hard to get away." And to that, I always say, "it is, but if your kid had an appointment, you would make that happen. You would make that work." And, and so sometimes it's the hard work of realizing, we've

maybe said we're prioritizing, but we're not actually prioritizing. And so, like for us, before pandemic, we religiously had a monthly date night and it was on the calendar. That was a great way to connect. That for us has gone away, so we've had to be a bit more creative. I think part of it is, is there someone that is in your bubble currently that you feel comfortable taking care of your kids? We have been fortunate enough. We have a dear friend who was a foster care caseworker for many years. She is trauma informed so she can watch our kids. We realize that is not everybody's reality. So, you know, for us, it's been maybe our kids can watch a movie and they are old enough to do that in our home while we sit in the backyard and talk to each other in quiet. I, I think part of it is you have to get away from your children at some point every, and if you can every week, not leave your house, but be in your backyard or, you know, have, we have coffee almost every morning at our dining table, and our kids can play. It starts my day differently to have 15 minutes with Currey before the chaos of the day unfolds. And I feel connected to him. That's where we talk about what is, what does today hold? What does today look like for us? When are you going to work? When, you know? And so I think there's like, yes, you check in weekly, but there's also these moments for us every morning of like, where are we at today? Where are we headed today? Are we on the same page? Oh, wait, did I tell you that I'm actually going to work two hours earlier? Oops. Sorry. You know, but I think part of it is especially now, while we are under additional stress, you have, there has to be communication. Always, always, always. And I think that's OK. I think it's OK to check in even several times a day. How are you doing? You know, for us, we've decided to homeschool this year, which is a new journey for us and has created some new challenges. And and so yesterday, before I headed to work Correy just said, "why don't you take some time after work today and just don't don't come home. I think you need I think you need an hour or two by yourself." I think to have healthy marriage, we have to be able to look at each other and say, "I see you having a hard time and I'm going to give you some space." I'm an introvert. This is a lot of time with people. So sometimes I can't set that boundary for myself of I, I feel I'm too important. And so I need Currey to kind of gently come in and say, "I think you're you're moving to burn out. I can see that in you and I would like you to care for yourself." And I think being partners that can give that to one another are getting to a place that we can do that is really important for marriage. Again, especially in a pandemic, when our resources are less, our ability to leave home is less. I think this is a time that could very easily add strain and stress to marriage. And so what are the creative things that you and your partner can be doing to care for one another in a really nurturing way?

[00:31:15.015] - Lisa Qualls

And that's so good. I actually just read an article from the Gottman Institute, which I'll link in the show notes of our, of this episode. And they were talking about this very thing, like having basically these touch points of communication. And they talked about, you know, five minutes in the morning, 20 minutes in the evening, you know, just different things. But I think Russ and I used to be really good at that. Years ago, we used to run together in the morning. And there's a time when because we have so many kids, we had older kids. You know, there was a time when we would go walking in the morning together. So we had a lot of time for communication. But as the strain of this incredible parenting just increased and increased and increased, that time just started to disappear. And Russ just started going to work earlier because once the kids were up, I needed so much help. So he would go early. And I'm a morning person. He's more an evening person. So the evenings we were out of sync. And honestly, we're, we've been married thirty six years you guys, and we're trying to figure out how to come back to some of that. You know, how do we put more intentional points of connection in our days, in our weeks? Because that's something that we have not done well in the last, quite a few years, so but we know it's so important, I think even that I think in all of this, I mean, I would say the same thing for trauma, I would say the same thing for parenting, but especially trauma informed parenting. But you just have to be willing to pivot. And if something is not working, you just have to be like, we're going to figure this out, we're going to try something. And if it doesn't work, we're going to try something else. Right, like, you just have to be willing to always be making things better and working towards that that harmony.

[00:33:03.675] - Lisa Qualls

And I do think creativity is important. We did find some great time to connect when on occasion we didn't set it up regularly, but when the kids were actually in school back in the olden days, actually the way olden days were all home schooling for me because I did that for twenty three years. But then in the last five years, the kids were in school. And so sometimes Russ would come home and have lunch

with me and we just get some time all to ourselves. And that was really lovely, but there is no time anymore. So we we've gone and taken some walks. We've literally, when it was really bad weather, we just went and parked our car at a park and just sat and talked, you know, there's ways to get away together. But if you don't have anybody old enough at home to watch the kids, or if your children's needs are and behaviors are so challenging that you can't leave a teenager in charge, then you need to figure out how to do it at home.

[00:33:59.775] - JJ Blandford

Yeah, and even simple, like even simpler things of like, you know, I know so often by the time kids are in bed, people are exhausted and,

[00:34:09.775] - Lisa Qualls

That's me, that's totally me.

[00:34:10.305] - JJ Blandford

Yeah. So for several years, I mean, when Britton first came home, we, those first few months, we didn't feel comfortable leaving him and we still knew we needed to stay connected. And so for us, it was like Sunday nights were less chaotic, so we'd put the kids to bed a little bit earlier and we'd do like a charcuterie board and a movie. It wasn't a glorious night out dressed up fancy, but we knew Sunday nights, you know, and sometimes it was living for Sunday night. Like, if we can just get there and watch this movie and have our special dinner, that's that's what we needed. And so I, I do think it is that idea of like it takes creativity currently because of the pandemic, but it's always creative. And I think that's what makes it challenging. Your kids get to different stages, their activities or therapies or whatever may take up more of your time, and so you do. We're all about when the kids we're in school, lunch together.

[00:35:16.995] - Currey Blandford

For sure.

[00:35:17.865] - JJ Blandford

It was this glorious non, and we have non-traditional schedules so we could make that work. And so it is that like, OK, things are different now. How are we making things work currently?

[00:35:28.695] - Currey Blandford

I think, I think we should talk about Sabbath. I think that's something that we-

[00:35:31.725] - JJ Blandford

I was thinking that too!

[00:35:32.865] - Lisa Qualls

Alright, let's talk about that.

[00:35:34.995] - Currey Blandford

Yeah. That's one of our, that's one of those places, you know, that's our soapbox right there.

[00:35:40.125] - JJ Blandford

Clearly we have several we keep mentioning.

[00:35:42.705] - Lisa Qualls

That's OK, let's let's hear it. I want to hear about Sabbath.

[00:35:46.185] - Currey Blandford

So for about 18 months now, we've been practicing 24 hour Sabbath as a family. And so it's just a day that we turn off our cell phones and like, people could get in contact with us if they really needed to, but it's very difficult, you know, no email, no anything like that. We do a special sugar cereal for breakfast at the kids, you know, and then we go to our our favorite restaurant for lunch every Saturday and have lunch as a family. But that whole like the whole day just slows way down. You know, it is it is

peaceful. We take time to delight in each other and delight in the Lord and the good things that he's given us. And it just.

[00:36:31.985] - JJ Blandford

It's a reset for our family every week because it's twenty four hours, no, no work. We are totally present with our children. I kind of back to that piece of what we're bringing to this relationship is I think every person listening has been guilty at some point of being distracted by their phone when they're parenting.

[00:36:57.065] - Currey Blandford

No, I've never done that.

[00:37:02.695] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, I'm sure that's not a problem. And also in our communication with our spouses, like how much I say to Russ, "oh, I'm sorry. I need to check this." Gosh, OK. I feel a little convicted here. Carry on, carry on.

[00:37:12.665] - JJ Blandford

And so it is twenty four hours of presents. And so that is often when we get our time together, like our kids are actually, it's the craziest thing. On Sabbath, our kids can play together in a way that they can't during the week. I don't know if it's because they feel that we're more present. I don't know what it is, but they can occupy themselves for hours and it gives us the ability to connect. And it is a discipline that we've worked really, really hard as a family to establish this rhythm. And we preach it because we've seen how it helps our families. It gives us not only that time to connect as a couple, but it's a beautiful time to connect with our children. We we have, you know, several slow meals together that we just linger at the table because there's no, there's not another thing to get to.

[00:38:07.085] - Lisa Qualls

So tell me practically, when does your Sabbath begin and when does it end?

[00:38:11.255] - Currey Blandford

We start Friday nights around five o'clock. It's usually whenever JJ gets home from work. We start at five o'clock and then it goes till five o'clock on Saturday.

[00:38:20.105] - JJ Blandford

On Saturday. And so it's a very, like we do a very simple dinner so that mom isn't stressed we-

[00:38:26.705] - Currey Blandford

or dad.

[00:38:27.125] - JJ Blandford

Or dad.

[00:38:27.965] - Currey Blandford

I cook.

[00:38:27.965] - Currey Blandford

Dad cooks a lot too.

[00:38:30.905] - Lisa Qualls

The parents aren't stressed.

[00:38:33.335] - JJ Blandford

Yeah. And then we we moved to a treat cereal in the morning. So again, no one's cooking Saturday morning. And our kids think like Fruity Pebbles are God's gift to the world. And, you know, and it's in a great way to talk about good gifts and delighting in God. And then this like long lingering lunch that we don't cook. And we have a song that we sing together. We light candles, we read liturgy. It's

beautiful.

[00:39:02.345] - Currey Blandford

It sounds hokey. I think sometimes you're like, oh, it's so. But it really like I feel like we are just like limping into Sabbath every single week. And it's like the thing that that we're living for as a family. We also in our, when we talk TBRI stuff, we talk about doing a day of yesses with your kids just to get and basically Sabbath is a day of yesses every single week.

[00:39:24.785] - Lisa Qualls

That's a beautiful connection. I love that.

[00:39:27.815] - JJ Blandford

And our kids know.

[00:39:29.195] - Currey Blandford

They do.

[00:39:29.645] - JJ Blandford

They'll be like, can I get two treats after lunch? Because it is Sabbath and we're delighting in the Lord. And so just this ability to say like, yes, yes, we are delighting with you because God delights with us. And so it is this beautiful connection of it's a great place for us to connect in marriage and in parenting.

[00:39:51.245] - Currey Blandford

And it just calms down everything it feels.

[00:39:53.405] - Lisa Qualls

And it kind of resets the nervous system, right?

[00:39:57.605] - Blandfords

Yeah.

[00:39:57.605] - Lisa Qualls

For everybody. OK, so two questions. How did you choose Saturday versus Sunday is your Sabbath? My background with Sabbath was a little bit more that our whole church was pretty Sabbath oriented, but we all did it on Sunday. So I'm curious how you chose Saturday.

[00:40:11.885] - Currey Blandford

Well, I'm a pastor, so I can't possibly Sabbath on Sundays.

[00:40:15.695] - Lisa Qualls

Right, so Sunday is a work day for you.

[00:40:20.207] - Blandfords

Right, yeah.

[00:40:20.225] - Currey Blandford

And it works. It works pretty perfectly for us. Honestly, I do wish we could worship with our community on Sabbath. That is like the one downfall, but yeah, it's it's works well for us.

[00:40:31.585] - Lisa Qualls

That's great. OK, and I'm sure you have some resources on Sabbath that we can add to the show notes. I'm making a big list of all the things we're going to add. But do you want to mention, we are getting off track, but how did you, very briefly, get tuned into the importance of Sabbath as a, as a place of connecting with the Lord, with each other, with your children? How did that happen? This could be a whole episode, but we'll condense it way down.

[00:40:57.035] - Currey Blandford

We do have an episode on that for the, on my on my podcast.

[00:41:01.055] - Lisa Qualls

Another, another link, OK.

[00:41:04.265] - Currey Blandford

Exactly.

[00:41:04.745] - Lisa Qualls

Yes. And Currey has a podcast, yes, we'll mention that, too.

[00:41:08.435] - Currey Blandford

So basically our good friends, Aaron and Jody, who are sort of our besties, sent us a podcast by John Mark Comer, who's up in your neck of the woods, and was like, we're hanging out tonight. You need to listen to this podcast so we could talk about it. And we listened. I mean, just our minds were sort of blown. You know, it was, like it answered a lot of questions that we had had for a long time, just about why are things, I don't know, feels like sometimes not everything's working. Like, why is, why do I feel off here and just kind of brought things into perspective, I think, in a new way for us. Yeah.

[00:41:42.575] - JJ Blandford

And I think part of it, God's timing is so timely. And I think we were really at a place of wrestling with do we look different than the world? We follow Jesus and we proclaim him. But if anyone wants to, like, observe our family activity week in and week out, would they look at our family and think like, oh, they're different, they're doing things different. And, you know, yes, you hope in the way you speak to your children and to your spouse that that would be present. But we felt a lot of conviction about how we were living life. And so it really kind of gave us pause and time to study, I think making this choice with another family to say we're holding each other accountable. This is a new rhythm that we're setting. Made it much easier if anyone would want to, want to reach out to talk more about it, we we are passionate about Sabbath, clearly, but but I think it yeah, it helps us find rest in a world that is chaotic.

[00:42:51.485] - Currey Blandford

And I think we had, we had attempted Sabbath in the past when we were younger, but it was always sort of like, oh just watch football all day or like binge Netflix, you know, just like not do like normal work. But it's so much more, it really is. It's delighting in the Lord and his good gifts, and I feel like there's no there's no place for that in our everyday lives, we are constantly just hustle and bustle and, you know, it's just work, work, work, work, work. It's emails. It's we're just so inundated. And if you're not giving yourself space for that, then it's not happening, I would say. And so we've just, you know, just I mean, it's almost like God created the world to function like that, you know, where you like, you know, work six days and rest one. You know, it's it's crazy.

[00:43:35.675] - Lisa Qualls

And I think we're afraid of it. We're afraid to stop. We're afraid we'll get too far behind. We won't be able to compete depending on our career. We won't we won't be able to hold it all together. And so many adoptive and foster parents, that's just what we're trying to do every day, is just hold it together to keep our families from just falling apart. But I think what I'm hearing is that we have to be intentional, really intentional about communication with our spouse, about connection, about rest. I think that's really, you're inspiring me, actually, to revisit Sabbath because I think, you know, again, when life gets really hard, we had a rhythm. And then with life changes and probably more recently, you know, we've always had a Sunday dinner with our kids, all of our big kids. And now literally all but one of our big kids has moved away, leaving us more with the ones that were parenting in the day in and day out, which is harder. And we don't have these big kids just gathering with us for a big family dinner. So but I have been thinking about this. How do we with the life we have right now with the kids we're parenting right now, how do we re-establish that? So you've inspired me to think about it.

[00:45:00.215] - JJ Blandford

To us, one of the funniest things kind of that idea, it's like that self-importance. Sometimes there is nothing like turning my phone back on on Saturday and realizing I literally missed zero things.

[00:45:12.725] - Currey Blandford

Like, nobody cared that I was gone for 24 hours.

[00:45:15.245] - JJ Blandford

But I think we like to think that we have this importance or like, what if we miss the thing on social media? And it's like every week when I plug back into the world, I'm like, nobody called, nobody texted, like the world kept moving. And I think having that pattern for 18 months makes it easier to be like, oh, I can do this. Like, I can unplug for twenty four hours and the world doesn't fall apart. But I've needed this repetition that that has happened again and again that I can say, OK, it's safe for me to step back and this is all actually still here to return to when I come back to it.

[00:45:56.045] - Lisa Qualls

And as a couple, we can unplug from our kids for an hour or two hours and they're going to be OK. One of the things, one of our little tricks over the years that we did a lot of at home dates because, you know, even before we adopted, we had seven kids. So there wasn't a whole lot of room and there was no money. Right. It felt like there was no time and no money to go out. But so we would put the kids either in front of a movie or to bed early and have a meal together. But one of the tricks we learned, when we had kids who were old enough to sort of manage is we, I would make dinner, we'd all have dinner. And we say, "OK. Kids, you are in charge of dinner clean up." And now this was post adoption. We did not have just all easy, breezy, well attached kids, you know, but still we'd say, "you are in charge of dinner clean up" and we'd name some kids for different spots and we'd say, "mom and dad are going to go upstairs and you guys can manage for thirty minutes." Well, you know, there's a lot you can accomplish in thirty minutes if you know the kids aren't going to knock on your door and you know, the points of connection, you just have to find them, you know, and it may be that your kids can clean up dinner for thirty minutes or it may be that they can be in another room and mom and dad can have coffee alone for thirty minutes. You know, it doesn't take, it doesn't mean always that we're going to go on a vacation together and leave the kids. A lot of our kids can't be left, unless we're totally desperate and we really need to. But we can find other pockets of time for communicating and just making sure our marriages are holding together. Because I know that, Russ and I know couples whose marriages have not survived the stress of life of and parenting parenting at the level that we all are doing. So I think it's and our kids have so many losses. Now, for those of you listening who've already been through a divorce, do not hear this as a criticism, but our kids have had so many losses. We want to try our best not to add to that and sometimes it's not possible. We all know that there are some marriages that for really legitimate reasons could not make it, but for the rest of us who are, have the normal stresses and strains of marriage and life, we want to do our very best to hold together, to not add layer more trauma on ourselves. Yeah, I do remember there's one book, I can't remember the name right now. But in the preface he says something like, you know, parents of kids who've had a lot of trauma, they don't divorce because nobody wants to be left with the kids all on their own. Like we actually need each other.

[00:48:44.775] - Currey Blandford

Yeah, you have to.

[00:48:44.775] - Lisa Qualls

We stick together as much as we possibly can. Do you have any final thoughts or words of encouragement for couples to persevere?

[00:48:58.215] - Currey Blandford

I guess even as you were talking, I was thinking that I think a lot of times we look towards those, like you said, vacations or those date nights as like places of connection. I feel like this whole episode has been a lot of "no, do it like now." You know what I mean, like it's the smaller points of connection throughout the week that make those date nights what they are. So don't just like, look out like, like that connection somewhere out there. Connection is here right now and with each other.

[00:49:24.555] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah. That's so true and so important. JJ, how about you?

[00:49:29.565] - JJ Blandford

I was just thinking like it's worth the hard work. Like for those of us who choose to use TBRI principles in our families, like when I start out with families, I talk about like this is going to be really hard. It's going to possibly be hard for a while. And you'll, but but you'll, if you do these things, you will start to see glimmers and those glimmers will help push you forward. And I feel like that's the same in marriage, like doing the hard work and marriage of even sending the text, like, how's your day to day? What's been good? You know, whatever whatever that connecting point is like, I've never met with a friend or a client who said, like, gosh, I, I, you know, care too much about my marriage. I worked too hard and it wasn't worth it. And I think sometimes you have to be willing to do the work. And and just the way that we're pouring into parenting, we have to put that same energy and time into into marriage.

[00:50:33.175] - Lisa Qualls

That's so true. I think one of the hardest questions and most important questions for me to ask Russ and even when I do it, I'm like, what's he going to say? How can I make your day better? What can I do to make your day better today? That's a hard question, but I think it's a very, it builds a bridge even in a time when a marriage is struggling. You know, what can I do to make today better for you is if we can be willing to ask that question, that alone will, I think, produce some healing and give us hope, because we are in this together and we want to be we don't want to do this alone, right?

[00:51:12.285] - Blandfords

Right.

[00:51:12.855] - Lisa Qualls

We want to do it together. We want to keep our marriages together. And, you know, marriages have hard seasons, but that is not it won't always be hard. It won't, it doesn't have to always be hard.

[00:51:24.225] - Currey Blandford

Right.

[00:51:24.615]

We just have to persevere and having been married thirty six years, I promise there have been some times that have been too smooth, like and I think we have such an easy marriage and there have been other times when we've been holding on by just a little thread of holding on by the commitment of our vows and our commitment to the Lord and saying we are going to fight this fight for our marriage, for our sake and for the sake of our family, too.

[00:51:51.375] - Currey Blandford

Yeah, totally. It's good.

[00:51:54.135] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah. Good stuff. Thank you. Thanks for being here with me and talking marriage. And for those of you listening, we will load up the show notes with lots useful links. When we finish this recording, we will make sure we haven't forgotten anything and I'll be sure to include those. So thank you so much. Do you want to give just a quick plug for Replanted Ministry? This may come out after the Replanted conference. I can't remember right now, but go ahead and just do a little plug for that.

[00:52:21.735] - Currey Blandford

We work closely with Replanted Ministry, which is a, it's a ministry to provide support groups for foster and adoptive families. And so those happen across the country. And so that's I mean, those are great places. If there's one in your area to just like get involved, you need that support. There's also a Replanted conference. It's digital this year in October, but it's happening again next year. We're already working on the 2021 conference and it's going to be epic because we have a lot of making up to do from, from the digital version. So, yeah, we'd love for everybody to check that out.

[00:52:54.165] - Lisa Qualls

For those of us who were planning to speak at it this year, we're all going to be there for you next year. Yes, we will include a link to Replanted as well. All right. Thank you so much for being with me.

[00:53:05.625] - Currey Blandford

Thanks, Lisa, this was awesome.

[00:53:11.575] - Melissa Corkum

That was a really great conversation. I love hearing how other families, how other couples are kind of navigating this whole journey. I think I've mentioned it on the podcast before. It's been a long work in progress. But Patrick and I were just away a couple weeks ago. We are working on a marriage book for adoptive and foster parents. And so I am excited to hear another couple just talking about how important it is to be intentional about our marriage relationship, because it's really the one that has to withstand time across all of our parenting relationships.

[00:53:49.785] - Lisa Qualls

Absolutely. In fact, Russ and I just got back last night from getting away for a weekend, which was really so good for us. We kept saying, "wow, that's nice. It feels so good to be away." And we were only an hour from home at a cabin where we ended up having no electricity. So it was a very interesting trip, but so, so worth it. I hope that you enjoyed this episode. If you would like to connect with Currey and JJ, if you want a link to Currey's podcast, you can find all of that in the show notes at theadoptionconnection.com/119. Before you go, we'd love to connect with you on social media. You can find us on Facebook or Instagram as @theadoptionconnection.

[00:54:32.535] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:54:42.705] - Lisa Qualls

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

[00:54:49.905] - Melissa Corkum

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