

Season Two Trailer_ Reforming Orphan Care

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SPEAKERS

Lauren Pinkston



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Welcome to the show where we talk about topics in modern Christianity that are so challenging. They require us to be grounded in something much bigger than ourselves. If you're here you have likely found yourself hungry for something deeper. You want to find answers for how to hold on to your faith after seeing religion be twisted in a way that has somehow become bad news instead of good. I'm here for all of that too. I'm here for the spiritual wrestle and I'm here to learn more ways that people are finding hope. In a God that interrupts our norms and expectations. I have never curated content that has made me more anxious to release into the world than this season you are about to hear. The issues surrounding orphaned and vulnerable children are complex and incredibly multifaceted. They are also written with decades, even centuries of saviorism, opportunism, colonialism, and a whole host of other isms we could define. I want to give you a fair warning about language and stories that you will hear in these episodes. And I want to be wise with the ways we have hard conversations. I want to be honest and clear about the ways in which the Church of the global north should be thinking about God's ancient mandate to care for children. In full transparency, loving vulnerable children once seemed to me like a simple enough command to follow. My first career as an elementary school teacher allowed me to rub up against some previously held ideas around children and families. And I started to question the gaps in my understanding when I was around 24 years old. As a fourth grade teacher in South Carolina, I remember one student who would behaved erratically in the classroom until, as a last resort apart from calling school administration, I would threaten to call her mother. Fear would come across her eyes and her back would straighten immediately at the mention of her mother's name. I assumed there was likely physical abuse going on in the home but there was no evidence for me to report. I did know, though, that their emotional bond was strong. On an overnight field trip, and I think back on that now and can't believe we were allowed to do that in 2010, a parent grew afraid when this student snapped at her for asking her to come down from the rafters of a bunk room on a WW11 aircraft carrier. Yes, we slept on a warship with 100 4th graders and a handful of parents and I do have stories to tell. But gosh, I love this kid. She gave a sideways apology to this other parent and then came to me begging to call her mother. We had only been away from home for 10 hours and this girl was longing to have her mom steady her heart and her mind. Her mom, who didn't hold a steady job, couldn't provide balanced nutrition and offered questionably abusive correction,

was who she needed. And I will never forget that night or forget listening to their conversation after I handed over my phone. It was a blatant proof to me that, number one: familial ties are often stronger than any kind of outside support network, and number two: the way that I perceive the most wholesome environment for a child shouldn't be determined by me or my worldview. I share all of this to say that when those of us who are resourced and educated in a vacuum of academia make the rules about child protection, policies and practices get wonky really quickly. There are some lovely people who love Jesus. Unfortunately, pure hearts don't always lead to pure outcomes. This podcast is an invitation for those of us who are courageous enough to explore our blind spots as we enter into the challenges of supporting families and keeping children safe. Several years ago, my husband and I were speaking at a Missions Day at a Christian school in Alabama. As we were being introduced to a couple there, I showed a family photo, as a proud mother does. The wife immediately caught her breath and said, "Oh, I always wanted one." And this is the part where I have to give a trigger warning, especially to my friends of color. I'm just going to pause here to allow anyone to find the right buttons on your screen or stop or fast forward. I was honestly unsure of what this woman meant but I had a hunch and I felt compelled to make her say it out loud. "What do you mean by that?" I asked her. To which she replied, "A black child. I always wanted one. I really connected with this little girl on our mission trip last year and I just wanted to bring her home with me in my suitcase. Unfortunately, she had a mom and a dad and her dad was the preacher there." She said it. She said that quiet part out loud. There is a pervasive self righteousness that flows through our churches when we see ourselves as better, smarter, and more equipped to parent the world's children than their actual parents. It is not only immoral, but it is perpetuating a crisis of institutionalizing the children in the global south and separating them from their loving families. You will hear many of my guests share that an estimated 80% of children in care around the world are not orphans. They have been wrapped up in an impossible system of foreign aid, mostly from North American churches, that has driven the construction and the management of thousands of orphanages worldwide. In this season, we are tackling some of the hardest questions around family preservation and child protection. We will also look at how families are grown not just via adoption, but also foster care and fertility treatments and surrogacy. These are deeply intimate stories to navigate. We'll talk about transracial and transnational families, we'll talk about the cracks in our mental health system, and the tragic approaches we have taken to policing those with childhood trauma. And we'll talk about theology. Where does empirical academic evidence line up with biblical mandates to welcome us into the heart of God? This season is so personal to me. My own journey of learning and questioning is wrapped up in the theme of every episode. I find it important to listen to the leaders from both within the Christian community and to experts who may not share our faith. As an academic, as a Christian, and as a mother, I can humbly share that stepping into the commitment of adoption has revealed some of the darkest parts of my heart I would have never access without following an invitation to love children and adults from hard places. I hope the episodes you choose to listen to will push you, challenge you, and evolve you I hope that the North American church will wrestle with its previously held thoughts around the care of orphaned and vulnerable children. And I hope that we will finally be courageous enough to perfect our love for others in a way that is led by their voices instead of ours. As always, these conversations will be impossible to have well, unless we are upwardly dependent. I look forward to meeting you here.