

Jamie Walley: Pain is Never a Reason not to Love

Craig: We're going to have a fun conversation today. Some of the listeners know that my wife, Rachel and I, back in 2011, started an organization called 200 Million Flowers. And as a lawyer, I thought that it would simply be adding a philanthropic wing endeavor to my everyday law practice. And we had the idea that we were going to start an adoption agency, and we did. We became a licensed adoption agency. Some of our listeners have heard me talk about the name 200 Million Flowers. It comes from a combination of the estimated number of orphans in the world, depending on the statistics that you look at, there's anywhere from 140 to 210 million orphans in the world. And there's a quote from Mother Teresa about the value of life that says, "How can there be too many children? That's like saying there are too many flowers." And so, we came up with a name 200 Million Flowers, and we worked for nine years doing various things around Christian orphan care here in Mississippi. And as we got into the work, we learned that really there is a huge global orphan problem, but here at home, in Mississippi, what that looks like here is foster care. That is really the American orphan - those kids that are caught up in the foster care system. And today I've got my friend and former coworker in 200 Million Flowers, Jamie Walley. Jamie is a former foster care parent and a present adoptive dad and he is a pastor. And he's the pastor of the First Baptist Church here in the local Jackson area in Florence, Mississippi, and more importantly, he is my friend. So, Jamie, thanks for spending time with us today.

Jamie: Hey, no way, man. Thanks for having me. Soon as you called, I thought, this is a no brainer.

Craig: Yeah, man and you responded to my text in like 30 seconds and I was so grateful for that. You're always so eager to come and talk about what we as Mississippians, what the church can do. And you and your wife, Stephanie. Talk about how you guys got involved in foster care.

Jamie: Yeah, probably like a lot of your listeners we just didn't have any idea what was going on with adoption and foster care. And so, you know, back in probably 2012, there were some people in our former church that God had kind of put on their heart to get involved with adoption and foster care, two separate couples. And they kind of came together and approached our staff and said, "Hey, we think our church needs to be involved in adoption and foster care". And my first thought was great yeah, we need to get people involved in adoption and foster care and so we started this journey of trying to help equip our church to do just that. And then kind of along the way, as we were equipping people to be foster parents and adoptive parents, Stephanie, kind of got this pull that we should get involved. And so somewhere along the lines in probably 2013, she started saying, "well, you know, we should be a part of this, Jamie, you know, we need to be foster parents." And I was like, no, we're doing what God has called us to do, which is, raising awareness and helping to equip other families because, we have three kids and full-time job and just was not looking to be a foster parent, but it was on Stephanie's heart. And you know, she kind of... like a lot of men, I think a lot of men who find themselves in this situation, I was kind of drug along. You know, right until God kind of opened my eyes.

Craig: What I've heard you say is that you are working in ministry and there were some couples in your church that encouraged the leadership to help equip the church family to come around adoptive parents and foster parents. In the process, your wife was inspired and called and your call came a little after.

Jamie: Yes. And that's true. But when you see that, a lot of times, you know, it's the wife that, gets this pull from the Lord, and we need to be a part of this. And then a lot of times the husbands are a lot like I was, we're comfortable - we've got the three kids, we've got a good schedule, things are good. And when you start talking about bringing another child in your home, especially out of foster care you just know it brings about some different variables that maybe you're not ready for. And that will, for lack of a better word, be disruptive to your lifestyle,

Craig: Right, to the comfort that you've created.

Jamie: Sure.

Craig: So talk about that. So you guys ultimately decided to, or maybe Stephanie decided for you, that you guys were going to be foster parents and you went through the training process. And I know that obviously with 200 Million Flowers, one of the main programs that we were involved in was a program to train families in an expedited fashion to become foster parents. But that program didn't exist when you went through.

Jamie: That's right, that's right. So when we said yes, we started asking the questions to, what does this look like? And so we began to realize we've got to apply and then you've got to take these classes. And those classes were spread out over the course of several months. And we were having to drive to Forest, Mississippi for these classes because they weren't scheduled locally for us during this window. And so we had to drive for it. And if you really wanted to pursue foster care, it just wasn't easy. There's this great need. There's I think even still 5,000 kids in the state of Mississippi, over 5,000 kids who were in foster care! So there's this great need, but it just wasn't very easy to do. And so you really had to want to be a foster parent in order to get there.

Craig: Right, you had to be diligent

Jamie: That's right.

Craig: Because it wasn't easy, and it still is not easy, certainly and what we're talking about is parenting classes and some common-sense things that foster parents would need to know, especially dealing with people and kids that come from neglect and abuse. And so anyway, you guys worked through the training and became foster parents. Talk about the first call you got when there was a child available.

Jamie: So, we went through the deal and they're like, well, we don't know when it will be. And we had signed up for children that were within a certain age bracket. We thought we'd be good with kids that were like five years or younger, but then that doesn't really matter. I mean, they're going to call you because they need placement. And so we probably had somewhere between 10 to 12 children come through our house, at any given time. And I

think one of the first kids we got was a sibling - a boy, a brother and a sister. And we got them and we were still kind of fresh out of class and just didn't really, we just kind of had some unrealistic expectations of what it's going to look like. So we got them in like the afternoon and loaded up that night and took them to Walmart that night. We're going to get them some things and we didn't get him through the door before one of them just started showing out - I'm talking about hollering and screaming. They didn't know us, we didn't know them. I don't know what we were thinking, but it kind of gave me a different perspective of what fostering was and you just you don't know what people are going through and everything. And so it was quite an eye opener like, hey, these kids are coming from some really difficult places and we've got them for a short amount of time. At that point, we had that brother and sister for like a week maybe, and then other kids would come through - sometimes for one night, sometimes for a couple of weeks. But yeah, it was very, very...there's just not enough training, Craig, to really prepare you to what the reality of foster care is. And it's just, there's just not enough. It's just, you just have to learn.

Craig: As you had kids that were coming in and out of your house, what do you think was the hardest thing for your family during that process?

Jamie: There were some situations where we realize because we sat down with our kids (our oldest is Evan and then Eli and Olivia), we sat them down and we talked about what we were trying to do, what we felt like God was calling us to do. And so tried to prepare them for it. But the reality is it does disrupt your comfort and your lifestyle there. It just, there's no way around it because you have to go and meet with families. You've got to meet with the social workers,

Craig: Right, when you're talking about the families, from what the birth families, bio families?

Jamie: You got to meet with bio family a couple of times a week, maybe, and then you've got to meet with your social workers and then most of those children are gonna come to you with nothing. And then, so your schedule is just thrown out the window in all honesty. That's those first, I think when we first got that first placement, the first couple of nights, I would just lay in the bed and I just, I just cried. I was just like, what have we done? Like, what am I doing? Like, we wanted to go out for dinner we couldn't do that. We were used to going and getting lunch together and we couldn't do that. You know, it just changed everything, but the kids were amazing even to this day, they were fantastic. But it changed some things for everybody - it impacted all of us.

Craig: Right, and then what I'm hearing you say is if someone's hearing our voices and they're considering this, that they need to understand that this is a game changer for your family.

Jamie: Yes, Yeah, it's yeah, no doubt is the hardest thing, to this point was the hardest thing we had done. I had been a missions pastor, I had gone to closed countries and not patting myself on the back, but that's the reality of what my job was. And so we had done those things. But foster care was by far harder than any of those ministry experience that I'd had prior.

Craig: And speaking of hard things, you guys received a phone call that there was a child at UMC, can you talk about that?

Jamie: Yeah, so we had plans and so I'm literally on the phone with a friend of mine from Vancouver, Canada talking about church planting when Stephanie calls on the other line, I tell them, hey, let me call you back and so I talked to her. She said, Jamie, there's a little boy and he's at UMC; he's really sick and he needs placement and I wanted to just go meet him at the hospital. And so I thought, well, that's not going to happen. I mean, we're not going to just go meet him, we're going to bring that kid home. There's no way she's going to leave him at the hospital. Sure enough I hang up. I called my friend back, said, hey, let me call you back. And so we go to the hospital and we meet this little boy and talk to his doctors and he's got a very rare kidney condition where he'll have to have a kidney transplant. And so they start talking to us about the 12 medicines he takes every day. They start telling us about the G-tube that he has, where he's totally fed through his G-tube. They're talking about some of the challenges of the bio family that he's experienced and what that might look like moving forward. And so we're getting all this information and we say, well, let us go home. And they'd already had, I think a couple of families that came through and just said, you know what, we just can't do this, and I get it I totally get it. And so we went home, prayed about it and as I knew, Stephanie said, we've got to bring him home and we did. And we brought Timothy home after that weekend and started that journey of our life.

Craig: So, what I've heard you say is that you you're in ministry, you were comfortable, and then your wife was inspired for your family to consider foster care. You were a little behind her and you did. And now you said you're on the phone with a friend about church planning. Was this about you and your family?

Jamie: Yeah, possibly. Yeah. So we had been talking about it. Our oldest son, Evan, came home from school and we were homeschooling him and we were anticipating perhaps a missionary type of journey, but church planting got on the radar so went to Vancouver a couple of times. And so, yeah, with that conversation, I'd already started the process of doing some of the legwork to plant a church. And so that was kind of our plan. We're going to go plant a church in Vancouver, Canada. And so that was kind of on the radar when we got that phone call.

Craig: And how old was Timothy when you got called?

Jamie: We got Timothy at five months so he came to us at five months old.

Craig: What I've heard you say is that foster care (being a foster parent) was one of the most difficult things that you had ever done in ministry and that you guys had parented many kids that had come in and out of your home, but this sounds like next level.

Jamie: Yeah, it was and then the projection was, or at least the thought was, we don't know if this is a long-term placement. We feel like it is, but we don't know that it will ever lead to adoption, but he needs someplace to go. And so we brought him in with kind of a lot of question marks, which is typical of foster care.

Craig: Right? It is typical because people who open up their hearts to foster kids, obviously the goal of the system is to reunify that child with its family of origin, with his birth parent or with a relative. And then when that's not possible at that point, that's when the social workers look for what I'll call the fostering population in general. And so generally speaking, when people accept a child into their home as a foster parent, they, even though they might want for that child to be in their home permanently, that's rarely the case. And so what I've heard you say is when Timothy came into your home, there were really question marks, not only about his health, but about how long he would be with you. Just lots of questions, right?

Jamie: That's right. And so we, just didn't have a lot of answers to those questions, but we knew that he was sick and we knew that he needed a place to be. And we really felt strongly that if we didn't bring him in, that he might not live. And that's what we were told by the doctors, as we were told by the judge. And so we brought him home and started on that path to learning about his illness and learning about caring for him and trips back and forth to the hospital and the doctors. I mean all three of my kids were super healthy, I think Evan got stitches in his head at one time. And then we've had tonsils out maybe, but I mean not much else. And so this was radically different from our parenting experience.

Craig: So what was it like? What was it like caring for a critically ill little boy to whom you had no biological connection? You had received a phone call - you guys were foster parents and you were in ministry. What was daily life like?

Jamie: Stephanie bore the brunt of that. She stays at home. And so, which is part of, I think why God has equipped her the way that he did. I mean, she has a medical mind. She's very good at that kind of thing, but there was certainly a large learning curve. And especially for me feeding through a G-Tube, I didn't know what a G-Tube was. And then when they showed it to me, it looks like a pool inflatable. The valve on a pool and inflatable is what it looks like.

Craig: And that's how he would eat.

Jamie: That's how he ate - you put his liquid and everything through that G-tube. Kind of a funny thing - one night, it actually came out. It popped out and I'm scrambling around looking for it and we're like, what is going on? Where is it? And she's like, I don't know, find it. We've got to put it back in. And I'm like, if I put this thing back in, I'm not blowing them back up? Cause I mean, that's what it looks like. It looks like a pool inflatable. I'm like, I'm not, I'm not blowing it up. You're going to have to do it. And so we finally found it and got it back in. And that was that was early on at a time that we had them, it was hard. It was hard. It was hard because we were caring for him 24/7. And it was hard because we loved him and it was hard because we didn't know if he was going to be with us and or how long he was going to be with us.

Craig: And how do you do that? I'm a planner. I think I'm future oriented and I think of things in terms of art, you know, what's next and planning. And this seems like a situation where you were forced to live day-to-day and moment-to-moment and not worry so much

about Timothy's health, whether he's going to be with you and the many, many questions that surrounded that. How did you do that all day?

Jamie: Definitely, exactly like you just said day-to-day. We would remember that this is a call that God has put on our heart. We tried to remember that this was part of our faith journey, stepping into foster care. We just did it on a day-to-day basis. And we had a lot of faith and a lot of trust. We had a lot of good people surrounding us.

Craig: Well, let's talk about that a little bit. Talk about how your community came around you, how your church family came around you during that process.

Jamie: Even to this day, man, I don't know how we would do it without that community of support. The church family knew our journey. And so people were stepping in to help provide meals for us and they would come by and drop off food or they would offer to babysit. They would bring supplies. There was certainly prayer – it was a big part of it, encouraging words for Stephanie. And so it wasn't a bad gig. There would be times where food would just show up - they barbecue, they bring us some barbecue and the boys would be like, well, how many more kids can we get? You know, this is pretty good, this is good. We have people that are taking care of us - like do we get ribs for every kid we get?

Craig: Right!

Jamie: And so through all that, the church is just such a critical arm of foster care; it is a support system. And so I think looking back, we were wise to try to put together a support system prior to starting the foster journey.

Craig: What did you learn about that? Talk to our listeners a little bit. Jamie will continue to talk about Timothy's journey and your family's journey with him, but take just a minute and talk about the local church because we were fortunate enough to have you as our Director of Church Relations at 200 Million Flowers. Part of your job was to educate people, educate Mississippians about the role they can play because as we both know, not everybody has that special something that Stephanie has and that you have, and that are just able, or at a season of life where they can bring another child into their home. But what we used to say, what we like to say is that everybody can do something and everybody can play a role. So what would you say to our listeners who maybe they're thinking, well, I just don't know if I could be a foster parent or if I could adopt, what would you tell them about what their role might be?

Jamie: I would say first of all, that was some of the most encouraging ministry in my life spent with 200 Million Flowers. The opportunity you gave me to go around literally the state of Mississippi and talk to churches.

Craig: Thanks for saying that.

Jamie: And I mean, it really was huge. And then to meet people like me, who just didn't know, but had this hole in their life that they should be doing something for these kids once they were made aware of what was going on. And so that was critical for me to be able to meet with them and answer questions. But one of the big things we try to communicate is,

“Hey look, this is not for everybody, to bring kids into your home”. And I think one of the things we wanted to make sure we, weren't not saying is, “Hey, you shouldn't leave here feeling guilty if you don't bring kids into your home”; that's not what we ever want to communicate. But you're right, everybody could do something, but there were people who would come through those gatherings that already had on their heart that they should seek out foster care adopting and then there were others who wanted to know how they could be on the team - and that's just as important. For people to realize, you can't do everything but you should do something - and what is that something? We tried to help them to figure that out. And so even if they left the Rescue 100 event or an informational meeting, not knowing, not thinking that maybe we're supposed to foster, they left those times knowing I've got a responsibility as a Christ follower to be involved in this to some capacity.

Craig: So let's talk a little bit more about Timothy. You guys we're living day-to-day. When did it look like it was going to be permanent, that he would be your legal son?

Jamie: So as we kind of went into the first year and into about a year and a half of having him, it began to look more and more like this was going to be an opportunity for us to adopt. The thing about foster care is, and Craig, you know this, you just don't know if that's going to be your child until you sign the papers.

Craig: Because of my work with 200 Million Flowers and my work as an attorney, I get calls from people. And if you're hearing my voice right now and you have questions, I hope you will reach out to our office. But what I like to tell people is that I'll get a call from someone who thinks that might be a child who's going to be available for adoption, or there's a family member who's unable to care for their child. And what I tell them is when they open up their life and their heart, to adoption and to foster care, or to parenting a child to whom they have no biological connection, to be ready because the journey that they start on might not necessarily be where they finish and so God might be using this experience in their life to open them up for some other opportunity that He might have.

Jamie: For sure and you had a guy come in, his name is Robert. He came in one time to one of our events and he said something that I've never forgotten. He said that pain is never a reason not to love. And so when we communicate to families, hey there is going to be some pain and there could be the pain of that child going back to their bio family when you felt like they should stay with you. You mentioned the word reunification. That's the goal. When you hear that, when you go through a training reunification, reunification, reunification, we get that, but it doesn't make it any easier when you're expecting to adopt this child. And so we had an idea about it a little over a year into it that there's a strong possibility that we would adopt him.

Craig: And I'll tell you something, I've had the opportunity to help a lot of families. And one thing I can say about you and Stephanie is you really never rushed the process. You really let the process take its natural course.

Jamie: We did and we prayed. We kept a relationship with the bio family still to this day. And we let it kind of play out the way that I think the Lord was going to let it play out. And so, we

just kind of trust it in that. And in the meantime, we had responsibility and that was Timothy's health, and that's what we focused on.

Craig: You know, we didn't have time to worry about whether or not the busy-ness their responsibility for his medical needs really overshadowed. Your own sense of our need for security, your own sense of, okay, everything's got to be right in our life because the immediate need is, of course, we've got our three bio kids that we need to take care of. And then we have this little boy who's sick, who needs attention.

Jamie: Right and it was every once in a while, that little creature of worry would raise its head. But it would quickly be suppressed by a hospital visit or doctor visits or hospital stays, you know, all those things.

Craig: It's almost like you didn't have time to worry.

Jamie: That's right. We couldn't - we had to keep him healthy and it was a job. And somewhere on lines about in 2017, it got to a point where we were ready and we knew it was about to happen. You helped us through that process and we adopted him and he became our son and it was one of the best days of my life. And since then we've been on this next part of our journey of transplant. And we're kind of on the other side of that.

Craig: Wow, let's talk about that. I remember the moment when we were in court and I can remember specifically that the judge prayed over the proceeding, which is unusual. I've been a lawyer for 20 years, and I don't remember ever seeing that happening in any other situation, but it did that day. What a beautiful thing. It's just really beautiful. And some of the most inspiring people in my life are those people who parent children to whom they have no biological connection. And certainly, we have a responsibility to parent our kids that we do have a biological connection to, but, and I'm not just talking about foster parents or adoptive parents, but I'm talking about step-parents and mentors and coaches and people who really step into that parental role with regard to a child, but just because they choose to not because they have a responsibility to. That's what you and Stephanie did was you chose him and notwithstanding that his little body was broken and notwithstanding the challenges associated with his biological family and the place that he came from that put him in foster care to begin with, but not withstanding that difficulty, you chose to love him.

Jamie: Yes, through all that we knew the day was coming when he was going to have to have a kidney transplant. He did so well for so long and a big part of that is because Stephanie's really good at what she does. She kept a binder - she didn't miss medicine times and she did everything and more that could have been asked. And he did really well. And so we adopt him. We're kind of on a new journey where we transitioned to a new place (we're living in Florence) and got the call to be the pastor at first Baptist church of Florence. We were there just a couple of months and then Timothy's health started to decline and we began to see those changes in him. We realized that we needed a little bit different team around him and so we started this journey to try to get over to Birmingham at Children's Hospital of Alabama because Timothy was one of only two other children in the state of Mississippi that have this particular disorder. This group in Birmingham had dealt with this before, so we started that process. That's a whole other story. We don't have time to get into today, but God in his

sovereignty and grace and compassion, moved some pieces around for us to be able to do that. We got Timothy over to Children's of Alabama in February of this year, and they removed both of his kidneys.

Craig: Removed both of his kidneys.

Jamie: So he and Stephanie had to go live there; we got a little apartment through a nonprofit over there and Stephanie and Timothy lived there. He was then started on dialysis and we brought him home for not even a month because his dialysis began to not work (it's peritoneal dialysis). We had to go back to Birmingham to start blood dialysis so we moved back (they moved) back to Birmingham, but by that time, all of a sudden it'd be about 10 months worth of time living in Birmingham through that and the transplant. Most recently we're about seven weeks removed from transplant and we just brought him home recently, probably within the last two weeks - they came back home. We still go over to Birmingham once a week for appointments to be checked on, but his kidneys are doing great. To me, it's amazing what they can do; he got one adult kidney and he's doing really well. He's home, Stephanie and he are both home - we're all under one roof, except for my oldest son, Evan who's married and on his own, but the rest of us were back under one roof and he's doing good. He's doing really good. He has to drink a lot of fluids, so that's probably the hardest part right now is trying to get him to drink enough. When he had his kidneys removed, he was on a fluid restriction and now we're like, okay, well, you couldn't drink much then, but now we're asking you to drink the equivalent of seven, eight-ounce cups a day. And he's like, well, I'm not thirsty. I'm like, well, you still got to drink. I don't care. You've got to drink. And so it's been a challenge, but he still has a G-tube. He can still put fluid through his G-tube but honestly, Craig, man it's been a long journey, and there were times where we just could not see the light at the end of the tunnel. Yeah, we're living separately. It's like we have two households. My daughter, even one time said, "Hey, Dad, I think I'm going to go stay at mom's this week". And I'm like, "Don't say that cause it sounds like...", "well, I'm going to stay at mom's" but I'm like, don't say it that way. Just say, I'm going to stay in Birmingham.

Craig: Well, so what I've heard you say is you guys are on this journey as foster parents and the stars aligned and you were able to adopt him and make him your son legally. And then you took on the responsibility for pastoring a church. And in the wake of that, his health starts to fail some. Now you had always known that he was going to be a transplant candidate, so they actually had to remove both of his kidneys and then he experienced dialysis for many, many months. And talk about the transplant itself. He was on a list, I assume?

Jamie: Yes, he was. The process of him being on dialysis, he was on an amount of dialysis for a certain amount of time. And then, once we went and saw some different doctors (we had to go see a dentist). Once he got active on the list then he could receive a transplant from a donated kidney. Then I was going through the process to get tested, to see if I could donate. And so I had just started that, but I didn't really know how organ donation works. And so we learned a lot, but on a Thursday I got a call - on Thursday morning and they said, "Hey, Mr. Wally, this is Children's of Alabama. We think we've got a kidney match for Timothy. We'll do the surgery tomorrow morning at 7:00 AM."

Craig: Wow.

Jamie: So it's like, "Oh, can you call my wife?" That's the first thing I said. I'm like, let me have you call my wife because I want to make sure that I don't say anything and mess anything up. So she turned around and called Stephanie and we packed up. I had to pack up and Stephanie had to pack up there in Birmingham and go right to the hospital.

Craig: What were the thoughts and emotions that were going through you guys' mind and through your family during that short time? You just don't have much time to process it.

Jamie: And so it's really hard to explain and I don't want to speak for Stephanie, but I know for her, it was a culmination of years of medical journey and it happens in 24 hours basically. And at the time she almost grieved the journey. I don't know if that makes sense.

Craig: It does make sense because she had the daily, ongoing responsibility that she had, which would make him healthy enough and where he grows strong enough, to where he would be a candidate for a transplant. And then she did that. And then all of a sudden that day is there.

Jamie: Yeah and it just, it just shows up.

Craig: And it's almost like an, I mean, it's almost like an Olympic athlete training for that moment in time where they are on the stage - and then that moment is here.

Jamie: Exactly. And it's like, okay, well, here we are. She was excited but anxious at the same time. And then I was excited but anxious at the same time. And then I'm thinking, all right, I've got to make sure things are in a row here. I've got an entire faith family, a good-sized faith family that we're responsible for and they've been awesome through the whole deal - encouraging and providing support for us. Trying to make that balance and figuring out how long is this going to be in a hospital and all these different questions. We thought we had answers to, but we just weren't sure, you know? And so we loaded up and headed that way and the next morning they took them in.

Craig: Wow. And so what's Timothy's prognosis today.

Jamie: He's doing great. He will hopefully continue to do great right now. He's still having to stay at home because he's on a medication that basically eliminates his immune system. We're not able to get out and about, but he's home and has a transplanted kidney. You can get typically between 16 to 18 years out of it.

Craig: Oh, wow.

Jamie: And then you do it again. Unless something changes medically, then someday down the road, hopefully down the road, he'll have to have another transplant, but it's not the cure for what he has because he's going to have to have another transplant, but certainly it gives him an improved quality of life.

Craig: And what is the biggest thing that you've learned from your son? Timothy?

Jamie: He is my hero - the toughest kid I've ever met! He's been through so much. I think one thing that Timothy has taught me is trust - he trusts us, he trusts his doctors, you know what I mean? Obviously, he's six now so he knows what's going on. He knows where he doesn't quite understand his journey to us, if that makes sense, but he knows what he's been through. And he knows he's got the scars to show it, right? He has the scars all over his little body, but he just keeps going. So he's taught me a lot about trust and he's taught me a lot about life. He's a kid - he's really an amazing kid. He smiles all the time. He's happy. He's a little bad, but he's a good boy and he loves the world. He loves life and he's brought us an endless amount of joy that he just never seems to run out of.

Craig: Well, I'm going to ask you this - what about Stephanie? Because she's a warrior. Unbelievable. Talk about her, talk about her through this process.

Jamie: She is absolutely the glue that held everything together.

Craig: Right.

Jamie: And honestly, he would not be where he is today without her. And I can't imagine anybody else doing what she did well,

Craig: I mean, single-handedly, she saved his life. I mean it's unbelievable.

Jamie: Yeah, she did. His doctors have told us, our judges told us, I think everybody has seen that. Now she might not always see it in herself. No, she's never patting herself on the back. She would never do that, but everybody else sees it and everybody else knows it. I mean, she saved this little boy's life.

Craig: And lastly, talk about your kids. Talk about you, your biological kids and their and their response to Timothy and how you guys rallied together as a family around this adoption journey and this transplant journey.

Jamie: His brothers and sister love him and we couldn't have done it without them. From the moment we started this journey, they never saw him as anything other than their brother.

Craig: Right.

Jamie: Never. And they always treated him like that, you know? And he knows that his brothers and sister love him and, and he thinks the world of them. And so through all this, they've been there. They've come and they've stayed as much as they could; they've walked with him on this journey. And even when we were apart, I put their phones on his little iPad so we could FaceTime. Except for Evan, because he has no discretion of when he calls. And so, we were like, we can't do that to Evan but we'll do that to the other two. Honestly, it's so important. We talk about it, encouraging families to do this. It is important that your family all be on the same page because it is truly a journey for the entire family. And even when Stephanie was gone and I had the big kids at home, they missed their mama and she missed them. There was that part where, it was hard on everybody because so much time and attention and devotion have to go into this, but my kids are amazing,

Craig: Right. As we're kind of wrapping up this talk that we're having, which is really just phenomenal, the families all look different and that's just the truth. And five years ago, you didn't think your family was going to look like it does today. And I think that people who can hear my voice right now, whether they're on an adoption journey or whether they're a foster parent, or maybe they're just struggling in their family and there's conflict and there are just challenges that they are just unsure about. I think that your story and Timothy story is one about taking it day by day. And taking care of those things that you can do for that day. And then the rest is pretty much, it's pretty much in God's hands. And so you take care of what you can take care of and then you live in the present and it's not necessarily going to be exactly how you thought it would. But it sounds, I can just hear in your voice, just the, how rewarding the whole process has been.

Jamie: Absolutely and for sure, that's a great way to say it. It's been incredibly rewarding and what I've learned, in my life and as a person and as a Christ follower, I could not have learned without the journey that God set us on. And so every day was important and every day was day-to-day, even though there are days Craig, where we couldn't see on the other side of the mountain, when we were in the valley, but we got there.

Craig: Well, Jamie, I could talk to you for hours. I'm sure our listeners want more. Just as we're wrapping up, just a few thoughts that you have as a foster parent (as an adoptive parent) - provide a little encouragement for someone who's hearing our voices and are thinking that this might be something that they're interested in.

Jamie: Yeah. I would say one of the things one of my friends, Rick, kind of helped me in some of this too, but a couple of things you need to do is 1. You need to make sure that if this is the call that God has on your life, that your family all. Is your immediate family all on the same page? Husband and wife need to be on the same page and you need to bring your kids into it. And then you need to have a team around you - some people that encourage you and lead you and, minister to you as you're on this journey. And then, if God is really calling you to it, then you should be obedient in that and don't wait for signs. When God puts it on your heart and opens the door, step through and then trust Him, and trust is going to provide for you. But certainly there's no shortage of need in our community and in our state. And so, we need believers to be on this journey because those kids need to know a love of God and the love of family. And as Christ's followers, the Bible tells us we've been adopted into God's family and so what more brilliant and beautiful pictures there of that, of that image? Then for us as Christ followers, to bring children into our home, to love, even if it's on a very short-term basis. We get to love them and encourage them and so many great stories that we could tell you now - families and bio families and foster families, joining hands so to speak in this journey for this child. You know what I mean? Just all those. I mean, there's great stories; not every story ends up with that pretty bow but there are some great God stories out there.

Craig: Well, Jamie man, it's really an honor to know you.

Jamie: Well, you've been an awesome influence. You know, I wish I could tell how important you guys have been - how important the Robertson's have been in our life and really the impact you've had in our state. But anyway, it's an honor, man. I love sitting here a lot. I wish

we could do another one. Coming back and I can talk about my other bio kids or whatever, man. I love sitting down and talking to you.

Craig: It's been awesome. Well, look, thanks again for being with us.