

Intro & Chapter 1:

"What did I do to my life?"

Overview: The costs of being a foster parent are high but ultimately outweighed by the benefits. Foster care is worth it because every child is precious to God, because families matter to Him, and because surrendering your life to follow Jesus is worth any cost.

Jamie talks about needing a new word to capture all the conflicting feelings of foster care. What words would you use to describe the experience of fostering?

Do you ever ask yourself, "What did I do to my life?"
What situations most often trigger that question?

"What has carried me through the hardest moments of foster care and carries me still is remembering and believing and knowing deep down that foster care is worth it."

What makes foster care *worth it* for you? What do you come back to when the costs of foster care seem overwhelming?

"And the days when the costs are the greatest are the days when my truest worship is offered. Those are the days when foster care is less about cuddling babies and more about giving myself to my God as a living sacrifice."

How has foster care shaped your faith? In what ways does fostering challenge your walk with God? In what ways does it strengthen your walk with God?

What Scripture do you find encouraging during the hard parts of fostering?

Chapter 2:

Jesus Loves the Little Children (and Their Families)

Overview: God established families, but sin has marred his perfect design for them. Part of our role as foster parents is to join God's work of restoring families.

Does loving your children's biological families come easily for you?
Or do you find it challenging?

"As foster parents, we have to take to task our hearts' natural yet sinful temptations toward self-righteousness, anger, and fear."

How do you combat negative feelings that come up toward your children's biological parents?

Have you seen firsthand God's redemptive work in the lives of your children's biological families?

What are some practical ways you can come alongside families of kids in your care?

Chapter 3:

Do Not Be Afraid (When Everything is Scary)

Overview: Following God can lead us into frightening circumstances, but we can move forward through fear by remembering God's faithfulness, His promises, and His character.

"We'd like to believe following God means the absence of danger, that a loving God would never call His children into scary things. But read the Bible, and it's impossible to go on believing this."

Has God ever called you into something that scared you?

Recall God's faithfulness: What examples do we see in Scripture of God's calling someone to a scary situation and seeing them through it?
What examples have you seen in your own life?

"I fall into fear when I define who God is by what I see rather than defining what I see by who God is."

Name some aspects of God's character that we see in the Bible. Which of these aspects is especially comforting to you when you are afraid?

Name some promises God gives to us, His children, in the Bible.

What shadows are scary in your life right now? What do you need to remember about God to shed light and drive away those shadows?

Chapter 4: I Don't Even Know How to Pray Anymore

Overview: Our prayers are an act of faith and a demonstration that we believe God is in control. They are the best gift we can give our foster children. Our prayers are always imperfect, but we are free to come to God with His own words, with the deepest cries of our hearts, and with childlike requests.

What effect, positive or negative, has foster care had on your prayer life?

“When something challenging comes up, I stop and access the fix-it part of my brain, realize there is literally nothing that I can do, and remember: I have direct access to the One who can do anything.”

Are you more inclined to fix or to pray when challenges arise?

Do you regularly pray the words of Scripture?

What phrases or verses do you find helpful to pray back to God?

“The gospel means that I never have to get my act together before approaching God. It means coming to Him with messy emotions and selfish requests and being sanctified by Him through the praying. It means that the blood of Jesus covers even my prayers.”

Do you sometimes hold back in your prayer life because you don't have the right words, or even any words, to pray?

What childlike pleas, with no pretense or fear of rejection, do you want to bring to God for your family? For your foster children? For your former foster children? For their families?

Chapter 5: Out of Control

Overview: Foster care brings to light the truth that we are not in control of our children's lives or futures. We can surrender our desire for control, knowing that God is in complete control.

When do you find it especially difficult to relinquish control and trust God? What situations in foster care make you want to hang onto the illusion of control?

“Advocate, work, fight, speak – and trust. The struggle is not so much about my behavior and words; it’s more about the position of my heart. If I believe God is the One who ordains authority, then giving up the fight for control means trusting Him.”

How can we as foster parents balance advocating and speaking up for our children with fully entrusting them to God?

“If you feel stuck in your white-knuckled grip for control, the most surefire way to begin to unfold your fist is to pray.”

What practical steps can you take to make prayer - for your children's lives, and for your own heart - a regular practice in your life?

How has the out-of-your-control nature of foster care challenged your faith? How has it strengthened and grown your faith?

“I don’t relinquish control to a broken system or to a flawed decision-maker. I relinquish control to God.”

Remind yourself again of the nature of God. Fill in the blank:

I know God is _____, so I can entrust my children to Him.

Chapter 6: Too Attached

Overview: Getting “too attached” to our foster children is crucial for their healthy development. We can love them freely with our hearts while guarding our minds closely.

Why is it important for us to get “too attached” to our foster children?
How have you seen this play out in your home?

“I believe love and attachment are the greatest gifts I can give to my foster children, and I give them away freely.”

Have there been times you found it difficult to give love and attachment to your foster children? How do you push yourself to love and attach anyway?

Are you often tempted to daydream, judge, or worry?
Why are these particularly dangerous patterns in foster care?

“Renewing your mind is a constant rebirthing of new thoughts, of making new and making new again and making new again - always. It’s exhausting work, but the fruit of renewal is beautiful: transformation. We can actually transform our lives by making our thoughts new.”

What practical steps can you take to *put off* your “bad,” sinful thoughts and *put on* “good,” biblically true thoughts?

What lies are you prone to believe about yourself, your children, their parents, etc? What biblical truth can you use to combat these lies?

Chapter 7: My Foster Child's Enemy is My Enemy

Overview: Sometimes our foster children's parents are difficult to love and could even be categorized as our enemies. God gives us clear directives for how to handle our enemies, though - love them, do good for them, bless them, pray for them, repay their evil with good.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, with your foster child's parents in mind. What would it look like for you to love them with this biblical definition of love? What if they are difficult to love?

What are some tangible ways you can do good for your foster children's parents? What words can you say, write, or text to bless them this week?

"Lavishly repaying the undeserving with blessing is the living, breathing gospel acted out before our kids' parents."

Why does it matter how we think about, talk about, and act toward our children's parents?

"The ability to love our enemies is found in a deep trust in our God. In our finiteness, we think that if we don't see and experience justice now, injustice must be reigning. But our God always reigns. He will right every wrong and repair every broken thing."

Does treating our enemies (including our kids' parents) with love mean we are endorsing their sin, or sweeping their bad behavior under the rug? Why or why not?

In Chapter 6, we read about "saying to ourselves" the truth of God's Word, instead of listening to our own sinful thoughts. What does the Bible say about your children's parents? Remind yourself how God sees them.

Chapter 8:

God Is in the Wait

Overview: Foster care, like the Christian life, is full of waiting. Waiting is part of the story God is writing for your family, and He arranges every detail to happen exactly when it should. God uses your waiting to grow your Christ-likeness and equip you for what is ahead, and He writes your timeline from His eternal perspective.

When have you struggled with waiting in foster care? How have you seen God use waiting to grow your faith or your character?

“Godly waiting is active. Even when there’s a waiting period in one area of our lives, there’s something to be done somewhere else. Even as we anticipate what will come tomorrow, we have a mission to fulfill today.”

What practical steps can you take to make the most of seasons of waiting in foster care? What can you actively do to fulfill *today’s* mission?

Jamie talks about “stories of unmet expectations and failed timelines and broken plans that God used to accomplish His exactly right plan.” Have you experienced these stories in your own life, or your children’s lives?

*“The object of our waiting is a Person. We wait for the Lord. We don’t wait for things to randomly unfold; we wait for our God to reveal what He has planned. And our discouragement can be transformed into sweet anticipation and eager expectation as we remember just
Whom we are waiting for.”*

Look back at the Scripture quoted in this chapter and say to yourself biblical truth that strengthens you while you wait. What does the Bible say about the character of God? About His plans for His people?

Chapter 9: I Thought My Love Would Be Enough

Overview: Parenting children who have experienced trauma comes with unique challenges and requires us to learn and adapt. Trauma-informed parenting urges us to look to Jesus to heal our children's bodies and minds, as well as their souls.

Did you come into foster care or adoption expecting your love to be enough? What made you realize that it would take more than love?

What resources have been helpful to you in understanding and navigating trauma parenting? What practical steps can you take to make the most of seasons of waiting in foster care?

What can you actively do to fulfill *today's* mission?

Jamie shares several lessons learned from trauma parenting:

- Don't worry about what others think of your parenting.
- Seek wisdom and understanding through prayer.
- Slow down to allow opportunities to nurture and comfort your children.
- Remember your identity in Christ, especially when your children's words and behaviors feel personal.
- Work to accept and treasure your children as they are.
- Sometimes the best way to love our children is to sit with them in their sadness.

Which of these principles come naturally to you with your children?

Which are more challenging?

"As a Christian foster parent, I need to see my children as in need of both the forgiveness of Jesus for their souls and the physical healing of their bodies and brains."

In practical terms, what does it look like to parent through both a trauma lens (knowing their bodies and brains have been affected by their experiences) and a gospel lens (knowing they are inherently sinful and need forgiveness)?

Chapter 10: What Do You Have That You Did Not Receive?

Overview: Every good thing we have, both physical and spiritual, is an undeserved gift from God. We are no more deserving of this grace than anyone else, including our children's parents. We are called to give freely and with humility from the abundance we have received.

Praise God for his goodness toward you – what gifts has He given you that make it possible for you to be a foster parent?

“May we give our coats and our shirts and our unslapped cheeks to our kids’ parents through kind words and thoughtful gifts and support and love.”

What do you get to do for your children's biological parents this week? In what specific ways can you give freely to them, from the abundance you have received?

Consider your minor, everyday missteps and failings that are no big deal in your life. How would similar missteps play out differently for your children's parents?

“But doing everything in love means ripping up the proverbial list of wrongs and switching the lens with which I see my kids’ parents. And here’s the punch line: the way I see my kids’ parents actually has nothing to do with my kids; parents and everything to do with my own heart.”

Are you tempted to keep a mental record of the wrongs your kids' parents have done? How can you combat this temptation?

What steps can you take to “do everything in love” in how you treat your children's parents? In how you think about them? In how you talk about them with other people?

Chapter 11: But What about My Kids?

Overview: Bringing foster children into your home affects your forever children. It is important to consider how to protect and prioritize your family, while also drawing them into the mission of foster care and recognizing the unique benefits it brings them.

What strengths do your children bring to their roles as foster siblings?

“Our kids, as foster siblings, will have access to the same biblical truths that carry us, as foster parents, through this journey.”

Think about where your children currently struggle most as foster siblings. What biblical truth do they need to hear from you? What practical steps can you take to listen and support them this week?

Has foster care brought any topics that are hard to discuss with your children? How do you navigate these topics honestly but without burdening your children with too heavy a load?

Jamie gives several examples of how foster care has benefited her children:
It has put us on mission as a family.

- We are able to expose our children to brokenness with a filter.
- We have grown in generosity and hospitality.
- We have discovered that the world is so much bigger.
- We have learned empathy.
- We have learned lessons on loss and grief.
- We have learned gratitude.
- We have found that love is costly.

Which of these have you seen play out in your own family?
What would you add to the list?

“I dream that my kids will love and live for Jesus above all, that they’ll follow wherever He calls. I dream that they will live radically and love selflessly and serve sacrificially. I know that my dreaming and my training can’t do this in their hearts - only God can do that - but I think that this foster sibling life is good training ground for these dreams.”

Do you think foster care is worth the risks it presents for your forever children? What is your answer when someone asks regarding foster care, “But what about your kids?”

Chapter 12:

I Don't Want to Hand Her Over Today

Overview: Sending our foster children on visits with their parents is necessary, but it is unnatural for us and often feels scary. We can remind ourselves who God is and that our children are in His care.

What makes visits challenging for you right now? In practical terms, what steps can you take to make them smoother for your child, your family, your child's parents?

Remind yourself of the good parts.

Why do visits matter? What is there to love about visits?

"That's what this foster care life is. It's a constant placing of your child in someone else's hands – literally and actually, in workers' and judges' and lawyers' hands. And it's a placing of your child, figuratively and spiritually – and also, in a very real way, actually – in God's hands."

What does God's Word say about how He cares for our children?

What Scripture encourages you to trust Him when you have to place your foster children in someone else's hands?

"You can do hard things, not because 'you've got this' but because you are carried by the One who does."

Recall the faithfulness of the Lord. How has He carried your children through challenging visits? How has He carried you through the difficulties of parent visits? How has He built up your faith and dependence on Him through this aspect of foster care?

Chapter 13:

Self-Care Isn't Selfish

Overview: True self-care—recognizing our God-given limitations and taking care of ourselves—is an act of love for our families, and wisdom and humility before God.

Prior to reading this chapter, what was your impression of the term *self-care*?

Were you familiar with the term secondary trauma? How have you experienced it yourself?

“True self-care is motivated by love, driven by wisdom, and walked out in humility.”

Are you resistant to the idea that you need self-care? Consider the opposite of the quote above: Is it unloving, foolish, and prideful to neglect self-care?

Recall the example Jesus himself set. When did we see Him rest in Scripture? When did He command or provide rest for His followers? How do these examples change the way you think about self-care?

Jamie shares several practical ways she incorporates self-care into her own life. Do you regularly incorporate any of the same practices? What self-care practices are already part of your life?

“The idea of self-care isn’t a call for me to find ways to fill myself with more energy, more pleasure, more, more, more. It’s an invitation to be filled by the Source, to find rest in His presence, to find strength in His Spirit. It’s an invitation to find the abundant life He offers through submitting to the limitations and needs He has placed within my body and on my days.”

How does your understanding and practice of self-care need to change moving forward?

Chapter 14:

Social Workers and Therapists and Lawyers—Oh My!

Overview: Workers involved with our child's case will likely bring difficulties into our lives, potentially even failing our family and kids and sinning against us. Our call is to remember that each one is a person, made and beloved by God - and to treat them as such.

Are you more prone to think of your workers with frustration and animosity, or with kindness and compassion? How can you shift your mindset toward “judging charitably”?

Think specifically about your current workers and those you have encountered in the past. Are there any that you need to forgive, or to seek forgiveness from?

Read 1 Corinthians 13, and consider your heart toward the workers you encounter.
Are you approaching them with biblical love?

Have you thanked your workers recently?
Think through specific ways you are grateful for them, and commit to thanking them this week.

“Our lives can be shattered by the wrongs and mistakes of others, but they can also be shattered - in the best way possible, in a way that actually puts them back together - by the realities of God's presence within those hardships.”

Recall God's grace in your relationships with your workers. When have you seen the positive effects of treating your workers with compassion, kindness, forgiveness, love, and gratitude? Is it still worth the effort even if you never see any positive results?

Do you struggle with the foster care roller coaster? What evidence from your own experience and what truth from Scripture can you tell yourself to help stay off the roller coaster?

Chapter 15:

Foster Caring Community

Overview: God designed us to need other people, and this need is even more pressing for foster parents.

Whether we already have a supportive community around us, or we have to seek it out ourselves, we are called to live out the Bible's "one anothers" with other people.

When do you most feel your need for community as a foster parent?

Do you have the community you need around you in your current season? If not, what can you do to pursue it?

"Asking for help from others provides them with the privilege and gift of getting to be involved in practically serving the vulnerable. When we operate in self-sufficient pride, we steal the opportunity from those around us to get involved in the sacrificial mission of foster care."

What practical help do you need right now? Whom can you ask to step in and meet this need? What practical needs can you meet for someone else in your community?

We looked at several of the Bible's "one another" commands and saw that we are to encourage and build up, serve, welcome, spur on, meet with, teach and admonish, confess to, pray for, carry, and love one another. Which of these come naturally for you? Which are harder or lacking from your life altogether?

"And as I wonder why God has called me to things that I don't feel equipped for, I am met by a supporting hand on the left and on the right. I am met by the people He has sent to help me. And the beauty in arriving at the place where I just couldn't without the others He brings along is that I'm led to worship Him for what He has done. I see the people surrounding me, who have held up my arms and fought my battles with me. Yes, it fills my heart with gratitude for them but so much more: It points my eyes to God – the One who brings victory."

When have other people "held up your arms" and carried you through challenges in foster care? Thank God for providing what you need, and thank Him for the people He uses to help you.

Chapter 16:

A Small-Time County Judge

Overview: Much of our foster children's fate rests in the hands of imperfect human judges, but God the righteous Judge rules over every human authority. We can trust that He will deliver perfect justice in His time.

How do you feel when court days approach?

Have you ever experienced a judge who you felt was unjust, or disagreed with a judge's ruling? How does the Bible instruct us to think of human judges, even when we see their fallibility?

How can you balance advocating for your child with submitting to the authorities God has placed over you?

"When we see injustice prevailing, we're to remember Jesus's words and, rather than raise our hands in defeat, fall to our knees in prayer." Are you quick to worry, complain, or feel defeated about your child's case, rather than pray about it? What specific players or situations do you need to bring before God currently?

"It doesn't all hinge on the failed person sitting on the center bench. It hinges on the One above, directing everything in perfect wisdom and love."

Tell yourself the truth about God, our true Judge. Fill in the blank: I know God is _____, so I can trust Him with my child's case.

Chapter 17:

Foster Care is Heartbreak

Overview: Heartbreak is inevitable in foster care and can be especially devastating when a child leaves our home. We see examples in Job and Jesus of how to grieve while looking to God.

Have you experienced grief over saying goodbye to your foster child? Or heartbreak anywhere along the way in fostering? How have you handled this grief or heartbreak in the past?

Jamie offers several principles for dealing with the grief of saying goodbye to our foster children:

- Prepare for goodbye from the very beginning.
- Consider the good memories you have and the impact you've made.
- Remember who God is - for you and for your child.
- Look to eternity, when every sadness and pain will end.

How can you put these principles into practice yourself?

What would you add to the list – how do you deal with loss?

"It is a shallow and dishonest worship that doesn't acknowledge the heartache carried along with the praise. And it is a hopeless grief that doesn't acknowledge the Lord who is worthy of blessing, even within the sadness. Sorrow and worship perfect each other into holy grief."

How can you, like Job, cultivate a heart of worship in times of grief?

Is it wrong or sinful to grieve the loss of a foster child? Why or why not? Is it wrong or sinful not to experience grief over the loss of a foster child? Why or why not?

"But, oh, my God knows about giving up a child. My God knows about sacrificial love, and it is His sacrificial love that motivates me. He isn't simply the motivation, however. He is also the strength, the sustenance, the comfort. He's the One who called me in, carries me through, and is near always."

How has experiencing grief in foster care challenged or deepened your understanding of God?

Chapter 18:

Spectator Signs for the Race

Overview: As we run the Christian foster parent race, we must keep the destination in mind. Now may be a time of grief – but one day we will see Jesus face to face. He will make all things new and reward our work, we will spend eternity in heaven, and every grief will turn into joy.

What questions do you look forward to asking God when you see Him face to face? What parts of the “tapestry” seem confusing from your current perspective?

How does your perspective change when you remember that all earthly things – both the bad and the good – are temporary and will one day pass away?

What has foster care cost you? What earthly things did you give up when you became a foster parent? What eternal things does God promise to you, His child?

Do you ever grow weary doing the unseen, mundane, daily work of parenthood and foster care? How does it change your perspective to remember that God sees and rewards your work?

“When life feels hard and hopeless, when confusion and grief overwhelm, when my heart is broken and my hands are weary, when I want to give up and I wonder Why? – I know then and remind myself always that all this is worth it. I may not feel it, but I believe it, I know it. I know foster care is worth it.”

In the Epilogue, Jamie recounts the lessons of this book, listing them as reminders of why foster care is worth it. Which lessons resonate most with your heart? What would you add to your own list of reasons foster care is worth it?