

Karen Springs Interview

Dr. Rick: [00:00:00] All right, welcome again to the Think Orphan Podcast. I'm Rick Morton, joined by my friend and cohost Phil Darke. Phil, second time we're coming live, via video, doing an interview together. Still kind of getting comfortable to this. Although you and I are really used to looking at each other when we do this anyway, right?

Phil: [00:00:20] That is true. That is true. And not many other people are, you know, are used to looking at us yet. So hopefully this isn't throwing them off too much. If you're listening still audio, you aren't going to video, you know, I have some different ideas of what we're going to do with this. We might just have a couple of questions that we only do on video so that you have to come and just, you know, bear with us.

I don't know. I don't know what we're going to do. This is fun. We can just, we can play with it. We can have some fun with it. And you know, at the end of the day, it's, it's, you know, it's really for the audience. So folks out there give us feedback on this. So if you like it, let us know. If you don't like it, we'll probably keep doing it, but maybe you have some suggestions on how we can do it better.

And you know, my hope is that you really do kind of, not only hear us, but see us so you see when we're struggling with something. You see when we're, when we're really, you know, when it's something that we're just having fun and we're joking around about. So it's a lot easier when you see someone, right?

So that's one of the ideas we have here. The other one is just really, so you can get to know us better. So when you see us at a conference, when you see us different places, you'll, you'll feel like you know us. You'll come up and you'll say, "Hey, Phil." And then I won't know you probably, but we can get to know each other so that'll be a lot of fun. So, you know, Rick, what are your thoughts on this? What, what are you thinking about that? Do you agree? Do you have any other thoughts on kind of the, the benefits of this?

Dr. Rick: [00:01:40] I, I think it, I think it gives us a great way also to interact with our guests. And so we're really able to, to see them and, and kind of feel a little more of the, the layers and kind of the nuance of the things that they're saying.

And so I'm looking forward to being able to engage in this way. We're all getting more comfortable with, you know, forums like this through COVID-19 and some of the things we've had to do at a distance. And so this seemed like a really good opportunity for us to kind of add this layer to what we're doing.

And, and I think honestly, you know, my, my hope and my prayer is that this is going to help the audio version. It's going to help the video version. And, and, and really honestly, too, it's a, it's a lot of fun for us to get to, to get, to do this with our, you know, with our guests. So I hope it's hope that translates into an enjoyable experience for our listeners.

Phil: [00:02:27] So do I. So do I. And it, you know, and, and as Rick said, we're working out the bugs. We're working out the kinks. It might not be as smooth as you know, it's usually so smooth with just the transitions and everything with Rick and me, and

Dr. Rick: [00:02:40] We are known, we are known for our smoothness.

Phil: [00:02:44] That's all, that's yeah, that's the first thing.

Just like we just talked over each other, like that, like just, it was like butter. Right? So, but you know, in all seriousness, we have a great, great interview. This is the second time we've had this amazing woman on our show and it's, you know, I was talking to her earlier. It seems like we use her as kind of the guinea pig.

It's the first time we're doing a video interview with someone like we have, obviously the last episode of Rick and I had the video between the two of us. But this is the first time we had a video interview with someone. This woman, we had on, she was the first time we had a, an interviewee also be the cohost of that episode.

Not only the first time, the only time. We had another person actually be a co interviewer, but that was, that was not anywhere near what Karen has been able to do. She is the pioneer of the Think Orphan Podcast, unintentionally and involuntarily. But Karen Springs, who is the Communications Director for World Without Orphans.

She's also a newly published author. The number one New York Times bestselling author of a book on road tripping people talking to people who have adopted. It's a small category, but she is the best seller, just like Rick is the bestseller of the ology books for orphan care. And, you know, so that we all have something to aspire to.

But Karen, you know, in all seriousness, this, this woman just blows me away with her, her humility, her, she's fun. She has, she has a blast doing everything she does. She loves people really, really well. And she has written a new book, Adoption Through the Rear View Mirror. And that is a book that you want to grab.

And I know after this interview you'll want it, you'll definitely want to pick it up and learn more about it than you're going to hear today. So without any more, we're going to bring Karen in to, to have this great interview.

Karen, welcome.

Karen Springs: [00:04:43] Hi. Hello there.

Phil: [00:04:47] See, this is what we're talking about, folks. Just smooth as butter right here. This is, this is what we were talking about. And you know, this is what we were excited about just to have this interaction with you, with our guests, to be able to, to have it. Maybe be a little awkward at the beginning, but you know what, that's okay.

Because isn't that kind of life, right? Sometimes when

Dr. Rick: [00:05:09] you're pulling that off, you're pulling that off incredibly right now. So we're, we're, we're all of it. We're all in the awkward. So that's, that's great.

Phil: [00:05:18] You just own it. Just own the awkward. That's what I try to tell my teenagers all the time. Right?

They say everything's awkward, right? That's our song from the Lego movie. Not everything is awesome. Everything is awkward. And that's just the way it is. But you get used to it. You love it. You, you, you know, that's when you can really get vulnerable and transparent with people is when you've been awkward together.

So that's what I think anyway. Even if it's not true, but I just made it up and that's what we're going with today. So, so Karen, you know, we introduced you beforehand. You don't have any idea how we introduced you, but that's okay 'cause it was really, really good. And, Karen, you know, last time we had you on, as I said in the, as the, in, in the intro of you, that you were the first person to ever be the interviewee and cohost of an episode. Only time we've ever done that on the podcast outside of me and Rick just talking with each other. But you know, when we talked about it, you were in the middle of a road trip. In fact, you're also the only guest to stay at my house with my family the night before the interview. You know, you're just full of firsts. Now you're the first person to be interviewed on the video.

So it's just amazing. But yeah, you know, I mean, it's, it's just, you are, we want you to be the pioneer, as I said in the intro. So, you know, the concept of the book really was you were, we talked about that the last time. You know, you were interviewed, you were taking a road trip to, to, meet with and hang out with and interview the people that you had hosted when you were in Ukraine.

And I just want you to, if you could take a minute to remind the folks out there, remind our audience about your ministry in Ukraine, how your experiences and the relationships you developed transformed you and led to the creation of the book that has just been released, *Adoption Through the Rear View Mirror*.

Karen Springs: [00:07:00] Yeah. well, thanks Phil. It's, how to take 14 years and condense it into a short sentence? But, in short, I moved to Ukraine in 2004 because I had relatives in ministry over there. And so, through that, I was working with, the Christian Broadcasting Network and Orphan's Promise. And, through that, started visiting some orphanages as I first moved over there, and God really gripped my heart with the needs of orphans and vulnerable children.

And specifically kids that were aging out or were in need of adoptive families so that, I was straight out of college and God just kind of gripped my heart with their needs. And, so very quickly became an advocate for adoption, both in Ukraine and internationally. So we were working to advocate for Ukrainian families adopting, and as well, I was connecting with American families that were coming over, and just sharing what I knew, helping translate when needed and through those relationships and wanting to help families that eventually about, I think after I'd been in Ukraine for about seven or eight years, I opened my home. I got a larger apartment and turned that into a hospitality ministry for families. So, started

hosting dozens and dozens of families. And before I knew it had hosted hundreds of families in my home over about an eight year period.

But, as I was hearing more about their going home and the challenges they were having, I was realizing that not everybody who comes over has a realistic expectation of what adoption will look like. So, people for years had said, "Oh, Karen, you should write a book sometime." And, I think I was just looking for an adventure and thinking how I could reconnect with these families.

And one thing led to another and the next thing I thought I'll write a book and reconnect with the families that stayed with me and hear their stories. So that was kind of the seeds you could say of, of the project.

Phil: [00:08:56] Yeah. And one of the things you talked about in the book, and I thought it's always great.

I love to hear just people's passion and we can tell you're passionate about it when you're talking about it, but you know, what, what you said, the book you found your passion and purpose really in, in doing what you did. Do you, I don't know if you remember. Sometimes we forget what we actually wrote in there, but I imagine since it's your passion and purpose, you remember. Can you share with the, with the audience that, cause I think that will go a lot, you know, go a long way into understanding more about what you're about to talk about.

Karen Springs: [00:09:22] Yeah. And I think, I, I can kind of remember that part in the intro. And I think that was in a sense that was like my 25, 26 year old self, where I was seeing all these families get activated to want to adopt.

And so I was so excited. It was this kind of naive, social justice missionary. I want to see children's saved and orphanhood end. And so I was very passionate about seeing kids and families 'cause I knew they didn't belong in institutions. So I, but I think the passionate part was sometimes blind blind to the reality of kids and family's situations.

So I would say, yeah, I was once the passionate advocate and now I would say I am more of the. Still passionate about the needs, but more cautious than the advocacy and how I do it. So that was a little bit of my, the journey that God led me on from the 23 year old that I was when I moved to Ukraine to where I am today.

Phil: [00:10:20] Yeah. And that, you know, really, you also talk in the book about how you were blogging about your, you know, just the people that were staying with you, not like the bad stuff about them, you were just blogging about what you talk with them about and what that is going on, right? I hope anyway. I didn't read the blogs, but, but can you share with that?

I guess part of what you saw was really, as you just kind of alluded to the harder side of adoption, right? The more difficult side to be able to help people, you know, kind of have eyes wide open. But can you share about that? You know, what you discovered when you dug deep into their stories and really why, as you said, in the book you transitioned from

simply celebrating the happy ending, Cinderella, like adoption stories, but really felt that it was critical to tell the whole truth when we are quote, unquote marketing adoption, right?

Karen Springs: [00:11:02] Yeah. Well, I think like anybody, any, any of us, we all love Cinderella stories. It's why we go to movies. It's why we love redemptive stories. I love redemptive stories. And I know in that first chapter I talk about, I loved telling them. But I also recognize I was telling the story at the very first part of the journey, which was family comes, you know, God moves all of these hurdles for them to be able to get said child into their family and so they see all these hurdles that were overcome. And that was usually where my story ended was and child goes home. So, right, that's the beautiful story we tell. And everyone gets really excited about that. And then it's like, but what happens after happily ever after? And I think that's the part where so many stories stop and we don't do justice by sharing more.

And I think as my years were ticking by in advocacy, I was becoming more aware of the harder stories and the not so Cinderella like stories. And I was, I've always just had, I'm very passionate about truth and truth telling and not. And I think as I was wrestling with that is like, Oh, am I always telling the truth?

You know, or am I afraid is adoption becoming this like idol that I have to protect and I can't share the whole truth for fear of this is going to fall apart? And so I was kind of coming face to face with that of like, I can still believe in adoption and believe that this is necessary, but still be a truth teller and share the whole, the whole spectrum.

And so that was why I set out on the road trip because I wanted to allow families to have that space where they could share truthfully and know that, you know, it was a part of the journey and that they couldn't share that with other people.

Phil: [00:12:45] Yeah, that was one of my favorite quotes, really. There were a lot of favorite quotes, but one of them was really where one of the women that you were talking with, I believe was a woman who said, "I didn't need naysayers.

What I needed were truth tellers." Right. And I thought that was so powerful and something that, you know, I talk with a lot of people about, you know, like, man, you're just such a negative Nellie. And I'm like, no, I just want to make sure that you're you fully understand what you're getting into. Go into it with eyes wide open.

But on that note, I like you, you know, you have not adopted, I haven't ever been a foster carer. I've never, I've never, you know, really lived the experience. Right. I've, it's always really from that 30,000 foot view. Now I've talked with a lot of people in the weeds and I know a lot of people doing this work in the weeds, as you have, right. Can you just speak through a minute about that 'cause I think a lot of people out there really aren't going to be doing this in the weeds? And we've talked about this on the show, but what is the value of the position you had of somebody who really is, was able to listen, see, talk with a lot of different people and see this, you know, really the landscape of, of adoption.

What's the value of that as you're, as you were writing the book, as you're sharing your story that you've seen as far as what it adds to the picture, when you're talking with people?

Karen Springs: [00:14:02] Well, I think one thing that comes to mind is that your own personal experience isn't clouding how you see it so you have a slightly more objective way of taking in the whole spectrum.

So it's like if, I just think of the families that, you know, have had a horrible experience with, I mean, and you could take this on anything in life, whether it's marriage or parenting or pastoring, you know, whatever your experience is, it's going to cloud how you see everyone else's experiences, even if it was different.

And so I found that I was able to hear from the people that struggled immensely. And I was able to hear from the people that had less struggles and the ones that came in with like very rosy glasses and the ones that were more realistic. And so, because I heard so many stories and yet wasn't filtering it through my own personal adoption experience, I felt like it allowed me to see like just trends and patterns in a way, and I realize there's except, you know, there's exceptions to every rule and exceptions to every story, but it still let me pick out those themes perhaps in a, in a broader way. And I think with my journey specifically in Ukraine, I think I understood some of the cultural nuances that a lot of families missed early on.

And that was always such a balance when families were staying in my home in Ukraine, because I understood the language. I could sometimes communicate with their children in ways they couldn't. And it was always that fine line of like, what do I say? And what do I not say? What do they need to figure out on their own and their parenting journey?

And what do I like step in and add? And so I think my lens, I think in the book, I say the wide angle lens I had was just the myriad of families that, that came through my door. And so I was able to hear it and then share the perspective from maybe a third, third perspective view.

Dr. Rick: [00:15:54] Yeah, Karen, I just want to tell you as, as a, as an adoptive dad from Ukraine, who feels like I've lived a lot of the story that you wrote out of, out of many of those families.

I just want to tell you thank you because, because I think that, that, that unique perspective, that, that ability to sort of tell the story from the outside, it, it isn't clouded by, you know, by that kind of, that enmeshed perspective that comes when, you know, when it's your story and when you're, you're living in the middle of the story.

And I, and I think, I think you've really done, you've done an important thing and, and something, I think that's going to benefit a lot of people. I think there's a lot of, there's a lot of blessing for families that are in the adoptive process now that can benefit from something like this. And, and honestly, part of it, you know, as I was reading the book part of what, what really struck me as, you know, as somebody who's trained as a social science researcher. This is really good research.

Like the, like the methodology is really good. Like it's like you really intuitively I think you, you did a lot of things in, in the way that you encounter these people and the way that you consolidated their stories, that are things that, you know, I tried to teach PhD students for

years. And, and so, so I'm gonna ask you a little bit of a quirky question, but really what I'd love to know, like walking away from the whole thing, what are like the big ideas that you came away with out of what I would term a pretty significant research project?

Karen Springs: [00:17:29] Which chapter should I focus on, right? The big ideas. Oh, I should have a better answer. I think, the, I mean, one of the things that I land on in the end of the book is, is it deals with the concept of paradox. And I think that was something I went through back, you know, of how do you live with, you know, truths here and truths there?

And I think kind of like I was just saying of when this is true for one family, that this is true for another or two truths are the same that the family is dealing with. But, I think, a lot of families entered in there was this what some of them said was we knew it would be hard. We just didn't know which version of hard it would be.

And I think that's so true with many things in life, is that, you know, we can tell ourselves psychologically, yes, this is going to be hard, right? I'm going to go. This new job is going to be harder. This marriage is going to be hard or whatever is going to be hard. And you know that, but until you're actually walking it out, as Phil said in the weeds, like, you don't know what your, your version is.

And as one dad said, it's like, they read up on all this stuff, like with attachment and all these specific things around adoption, and then their struggles were completely other things. And so it's like, you can prepare. but you don't always know what you're going, you have to prepare for and until you, you're in it.

And I think that's the balances. I think families do need to prepare, but it's an ongoing preparation. It's the prep. And then the relearning while you're in the middle and the in re figuring it out. So, I think that was one of the, my big takeaways.

Phil: [00:19:06] Yeah. You know, I mean, that's, it's the reality of it is, and we've talked about this a lot on the show and I think you and I may have even talked about it last time we, we had you on, but the idea of what you're basically saying is every one of these children are unique children of God.

And every one of these families are unique couples that when you put all of that together, it's a unique, amazing thing that's going to be really hard, difficult, lessons learned, problems had, you know, and continuing problems and issues and continuing blessings and amazing things. And I say, problems, not like, Oh, it's a problem per child, but that's just reality, right?

That's life. And to see that borne out and to see the, you covering as, as Rick said, the issues in, in really, I thought it was just very, you're catching a lot of the nuance that we talk about a lot that, as you said, you have that view to be able to come in and have it from a lot of different people, because it's not as simple as saying this is the way it's going to be, because you don't know that, right? And with that, I think that the, you know, the next thing that I just want you to be able to talk about is the first kind of chapter of talking about what you learned and what you took away. It talks about families reframing their expectations and redefining success. Right? So what did you learn that you'd want to pass on to prospective adoptive families about that?

Karen Springs: [00:20:29] I think that, especially in, in our Western culture, what we define success is, and even maybe more so in the evangelical churches, we think, you know, a good job, a good or good education, good job, good spouse, good family, loves Jesus. You know, we have these things of kind of the steps of what is successful.

And one of the dads, there's a conversation that sticks out in my mind, but, That he was sharing, you know, you watch the, the YouTube video or the, whatever that motivates you to adopt because you see this family that adopted the future leader of, you know, they, the kid went on to do these amazing, great things and you think, wow, I could adopt an orphan and they could go on and change the world.

Right? So you have like a little bit of these altruistic motives, but they, you know, you have your expectation with that. And so, The dad said, you know, God had to really open his eyes of redefining success to saying like my that's not success. Like success is bringing them home and them having a family and maybe working just a normal job at Home Depot.

I mean, it doesn't have to be they're the next doctor and lawyer. And I think we've sometimes sold ourselves that message so much. And I remember another mom said, you know, she just hopes that someday her daughter will be able to have healthy relationships with other human beings, because right now she's seeing, she's not having healthy.

She doesn't know how to have a healthy relationship. And so I think success looks different for every child in every family. And I think that's where you go as an adoptive parent going in, you have to strip away what your preconceived notions of success are and you know, how do you help your child heal to the best of his or her ability and hopefully come to know and love the Lord?

You know, I mean, I think that was stripped down in terms of success for me, was seeing kids, kids that had a profound understanding of who Christ was and our relationship with the Lord. Like to me, that was a level of quote unquote success, but I don't like using that terminology in that way. But yeah, just success looks so, so different is, is a big takeaway.

Dr. Rick: [00:22:42] Yeah. One of the things we, you know, we've kind of said, and if through the lens of experiences that, I mean, it doesn't matter how much training you've had. It doesn't matter how much you've prepared. It doesn't matter how much you've imagined. It never lives up to, to the reality that you construct before you get there.

Right? And, and that, and that really, truly everybody, everybody deals with disappointment. Our kids deal with disappointment. We deal with disappointment because it doesn't match the, it doesn't match the reality that we created. That fantasy of, but that doesn't mean it's not good. And, and, and that re a lot of that kind of recalibrating your thinking and readjusting is, you know, is about, you know, just kind of coming back to reality.

And I, and I do think that's based on, you know, based on a lot on expectation. I think one of the other things you touch on in the book is, is just the role of emotion, like the role of feelings. And, and I think so much of even what we, you know, what we do in pre-adoptive education even in the best scenarios is it's all about, it's about kind of reaching the mind it's about like us, you know, as knowing the right things and knowing the right ways to respond.

But you know, you really, you, you address some pretty touchy issues, emotionally, like, like the idea that like what happens and, and the reality of, like when you don't feel attached and when your kids don't feel attached to you. And when that, you know, when that, that bond, that you've, you've hoped for talk a little bit about that and just what you, what you saw and maybe what you learned in, in conversations with some of those families that, that had struggled with that and maybe some that are still struggling with it.

Karen Springs: [00:24:25] Yeah, I knew going into it. So I mean, a lot of the questions I had about a 20 to 25 questions that were, that I asked to every family to kind of guide the interview. And I knew just some, some previous conversations with adoptive moms that the topic of like, not feeling attached to your child at an emotional level, it had come up before.

But, so I wanted to include that in my question. And I think that it. It was amazing to see how much it did come up. And almost this look of relief from mothers, specifically, fathers, too. But I felt like it was maybe more common in moms of like, when they felt like that was a safe thing that they could talk about.

It was like, Oh, wow, no, one's really. Asked me about that before and you're giving me space to talk to, to it knowing that my name's not going to be attached to it 'cause that's such a touchy thing. I mean, you think of being in a small group in a church or somewhere and you know, to say I'm really having a hard time loving, feeling love for my child.

And even though, you know, biological parents might have tons of struggles with their children, I think at the core, just because of the bonding and nurturing that's happened since womb to birth, to, to wherever you are in that day, there isn't an, there's a lot more feelings that are just attached there that, you know, the adopted child that comes into the family later on doesn't experience.

And one of the moms in the book shared about how she had gone to a conference and someone had said, talk about this concept of a love bank. And every time a child does something, they deposit in your bank. And then when they do something naughty or misbehave, they pull out. But there's this like give and take.

And they make a lot of deposits when they're little and cute. So they, you know, they withdraw a lot when they're older. Well adoptive kids that come into the family, they don't, they come in with zero in the bank and then they start withdrawing. And so the mom gets empty pretty fast, or the dad gets empty pretty fast.

And so, I think as parents started to give themselves grace for that, because I think there was a lot of shame and guilt connected with the fact of like, I don't feel as attached to this child as a mother should feel, should feel, right, to a child. And so with that was just this vicious cycle of guilt and shame and not having a place to talk about it with.

So I felt like I was able to help normalize that for some of the parents to say, You know, this is actually something that a lot of families deal with. And I had several families just voice that they didn't feel like that was talked a lot about in the adoption communities that they'd been a part of and that there wasn't a lot of literature on that topic.

Dr. Rick: [00:27:00] I don't think it's talked about a lot in the church either. And I think there's, you know, one of the things you, you mentioned. In the book and you really drew out and I thought it was, I thought it was right on point is kind of the whole overspiritualization of adoption.

And, and I think one of the things we've done in inadvertently is, is we've created a forum where people are afraid to express those things in the church. You're afraid because, Hey, we've, you know, we've been on this very public journey and people have seen us, you know, move toward a child and maybe they've given financially and they've, you know, they've sacrificed to help us that when we get home, there's a shame that, that develops where in the place where we ought to be able to be the most transparent, we struggle to be transparent.

And I think that's been part of the crusade, I think for me, and even, even coming out of this, you know, professionally now being a part of a ministry that, you know, that does adoption is really trying to, to speak those words into the church as well, and to train and prepare and say, you know, part of what the church has to expect is this is going to be messy and it's going to, you know, it's going to be hard on, in, in any circumstance and you have to be willing to, to let people be real.

And we have to create environments where you know, where we're not, we're not judging and where we're not triggering and where we're not, you know, causing people to feel shame and, you know, and feeling like they're going to have to hide. And I just, I really appreciate, I, I feel like that's all I'm going to say through this whole interview because, cause I just, I felt like the whole time, as you know, as I was reading the book, it was just kinda amen after amen and, and going, I mean, we've had, we've had conversations, you know, around Lifeline in the last couple of weeks since I have, you know, got my hands on the book of of saying like, this is, this is something we want to put in the, in the hands of prospective adoptive families. Like we want families to, to, to hear this and to see it because, because we, it reinforces the messages that we're, you know, we're trying to give them. I think, another, another one of those things that you, that you tapped into that, that I don't think we talk about in our community enough is, is grief.

And, and I think one of the, you know, we, we've kind of grown up to the point, in a, in an orphan care and adoption community where we talk a lot about trauma and we're, you know, and, and, and honestly, we kind of look at everything through the lens of there's a, there's a trauma behind it that's causing it.

I think what we've come to realize, or what we're coming to realize is is there some of those things that we see, it's not trauma, it's grief. It's, it's, it's, it's just a profound wound of sadness and, and that sadness doesn't always come out, looking like sadness. Sometimes it looks like anger.

Sometimes it looks like, you know, and, and, and I just wonder if there are, you know, are there stories, are there people that come to mind where, you know, where, where you saw bits and pieces of that and, and, and just like, how did they, how did they open up and were they able to deal with their grief?

What were some things maybe family you saw families do that, that helped them help them as parents and help their kids as well to, to grieve well through the process and to resolve that?

Karen Springs: [00:30:16] Yeah, grief was that big, I think, I don't think one chapter alone focuses on grief, but I feel like the theme of grief is kind of woven in because it isn't encompassed in so many of the subjects from integrating adopted or, yeah, adopted and biological siblings where you had the biological kids grieving what their family used to be, or the one, the chapter that's dealing with the parent's feelings 'cause they're grieving also what their family wants was or grieving the loss of expectations. Another thing grief came up in the, when we were talking about healing and just grieving, I mean, you, like you said, trauma, but parents grieving what's happened to their children. When they, when stories start to come out, there's a grief over just the sadness and the loss or the horrible things that have maybe happened to their child before they came into their home.

So yeah, I think grief is a huge, it's very all encompassing and it's from very different angles. And I did interview a handful of kids and I would also say that, yeah, very few people, I think, know how to use the word grief to adequately, like he said, put to something, but I felt like a lot of kids, there was a grief.

Especially for the kids that came at an older at that like tween between 11 to 14 age that over the identity. Because the few teens that I sat down with, it was this grief of like, I'm not really American and I'm not really Ukrainian because I've, you know, maybe forgotten my language. Or I know that if I go back there, I won't fit in anymore.

And so I think that that was a really big, big topic. And I think some families, they felt like were pretty prepared to talk about it and handle. I think other people maybe didn't have the words. and even with counseling, I know a lot of families were wanting to get their kids into counseling, but then felt like their kids weren't at the place where they were ready to open up or share.

Didn't maybe have the skill set to even engage in what, you know, counseling would require. But, yeah, the topic of grief from so many angles is such a huge, huge topic that needs to be addressed. I think for any perspective or current adoptive family.

Dr. Rick: [00:32:25] So as we're taking on tough topics, right? Like we're, we're, we're hitting the, like the top five list of the big ones, but, but we're gonna, we're going to take on one of the really difficult ones.

And I, and again, this is something that I appreciate that you didn't shy away from, but you, you know, you pressed in and talked about, and it's about disruptions. And, and, you know, and, and you write in, you know, in the book about, an issue that's been really visible, you know, we've, we've kind of seen that play out in front of us in the media and, and it's been something that there's been a lot of opinions shared on, on social media and, you know, in those kinds of things.

But I think where I would, where I would want to, to focus. The conversation is how, how can we deal better in the church and how can we deal better in, in the adoptive community

and, and in the, you know, kind of the, the people that come around kind of the community of concern, how can we deal better with disruption?

Karen Springs: [00:33:26] Hmm. Yeah. Such a good question. The first thing that was coming to mind as you were sharing 'cause especially in regards to some of the recent media around some of the disruption, that one disruption that happened with the YouTube star. But, I think it's this idea of, we, in this community, we can have a lot of strongly opinionated people because of the research and the background and the things that we've done.

But I think after sitting with the families, so many families and the specifically some families that went through a disruption or some form of a disruption, whether that was sending their kids to a therapy program long-term is that, that opinions, people usually have their opinions from their own ivory towers, again, of their own experiences.

And I just think that we need to withhold some of our really strong opinions. And I say this as a strongly opinionated person and listen, to listen to people's experiences and to listen and give them space to share and to ask questions. I mean, it doesn't mean we, we're neutral from, you know, that we can't have an opinion at some point, but I think that until we've walked a mile in someone's shoes and known what they've truly experienced in their home, which in reality, we can't because we're not in their home.

And we only know what a family is sharing with us, but, I think it's, it's extending grace and recognizing the complexities of, you know, nobody walks into adoption wanting to disrupt. So we have to know that is that nobody goes in thinking like, I hope this isn't going to work. I'm going to find another family for my child.

So if we go in with that attitude and think, wow, something must have really happened. That was super hard. And this family either didn't have the resources; something happened that was someone was at risk, you know, so it wasn't safe for someone to be in the home. And that's why they came to that decision.

And, you know, the, the amazing thing about it too, is that, I've read so many stories. And even from the families I talk to is a lot of times the family that the child goes into after the disruption ends up being a much better fit for the child. And in the two cases that I kind of unpack in the book, both instances that disruption happened quite early on and I would say was definitely in the best interest of the child. And the child is doing so much better in a family that was more ready to handle the needs or the could the family dynamics just weren't suitable to that child finding health and healing.

So, it's definitely a topic that I think in the adoption community, there needs to be some judgment withheld and allow people to share. And that any family going into adoption needs to already be talking about what that would look like for their family. You know, it needs to be a real conversation.

Dr. Rick: [00:36:19] Yeah. I definitely think that, that there. Yeah. And, and, and, and I think we've learned so much about the need for, you know, the need for pre-adoptive education and the need for, you know, community around families and things that things that, you know, 15 years ago, 17 years ago, when we first set foot in Ukraine to do our first adoption,

none of those things were being talked about and, you know, and it was, it was, here's a good reading list and, you know, some things to do to get ready and, and to see today, you know, where we are. But, but yeah, I mean, I think it's, we, part of, part of what I think we also need to be talking about it in, in the adoption community and we don't need to, you know, kind of let that be the murmur that, that we, you know, that we trail off with.

And, and I just, again, I really, really appreciate the fact that you didn't just gloss over or skip over that, but you, you brought light to it. And I think it, it, it speaks to, you know, to the integrity of, of what you created and, and the importance of it. So for me here, hear me saying to you, thank you.

Phil: [00:37:33] I did not expect Rick to fan girl on ya, Karen.

Karen is, you know, and you know, that was worth the price of admission right there.

Karen Springs: [00:37:45] Rick came over to Ukraine years ago to speak so we've been friends a long time.

Dr. Rick: [00:37:47] Absolutely. I'm just trying to figure out how in the world, we did three adoptions over 17 years and we never stayed in your home. That's that's the amazing thing.

Karen Springs: [00:37:56] I think your adoptions were pre my home. But.

Phil: [00:38:00] Yeah, that's, that's probably what happened, Karen. That's probably what it was. So no, and I, and I, I mean, I think that what you're talking about here, and why you were able to have these conversations and what you were just talking about in that last answer, I think goes to a lot of what we've been discussing. What we talk about all the time on the show, which is the way you're going to have a lot of these conversations, the way you're going to be able to have the truth telling is in relationship, right? You have to earn those conversations. You don't just, you know, you've earned the conversation. You've earned the ability to write this book because you took the time to understand people. You took the time to get to know people. You took the time to really see, you know, these aren't people that are going in, like you said, no one goes into it and wants to disrupt. Or expected to disrupt. Any thought that they're going to disrupt then there's no way they would ever even start the process, right? It's not like the adoption process is a really fun thing to go through, right? It's, it's, it's grueling. It's hard. Right. But it's a call, as you said, in the book and when it is a call, you're going to do it.

And sometimes it doesn't go as you expect. And in those relationships, you will know how to mourn with those who mourn and rejoice with those who rejoice. And what does that look like? And I think that goes to so many things that are going on right now, but we didn't have time for that right now. But I do want to talk as we, as we are bringing this to a close, I want to talk a little bit about what you talked about as you were bringing the book to a close.

Really you discussed some faith lessons and adoption that you've learned along the way, as you said. In a couple of them, I just want you to talk about, and just expand on it. Might nice to expand on it, but give a little preview on what someone would read in the book, talking about blessings redefined and redemptive suffering. Because you know, these really aren't things that we really like to talk about a lot of the times.

Right. But there's so important. So can you just share a little bit with that or with our audience about that?

Karen Springs: [00:39:48] Yeah. I think for a lot of people, that faith journey of a blessing redefined of, yeah, we can think of a blessing as material, material, blessings, or a vacation or a home. I mean, we go to the tangible, right?

And I think for people to understand like a blessing, the blessings that were redefined was understanding God's heart in a different way, or even just seeing, wow, I never knew that I, you know, as I tenaciously go after my child, but feel rejected by my child, like, how often has that been my face towards God?

And how much does God have, you know, grace and mercy continual on me? And I just think, I know for parents, you know, always describe how they understand the father, heart of God so much more as they walk into parenting. And I think for adoptive parents, that's even a deeper level of understanding. Just God's tenacious love and that you keep going after.

And even though it's hard and you know, you, you keep going. And so I think that, that, that beautiful lesson that so many people found. And then in terms of the, the redemptive suffering that you mentioned, and the, I actually, I opened to that page 'cause I just wanted to read the quote that, the mom's that, because it stuck with me in such a profound way, what she shared, but the mother said, "We always try to find a reason for our suffering, but sometimes it doesn't seem to have a constructive purpose except for being with Christ in his suffering.

If I can offer my suffering to Christ as in, I'm going to suffer this without complaint, because you suffered for me, I can give my suffering meaning, which can help me deal with it. Protestants are really bad at this. We want to glibly quote, Romans 8:28. Everything will work together for good. We want to rush to find out, what's the good that's going to come out of this, but sometimes the good isn't a tangible thing.

Sometimes the good is simply that you've humbled yourself." And she goes on, but I just think that, I go back to that quote. It's funny because I listened to the, I interviewed the families. I transcribed the families. I wrote the book. I read, I read it a million times as I edited it. So some of these phrases are like stuck in my head. And in moments, in my own suffering, in my own ways, I, I go back to that and I think like this isn't always, I mean, I've even thought that during what we're going through right now with the Coronavirus is we want to quickly say, okay, where's, what's the good, what's the silver lining, right? We want to find our silver lining to make this all make sense, because God works everything together for good, but the good isn't always the way we see it, which I think kind of circles back to the blessings redefined, is that the good is redefined when we look at it through the eyes of God. And so carrying a cross right is, is painful. So what does it mean to carry the cross of being a parent to a child who has struggled? Or what does it mean to carry the cross of not always feeling a time attached to your child? Or carrying the cross of the tension in your home because of what's happening between biological children and adopted children? Or the spiritual warfare? Or, you know, all the other topics that I discuss in the book?

But I just think, I always go back to that redemptive suffering is how is, is this my offering of obedience to Christ.

Phil: [00:43:09] Yeah, that's good. That was basically a sermon right there, folks. So, yeah, it is, it's so good there. I mean, as Rick said there's a lot of, there's a lot of goodness in this book folks, so, definitely pick it up.

And as you've seen, Karen's not like, you know, thinking she's all big time 'cause she's printed, you know, done a book. She knows this is God's work and God has worked through her and she's the real deal. And, I know that's kind of weird me saying that while I'm looking at you on a, on a Zoom call, but it's true. So I'm going to say it. So, so Karen, as, as we always do, as you know, there's a couple of questions we always ask, we're going to modify the last one 'cause we've already asked you one of them and I don't want to put you on the spot for another person that you know, has changed your life. But because there's so many in the book that we've seen, those people already or, we've, we've read about them. But what have you read, watched or listened to recently other than your book, obviously, 'cause you've read that a lot, that has impacted your thinking on how we can love orphan and vulnerable children with excellence?

Karen Springs: [00:44:05] Well, I just got in the mail this last week, I don't know if you've chatted with her recently, but our friend, Jodi, Jackson Tucker's Bible study that she put together called, Second Mother.

And so I've been reading that and even though I'm not a mom, it has really, I've read it through the lens of the moms that I interviewed, and I've already got a list of people I want to send this book to because there's just so much beauty in it. And, just the way she weaves scripture and really deep theological insights.

But then from like the foster adoptive perspective, it's just, it's really beautiful. So that's kind of what I've been, reading and looking at and connecting it to some of the lessons I feel like I drew out in the book. So that's been really cool. I think they pair really well together.

Phil: [00:44:52] It's like a wine and a steak, you know? It's like a good pairing. Very, very good. Very good.

Yeah. So, the last question we have, as I said, I mixed it up a little bit this time, but it's, you know. How has this process changed, you know, or, or even refined, maybe not change, but refined how you, you know, you're thinking about how we can love orphan and vulnerable children with excellence and, and obviously in your, in your work with role without orphans as well and what you've seen over the last, you know, few years of just doing this work regularly from that, you know, from that higher view?

Karen Springs: [00:45:26] Yeah, I think it's given me, for one, I think it's instilled even a deeper passion for wanting to advocate for kids in their home countries. And I know that's not possible for every child, but I just see, after seeing so many of the challenges that families have had, I think recognizing are there ways that we can intervene earlier so that, you know, so kind of looking at preventative measures of how can we help prevent trauma and how can we help, you know, prevent kids having to be adopted?

So it's, I'd say it's stirred at my passion for that more as well as how do we bring communities around families that can support one another so those that are in the adoption journey, I just saw that those that had, you know, and they didn't have to be in huge adoption support groups, but just having those one or two families around them that could step in and say, how can we help you?

And, and just checking in, you know, 'cause families aren't always going to blare what's hardest in their story. And so I think it was just the need of, seeing families, seeing families that are fostering and adopting and knowing that they're seen in the church and that it is an important part of, of ministry of coming alongside these families and how to, I mean, I think it's a huge area that the church, in North America has to grow and creating resources and, you know, like not to scare people away to be like you said, the truth teller and the naysayer.

I think it's that, that balance. And I think that as we challenge people in their faith in Christ, that, you know, more people will take this journey, but how do we prepare them and make sure that they have the support system around them that they need.

Phil: [00:47:11] Yeah, no, that's great. Well, thank you so much, Karen.

You know, I I'm, I'm encouraged every time we, we spend some time together, so I very much appreciate you. Very much appreciate this book and all that went into it. And as always, and folks out there, you know, you know that you can come and hang out with my family anytime. So I hope that that happens again.

So I, I showed Becca the, the book and she goes, I think I remember and then I showed her the picture and she was like, "Oh yeah, Karen," you know, so, so that was a very, very, fun time. And I'm very appreciative of what you've done in this interview as well.

Karen Springs: [00:47:50] Thanks. Thanks, Phil. Thanks, Rick

Dr. Rick: [00:47:52] Thanks Karen. Appreciate the book and appreciate you.

And, and just really excited for what the contribution this book is going to make. So thanks for the hard work and for sharing it with us.

Phil: [00:48:05] Absolutely.

So, Rick, what'd you think of that first video interview?

Dr. Rick: [00:48:12] Man, we could've gone on for a long, long time. You know, just obviously much, much love and much respect for Karen. And she's somebody that, you know, that you and I both have known for a long time and for many years and in many contexts.

And so, my expectations were high for the book just because of knowing who was putting it together and, and knowing her experience. But, but for sure, you know, she delivered. I think, you know what I, what I would say about the book in retrospect, I mean, she, I'm so familiar with the context of, of what she was, you know, what she was talking about because it's, I mean, she, she was living and working in the country that, you know, that's so close to

our heart and where our three kids came home from. And, and so there's just so much reality and in what she said and our experience and experience of other families. I think, you know, one thing I would, I would want to bear in mind for, for families and for people as they, as they read, this is we have learned a lot and we've grown a lot in, in the adoption community, you know. International adoption is not what it, what it was when, you know, even when Karen started, the, the ministry to house families. And it certainly isn't what it was when she, you know, when she first got into this and in 2003 or 2004.

And, and, and I think, you know, now it, it, it really is more about older children and kids with special needs and complexities and large sibling groups and kids that are just going to really, probably not finding any sort of permanency outside of an institution. Those are the kids that are, you know, that are available in most in need for international adoption.

And, and I think, because it's hard, because it's difficult, doesn't diminish the call to step into it and do it. I think there are still people that God calls into doing this. But I think you do need to go in with your eyes wide open, and I think you do need to prepare yourself. And I do think you need to bring, you know, a community of people around you.

And I do think you need to have healthy expectations about, you know, about, about what that's going to be. And hopefully we've grown up as a community to talk more and more about that and to provide more resources. You know, but the thing is that the things that she said and, and the experiences that she pointed to with families, they're, they're true.

You know, those are, those are realities. And some of those are as a result of, you know, of, of people that weren't prepared well, or people that weren't supported well or whatever. But some of those are just, they're just the result of, of just brokenness and, you know, and I, I didn't say it to Karen, but I think the, you know, the reality that we understand in, in all of this is that that is adoptive families we didn't get here any other way than the fact that something, something is broken and it, and it's badly broken, you know, that brings us to this place. And that doesn't mean that there can't be good in your family. Doesn't mean that there can't be great in your family.

It doesn't mean. But, but what, what it does mean is that there, there are always going to be some things that are present and, and you're not ever going to really kinda, you know, it's not like something you're going to get over. It's just part it's part of the, you know, it's part of the reality and part of the backdrop.

And I just thought she did a beautiful job of, of being, you know, being a truth teller about those things. But, but also in, in, and I'll just say it. And I, you know, and I would, I would say Karen, I think I thank her for not taking the easy way out. Because the easy way out would be to say, here are all these really tough realities, now we just can't do this anymore. And I think there are a lot of people out there that are saying that. And that's not the answer either. You know, we've talked about it on this show that, that there are, adoption is not the only answer and it's not the best answer for most kids that are, that are vulnerable.

And most kids even that are, you know, that are orphaned around the world. But it is the right answer and it is the best answer for some kids. And, and so we need to do that well,

and we need to do it responsibly. And I just am super, super thankful for her, you know, her voice and her balance perspective in that.

Phil: [00:52:18] Yeah, I agree. And I thought it was super cool too, and I'm, I'm excited to continue doing these interviews with you as well 'cause of the different perspectives we bring. Right. and it's in a particularly, I think it was very obvious in this, in interviews like this, right, where it's, you know, her perspective is similar to mine.

Yeah, your perspective is somewhere, all the adoptive families, even being able to adopt from, from Ukraine and any, you know, and, and I've lived with you not lived with you, but I've walked that journey with you over the last several years. That'd be kind of weird since we don't live in the same state.

Dr. Rick: [00:52:51] Right, we're really not close at all.

We're close. We're close in proximity.

Phil: [00:52:56] Yes, exactly. Anyway. But I, you know, we've lived a lot of these things, right? Like, I mean, we've shared meals and we've talked about, and we've cried together and we mourned with each other and we've rejoiced with each other and, and with my biological children as well. right? And so I can remember where I'm in a, you know, on the call with you crying and, and that's, that's real, right? That's, that's what it's about. That's life. It's real. It's vulnerable. It's it's and that's what I loved about the book. I mean, I said during the interview, that's what I loved about the book.

That's what I loved about. you know, I would, I would like to think that if, if I were to able to write a book, something like that, it'd be similar to what I'd want to write, right? Like just real, raw stories that are not just the good stories, not just the bad stories, but stories of a, of a picture, a mosaic of families that are, that are, have gone through this thing and some, you know how to, in a way that it's like just a lot more rejoicing than mourning and some, a lot more mourning than rejoicing. And, and that is where,

Dr. Rick: [00:53:58] like I said, you know, like I said, man, I think I hope that that part of what the book does and where I would, where I would make a strong recommendation to people to pick it up, but, but also to share it, share it with pastors, share with, yeah, you know, with leaders in the church share with, with people in, you know, in a wider context, because, because I, I hope it does the work of sort of de-mythologizing adoption and, and kind of pulling back the veil a little bit and, and really saying like, here are, 'cause she really exposes a lot of the ministry opportunities and a lot of the ways that we can, you know, can support families. And the truth. is there a lot of hurting families out there that are, that are hiding, and they're not saying these things out in front of, you know, out in front of their friends and out in front of their, you know, their church community and, and, and people pressing in to those families and, and, you know, really being community to them, is, is, you know, is an important thing, but it may take, it may take the community, you know, being the ones that take the first step and, and not waiting on, you know, the adoptive families, not waiting on the foster families.

And I think we don't leave them out. You know, this, obviously she's writing about a very, you know, very narrow context, but there's a, there's pretty wide application to this and, and so I, you know, I just pray that it goes far and the Lord uses it. And 'cause I think it's an excellent work by, you know, by a wonderful person and a great friend and and I think there's much good to come from it.

Phil: [00:55:25] Yeah, no, I agree. And I, and I think, yeah, before we jump into the recommendation, I know you have a recommendation for us today or, or at least a book that that is food for thought, as you said to me. I want to be careful to, to, you know, to let you classify whether it's actually recommendation. But before I do, I, I mean, I kind of jokingly said it like that was, she preached a sermon, but I think that, you know, if you're looking for Orphan Sunday sermon material, the chapter about the faith lessons that she learned on the journey. And I mean, other stuff in the book too, but I think that chapter has like, you know, your themes right there that you could get probably for the next five to six years on, on different lessons.

But, but it's, again, it's just real. Pick it up. You know, we could talk for days about it, but instead you can read it. And, and I will now go to my friend, Dr. Rick for his, conversation about a book he read recently.

Dr. Rick: [00:56:20] So, and this is kind of a, this is kind of a, a little bit of a recommendation or at least a conversation out of left field, maybe for, you know, for a lot of folks.

But I, in, in preparation to, to spend some time with some, with some youth pastors and to kind of do a thing on the seminary level, which is, you know, what I used to do a long time ago. I, I've just been kind of refreshing on some ideas and ran across a book that's fairly new in youth ministry circles called, Adoptive Youth Ministry.

And, and the author is a guy named, Chap Clark. I know Chap, love him. One of the, one of the foremost authorities in youth ministry, one of those popular authors, it's out there, you know, writing to youth ministry people, and he's been doing it for, you know, 25 or 30 years. But he presents an idea that, that what we ought to be doing and in kind of the way that we're caring for and, and assimilating people into, you know, into the body of Christ ought to be reflective of, of our adoption in Christ that we ought to be, that the church ought to be an adoptive community.

And it was really funny because reading that book at the same time, considering Karen's book and really, you know, really thinking through the realities of adoption and, you know, and the difficulties of that thing. I just have to be honest, I struggled with that idea, on, on a level. And I think there, I think there's some kind of, you know, key ways that you can, you know, you can talk about how, you know, how that happens, but I think it, it also, it also doesn't really, it doesn't really honor the reality of, of necessarily, you know, what adoption is. And I think we're, we're, we want to be careful that, that in that, in that it kind of in that walk in between the theological reality of what adoption is and what you and I have and who we are as a result of what Christ has done and all of that is, is, is kind of operationally separated from this thing that we do, that we experience called adoption. And, and the truth is that it's, it gets messy and it's about molding cultures and molding lives together. And it's

about brokenness and it's about, you know, kind of incompleteness of story in a lot of places and, and about limitation.

And, and I think the truth is that, that what we're trying to model in, in the, in the body of Christ is this, you know, kind of this idea of full embrace and full inclusion, but I just, like, I just don't have a peace that that's a, you know, that's a, that's a great way of, of looking at things. And so just, maybe, maybe more of a, of a, of a, this is maybe more of a comment than anything else that I think one of the things that those of us that are, that are a part of the adoption and part of the orphan care community, we need to be writing and saying more things.

We need to be creating more vulnerable spaces where we're speaking to the rest of the world about the reality of, of what, of what adoption is and the reality of how, how different earthly adoption is from, you know, from the, from the things that we see in the Scriptures and, and, and spiritual adoption.

Not that it's not good. It's just not perfect. And giving an opportunity for us to, kinda not my, you know, reckless generalizations. And I think that the point, and so really, it's not as much about the book as it is kind of a diving off point to say that, that one of the things that really, that, that even Karen's book has, has sort of reawakened in me is, is a, is a call to the church to say, Let's be careful about what we say, and let's be careful about how we present the picture.

And let's be careful about, about what we say particularly about, about earthly adoption, because, because I think the more we overromanticize it and the more we couch it in terms of the language of spiritual adoption, the more we set a bar, that's just him, the two impossibly high for, for real live families to, you know, to attain. And, and so, yeah, so let's be careful out there.

Phil: [01:00:45] Absolutely. No, I think that's, that's really important. It's really important. I think it's, it's important what we write. It's important what we talk about. It's important what we're covering at conferences. Important, what we're, you know, what we're recommending. Right. And that's just why I said what I said.

And, and so, but all that, you know, folks, I, I do, I do hope and pray that you are discerning in what you're doing, including in the context of this, this episode itself, right? I hope that you're taking what you're reading. I hope that you're taking what you're learning, what you're listening to, what you're watching, and you're using it in a really wise way to help you to understand how you can love orphaned and vulnerable children better and better each and every day.

Thanks a lot.