

EPISODE 4- "STARTING OVER: ADOPTION AFTER YOUR KIDS HAVE GROWN"
With DALE AND TAMI HEIM

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Welcome back to the Newborn Promise Podcast. We are wrapping up our last adoption interview today with Dale and Tami Heim and I know you won't be disappointed. Their story is unique and I know that as I describe their current life stage, it may not initially seem relatable to many of our listeners. However, I really want to encourage you not to skip this episode if you are planning on becoming a parent, despite your age or how you choose to grow your family.

As I listen to their testimony, I realize that this episode is less about age or life circumstances, and more about the "extraordinary invitation," as Tami will put it so eloquently later, to choose something larger than ourselves. In fact, to make the choice to die ourselves, to parent selflessly, to parent in God's strength and not our own. In our book, "Your Newborn Promise Project" we start with a chapter on love and what true, Godly love really looks like. And, Callie Grant says it so beautifully, "When you devote yourself to loving God, He uses your acts of service and sacrifice to unlock your self-absorption and transform you."

In their 50s, Dale and Tami were close to retirement, becoming grandparents, and looking forward to a slower pace. But, when God decided to step in and rewrite their script through mission efforts to Haiti, Dale and Tami bravely accepted a new adventure, a new calling, and a new life into their home.

Audra: Dale and Tami, you are both got started in mission efforts a little later in life. Tell me about how you got involved in Haiti.

Tami: I have to say it all started through our church, back in 2009. The church was engaged in a major capital campaign and part of that capital campaign included support and building orphanages in Haiti. So, we were captivated by that, just everything that we were learning about the work that we were going to do there and we immediately felt called to be a part of it. But, then an interesting thing happened. In 2010, there was the major earthquake in Haiti and it pretty much changed the original plan of the church and instead of taking children from Jeremie, orphans from Jeremie where we were building the orphanage, there was just a huge movement and encouragement to take children who had lost parents from Port Du Prince. So, we agreed to do that and by June the orphanage was up and running and it was a wonderful opportunity now for teams to go in and serve. And, Dale and I had the amazing blessing of being the very first ministry team to go in. The medical team had been there the year before, the kids were in tough, tough shape but we were among a very small team that really got to go in, love on the kids and begin to talk to them about Jesus. So, that started what I consider a pretty epic life-changing journey for us.

Audra: You have both taken several Christmas trips to Haiti and many years this was your gift to one another instead of giving traditional gifts. Do you guys mind sharing your heart behind that?

Dale: Well, again, first going we met children and we met children that touched our hearts. And, you know, we saw the depravity of these situations but we also saw the great joy that they had and they touched us with that joy. We wanted to share some of the love of Christ through just giving presents during Christmas time so Tami and I were able to lead a trip during the following Christmas and we took lots of little toys, not big presents but little things. And, we found out during the process of handing those presents out, for many of those children, that was the very first Christmas that they had ever experienced. They would tell us that Papa Noel usually just passes over Haiti and so we were able to share with them some gifts and really emphasize the fact that we give gifts because Jesus had given us the greatest gift of all.

Tami: And Audra to build on that, as we were doing that, all of the sudden that gave us a whole new sense of gratitude. So, for the past 6 years we've given up our holiday time so we could go to Haiti and we consider those trips not only a time to bless the children but also our gift to each other. We've spent a lot of anniversaries there. We spent our 30th anniversary in Haiti and it just seems like the place we wanted to be; that celebrating those special occasions are no longer as special than being able to invest and be present with those children.

Tami: Well, clearly our lives have been deeply impacted by what we've seen and what we've experienced there. And as we've taken other trips people go and they think, "Well, I'm going to go and do a great thing for these kids." And then, they are broken and they are humbled and they feel that they have in fact done nothing and the children have done everything for them. It's just part of God's love and economy. For us, it's the deepening of these relationships with these children. It's easy to sign up for a mission trip and say, "I'm going to go and I'm going to experience this and you have it." Before Dale and I picked this, again, we hadn't done mission trips, this was our first trip mission trip and we are over 50, we just said God we don't want to go on a mission trip, be all excited going, be deeply moved, and then come back and be the same. So, we asked God to profoundly change our hearts and he honored that and literally the experience and the relationships that we've built with the children there and as we've watched them grow. It's changed everything about the way we give, the way we live, and definitely the way we love.

Audra: And, I know a huge part of the way God began to move when you guys took these trips, is He began to speak to you about one little girl in particular. Tell me about that.

Tami: Well, we were preparing for a Christmas trip and I was working with a team at our church and it just so happened that there were a couple of families that had been deeply touched by some of the children there, so much so that they were compelled to go through the adoption process. Obviously, they were much younger than we are. And, we had never

thought about adoption, but we thought well if one day there was a way were we could either do visas that would allow children to come over and be educated that we'd be all in. In fact I remember walking in our house and saying, "We could fit 7 kids in our bonus room. We could change this into a great dorm." So our mind was in a total different place, but when I went to what I thought was a meeting to plan the mission trip, I was presented with an extraordinary invitation about one little girl in particular who the adoption process had begun and it had fallen apart and that they were prayerfully seeking who might step in for her. I had known her because every time I'd gone she'd been part of a group that wanted to hang with me. So, I knew her but candidly I was shocked. And it was almost a Sarah moment in that I laughed and I said, "Obviously you don't know how old I am." And, the response was "No, I know how old you are." And, I said, "Well, but we don't have any children at home." And they said, "Well, we believe that this little girl would do best if she could have undivided attention and be the only child at home." I was stunned but then I went home and shared that with my husband and that really began a journey of prayer. I don't think for me, it was ever really a "no," it was more, "really?" I characterize it as that crisis of faith, where there is an extraordinary invitation that is offered and you have to make a decision. "Am I going to do this and do I trust God? And, in doing this, what does it say about what I believe about him?"

Audra: And Dale, what was your initial reaction to this proposal?

Dale: I think I had the same reaction that Tami had. I chuckled and I said, "Yeah, you've got to be kidding me." And, I thought about it and said really, there is no practical way to do that because we had so many children there that called us "mommy and daddy" and so how could we just adopt one child? So, at first, it was just like "No, it's just not something that we should do." But, I did commit to pray about it and as we committed to pray, God revealed to my heart that this was this child's only opportunity and how could we say "no." The only reason that we could say no was for selfish reasons. As God started to work on me it really changed my heart to say, "Why not? Why can't we do this? We just need to provide the opportunity for this child and God can do the rest. It was through the process of prayer that God actually changed my heart.

Tami: After we both got over being in shock and we made that trip to Haiti just a month or so after this all came up, on the way home there was no question in our mind that this was something that God was ordaining for our life and that we were going to move ahead.

Audra: Let's back up a little bit from certainty of "this is really what God is calling us to do." Did you have any initial fears or concerns about adoption?

Dale: Yeah, I think in particular I had some fears. I had some fears that this child would not even like me because Sonia was a part of Tami's group, she was never a part of my group. So, the fear was that she wouldn't like me. And if she didn't like me then that was really a "no-go." So, in this trip that Tami mentioned that we went on, I was determined to just find her and have some interaction with her to just see if she'd like me at all. The interesting thing was when we got off the bus, on this particular trip the kids I usually hang with grabbed my hand and started to lead me down to their house. And, I was like, "Wow this is weird." And, it so happened that as we crossed the bridge, there Sonia was on the bridge. And I just thought, "Oh my." So, I picked her up and put her on my shoulders and said, "Sania!" And, she basically hung with me the whole week, enjoyed the little peanuts I had for

her, and just was a joy to be with. To me, that was just God speaking to my heart that there is not that excuse that she doesn't like you. That she likes you and could grow to love you.

Audra: And Tami, how about you? Did you have any specific fears about adoption?

Tami: I would say that there was that feeling, because we have an older daughter that is 31 and we have two grandsons. And, for me although I try not to dwell on it, just doing the math, just thinking about I know that we can provide for her today, I know that we can give her a much better life than she has. Obviously, that we are part of her destiny but just thinking about getting older and the energy that it takes to go back and have a young child in your home. You hear grandparents talk often about "Oh, I love being grandparents. We have the kids and then we get to rest." It just requires a lot of energy, and good health, and stamina to be able to do that. Being in the place where I'm just like, "God I have to trust you that this is what we need to be, to be able to run this race."

Audra: Despite your fears, just tell me how God continued to confirm and encourage you guys along the way.

Tami: Well, it's really interesting. I think the greatest moments of encouragement came at the point where it appeared to be the most impossible. So, I would say this for everyone. Going through an adoption process, it has a stamina and endurance all to its self. So, because Haiti as a country was going through transition, they were a non-HAGUE country and were just stepping into that. The US embassy was becoming much more involved in investigation around adoption, so not only is it hard in that country, but it became harder because of the transition that they were doing with adoptions, so there were several points throughout the adoption where we were told, "It's over. It can't happen." Either you didn't make the approval, they changed the law or they said, "Well, people over 50 can't adopt without presidential dispensation." I mean, there seemed to be these huge mountains that would appear and we would stand back and only God could move them. There wasn't anything we could do. We would be ultimately helpless and hitting a wall and saying, "Okay God, is this a test to see if we would?" And then literally, doors would open in miraculous ways that was constantly a nod, even Audra to the very last few days before we brought her home. There was a point where we thought we may never see her again, because of a hold up in the U.S. embassy and the work they were doing. And, again, people interceding all around and God made it so.

Audra: I am Audra Haney and you are listening to the Newborn Promise Podcast, a production of Graham Blanchard Inc. One unique aspect of Dale and Tami Heim's adoption of their little girl Sania was that they had a longer than average wait time. When they began the process, Sania was 3 1/2 years old and it wouldn't be until she was 7 years old that they were able to bring her home. We asked Tami what she learned in the waiting.

Tami: For me, God just did a huge move in my heart. She at the time was in the transition home and we were staying there and every time we were with her, it was just so hard to leave her. And it was like, "Lord, can't we bring her home? I want to bring her home!" And God just stopped me mid-prayer and all of the sudden said, "My timing is perfect. Find me in the waiting." I remember I was lying in bed and the moon was coming through the window and I could see her profile and she was all cuddled up to me. And I said, "That is right. In my waiting, I am missing God and his timing is perfect. So, what is it that I need to know? What is it in my heart he needs to do, and what does he need to do in her hear to prepare both of

us for that moment when she comes in?" And it changed everything Audra. All of the sudden, I was present to the moment I was in and I was savoring the moment that we were in and making that moment a memory. That would be part of our story, part of her story forever. So, just accepting. And then just, the side note to that is, you wait a long time and the wait is hard, but once the child comes home it is like a blackboard that gets erased. So, you don't ever remember how long and hard it was. You can talk about it, but you are so in the now, it is like all of that vanishes.

Audra: I love that. And, with that hard waiting period over and now and the joy of having Sania in your home, she is 10 years old now, can you tell me a little bit about her today.

Dale: Well, she is the joy of our life. Right now, she is such a joy. Not to say that there aren't challenges because being in an orphanage; not having the love that a child deserves at a young age, not having the attention, not having really enough food to eat, it does have an effect and there are challenges that come with that. But, we can see such a spirit within her, a joyful spirit and it's just wonderful to be a part of that and we thank God everyday that we can participate in that.

Tami: The one thing about Sania too is that she is high energy. I think that was why it was so shocking when we realized that we were adopting her, because she has so much energy, so much potential. She is a survivor. She is a fighter. She is determined. She is strong-willed and she's larger than life. She is funny, entertaining; she is all of those things. Sometimes, people think about orphans being timid or shy, but Sonia is full of energy and life. So everyday when we look at her, we think about how God will use all of that one day for his purpose and his plan.

Audra: I know a lot of people focus on the faith that it takes to bring an orphan into your home, whether that is financially, energy-wise, waiting-wise, but few people think about how much faith it takes to daily walk out a family once you've adopted. How has God really shown up for you guys in walking out your new family?

Dale: I do think that it is just the everyday experience; being able to you know, get through the fun times but also the difficult times. To be able to get through those times and just have the realization of what her past has been and not to take the problems personally, but to realize that this is something God has given to us because He has trusted us with it. So, to be able to react in ways that could build her up and not to focus on ourselves and our own feelings, but rather what she is feeling and what God is doing with her and how she needs to be developed. So, you know, that is a challenge. It is a challenge for anybody to do but something that we consciously attempt to do every day.

Tami: Just teaching her and loving her. Of course our hearts desire is wanting her to grow into a mighty woman of God and we believe that and we want her to demonstrate kindness and compassion. We are rewriting, God is using us to rewrite the script of her life and so we know that is an important stewardship, so that is what that is what we pray and that is what we practice everyday, following into that pattern into that good God-loving family.

Audra: And, as we kind of broaden our view, can you guys talk about orphan care on a global level for a bit? You do such a great job of leading out, sending teams, helping teams and really teaching others to care for the orphan, even if they don't feel called to adoption.

Just share with me about different opportunities for the everyday person to step into this God-work, this God calling.

Tami: I think the first thing someone can do is just take a good look at the church because many times we aren't even aware of some of the ministries that are happening within the church and if people are feeling a tug or a pull this way, just explore what might be possible whether it is through mission trips or things locally. I know our church is really involved with foster care as well as adoption. Just stepping into that space and seeing what is possible. And then, if people are thinking well broader, what does it mean? I'm a huge advocate of the Christian Alliance for Orphans which is often known as CAFO. And people can find out more about them at CAFO.org. What CAFO really is, it's a movement in support of vulnerable children. There is a lot of emphasis on adoption and foster care and it's the coming together of the church, adoption agencies, organizations, and people that are generally interested in adopting or feel called to support adoption. Really just say, I don't know what this means for me, but I want to get involved.

Audra: And for those who may be considering adoption but they just aren't sure because of some life situation or limitation, what would you say to them?

Dale: Well, I think the first step is to gain clarity on what God wants you to do. I think just going to the scripture and knowing that God is a father of the fatherless and we are called to defend the poor and fatherless. I think that knowing God's word and His heart just to be in that and to strengthen your resolve as individuals wanting to adopt, to know that it is in God's will that something like this were to occur. So, I think that preparing yourself in the word, but also to seek out as much information as you can through agencies and to know in reality what the process will be and what the reality of having a child come into your home is. A lot of people face the adoption process with rose colored glasses. They think that it's going to be easy. Once I get the child it's going to be wonderful. They are going to love you and appreciate everything you've done for them. It is just getting the information and knowing the reality of the situation and know that any battle really, spiritual battle, is going to be difficult and you need God to be there with you. So, just to equip yourself with as much information, with as much and as many verses in the Bible that you can grab ahold of. Again, to just to help you to get the resolve to follow through.

For me what I would say, start when you are young. Tami and I waited because of our life situation, we waited until we were older to go out on the mission field, I'd say get involved early in your life. Whether it be some of these simple things like just encourage those who are adopting or giving a little bit of money towards that, but the earlier you can start I think the more that God can do with your life to carry out his plan for those that are weak or those that are under-privileged and those are fatherless.

Audra: The step of obedience to adopt Sania, has required a huge amount of faith but how have you seen God provide for you and equip you in this journey?

Dale: I think that He, He in his providence are you are just obedient and just say, "Yes, I will do this," that he will equip you and give you what you need. There were many things in our lives that were lacking and it's amazing how God just equips us in the right time to be able to handle this situation. And, God is good. That is the thing that He will do for you if you get involved.

Tami: Just like any kind of parenting, you are going to make mistakes. Things may not go exactly the way you want them to or you may feel like, "I am not doing all I need to do." It is just that constant reminder that there is nothing beyond the grace of God and all things really do work together for good and being able to stand in those promises when you are venturing out on something new, whether it is adoption or whatever. He fills the gaps for us and sees and he knows. We just always stand in faith and know God has got this.

Audra: And to wrap up today, we've actually asked Dale to say a prayer for couples, who are considering adoption, whatever stage of life, and also their role in caring for the orphan worldwide.

Dale: Lord God, we are just grateful to be involved Lord in this process ourselves. Lord, we are thankful for this time, for this discussion. We know that there are many out there who are considering adoption or being involved in some manner and we just lift those up to you. That you would touch their hearts, Lord, and that you would give them a revelation as to the joy it is to be in your will. Lord, I'm just grateful to be a part of it and I'm thankful for what you have done in our lives through adoption. I just pray that you would touch these ones thinking about it, that you would open the doors that need to be opened. Lord, to bless their lives in a way that they couldn't even imagine. Lord, we are thankful for those who step up and are willing to do your will.

Audra: Well, that is all for today but please join us next week as we share a special and tender episode "God of All Comfort in the Midst of Miscarriage." Remember, you can get today's show notes, guest bios and transcript at GrahamBlanchard.com