Our Adoption Journey

Guests: Governor Matt and Glenna Bevin
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Bob: Long before he was governor of Kentucky, Matt Bevin and his wife, Glenna, decided they wanted one day to adopt. So, they began the process.

Matt: After well over a year of complications and finger printings and multi-finger printings and financial exams and home inspections and interviews with our children and interviews with us and joint parenting classes that we had to take together during set hours that they were determined by, some of which we were being taught— as parents of five—how to be parents by people who didn’t even have children.

At the end of it all, we were told that— “You know what? You already have five children, and it will be better for her to stay in the system than to be the sixth child in a family because she won’t get enough attention.”

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Thursday, August 1st. Your hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson, and I’m Bob Lepine. That frustrating experience is a part of what led Matt and Glenna Bevin to become so passionate about the need to fix the foster care and adoption system in their home state of Kentucky. We’ll hear more from them about that today. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. I am excited about what you guys are going to get to hear. In fact, I wish you could have been there. For years, we have gone to the Christian Alliance for Orphans Summit which FamilyLife actually helped start more than a decade ago.

Dave: Wow.

Bob: We’ve gone to this event to cheer on champions who are helping in the foster care and adoption ministry area and also to record a live FamilyLife Today program in front of the audience that’s there. So, I was able to do this back in May. You guys were speaking somewhere else. You weren’t able to join me for that, but it was a great opportunity to meet and talk about adoption and orphan care with the governor of Kentucky—

Dave: Wow.
Bob: —and his wife, Governor Matt and Glenna Bevin. They are adoptive parents, as you’ll hear. I won’t give away anymore of the story. Are you ready?

Ann: I love hearing this. I can’t wait to listen to this interview.

Bob: This is going to be fun.

[Recorded Interview]

Bob: So, welcome to both of you. Great to have you here. I want to get this right off the start. I understand adoption and orphans was something both of you cared about when you started dating. I just want to know from you—“Was he faking it to get the girl?” [Laughter] I mean, because you know, usually, it’s like—“Oh, yes; you’re interested in adoption. Yes; me too. Yes; right.” He’s just lying because he wants to get—

Glenna: No; it was him first. We were sitting in his driveway; and I’ll never forget it because I kind of knew then. [Laughter] We were talking, and it was basically one of those conversations—I was a nurse. He was in the military. We were like—“If you could do anything in the world—when you grow up, what do you want to be?”

Bob: Right.

Glenna: He said, “I want to own an orphanage.” I’m like—“Yes!” [Laughter]

Bob: I want to own an orphanage?!

Matt: I did.

Glenna: Yes.

Matt: It’s an odd thing, but when I was a kid, the first time I ever remember anyone asking me what I wanted to do when I grow up, that was my response. I always had a heart for orphans. I would read stories about orphaned kids, and my heart would just break. I mean, books that no one has heard of like a book called Clematis—nobody has heard of it. Then books everybody has heard of like, The Boxcar Children—and just kids that were just wanting a home and trying to make their way. It always just moved me as a kid.

Bob: Any idea where that came from?

Matt: I think it was formed by many things, not the least of which was I learned also of an orphanage in India when I was a boy. It’s a crazy—I will say, time does not probably allow us to talk to the full extent of what’s just been unfolding backstage here; but when I was seven years old, I learned about an orphanage in India.
How I learned about it was as a result of a woman who had grown up there herself—traveled around to small, little churches throughout New England. I was raised in a tiny, little village in Northern New Hampshire. She didn’t come to our church, but she happened to go to some other church. My mother happened to go and hear her speak. Her name was Kamul Bhai. She was somebody who spoke, and she sang.

My mother must have made some small donation or put her name on a list or something; and then we began to subsequently get a little newsletter called *Buds and Blossoms*. In this little newsletter, once a month, it would detail stories of these children and their background to the extent that it was known and what—through the love of Christ and the hands and feet of Christ being administered at this little place—the Ramabai Mukti Mission—how lives were being changed and little buds were blossoming.

Just a moment ago—just incredible—we met a young woman by the name Anu who is not such a young woman, but she’s still younger than us who grew up there / was an orphan there and whose life was transformed. She was brought there as a ten month old. Her story is so remarkable, but it’s incredible how God works and how things come back together. I just don’t believe in coincidence.

**Bob:** You’ve been to that orphanage many times yourself.

**Matt:** Many times.

**Bob:** Yes.

**Matt:** Yes; it was when I was a boy I said, “Someday, I’m going to go there.” God has blessed us; and I’ve been able to, in turn, do a lot of things there in terms of projects; but then to meet this woman whose life is now so intertwined with so many of the ministries of the people in this room, it’s just incredible how it comes together.

**Bob:** So, just to clarify. When a guy says, “I want to own an orphanage,” that’s a romantic things. Girls fall for that. [Laughter]

**Glenna:** For this girl.

**Matt:** It worked on this one.

**Glenna:** Yes; right up my alley.

**Bob:** You’re the reason that was something that you were drawn to. You vocationally were a nurse.

**Glenna:** Yes.
**Bob:** You saw first hand—in fact, you shared a story about when you were nursing in Louisiana a situation that happened there with foster care and adoption that had a tragic end.

**Glenna:** Exactly; when I was a nurse, sometimes, we would do private adoptions out of the—they were in the delivery unit where I worked. We had a nurse and a doctor who were set to adopt a child / a newborn baby; and at the very last minute, the mother who was a cocaine addict—it was her eighth child. The other seven were in the system. She changed her mind. That’s when I knew that something was terribly wrong with our system.

Then our story—like I said—we had always wanted to adopt, but we were in Cherokee Park one afternoon playing. My girls took up with the little girl about their age. They were around 11ish. At the end of the afternoon, I said, “Would you ever want to come for a playdate?” There was a woman sitting over on the picnic table watching her play. I said, “I could ask your mom.” She said, “No; that’s not my mom. I don't have parents. I live in the orphanage, and we are not allowed to have playdates.”

So, of course, we went home and called the orphanage. We wanted that little girl. We went through the whole process. It was a little over a year and a half.

**Bob:** You say you wanted her—not just for a playdate?

**Matt:** No; to adopt.

**Glenna:** Oh, we wanted that little girl. [Laughter] She didn’t have parents.

**Bob:** What’s it like to have a wife who goes to the park one day and comes home…?

**Matt:** I was there with her.

**Bob:** Oh, you were there!

**Glenna:** Yes. Oh, yes.

**Matt:** It was a joint effort. We were tag teaming, actually.

**Bob:** Wow.

**Matt:** So, here is the thing. This was a little girl, 11 years old. She had, as we subsequently found out, had 14 different placements.

**Glenna:** She aged out without a family.
**Matt:** Nobody was trying to adopt her. She wanted a family desperately. To make a very long story short, after well over a year of complications and fingerprintings and multi-fingerprintings and financial exams and home inspections and interviews with our children and interviews with us and joint parenting classes that we had to take together during set hours that they were determined by, some of which we were being taught—as parents of five how to be parents—by people who didn’t even have children.

I wish I were making this up.

**Glenna:** We’re not kidding.

**Matt:** It was—the whole thing was so absurd, but we went through it all because the desire to adopt this little girl was great. We wanted her to be a part of our family.

At the end of it all, we were told—this was here in Kentucky more than ten years ago now—we were told that—“You know what? You already have five children. It would be better for her to stay in the system than to be the sixth child in a family because she won’t get enough attention.” Can you imagine?

I just remember, then, I had never been anywhere near the political process. I had never run for anything. I had never worked on a campaign. I had never taken a political science course; but I was just outraged the government would have control over this young girl’s life with the responsibility of doing what is in her best interest would make such a seemingly arbitrary just wrong-headed decision. I remember at the time thinking, “Somebody should do something about this.” Now, here we are.

[Applause]

Incidentally, I will say that in Kentucky, if you have five children, you can now adopt a sixth child.

**Glenna:** Oh, yes.

**Matt:** It is possible.

**Bob:** Well, and you were not able to adopt that young woman; but you did ultimately go outside of Kentucky.

**Matt:** Yes.

**Bob:** In fact, you found international adoption was much less complicated than adoption inside your own state.

**Glenna:** Right.
Matt: To a degree, although—and I think this is a room full of people who understand this—there is nothing uncomplicated about the adoption process anywhere.

Bob: Right.

Matt: Anywhere. The fits and starts and the forms and this and the that—and many of the things with good intent, but ultimately just convoluted and bureaucratic and so difficult and so time consuming and so costly.

Glenna: And so worth it. [Laughter]

I mean it is very difficult. Some of the paperwork will make you want to pull your caseworker’s hair out; but it is so worth it. We went there to pick up our son, and we met a sibling group of three. So, I like to say—

Bob: You went there. You went where?

Glenna: To Ethiopia. God called us to Ethiopia.


Glenna: Five became nine. So, we’re now the Bevin Eleven.

Matt: We adopted one which was the intent. So, then we were a family of six; and then this sibling group—again, we’re preaching to the choir here. Six / nine—really, I mean, what’s the difference at that point? Really? The only thing that changes is what you drive. You do need—you get your own personal church van at that point; but—

Bob: You shared that the bureaucracy in the state was one of the things that motivated you to start looking at public service.

Matt: Yes.

Bob: Since you’ve been elected, this has been one of the areas that your administration has focused on in the state of Kentucky. How can we make this simpler? How can we do what’s right for kids / right for families but right for kids? We would have thought, maybe, as early as two decades ago that would be something everyone would rally around and be on the same page with. It’s not as simple—there are forces aligned against adoption and foster care in our day.

Matt: There are—not only in general, but even for people of faith—there are just a whole lot of hoops to jump through.

Unfortunately—folks in here understand this—it’s so inextricably woven together with government—“Mother, may I this? Mother, may I that?”—a lot of rules, a lot of hoops, a
lot of—“Can’t do that because otherwise it might compromise your funding from this source.” It’s become just too bureaucratic.

So, what we’re trying to do—and I would love to tell you that we’ve solved it all in Kentucky, but we haven’t; but we’re working on it. We’re determined to come up with as good as such a thing could exist—a gold standard—that could be plugged and played in other states / that could be replicated.

It will never be perfect. It is comprised of lots of imperfect moving parts; but if we can find homes for the 470—some-odd—thousand children that are in foster care in America—and so many of them eligible for adoption. About 25 percent of the ten thousand in this state are eligible for adoption. We have 6,500 houses that worship in Kentucky and 2,500 children just looking for a forever family. I mean if the body of Christ cannot step up and find one home for every two and a half churches—

Bob: Yes.

Matt: —I’m not sure what we’re doing every week.

Bob: What our hope is; yes. That’s right. [Applause]

I don’t think there are many states where the governor has a—do you call him a czar? A foster care / adoption czar?

Matt: No; we have a fellow and his wife, Chris and Alicia Johnson, who were brought in—known apparently to some in this room. It might be them cheering. I don’t know—but here’s—this is a couple who is amazing. This is a passion of theirs as well. They were living in Florida. We learned of them—long story short—touched base with them. They have fostered over 40 children. They have adopted seven of their ten children as a result of that process. It seemed to us that they were the kind who meant it. They, too, were all in on this.

When we met them, it wasn’t initially seemingly obvious that it would work, but God blessed our conversation and the opportunities in ways that resulted in them being able to move here. So, the two of them have really helped to shepherd this really helping us to find ways to partner with people primarily faith-based organizations—but not even necessarily faith-based organizations—to take every resource in America and bring them all together and to channel those in ways that are not being done anywhere else in the country. I’m excited to see the kind of things that are starting to happen.

Bob: One of the challenges that we face is that when we approach this from a faith-based perspective and try to work things out in public policy there can be some—

Matt: —resistance.
Bob: —some resistance to that. How can we work well together—because we want to be good citizens as followers of Christ—and yet we’ve got some views about marriage and family and what that’s supposed to look like in a culture? How are you navigating those waters?

Matt: I would say this—both to you in response to this question, but also to everyone in here. We have no reason to apologize for what we believe. [Applause] We really don’t. Again, not everybody believes what we believe; not everybody shares our faith or our worldview on any number of things; but any more than we don’t expect them to apologize for their opinions, we do not need to apologize for ours. We do not need to fail to hold firm to those things that we know to be true whether others know it to be true or even believe that we are correct—doesn’t mean we need to back off.

So, for me, I’m very unapologetic about it. I don’t wear it on my sleeve, but I encourage all of you to be bold in this.

Bob: Tell folks about the First Lady’s Youth Fly—what is it? Fly what?

Glenna: We call it the FLYLC.

Bob: FLYLC.

Glenna: It’s the First Lady’s Youth Leadership Council.

Matt: It sounds kind of hip; doesn’t it?

Glenna: Yes; it does.

Matt: FLYLC.

Bob: “You’re so fly.”

Glenna: Exactly; right.

Matt: We’re dating ourselves by thinking that’s cool, though. There are kids here thinking, “Oh, that was in the 80’s.”

Bob: Uh-huh.

Matt: Yes.

Bob: That’s right. So, tell everybody what you do.

Glenna: So, basically, what we have is a leadership council comprised of foster care kiddos who we meet several times a year. We look at policy, what they would like to see
changed, and then we prep them and they go before the legislatures. Our kids were not allowed to even get a driver’s license if they were—

**Bob**: A foster kid couldn’t get a driver’s license?

**Glenna**: No. If they were in care, they were not allowed to get a driver’s license. So, we changed that. They’ve done a lot of wonderful things like that.

**Bob**: This is 18—

**Glenna**: We have 18 right now. It fluctuates a little.

**Bob**: They’re between 14 and 19 years old.

**Glenna**: Mm-hmm.

**Bob**: And these are sharp young people still in the system?

**Glenna**: Yes.

**Bob**: —being fostered; right?

**Glenna**: Yes. Being in foster care isn’t easy, and these kids have endured some amazingly horrible things; but we’re just giving kids a voice, giving them a platform, putting them in front of a speaking coach, and just encouraging them and giving them opportunities. They are the ones that take it and run with it.

**Bob**: Amazing.

So, if you could go back and talk to yourselves from ten years ago when you were facing the bureaucratic challenges—because some of these people here are in that place where they are frustrated with the systems in their own states—they have been trying to advocate for foster care for adoption and they are hitting roadblocks. Some of them may be thinking, “Well, maybe, I need to run for governor in my state”—

**Glenna**: Yes.

**Bob**: If that’s not what God is calling them to—the first lady is going—“You all run for governor”; okay? How would you coach them on how to deal with the bureaucracy in a way that brings about change?

**Matt**: Boy, there is—

**Glenna**: On your knees. [Applause]
Matt: Yes. I would think—I mean it—be graceful. At every turn, be gracious. People in government are overwhelmed. They’ve become jaded. They’ve become cynical people who came in with all the right intention and good hearts, find themselves frustrated and overwhelmed and broken down by the process almost as much as we are on the other side of the equation. A little bit of a smile and a little bit of graciousness goes an amazingly long way. I would say that costs nothing, is easily done, and is the first thing I would say.

Additionally, find a legislator. Find somebody who will own this in your respective states because we spoke recently at the National Governor’s Association; and this was a topic that we had asked to be put on there. There are other states where people have a passion and a heart for this. They are making strides as best they can.

Here is what I know. People want to find solutions for this. So, if we can come up with solutions, here in Kentucky that can be replicated—if you don’t have to reinvent the wheel, the wheel has the ability to roll in any number of other places. This is why we are passionate about making it work here.

And I am grateful to all of our partners that I alluded to earlier that are coming together to help us with this because you’re going to start seeing marked change. The Johnsons and others are shepherding this. Our Cabinet Secretary for Health and Family Services Adam Meier has such a passion—his Deputy Secretary Kristi Putnam—such a passion—a genuine heartfelt passion to see this work. I’m working to try to get this elevated to become a national-level focus of attention.

Bob: I know as we’re talking about this here, your passion is coming through. I’m sure if we were in other forums other passions would be emerging because you’re not a single-issue guy; but I do have the sense that if we could look ahead 25 years and we could say, “What was the Bevin Administration known for?”—if somebody said, “Foster care and adoption in Kentucky was changed and it spread throughout the country,” you’d be okay with that being your legacy.

Matt: Oh, absolutely.

Glenna: Yes.

Matt: There are many things, but I’d be delighted by that because, again, that has profound generational, family tree related affect for generations to come. I mean this would be my hope that people would say that. [Applause]

Bob: I’m going to put you on the spot a little bit. You mentioned starting on your knees. Would you mind closing what we’re doing here with just a word of prayer for the kids and for this issue—not just here in Kentucky but all across the country—would you do that?
Glenna: Yes; of course.

Dear Jesus, I am so humbled. I am just so overwhelmed by Your goodness to us. Thank You for this room full of people. I know that they are going to go out, and they are going to take everything that they’ve learned and they’ve experienced here, and they are going to spread it throughout. I thank You for the hearts that are here that, even though this is a huge, daunting task, they are willing to take that step forward. I ask that You bless each and every one of them and everyone that they come in contact with for Your glory. We ask all these things in Jesus’ precious name.

Matt: Amen.

Bob: Would you all join me in thanking the Governor and First Lady of Kentucky. [Applause]

[Studio]

Bob: Well, again, we’ve been listening to a conversation that I had with the Governor and the First Lady at the Christian Alliance for Orphans Summit—which by the way, if you’ve got a heart for adoption / for foster care / for orphan care—if your church wants to do something, this annual event is really the premier event, I think, in the world to help figure out how we can solve the issue of the orphan in our world today. Jedd Medefind who gives leadership to the organization is doing a great job and so are the Governor of Kentucky and his wife; huh?

Ann: They are really inspiring.

Bob: Yes.

Ann: What a great couple.

Dave: Only Bob Lepine would start an interview asking her if he was faking his—

Bob: Was he up to something—you wonder. [Laughter]

Dave: That was a great question; but obviously, it’s their heart and soul.

Bob: This is bone-deep for both of them. It was really exciting to get a chance to talk to them.

Let me just mention. If you’d like to watch a video of this interview, we have a link on our website at FamilyLifeToday.com. So, you can watch the entire conversation with Matt Bevin and his wife Glenna. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com for information about that. We also have resources available for those of you who have thought about or are thinking.
about adoption or foster care. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com. There are articles and resources available.

There is also a link on our website where you can get more information about the Christian Alliance for Orphans and about the 2020 Summit. That will be held next May. If you have a heart to see churches more actively involved in the issues of adoption and orphan care, go to FamilyLifeToday.com and click the link for the Christian Alliance for Orphans.

Just one more quick reminder today: At the end of this month, we’re going to be drawing a name, and one couple is going to be joining us on the Love Like You Mean It® marriage cruise in 2020. That’s February 9th through the 16th. We’ll cover the airfare and the cost of the cruise and a night in the hotel before the cruise leaves and your passage onboard the cruise. There is no purchase necessary to enter. The contest began back on July 1, 2019. It ends on August 30, 2019. The official rules can be found at FamilyLife.com/StrongerForever.

If you want to be eligible to win the cruise, all you have to do is download the “Stronger Forever” Marriage Fitness Guide that our team has put together and start doing some of the exercises in that guide. They are designed to help strengthen your marriage relationship. So, again, download the guide; you’re automatically entered at that point to, perhaps, win the cruise. At the end of the month, we will be drawing the name of the lucky winner. Again, go to FamilyLife.com for more information.

Now, tomorrow, we’re going to listen in on a conversation about what happens when, after a divorce, one spouse tries to alienate the children from the other spouse. Ron Deal will lead that conversation, and we hope you can be here to tune.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

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