

The Lovelight Stories[®]

PODCAST

Ep: 32 | Loving Children In Ukraine's Orphan Care System Amidst War With Lina Robie | SHOW
TRANSCRIPT

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00:00:01.42

Stephanie Jacobs

Lina, welcome to the Love Light Stories podcast. I am so excited that you were able to join us today.

00:00:08.84

Allina

Thank you so much for having me.

00:00:10.68

Stephanie Jacobs

Yes, so I followed you actually on Instagram for quite a few years, all the way back. um I think you were moving to Ukraine about the same time that the war in Ukraine broke out.

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Stephanie Jacobs

And so we'll get into that a little bit, but um I've just followed your story for multiple years and love your heart for the orphan care system. And just thought this would be such an incredible um introduction to you for our listeners. And I'm just so thankful you wanted to join us today.

00:00:38.26

Allina

Thank you.

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Stephanie Jacobs

So,

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Allina

I have so appreciated listening to your other stories on like social justice. And so putting like orphan care into the mix of that is such a gift. So thank you.

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Stephanie Jacobs

Yes. So why don't we just start off by sharing a little bit about your own childhood story of growing up with your mother. You shared a little bit about that with me, um your mother and siblings while your father was in prison, actually.

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Stephanie Jacobs

So help us feel like what it was like to be you and just share a little bit about that.

00:01:02.18

Allina

Mm-hmm.

00:01:07.55

Allina

Yeah, i grew up in the States. I live in Ukraine right now, but I grew up in the heart of America in Missouri and the heart of Missouri at the Lake of the Ozarks. always like to describe it as like the heart of the the actual heart of the country.

00:01:20.56

Allina

um

00:01:20.95

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

00:01:21.65

Allina

But when I was about eight years old, um up until then, my life had been pretty typical. um Grew up in a a conservative Christian family. um I'm the youngest of three girls. um My mother and my father were married.

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Allina

And up until about eight, everything, um as much as an eight-year-old can know about the rest of the world, everything seemed pretty typical in my life. i And then very quickly, very suddenly to me, obviously there was a lot happening that I didn't know about and did not understand at the time.

00:01:54.12

Allina

But to me, it felt very sudden um to have my world flipped upside down by my dad leaving and going to prison.

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Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

00:02:01.29

Allina

um and that was kind of and like a little bit intentional of my parents. Like they did not keep me in the loop um because obviously there was like court proceedings leading up to that. um And a lot of like conversation, a lot of things happening that as an eight-year-old, I just wasn't privy to.

00:02:17.82

Allina

um And there's some, there's a lot I can get into just about that alone about, I do wish I had been like trusted a little bit more um and to be like in the know of what was going on.

00:02:27.56

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah. Yeah.

00:02:32.04

Allina

So it felt less confusing, less like a shock at the time. But um of course, I always just say we do the best we can with what we know it at the time.

00:02:35.66

Stephanie Jacobs

yeah

00:02:41.14

Allina

Um, but yeah, my dad went to prison. i i won't go into like the whole details of that, but it was a pretty messy situation. um my mother ah immediately went into the role of being a single mother. She did choose to stay with my father through the time that he was in prison.

00:03:00.03

Allina

ah but very much was living life like a single mother after he was gone. And i now as an adult, I never would have thought this at the time, but now as an adult looking back and understanding the situation more, um i often describe my childhood as being like so foster care adjacent.

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Stephanie Jacobs

Wow.

00:03:17.53

Allina

um And by that, I mean, there were several instances, several moments and circumstances that had our circumstances been slightly different. We probably, my sisters and I probably would have ended up in the foster care system or in some type of um alternative care.

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Allina

However, we were really surrounded um by my grandparents during that time.

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Stephanie Jacobs

wow yeah

00:03:39.22

Allina

ah they They took us in. um we ended up living in their home. Yeah. While my mom was working, my grandma would make sure we got back and forth to school.

00:03:50.18

Allina

um My grandfather was a big part of making sure that we could like maintain our living financially um because we were very much reliant on my father's income.

00:04:01.12

Allina

um At that point, he owned a business.

00:04:01.56

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah. Oh, wow.

00:04:03.24

Allina

My mom was working as a librarian. There was a very just like huge discrepancy in their income.

00:04:07.87

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

00:04:08.57

Allina

And so there was just a lot that could have happened um that would have like the circumstances been slightly different. My mother did get um injured on the job and was bedridden for several weeks.

00:04:22.65

Allina

There's just so many times i look back at and think like, had we not had my grandparents there,

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Stephanie Jacobs

ah wow yeah

00:04:28.09

Allina

um we we very much probably would have been um in the social service system of the state of Missouri, which I know now is not an ideal place to be any way, shape or form.

00:04:36.02

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

00:04:39.67

Allina

So I feel very fortunate um to have not had that case um and to have had family, what we call kinship care around us at that time. But it was but definitely um a very...

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Allina

integral part of who I am now. um i feel like it developed a ton of empathy for me, ah in me for children that don't have um necessarily the quote unquote normal or picture perfect or even just stable childhood that we hope children get, that children all deserve.

00:05:10.76

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

00:05:13.46

Allina

um And so, yeah it just developed a lot of who I am today as a person.

00:05:19.36

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah, I love that. And um I can imagine too, like God's story in, or God's purpose in your story of, of giving you those experiences as a young girl to lead you to what you're doing today. it's all, it's interwoven, or at least it seems that it is, which doesn't make the difficulties you experienced better necessarily, but just that you're able to now use that for a really, really great God-honoring purpose.

00:05:51.24

Stephanie Jacobs

It's very beautiful. So um Can you just help us understand a little bit? I think in our call earlier, we were talking about the family unit and just the purpose and importance of that family unit, just through your own experiences as a child, like help us understand how that you've really come to see how important that really is for society, I guess, or the family.

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Allina

her

00:06:16.95

Allina

Yeah, absolutely. i working in orphan care now and I'll get more into that later of what that looks like, but you see, um, all the levels of need in a child's life, especially a vulnerable child, especially a vulnerable a vulnerable family.

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Allina

And you see all these like avenues of need. Okay. So it can start like later in age with graduation and it can start, you know, um with needing food and needing um just like all these different like avenues that we can reach these children reach these families that are in need.

00:06:48.54

Allina

But when you go kind of pull back and look at like the root cause of how do families end up in this situation? Like, how do we have vulnerable families that then, um you know, have these vulnerable children that then rely on very broken systems of welfare systems in the state and or countries, um depending on where you are. There are vulnerable children. There are children needing care everywhere in the world.

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Stephanie Jacobs

mm-hmm

00:07:13.25

Allina

And so when you peel it back and you look at the root cause of that, um it goes back to a lack of family preservation efforts um in a community. And that community can be a city, but it could also be a church. It could also be a school.

00:07:27.57

Allina

A community coming around a family can look a lot of different ways. And, um what I've learned my time in the orphan care system is that we see so much more success when we are supporting a family family unit, rather than when we're just putting band-aids on issues that come up afterwards, after these children have been traumatized, after they have been.

00:07:50.88

Allina

um you know, pulled away from their family, and then we're trying to find where to put them. So even like the foster care system as a whole, right, is essentially a band-aid to a much bigger issue.

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Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

00:08:01.52

Allina

Not to negate the importance of that and the value of that, you're always going to have children in that situation. But as communities, and especially as Christians who are so specifically called to care for the widow and the orphan,

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Allina

I see such a large responsibility on us to really come around these family units that do find themselves in vulnerable situations. And they're not always going to be vulnerable situations that we immediately imagine.

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Allina

Like sometimes, sometimes it's poverty.

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Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah. Mm-hmm.

00:08:32.94

Allina

Sometimes it's illness. Sometimes it's like we have seen children here get put in the institution because their mother was ill and in the hospital and there was no one in the family to come around and care for the child during that time So sometimes it's ill, sometimes it is incarceration.

00:08:47.38

Allina

um i was like so ashamed to talk about my story when I was younger because there was such a um stigma around it. And so we didn't ask for help probably in a million more ways that we could have um because of that stigma around our family circumstance.

00:09:01.45

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah. Mm-hmm.

00:09:04.66

Allina

And um there's just so many different ways that a family can find themselves in vulnerability and zero out of 10 times that is the children's child's fault.

00:09:16.34

Allina

10 out of 10 times the child is a victim to the circumstances that they're born into and then therefore we as the adults in their lives, as the people in their community, as the church, um as society, have the responsibility, have the job to come around these children and

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Stephanie Jacobs

right

00:09:34.83

Allina

and help protect them. And from my experience, one of the most successful best ways to do that is coming around the whole family unit.

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Stephanie Jacobs

I love that so much. And um I think it's just really wise of you. And it obviously shows like your deep involvement in this orphan care ah issue and also just, you know, your involvement over your life and and your experiences, even as a child to come to understand that.

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Allina

Mm-hmm.

00:10:00.87

Stephanie Jacobs

And I think I agree that being able to kind of pull back the layers and address the the root cause of a lot of these issues that we see surface later is a much more efficient, effective, and that sounds, you know, um pretty legally, but ah much more um effective way of being able to help these children or prevent the issue from even arising um

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Allina

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

00:10:29.16

Stephanie Jacobs

And, you know, in my experiences too, and just getting involved with a lot of different nonprofits, hearing about a lot of different causes, social justice issues, talking with so many people and stories, um you really can see how a lot of these issues are interrelated and how um different things like a family member going to prison or someone living in poverty can then connect back to another issue.

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Allina

Mm-hmm.

00:10:53.80

Stephanie Jacobs

And, um, You can see how the family unit is a big part of that. So anyway, thank you for explaining that more fully and helping us understand that a bit better. So I would love to just kind of jump in and get back to your own experiences, too, that have led you to where you're at today.

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Stephanie Jacobs

And one of them is really interesting. I think personally, your experience in international missions. Share with us a little bit about the world race um and everything that you've done there.

00:11:16.20

Allina

Yeah.

00:11:21.64

Allina

Yeah. So graduating from school. so I went to um school, grew up in Missouri, went to college, university in Missouri as well. And graduating from college, um I was very much like a 22 year old who still didn't know what she wanted to be when she grew up.

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Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

00:11:40.47

Allina

But my circumstances in my life had just developed so much empathy and compassion. um in me and so much like drive for action um when it came to working with vulnerable people groups uh that I really wanted to just discover um what the needs of the world were and so after

graduating college graduated college in 2017 and instead of jumping right into a career i ended up taking i yeah I wouldn't have known this term at the time, but I guess you could call it like a gap year um where i pursued missions.

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Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

00:12:14.69

Allina

um I went on a 11 month missions trip.

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Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

00:12:17.41

Allina

At this time, they went to 11 countries, structured a little differently now, but they went to 11 countries over the course of 11 months called the World Race. And you partner with local ministries in each country, um just trying to bring lift to these ministries or a team of like five or six people that um come into these ministries and just try to help.

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Allina

And what that gave me was one, a wide exposure to the world we live in, to different cultures, language. um It also gave me a wide exposure to the different issues within the world, which is really at the root of what I was looking for.

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Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

00:12:53.06

Allina

um

00:12:53.44

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

00:12:53.98

Allina

i don't know if I would have articulated it that well at that time, what I was looking for, ah but i was like really wanting to identify how me as a person with my passions and my skills and my giftings could fit into this world and bring impact and bring change.

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Allina

And so being able to travel, meet so many different people who had like tangibly addressed issues within their communities um and seen fruit and seen progress and carried the name of Jesus with like love and grace and compassion.

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Allina

It was just a gift. ah So I definitely think i was more impacted by this trip than anything I did on it, um which was not what I was thinking going into it.

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Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

00:13:41.90

Allina

Going into I'm like, oh yeah, I'm going to make such an impact. going to have such a change.

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Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

00:13:46.24

Allina

At the end of the day, i was so much more touched, so much more blessed um and impacted by this experience. But I also think that's kind of what it's designed for. um

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Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

00:13:56.81

Allina

Young adults out, give them the opportunity to see the world, see the brokenness, but also see the ways it's healing and figure out what part of it they want to be in

00:14:06.16

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

00:14:06.80

Allina

And it was actually on that trip that I first came to the country of Ukraine. um I came here, it was spring of 2018. It was my first time and I spent a month here um in the current city where I'm living and had my first introduction to the Ukrainian orphan care system.

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Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah, that is so beautiful. So is that what essentially gave you the spark to then come back a few years ago when you moved? You moved when, tell us what year it was you actually moved to Ukraine.

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Allina

Mm-hmm.

00:14:35.44

Allina

Yeah, ah so I went back to Ukraine after this in spring of 2021, and I was there for three months and then came back to the States, kind of got my affairs in order and officially moved to Ukraine in January of 2022.

00:14:48.14

Stephanie Jacobs

Okay. Okay. and and that's when yes yes And that's when I started following you.

00:14:49.37

Allina

So a little over three years now.

00:14:53.68

Stephanie Jacobs

i don't even know how I came across you, um but I'm so thankful that I did because I remember as I was watching you move there and start to experience the war breakout and just your faith and conviction to stay.

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Allina

Mm-hmm.

00:15:07.80

Stephanie Jacobs

I remember you saying like, I mean, you were up in the middle of the night sharing like i there's bombings going around. There's these airstrikes. You know, there's these warnings going out. And I just remember you saying like people are asking me if I'm going to go back home. like And you just saying I came here because I feel called by God to come. And I just have faith that I'm going to stay. And I know you were – Well, I shouldn't say I know.

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Stephanie Jacobs

I'm pretty sure you were fearful in that moment, but you had faith as well. And you could shed light on that and tell us more about what you were feeling in the moment. But um just watching you was so inspiring to live out your faith and just say, I'm going to be here for the long haul and I'm here to stay.

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Allina

yeah

00:15:49.41

Stephanie Jacobs

um and so anyway, share with us a little bit what that experience was like.

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Allina

Yeah, I think um as people started like following along on the story, there very much became more people following along once the Full Scale Invasion started. And i think what they had missed in that story coming in at that point was they had missed that I...

00:16:05.02

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

00:16:12.26

Allina

had just moved there and having just moved there, I knew a little bit, I had an idea of the situation I was possibly moving into.

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Stephanie Jacobs

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00:16:23.08

Allina

So when I was in Ukraine in spring of 2021, there was already the buildup of Russian troops on the border of Ukraine and the talk of a full-scale invasion was very much already in the air.

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Allina

So, um, in my months when I went back to the States and was prepping for the full-time move, um, I was watching it very closely. i was talking with my friends here in Ukraine, um, and just praying whether or not this was a wise decision and whether or not this was, um a safe decision.

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Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

00:16:54.73

Allina

um, like Through that whole process, um actually, one of my childhood pastors, who I have not seen in years years and years, and years um commented on one of my posts right before I was moving. And when all these people were commenting, saying, you shouldn't go, like you're crazy, you're stupid. my childhood pastor said commented and said, the safest place to be is in the will of the Father. And that for For the first time, I was like, okay, I finally have words to say what I'm feeling inside me because I was feeling so much confidence, um not necessarily like lack of fear.

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Stephanie Jacobs

Yes.

00:17:33.56

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

00:17:33.56

Allina

like I was definitely still scared about the move, but I felt so much confidence that what I was doing was right. And what I was doing was where I was like supposed to be. And so then he said that yeah you know, the safest place you can be is in the will of the father. And I was like, yes and amen That's what my tagline now

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Stephanie Jacobs

Yes.

00:17:50.75

Allina

And um that's what I like used to explain to people as I was moving there. So this is January of 2022. um i get there like a full 24 days before the full scale invasion starts.

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Stephanie Jacobs

Wow.

00:18:04.57

Allina

um It was really such a gift. Some people would say that's terrible timing for me. I it was like, that's perfect timing because I was able to get into my apartment on February eleventh

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Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah. Hmm.

00:18:14.02

Allina

um and was like more settled-ish by the time full-scale invasion started

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Stephanie Jacobs

yeah

00:18:21.88

Allina

and looking back, that was such a gift because if I was trying to, my city ended up becoming quite the refuge for internally displaced people throughout the country. And so if I was trying to like find a place to live, get a foot, and get my footing under me more at that time or after the full scan vision, everything just would have been so much more difficult.

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Allina

So I was actually very grateful for the timing of it all.

00:18:41.07

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah, yeah.

00:18:44.58

Allina

um The day or like the the week, I guess more so that the full scan vision started Like I said, I had an idea that there was a possibility of something.

00:18:55.83

Allina

There is nothing in this world that can prepare you for what it actually feels like when that happens.

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Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

00:19:01.72

Allina

um Especially ah Midwestern girl who grew up, you know, in the heart of, you know, a safe country that's never had war on her own land um in my lifetime. And so it was very much like...

00:19:19.83

Allina

The only way I know how to describe it is you're operating out of adrenaline and faith. um my like There wasn't really a ton of time to process as things were happening because things were happening and changing so quickly.

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Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

00:19:35.33

Allina

um The night that the full-scale invasion started, I did end up staying awake that whole night. um I blame jet lag, but I also think that the Lord just kind of like, i was watching Love is Blind at like 1am because I couldn't sleep.

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Stephanie Jacobs

yeah

00:19:48.34

Allina

And then there was like notifications about the airspace closing and um I just ended up staying awake and I really felt like that was like such a gift because I got to kind of communicate to the people back in the states in real time what we were seeing here in Ukraine um and looking back that was like I don't know a pretty powerful experience for me to have um and to be able to share with like an audience that I have in the states um but rolling into the morning of February 24th um finally got a hold of my friends that live here in Ukraine and

00:20:02.03

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah. Mm-hmm.

00:20:23.73

Allina

We had talked about it leading up, you know, like, oh, well, we'll do this.

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Stephanie Jacobs

o

00:20:26.89

Allina

Like, we'll leave if they make it this far and all these things. Like we had all these like contingency plans um and kind of what I had landed on before was like, Okay, if they make it to Kiev, which is the capital and about the middle part of the country, if they make it there, then like maybe I'll consider leaving.

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Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

00:20:43.90

Allina

um But it was the first morning and they had hit Kiev International Airport and they were already like coming down from Belarus um and like coming down into the region of Kiev.

00:20:48.88

Stephanie Jacobs

Oh,

00:20:55.06

Allina

And so, because I just always pictured them coming from the East. I'd never pictured them coming down from Belarus.

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Stephanie Jacobs

who

00:21:01.00

Allina

um So that was alarming, but also just was like, okay, reevaluate. What are we doing?

00:21:07.24

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah, new plan. Yeah.

00:21:08.92

Allina

Right. And so um I really just like never felt the desire to leave. There was never a moment in me where i was like, man, I just want to get out of here.

00:21:19.56

Allina

That was just never the case.

00:21:19.96

Stephanie Jacobs

Right.

00:21:21.04

Allina

um I always... in the beginning, in the first few weeks, I always kind of felt like if I can stay and be a help, then I'll stay. stay and I'm just in the way and I'm a hindrance, then I'll get out because I don't want to be in the way of something.

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Stephanie Jacobs

Right.

00:21:33.88

Allina

I want to take resources from Ukrainians that need it because I have a place I can go. Right.

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Stephanie Jacobs

Right.

00:21:39.32

Allina

um But what I found very quickly is that the help was the help was needed everywhere. Like that there was we needed hands in every area at the IDP shelters, at the orphanage.

00:21:51.72

Allina

The orphanage where I volunteered at ended up taking in um about 60 orphans from another region and putting them in our institution. And um the church that I had relationships with was turning the entire church building into an IDP shelter. So we were buying mattresses, we were buying sheets.

00:22:11.34

Allina

um And this was all within the first few days. And so...

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Stephanie Jacobs

Wow. Yeah.

00:22:15.92

Allina

All that is to say, I could have a million and one stories about what those first few weeks were like.

00:22:19.51

Stephanie Jacobs

yeah

00:22:19.92

Allina

But um it was a very wild time. But through it all, I felt confidence that I was where I was supposed to be. Not to say that I wasn't fearful. Not to say that I even experienced much peace. Because my body, my mind, like my emotions, everything was just like...

00:22:38.37

Allina

scared on high alert. We didn't know how things were going to unfold. We didn't know what to expect the next day. We didn't know where they were going to hit. We didn't know how far they were going to come. All these things, all these questions. So I wouldn't describe it as peaceful or fearless, but I would describe it as confidence.

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Allina

Like I just had confidence through the whole situation that I was where I was supposed to be.

00:22:54.55

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

00:22:59.39

Stephanie Jacobs

That is so beautiful. And, and like you said, I think, I think it's just a testament to the faith that you have and just the peace, peace about your decision before you decided to come to Ukraine and go to Ukraine.

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Stephanie Jacobs

Um, and,

00:23:13.20

Allina

I think that was one of the greatest preparation points of coming to Ukraine. Because when you're moving, my sort situation is so different than I think a lot of individuals that are just going into missions. Like you do so much prep work, you learn a language, you try to understand a culture, you grow in your discipleship, and you set up mentors and coaches and all these things. And I did all those things as well.

00:23:35.14

Allina

But I also was praying so fervently over this coming storm that we didn't quite know um what it was going to be like, what to expect.

00:23:39.47

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

00:23:46.90

Allina

and i think those weeks and months leading up to my move here, praying over that time, really seeking the Lord's discernment in that just bolstered up my confidence because i knew that I wasn't operating alone.

00:24:00.78

Allina

knew I wasn't like making decisions alone. Even though sometimes I kind of felt like I was, you know, you're in the middle of the night and the air raid sirens are going off. I live alone. I'm a single woman. i have no one to look to to be like, what do we do?

00:24:12.44

Allina

But also always had the the peace of the Lord with me, even though I didn't necessarily always feel peaceful.

00:24:13.06

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

00:24:20.89

Allina

And I had built up a community of um just like really incredible warriors for the Lord all around the world that in any moment's notice, but especially that night when an invasion invasion first started, I was texting them, i was calling them, I'm saying, it's happening, let's pray. And I felt so covered and so supported, not just that night, but in the three years that followed. um And so I think those are like, two things I did in preparation for moving here that really set me up to actually be able to exist in a war-torn country.

00:24:56.72

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah, yeah. And to not only just exist, but to actually be of help, like you said, to to be in the right mental space and be prepared enough to be able to operate under such difficult circumstances.

00:25:01.64

Allina

Yeah.

00:25:09.17

Stephanie Jacobs

It's very, very inspiring.

00:25:09.53

Allina

Yeah.

00:25:11.10

Stephanie Jacobs

Thank you so much. So help us understand the orphan care system a little bit better now in the U.S. as well as Ukraine, because it's a very complex thing.

00:25:19.35

Allina

yeah

00:25:20.65

Stephanie Jacobs

So ah shed some light on that.

00:25:24.17

Allina

Yeah, so like I said at the beginning, there are vulnerable children in every aspect of the world. So even if you think, well, not in our community, we don't have orphans in our community, I guarantee that you do.

00:25:37.39

Allina

um They might not look the way they do in my community where I serve, but we all have vulnerable children everywhere we live. Unfortunately, that is a fact of life. um However, the way that we respond to that can definitely improve um and can definitely like bring impact to these children's lives.

00:25:55.37

Allina

So I just wanted to say that is like this is not a unique experience to Ukraine.

00:25:56.72

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

00:25:59.52

Allina

um So the orphan care system in Ukraine is um Soviet era system is um how I'll describe it, meaning that it was developed and designed under the Soviet Union.

00:26:12.07

Allina

Now, to understand how that unfolded, you kind of have to understand a little bit of Ukrainian history. It was in 1991 that Ukraine gained its independence um from the Soviet Union. And um with that, it adopted kind of all of the problems that came with the Soviet Union and the Soviet Union mentality towards people that were different or people that had bigger needs or people that had disabilities um was very negative.

00:26:39.95

Allina

And they often just um actually removed them from society and put them in institutions and kind of just let them live and exist separately in an institution.

00:26:51.61

Allina

And then their society was this beautiful prime place or so they say.

00:26:56.38

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

00:26:57.98

Allina

And so Ukraine finding its independence fighting for its independence in And gaining it, um they then had to start dismantling a lot of these Soviet era systems. And they have are riddled throughout the country, throughout the government, um throughout society.

00:27:16.10

Allina

And I'm not just saying like policy, I'm also talking mentality, belief systems, superstitions, the law.

00:27:22.29

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

00:27:22.91

Allina

ah Okay, so there a lot came from this very oppressive time under the Soviet Union, where society was very much separated. If you were different in any way, shape or form, you were kind of excommunicated from society and put othered.

00:27:37.38

Allina

um And that's what happened to the children of the orphan care system widely. So um in Ukraine, we have an institutionalized based system. In the States, we have a family based system. So that's why if you're at all familiar with the foster care system, that's why we have foster care systems. We also do have group homes.

00:27:56.49

Allina

But it is family-based, family-style care. um In Ukraine, we still largely care for our 120,000 children in the orphan care system through large institutions.

00:28:08.07

Allina

And that could be sizes anywhere from 50 kids to 350 kids

00:28:08.53

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

00:28:12.65

Allina

and one institution To kind of paint that picture, you can picture like ah kindergarten or an elementary school and then just turn all of those classrooms into like bedrooms with cots and cribs.

00:28:26.24

Allina

um And that's where these children are living. i The system to...

00:28:34.66

Allina

The system to get these children out of an institution is broken at best.

00:28:40.86

Stephanie Jacobs

Hmm. Yep.

00:28:40.85

Allina

And on the worst days, it doesn't operate at all. um So the unfortunate thing is that the goal would be to get these kids either reunified with their parents um biological family, that would be like highest priority, ideally.

00:28:55.10

Stephanie Jacobs

ye

00:28:56.16

Allina

And then if that is not possible, then the next goal would be to get them placed in some type of family care unit. So whether that's adoption or foster care, we do have foster care here in Ukraine. However, it's just significantly smaller and operates a little differently than what we're used to in the States.

00:29:12.82

Stephanie Jacobs

Okay. Mm-hmm.

00:29:13.07

Allina

um So ideally, we would get these kids home biologically or in ah in a family-based care. um That system that is supposed to take care of these kids, advocate for these kids, ah is incredibly broken.

00:29:29.78

Allina

it's incredibly understaffed. It's and incredibly under-resourced. And with the ongoing full-scale invasion, Even the little bit of resources that they had previously have been rerouted to the war effort.

00:29:41.84

Allina

So a lot of what we see the orphan care system here is in Ukraine it is kind of this stalemate, or we call these like these kids living in limbo, where they're not moving towards progression of getting home to their biological family, but they're not also moving towards getting adopted and placed into another family.

00:29:49.42

Stephanie Jacobs

Hmm. Hmm.

00:29:57.57

Allina

So they just exist in these institutions where they're I'm not going to say that there is always neglect and abuse, but it's definitely exist.

00:30:10.34

Allina

It definitely happens. um Exploitation is a huge thing within these large institutions. They're just like, you cannot hold a quality of care um when you have 350 kids living in one institution.

00:30:25.45

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

00:30:25.48

Allina

And then going back to some of these Soviet mentalities that I talked about,

00:30:25.62

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

00:30:30.69

Allina

um a lot of Ukrainians her grew up with this mentality that these kids should be othered, that these kids should be separated. That's what they were taught to believe.

00:30:41.83

Allina

So we're not just like working against a broken system. We're also working about working against some um wrong um belief systems and mentalities about the value that these kids have and what they deserve and where they should be and how they should be cared for.

00:30:59.13

Allina

So that's kind of the climate of what we're existing in in Ukraine. I know it sounds very bleak when I paint it out that way.

00:31:05.96

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

00:31:08.51

Allina

And to be frank, it is. it's It's an incredibly hard system to work within. um But Ukraine was making great strides towards improvement, towards um reform up until the start of the full-scale invasion, unfortunately.

00:31:24.61

Allina

um Governmentally-wise, I don't see any reform really being able to happen while they're still in war.

00:31:32.28

Stephanie Jacobs

yeah

00:31:32.27

Allina

um Just so many resources, human resources, money, all the things are getting rerouted towards um the war effort. And so that then has fallen on that responsibility of advocating for these kids has then fallen onto the private party, the private entity.

00:31:48.34

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

00:31:48.98

Allina

So I'm talking churches, and NGOs, nonprofits, and the individual to step in the gap of um where the government, one, just really lacks the ability to meet needs right now.

00:32:01.79

Allina

And two, where there is so much brokenness in the government, we get to step in the gaps. So So that's what I do here living in Ukraine. i work with an organization that is Ukrainian based. Um, And our team really just tries to step into the gaps for the kids in our region. I volunteer within one of the orphanages with children with disabilities, trying to bring supplemental care and activity and stimulation to their days.

00:32:24.87

Allina

um And all doing that while advocating for, um you know, future reform for awareness for the average Ukrainian to understand what is going on within their systems and how they can speak out about it.

00:32:39.35

Allina

um And really just like trying to close that gap between this group of people that have really been othered and outcast from society and kind of bring them back into the fold.

00:32:50.07

Allina

I do believe that the ground is there, that like the soil is rich for that integration. um Right now, Ukrainians are ready for it.

00:32:56.08

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

00:32:58.07

Allina

They want to um break free of these Soviet broken systems. And um so they're ready for it. It's just, it's, it's a process and it's a, it's a,

00:33:10.10

Allina

It's a lot of work. It's a lot of conversations, but that's where I'm working in Ukraine. And just to kind of give you the calm contrast of the foster care system in the States that probably most of your listeners are familiar with, the goal of the foster care system in the States is for reunification.

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Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

00:33:27.67

Allina

I love that.

00:33:27.83

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

00:33:28.78

Allina

A child enters into the state's care and the number one priority is to reunify that child with their family. Again, again We're people, we're broken. It's a broken system. It is by no means perfect. um One of the benefits that I believe that the US has over the system that exists in Ukraine right now is that mentality of reunification.

00:33:53.33

Allina

um I hope and pray that everyone that goes into foster care understands, like people that um go in as foster parents understand that that's that's the goal and the mentality of the system.

00:34:04.04

Allina

um But that is like the progression forward is we want to get these kids placed back with biological family when possible. And then when that's not possible, obviously, you know, adoption is the next step for those children.

00:34:17.09

Allina

So at least there feels like there's like a progression forward for these kids in the States.

00:34:21.51

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

00:34:22.50

Allina

Whereas here in Ukraine, it so often feels like they just get stuck in what I describe as like that limbo state.

00:34:28.77

Stephanie Jacobs

Okay. And is there a difference too in the reasons why children end up in foster care in Ukraine versus the United States? Is there um a lot of children in foster care ah because of like poverty or is it very similar?

00:34:42.93

Stephanie Jacobs

I mean, ah are there issues across the board where you can't point to necessarily one thing?

00:34:46.52

Allina

Yeah. There are definitely issues... there are reoccurring issues that lead to children living, um in child welfare welfare welfare services across the world.

00:34:59.34

Allina

And ah number one issue worldwide for that is poverty.

00:34:59.89

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

00:35:03.44

Allina

Um, I, poverty is such like an, like we said, like these social issues are always so interconnected with other issues.

00:35:10.19

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

00:35:12.08

Allina

So i hate to just blame and like the lack of financial resources as the reason that we have orphan crisis. Um,

00:35:19.72

Stephanie Jacobs

Right.

00:35:20.44

Allina

Because the lack of financial resources often comes from either other things or begets other other things. So that's it's such a like a complex thing to just say the number one cause of orphanage is poverty.

00:35:27.59

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

00:35:31.66

Allina

But um I think your listeners will understand that. They've been listening to your podcast and like aware of all the other social issues that go into this type of thing.

00:35:38.03

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

00:35:41.07

Allina

But yeah, here in Ukraine, poverty is definitely a huge issue.

00:35:41.42

Stephanie Jacobs

right

00:35:44.48

Allina

Yeah. And there's also, ah this goes back to the mentality. So children with disabilities here, um there's a mentality around disabilities here that um these children, these individuals um are better off cared for by the state.

00:36:01.77

Allina

um That is a false false truth that they've um been told that they've been convinced their whole lives that, um you know, and I'm talking children with cerebral palsy with down syndrome, even different levels of autism.

00:36:15.32

Allina

um Parents will often be told that we don't have the resources for you to care for them at home, it's better off to send them to the institution. I've seen the institutions and I can guarantee it is not a very better situation.

00:36:29.49

Allina

um And so that's a really hard, frustrating part for me here is that there is just such and this ingrained and rooted belief system, especially around the groups of children with disabilities, that they're just better off there.

00:36:29.89
Stephanie Jacobs
yeah

00:36:44.85
Stephanie Jacobs
yeah

00:36:44.91
Allina
ah Now, to say that there is a huge lack of resources for parents with children with disabilities in this country, there's a huge lack of childcare for children with disabilities, like, there's need for change other ways.

00:36:56.59
Allina
um But... That is a difference of of why we have such a large percentage of children with disabilities in orphan care and the orphan care system and in institutions here. um But we can also tie it back, and this is is true for in the States as well, like drug and alcohol use.

00:37:13.54
Stephanie Jacobs
Mm-hmm.

00:37:13.98
Allina
Like I mentioned earlier, illness. if If you're a single mom and you come down with hepatitis or cancer then and you don't have anyone else in your family care for them, taking them to the institution to live for six months a year while you're getting treatment that's a normal situation here um and so there's there's a whole array of course with the the work ongoing right now um we have seen children enter um into the institution it's it's kind of like a secondary effect of the war so like um the the war has hit the the

00:37:45.12
Stephanie Jacobs
oh

00:37:47.17
Allina
um financial climate of this country largely. And so parents might feel more pressured to then place their kids in the institution because of the financial strain that a war has on a country.

00:37:59.40
Allina
um Also not to mention the amount of men and women we've lost to the services of this war. um So again, complex issue, but yeah, those are some of the main main reasons we see kids in the institutions.

00:38:08.52
Stephanie Jacobs
Yes.

00:38:11.99

Stephanie Jacobs

Okay, that's very interesting. And, you know, it might be a misnomer, but one of the reasons why I asked that question is, I haven't personally been there and witnessed this myself, but in Africa, I think there's part of the culture in that um if a family can't take care of their children because of poverty, I mean, extreme poverty,

00:38:31.87

Stephanie Jacobs

um they often put them in a orphan care system and that can kind of just become a social norm is what I've heard from, from others who do work there and who work with in the foster care system.

00:38:38.98

Allina

Yeah. Mm-hmm.

00:38:44.53

Stephanie Jacobs

So I was just curious if there were some similarities there and thank you so much for just shedding light on that. Because again, as you share this, I think it helps us understand a broader picture of all the complexities that really do and can exist and how the culture really can impact and affect um the system and and just the mentality of of families and all of that. So thank you. So how about, um I loved when I first got to actually meet you in person, you were talking so much about this this lens that you've gained, this perspective, having lived and worked in Ukraine in the orphan care system and just how the brokenness of um the experience of orphans and their spirit

00:39:30.54

Stephanie Jacobs

can really be relatable to us as humanity living in a broken world. I'd love if you could just help us understand that perspective um because I think it's a really beautiful, um just a gift you could give us to help us better empathize.

00:39:50.31

Allina

Yeah, I think one of the things I really had to figure out in moving here and in working with children in the orphan care system was um like where's the Lord in like the brokenness and messiness of our world.

00:40:06.31

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm. Yep.

00:40:06.83

Allina

And you're reading through scripture, especially through the gospels, um learning from the teachings of Jesus and his disciples, um caring for the widow and orphan is repeated so often. And, um you know, Jesus even says, you know, like how you care for the children is like how, you like how you care for me.

00:40:26.16

Stephanie Jacobs

yeah

00:40:26.73

Allina

and um really trying to understand his heart for the orphan. um And there's like this like logical side of like, okay, they're the most vulnerable in the world. Like, you know, they're just children. They don't have adult advocacy. Like the vulnerability state of that is obvious. But when you get to the heart of it um until we like come into our own healing and redemption as people and maybe I'm just speaking out of my own experience but we operate out of so much brokenness ourselves and so much orphan-like spirit ourselves until we come to a place of redemption with the father and because i don't know i think most people have experienced pretty big pain on this earth

00:40:53.65

Stephanie Jacobs

yeah.

00:41:07.55

Stephanie Jacobs

and

00:41:14.73

Stephanie Jacobs

yeah

00:41:14.78

Allina

And whether that's happened because of our parents or that's happened because of circumstance or that's happened because of a loss, like we've all kind of come, I think the human experience allows me to say this, that we've all come to this part where we just feel lost, unseen, unknown and broken.

00:41:35.28

Allina

And if we allow ourselves to operate differently,

00:41:35.48

Stephanie Jacobs

Yes.

00:41:39.69

Allina

Out of that, I think that often is where we but get more brokenness and that's where we end up hurting the people around us. um I think a lot of um our parents' generation, um where it's operating out of a lot of hurt from their parents' generation.

00:41:46.38

Stephanie Jacobs

yes

00:41:54.03

Allina

And so then we have this generational hurt that has come through and then we are now experiencing our own sense of orphanhood through that generation of brokenness.

00:42:06.40

Allina

So I had, in coming into working like this, you get become so self-aware of your own self-experience, of your own um like pitfalls, your own hurts, your own pains, and also your own strengths.

00:42:21.28

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

00:42:21.69

Allina

So through working in this like very complex, um

00:42:28.23

Allina

very complex system, very complex environment, i very heavily spiritual environment, I have had to really come face to face with where where do I carry the orphan spirit myself and why has that allowed me to empathize with these kids so deeply?

00:42:47.25

Allina

and we could tie it back to, you know, my story with my my father being gone for most of my childhood, you know, to um having to live with my grandparents, you know, these things like very like practical relatability to children in the orphan care system.

00:43:03.32

Allina

But there's deeper wounds, ah deeper experiences that actually rested on like my soul and my spirit that allows me to empathize with these kids.

00:43:14.50

Allina

That isn't just because, you know, I almost went into the foster care system a couple of times or even kids that like never had that experience, you know, they were never on that.

00:43:19.83

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

00:43:24.14

Allina

But they have we all have experienced these different experiences. moments of of feeling lost and alone. And if we can just like step back into that for a few minutes and reflect on what that meant for us as children, as vulnerable individuals, as...

00:43:46.53

Allina

um someone seeking for hope and light and love and comfort. um I think so many times, back so many times to the moment this child as a child, I was always a very emotional child and um the ways that I craved comfort as a child.

00:44:04.11

Allina

And I can see the way I cope for that now as an adult.

00:44:04.50

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

00:44:07.81

Allina

And so when I go in and I'm working with these kids, if the one thing that I do for that child that day is provide them some level of comfort, from an adult like that cares for them and is there for them, then like that, that's a win.

00:44:23.72

Allina

um

00:44:23.85

Stephanie Jacobs

yeah

00:44:25.01

Allina

Because like, that's where I felt in my story um where I was like craving the adult interaction, the adult intervention in my life.

00:44:37.99

Allina

um

00:44:38.15

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

00:44:40.00

Allina

And so, yeah, the short of this is long story short. We're broken human that um have all experienced the pain and the brokenness of this world.

00:44:50.80

Allina

The children in the orphan care system have, in fact, probably seen the world at its absolute darkest. um And so we have the availability and the responsibility to understand our own needs.

00:45:08.37

Allina

orphanness in our spirit, the ways that we have felt lonely and alone and grown up to then cope and heal from those things. And then hopefully in the children in our lives, we get to prevent them just that little bit more, like prevent a little bit less pain and loss and, you know, that desire that we had as a kid.

00:45:24.56

Stephanie Jacobs

Yes. Yes.

00:45:30.20

Allina

Maybe we can, we can fill some of that for the kids in our lives. so And then remembering that there are kids that millions of kids around the world that do not have the adult advocacy in their life because they're living in orphan care systems that is in our responsibility to step in for those kids as well.

00:45:46.71

Allina

So not just our own children, not just our nieces and nephews, not just the kids at our school, but like the kids of the world that we get to, that sounds, that sounds so cliché of like, Oh, care for the kids of the world.

00:45:46.96

Stephanie Jacobs

yeah

00:45:57.81

Allina

But like we have that responsibility because if we don't do it, then who right?

00:46:02.00

Stephanie Jacobs

Right. Right. And these, we have to remember that these children, and again, if you, if we think back to our own childhood and what it felt like to have our mom and dad to look up to whoever our caregiver was and know that you were safe, you were seen, you were whatever.

00:46:18.46

Allina

Mm-hmm.

00:46:19.75

Stephanie Jacobs

And if you didn't have that, what that felt like and just, know, just stepping into that for a moment and realizing like that, that true vulnerable experience as a child, like if, if, if we don't take care of them, like you said, like there's no one that can, cause they can't do it for themselves. They're not developed enough to be able to do that.

00:46:38.66

Stephanie Jacobs
Um, and.

00:46:38.98

Allina

I think so often on the subject of empathy, um we as adults, as people can say, well, like that doesn't affect me. Therefore, it's not my responsibility to step in.

00:46:50.00

Stephanie Jacobs

Hmm.

00:46:49.91

Allina

And I think that's what I'm trying to say with this. Like we all carry this level of empathy. like vulnerability from our child because we were all children right so we were all those like we all carried that vulnerability at one point in our lives and whether or not we had a safe adult that you know was there for us or not like we were all that vulnerable child at one point and some of us were more fortunate to have safe adults and some are not as fortunate to have those safe adults

00:46:58.61

Stephanie Jacobs

Yes. Right.

00:47:16.84

Stephanie Jacobs

right

00:47:16.85

Allina

And so i feel like orphan care, vulnerable children is like the one issue, maybe not the only issue, but one of those issues that we all should be able to empathize with and all should be able to understand the importance of advocating and caring for these kids.

00:47:35.49

Allina

um Because we we've it's a lived experience that we've all had, whether or not you're in an institution, whether or not you're in foster care, we have all had the lived experience of being a vulnerable child.

00:47:46.69

Stephanie Jacobs

That is so powerful. It really is. and and and And not to mention either that, of course, like you said in the Bible, God mentions the the orphan, the widow as being some of the most vulnerable people we are truly called to to love and support and advocate for.

00:48:04.29

Allina

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

00:48:05.39

Stephanie Jacobs

um Thank you for sharing that perspective. And I feel like just having, being someone who um has really felt God speak to me personally and um kind of lead me and guide me in my way, i can sense how you've come to this realization through God guiding you and leading you to that.

00:48:27.50

Stephanie Jacobs

um Because it's it's not something that I feel like you probably just wake up one day and just fully understand you have to go through that wrestling and those experiences.

00:48:41.59

Stephanie Jacobs

And it's, it's as if God is, like I said earlier, bringing you through these childhood experiences, helping you, how you felt as a child and helping you experience it now from the other side of it and, and and helping these other children.

00:48:48.90

Allina

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

00:48:55.05

Stephanie Jacobs

um And then just through your spiritual walk with God. And um he really,

00:49:02.43

Stephanie Jacobs

reveals to us different perspectives that he wants us to understand and carry with us and share with other believers um as we're ready for it and as we're we're able.

00:49:11.58

Allina

ah hu

00:49:12.48

Stephanie Jacobs

And I ah feel like it is such a gift that you're sharing that with us because um it's not something that we maybe would understand or see otherwise. So thank you thank you for that. um Do you have any stories that you feel comfortable sharing about these precious children that you've come to love in the Orvin care system in Ukraine? just Just share anything that you might have that you'd like us to to know about or understand.

00:49:45.22

Allina

I love these kids and I could talk about them literally all day. um

00:49:49.64

Stephanie Jacobs

okay

00:49:50.28

Allina

I do tend to try to keep some details um out of stories is just to protect their own privacy. That is like a huge aspect of when you're working in orphan care.

00:49:57.61

Stephanie Jacobs

Yes. Right.

00:50:00.95

Allina

um You also, even with the best intentions, don't want to become one of those people that are exploiting these children um for their stories or their cute faces or all the things.

00:50:06.97

Stephanie Jacobs

right

00:50:10.09

Allina

um So trying to be honoring of their stories as well. um But there is one story that's happened. actually It's actually been... happening over the course of these last three years, but kind of came full circle recently that has just like...

00:50:24.78

Allina

just like really just wrecked me. um i like cry every single time I think about it, but it's just such evidence of the Lord's faithfulness.

00:50:27.66

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah. Yeah.

00:50:33.68

Allina

And it just gives testimony that I needed of how God is working, even when we can't necessarily see it.

00:50:40.88

Stephanie Jacobs

yeah

00:50:41.04

Allina

um So when I first moved to Ukraine in 2022, I started working, I worked primarily at a toddler orphanage. So it's ages zero to five. And then we have a group of children there that also, um,

00:50:52.80

Allina

are children with disabilities and they'll stay at that institution until the age of five and then all of these kids end up, you know, aging out to another institution somewhere. And um at the time when I first started working, I was spending a ton of time in the infant room. So this is like zero to two year olds.

00:51:09.29

Allina

And um in that room, you don't really interact a ton of with them, like, um you know, doing like activities and things like that.

00:51:18.13

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

00:51:18.06

Allina

They're infants, but you're holding them, you're feeding them, you're getting them time out of the crib. um And so that's like a lot of what I was doing, um because I didn't know much of the language. And so early on, that was like, kind of like a good starting point for me.

00:51:31.66

Allina

And I had met, there was a handful of kids from that group that I just like really, like my heart just really um attached to and and one of them ah was a little girl and she had cerebral palsy but she hadn't been diagnosed at that point um I believe and so we knew that she had a level of disability and and like desperately needed like intervention and like therapy for her disability, but being in the institution, that's just like really rarely an option.

00:51:56.54

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

00:52:00.69

Allina

Um, and so I would spend quite a bit of time with her because I knew, you know, that she was lacking this, this intervention that she needed for her disability. Um, um,

00:52:11.53

Allina

I can't even say how long that was probably eight or nine months. And then this young child left the orphanage. And so often we just like, don't know what happens to them. So we don't know like what she adopted, was she lost in foster care? Did something happen? had go to the hospital, was she brought home for a family?

00:52:27.37

Allina

You just don't know. And a lot of times the caregivers at the orphanage also don't know.

00:52:28.33

Stephanie Jacobs

Wow.

00:52:30.93

Allina

um And so you just have to like pray and like, and hope that, you know, everything's okay. And that, you know, I kind of like always hoped that I wouldn't see her again, because then that would mean that she came back to the institution.

00:52:39.99

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

00:52:47.33

Allina

And I hoped that she was, you know, in a family and and doing well.

00:52:50.90

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

00:52:51.49

Allina

Fast forward, um last spring, my really good friend, Emma here, she runs a clinic that does physical therapy OT for children with disabilities, um primarily children and families um here in the city.

00:53:00.50

Stephanie Jacobs

Thank you.

00:53:07.27

Allina

And she had met a mother um who had a ah who had a daughter with cerebral palsy. And she you know offered and said, hey, like come to our clinic. We would love to um you know help provide therapy for your daughter. So they start coming to the clinic and she's working with Emma and her therapist there and making incredible progress. And Emma had told me about her multiple times.

00:53:30.51

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

00:53:31.37

Allina

And just, you know, told me about the progress she was making how cool the story was that she just, like, happened to meet this mom and just, like, all these things. And then here recently, just, like, several weeks ago, Emma was talking to me and being like, you know, it's so hard because, you know, we work with so many kids with disabilities.

00:53:49.62

Allina

And these moms have such a hard time because there's no child care for these kids. um That, you know, a lot of times the daycares or the kindergartens, they won't take children with disabilities. So these moms are trying to work and, but they don't have anywhere to provide

childcare for their kids. And so she was just asking me, like, do you know of anyone, do you know of anywhere that um this mom um with this daughter with cerebral palsy could take her child?

00:54:12.33

Allina

was like, i i don't, like, i'm i'm fully aware of how big of an issue it is that we don't have a lot of childcare options for them.

00:54:12.70

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

00:54:19.01

Allina

um But I felt in my spirit, I felt the Lord say like, Where's your willingness? like where Like, you have availability you can make for this. And so I prayed about it for a couple of days and and reached out to Emma and ah just like kind of put the offer out there. I was like, what do you like?

00:54:34.26

Allina

What do you think? Do you think this would be a good idea? i have availability. um i have experience working with children with CP. um You know, would the mother would be comfortable with this? And she was, you know, reached out to the mother.

00:54:46.11

Allina

Mother wanted to meet me, of course. And so I came the clinic um to one of the daughter's appointments to meet the mother and meet the daughter to see if this was going to be a good fit.

00:54:48.20

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

00:54:56.23

Allina

Um, within a few minutes of being there, I think you can probably see where the story is going. But within a few minutes of, you know, I realized at first I was like, this child looks very familiar. But I thought like, maybe Emma had just shown me videos like and things. and that's why she's familiar. yeah And then a few minutes into it, I'm like, no, I know this child. And it was the child that I had worked with at the institution for those eight or nine months.

00:55:18.11

Allina

Um, And she was now home with her biological mother and get receiving care at my friend's clinic. Um, it was, I was just, I was like stunned.

00:55:26.86

Stephanie Jacobs

Yes.

00:55:30.97

Allina

I didn't bring it up right away. Like that. i knew her because I was just like, I was so taken aback.

00:55:33.81

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

00:55:35.41

Allina

I didn't want to make the mother feel uncomfortable. And i hadn't like known from Emma and their interactions that she was like very kind of timid and like very, you know, wasn't very forthcoming with their story.

00:55:45.88

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

00:55:47.69

Allina

So I didn't want to like make it seem like I knew more than she had wanted to share with me.

00:55:51.65

Stephanie Jacobs

Right.

00:55:52.44

Allina

um But for me, in my walk, in my work, that was such a testament of the way that the Lord works in these children's lives, even when I can't see it

00:56:01.86

Stephanie Jacobs

Yes.

00:56:04.37

Allina

um Because so often I'm like, God, where are you?

00:56:08.23

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

00:56:08.41

Allina

And I get really frustrated and get really disheartened. And then he gave me, he didn't have to, but he gave me this evidence with this testimony of this child. um And now I get to serve this family as a caregiver three days a week.

00:56:23.20

Allina

And so I get to like reconnect with this child that I had connected with when she was an infant.

00:56:23.43

Stephanie Jacobs

Yes.

00:56:29.62

Allina

And now she's a beautiful three-year-old. And we get to play around my apartment and she gets to go home to her family at the end of the day. And I don't know. That's just such, it's such such a healing experience for me and such just a story of God's faithfulness that I just, I just can't believe it.

00:56:38.89

Stephanie Jacobs

Yes.

00:56:47.55

Allina

Like, I'm still just shocked that that's how that played out, but yeah.

00:56:50.69

Stephanie Jacobs

Yes. What a full circle story. And like you said, this work can be really hard and dark and difficult. And sometimes where you're feeling like, how can I do more? And the system has all these children um in a way that it could be improved so much better. And

00:57:07.62

Allina

Mm-hmm.

00:57:07.82

Stephanie Jacobs

And then you see this full circle, like best case scenario with this child being reunified with her mother.

00:57:12.63

Allina

Mm-hmm.

00:57:13.94

Stephanie Jacobs

And you're able to actually touch that and then serve again and have this relationship outside of the institution with this child that once was in the institution.

00:57:24.69

Stephanie Jacobs

um

00:57:24.80

Allina

Mm-hmm.

00:57:25.61

Stephanie Jacobs

Just what an incredible.

00:57:26.02

Allina

And that goes back to what we were talking about with like the family preservation and surrounding the family unit.

00:57:30.10

Stephanie Jacobs

Yes.

00:57:30.74

Allina

Like this child and like still and like has risk. Like it's still a vulnerable family situation that she could get placed back in the institution.

00:57:39.68

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm hmm. Yes.

00:57:41.43

Allina

But right now she's at home with her family. So let's surround that family and like let's make sure they're equipped and supported and cared for in the ways that they need to in order to keep this child at home.

00:57:52.56

Stephanie Jacobs

yes

00:57:52.73

Allina

And that, like, that is so, like, there's been studies done by countless research organizations that prove even that it is more financially, um,

00:58:06.30

Allina

like financial, that's the word I'm looking for, efficient, sorry, financially financially efficient to support a family unit than it is to support these large institutions.

00:58:09.51

Stephanie Jacobs

but Financially, yeah. Yeah.

00:58:17.81

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

00:58:17.80

Allina

So even like if we want to take out like the soulness of it and like the the people of it and just like look at the numbers, like it is more responsible for a community, for a government to support families um than it is to run these large institutions.

00:58:33.75

Allina

So

00:58:34.42

Stephanie Jacobs

Yes.

00:58:35.18

Allina

those are the that's like the kind of evidence that we really want to bring to ukraine and to the people and show of like these success stories of how um it's possible it's so possible to care for these kids at home um we can create the resources that are needed to make it even more so um and like it's not only possible but it's actually better for the children it's better for society it's better for the government it's Better for the bottom line if you want to go there um to care for these kids within the family unit.

00:59:06.08

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

00:59:08.38

Stephanie Jacobs

I love that. So beautiful. So before we wrap up, I would love for you to just share a little bit about the project you're working on right now. You're building a building.

00:59:16.76

Allina

um Yeah.

00:59:18.17

Stephanie Jacobs

Is it a home, a school? Share about what you're doing there.

00:59:22.93

Allina

First, can I tell the story of how we ended up with this property? Because I feel like it's just also such a God thing.

00:59:26.14

Stephanie Jacobs

Sure. Yes. Yes, please.

00:59:28.09

Allina

um So I work with an organization called Shade for Children. i a Ukrainian organization. There's a small team of us. um and we weren't even really looking for property. Our mission, like our vision has always been to really just like um activate the community in caring for the vulnerable children of the community. We do orphanage visits, like I had described, like really just trying to fill in the gap and provide supplemental care.

00:59:58.74

Allina

um The organization hosts camps for for children within the community and within the the orphanage systems and tries to like bring the community and these children together so that there's less of the societal divide, right?

01:00:08.40

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm. Yes, love that.

01:00:11.14

Allina

So the idea of like buying property or building a building was not really on our radar. But after the full scale invasion started, um like I had described before, so many of the resources got rerouted to the war effort.

01:00:24.05

Allina

And so we really felt this need and this call to step in the gap even further and create and help create the systems that need reform um because we knew the government wasn't going to be in a position to do it for a while.

01:00:33.56

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

01:00:37.01

Allina

So again, like I said, that responsibility then falls onto the private entities to step in and fill the gaps.

01:00:41.99

Stephanie Jacobs

Yes.

01:00:43.73

Allina

And so as an organization, we are really praying about ways that we could better step in the gap during this time to support these vulnerable children and these vulnerable families. And we toyed around with a couple of different ideas, but we had just been talking um with a a friend here who actually also serves as a foster mom um here, but she um had come aware of this piece of property outside of the city um and was like, hey, like let's can we show it to you? Because I know that you guys are toying around with these different ways, these different avenues that you could potentially support children and families.

01:01:17.86

Allina

And so we went out there. this was spring 2023. spring of twenty twenty three Um, right? Yes. Spring of 2023. And so we go out to the property and i kid you not all of us agree, like the spirit of like the Lord was already on this property.

01:01:38.60

Allina

It felt like the only way can describe it is it felt like someone had prayed over this property long before we got there.

01:01:38.73

Stephanie Jacobs

Wow. Mm-hmm.

01:01:45.30

Stephanie Jacobs

wow

01:01:45.54

Allina

Um, and like the situations, just like the doors opened up where doors shouldn't have opened up. And, um We had the money to purchase the property simply because so many people had given as an influx at the start of the war of like, hey, we know we're helping kids in this war-torn country, like use this to help the kids. And so we had the finances readily available thanks to people's generous giving. And we were able to purchase this piece property for \$1,000.

01:02:13.93

Allina

way lower than market value, um which was such a gift. And the way that the spirit of Lord was just already on this piece of property to this day still gives me chills when I think about it.

01:02:18.36

Stephanie Jacobs

wow

01:02:24.83

Allina

um So then we had the property and we were like, okay, Lord, what are we doing with it?

01:02:29.05

Stephanie Jacobs

yeah yeah

01:02:29.66

Allina

um And again, we kind of toyed around with a couple different ideas, but it did not take us long to really land on the heart of what we felt like the Lord is bringing us into. And like I said, we're we're really hoping to bring in, help bring in systems that bring Ukraine from these large institutionalized care to family-based care.

01:02:47.44

Allina

Like the best case scenario for these kids is to be in a safe, secure family home.

01:02:47.74

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah. Yeah.

01:02:53.28

Stephanie Jacobs

yeah

01:02:53.32

Allina

um We are not creating a family home. And I know that might sound counterproductive, um but we are creating a small group home that we hope will serve as a stepping stone for Ukraine.

01:03:05.23

Allina

from these large institutions to family-based care. Because we the reality of the situation is we're just not in a position to immediately switch from these institutions to family-based care.

01:03:15.80

Allina

We just don't have enough families that are educated, that are interested.

01:03:16.20

Stephanie Jacobs

yeah

01:03:19.26

Allina

we just can't make that switch overnight. And so what we're doing with this home called Blossom Cottage is um we're developing a small group home. It'll be privately run and operated um but for children within the Ukrainian orphanage system and specifically for children with disabilities, because through our experience within the orphanage system.

01:03:35.90

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah. Hmm.

01:03:39.34

Allina

um We have found that they, um one, have the least amount of resources provided for them, and two, it is the highest percentage of children in the institutions are children with disabilities because they're so um least less likely to get adopted here in Ukraine if you have a disability.

01:03:51.21

Stephanie Jacobs

yeah

01:03:58.40

Allina

So these children end up just like aging out of children in institutions and going to adult institutions for people with disabilities. And so they just live behind these institutional laws the whole lives.

01:04:08.77

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

01:04:08.73

Allina

So our heart behind Blossom Cottage is to bring these kids into a home environment where we would be able to um equip them, help them heal, have a very holistic approach to their care, um but ultimately to be able to get these kids placed into families.

01:04:09.06

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

01:04:23.61

Allina

So whether that's through reunification with their biological families, if we're able to help a mother feel equipped to care for her child with disabilities, that will be such a win. If that's not possible, then we would love to get these children adopted into homes that do feel called to to care for these children, whether that's here domestically or when international adoption opens back up. International adoption um could be an option for them as well.

01:04:48.83

Allina

So we're in the building process of that. We have foundation, we have walls, we have a roof. um It is honestly going swimmingly, knock on wood. Things have been moving really quickly and we're very, very thankful for that.

01:05:01.15

Allina

Our next steps are getting electrical and plumbing. If people want a prayer point for that, we've been going back and forth with the electrical company for over a a year now a year I'm trying to get electric um ran out to the property. It's currently being run on generators right now. So we'd love to get um a breakthrough with the electrical company for that. And I would love to say we have a timeline for when the home will open and we'll be able to accept kids. But living in Ukraine, I just know that I can't, I can't give a timeline. I can say that we're moving forward and we're hopeful and we're excited. We'll be able to care for eight to 10 children within the home.

01:05:39.25

Allina

um And the discrepancy in that number will kind of depend on their severity of of need and disability and, you know, how we can best accommodate the kids within our care.

01:05:43.23

Stephanie Jacobs

h

01:05:49.69

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah, that is so beautiful and so exciting.

01:05:49.60

Allina

So, yeah, that's what we're working on.

01:05:52.78

Stephanie Jacobs

And again, another testimony of how God is um affirming the decisions that you're making as you're going and and supporting you so that you can support others and just giving you that energy and that life to say like,

01:05:58.25

Allina

Mm-hmm.

01:06:06.93

Allina

Mm-hmm.

01:06:07.30

Stephanie Jacobs

I see a lot of hard and I see a lot of difficult things with dead ends, perhaps. But God, you are making a way and you're still making a way in these other areas.

01:06:13.05

Allina

Yeah. Mm-hmm.

01:06:15.31

Stephanie Jacobs

And I think, too, you're just such an inspiring example of someone who, again, empathizes with the orphan spirit and is able to step out there respond.

01:06:26.25

Stephanie Jacobs

wrap your arms around these children in ways that you know they need that is not yet being provided through the current system.

01:06:30.42

Allina

hu

01:06:34.36

Stephanie Jacobs

And you're an example of how we all can really do that. You're just one person that's saying like, hey, I can i can watch this child a few days a week that her mother needs.

01:06:43.74

Allina

Mm-hmm.

01:06:44.41

Stephanie Jacobs

and And little do you know that you're going to be so blessed through that. um through that experience as well so um thank you so much for just helping us understand i mean there's so much about your story that's so interesting and inspiring i mean going all the way back to your your childhood and what you experienced and the difficulty in that and then how god is really using that in your story today and just the faith that you have And, um, just you're an example of someone who's able to share back with everyone who isn't in Ukraine, experiencing the war, even there's so much that you're such a gift to so many.

01:07:24.26

Stephanie Jacobs

So thank you so much for, um, sharing what you do share through your own platform, but also joining me here to, to share with, with others.

01:07:30.64

Allina

Thank you. I appreciate it.

01:07:33.30

Stephanie Jacobs

So, um, before we wrap up, Lena, I just want to ask, um, If there's ah any other message that you would love to leave with people today, like your number one message, and then also where can people follow you and learn more about Shade for Children?

01:07:44.14

Allina

Uh-huh.

01:07:51.97

Allina

Yeah, I mean, I think the number one message we already hit of just like each individual's responsibility for these vulnerable kids. One of the questions I do get asked a lot when i have the opportunity in the platform to like share my whole story of where I came from and and really get to the nitty gritty of how difficult it is here in the orphan care system and with the war and things like that.

01:08:15.05

Allina

um People will ask like, how do you how do you remain faithful and how do you have like How do you have the joy of the Lord when everything feels like it's on fire?

01:08:23.61

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

01:08:24.46

Allina

And first and foremost, was like I don't always.

01:08:25.23

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

01:08:29.32

Allina

It is very much a practice. um But also i do That is something i pray over the children. i think I mentioned this to you when we had our initial call um is that the Lord had such a grace of over me as a child to keep my heart soft.

01:08:45.38

Allina

um that he didn't allow like the brokenness of the world and the difficulty of my circumstance to harden my heart to a point where I wasn't able to empathize, where I wasn't able to step into faith.

01:08:53.66

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah. Mm-hmm.

01:08:58.44

Allina

And so when I'm with these children that are living in some of the hardest situations, hardest circumstances, that's something I'm constantly praying over them is that the Lord will help them to remain faithful.

01:09:09.29

Allina

soft in a world that's very hard like we all kind of have to toughen up to be able to survive our circumstance um but also if we allow ourselves to be like changed and impacted by those circumstances in order for us to then help others I think that's just the greatest gift and by the story I shared um with the young girl I think i learned to

01:09:26.39

Stephanie Jacobs

Yes.

01:09:33.32

Allina

or am reminded so much that like the Lord is working with or without us.

01:09:38.23

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

01:09:38.58

Allina

And Christians, we get the invitation to be obedient and give him our yes. and I'm so thankful that I had like been in a place to be able to say yes to Ukraine, to be able to say yes to this Ukraine at this time and in this place and be able to serve these children.

01:09:53.47

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

01:09:56.35

Allina

but God's working and we then have the privilege and the responsibility and the invitation to come alongside what he's doing. And it's honestly, it's on us if we miss it. if we If we're standing here and we're like, where is God? it's all doom and gloom.

01:10:12.79

Allina

The world's on fire, which it's so easy to get that way. Trust me, I know.

01:10:16.44

Stephanie Jacobs

Yes, yes.

01:10:17.83

Allina

Um, but if we just like take two seconds and really look at how the Lord's moving and the way he's invited us in to take action and be a part of the way that he's moving, um then it does become a practice of really experiencing the joy the Lord, the faithfulness of the Lord and living out his testimony.

01:10:32.06

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

01:10:34.63

Allina

Um, the way that we are called to do, you know,

01:10:35.48

Stephanie Jacobs

Right.

01:10:37.95

Allina

Thy kingdom come, thy will that be done on earth as it is in heaven. Like we get we are called to bring heaven to earth.

01:10:41.20

Stephanie Jacobs

Yes.

01:10:44.23

Allina

um And so however way that manifests in your life today, like however way you get to show up to your community, to your family, to your church and bring heaven to earth, like that's walking in obedience and you're going to see the goodness of the Lord in that.

01:10:59.20

Stephanie Jacobs

Yes. And the joy too.

01:10:59.66

Allina

Yeah.

01:11:00.60

Stephanie Jacobs

It won't be all doom and gloom despite the brokenness around us.

01:11:01.35

Allina

Yeah.

01:11:04.22

Stephanie Jacobs

Right. You get to.

01:11:04.74

Allina

That's how we find it.

01:11:05.63

Stephanie Jacobs

Yes.

01:11:05.66

Allina

That's how we find the joy of the Lord.

01:11:06.04

Stephanie Jacobs

Yes.

01:11:07.46

Allina

It's like really just like walking, walking into what he's already doing and being a part of it.

01:11:12.03

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

01:11:12.75

Allina

um It's such a gift. um But yeah, I think that's my last little tidbit there.

01:11:17.31

Stephanie Jacobs

Yes.

01:11:18.46

Allina

um If they want, your listeners want to, and you know, follow along with what we're doing.

01:11:19.29

Stephanie Jacobs

Thank you.

01:11:23.48

Allina

Instagram is a huge place to follow both me and the organization and, um You can follow me on Instagram, Alina K. I'm sure you can put that in the show notes.

01:11:31.67

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah, I'll

01:11:31.66

Allina

um And then Shade for Children is the Instagram handle for the organization. And then if you want to contribute to the building project of Blossom Cottage, we have a place to do that on our website and tons of more information about the orphan care system and the work that we do on Shade for Children dot org.

01:11:50.59

Allina

um And yeah, they can also contact us through that if they have any questions or want to get involved further.

01:11:58.38

Stephanie Jacobs

Awesome. Well, thank you, Lena, so much. Before we go, I just can't help but point out just the overall messaging of of your message and how that ties back to this podcast. I am so thankful to have you on this show because you're talking about this deep brokenness and how we all as humans experience this brokenness and how we can press into that to then find the light

01:12:08.37

Allina

Mm-hmm.

01:12:17.71

Allina

Mm-hmm.

01:12:21.22

Stephanie Jacobs

And that is exactly, if you go to my website about this podcast, that's what it's all about.

01:12:21.30

Allina

yeah Thank you, I appreciate it.

01:12:26.54

Stephanie Jacobs

This show is for people who walk through a difficult place and come out and found the light on the other side. And so um i I can't help but point that out. It's a really exciting and such a joy and such a gift to all of us to have you on the show today.

01:12:39.77

Stephanie Jacobs

Thank you so much.