

**INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER
FOR ORPHANS AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN
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MYTHS AND REALITY OF ORPHANITY

Sometimes we must speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves (Proverbs 31:8). Back in 2013, a family in a southern Russian town received wonderful news – the mother was expecting their first baby! Both the mother and the father of a newborn-to-be started preparing for the arrival of their first child as they looked forward to spending their whole life with the baby. However, a genetic test in the first weeks of the woman's pregnancy showed that the baby was likely to have some serious challenges and most likely would have a mental disorder. Even though this family was well off and could look into the future with confidence, the very thought that they would have to dedicate themselves to living – and catering for – a disabled child, was very disturbing. Soon after that, they made a difficult decision. They decided to leave their child at a hospital.

One hundred fifty kilometers away from them, a young Adventist couple prayed continually asking Jesus to give them a child. It had been five years since they been married, and they just could not have a baby. They went their way of suffering as their hopes for the modern biotechnologies vanished and were replaced by a total denial and despair... They continued to pray for the Author of Life could produce a new life for their family. As they did so, a thought came to them to consider adoption. The wife received a phone call from a doctor telling her that he had an option for them. They rejoiced and but were terrified at the same time. It was definitely an answer to their prayers, but was it the one they were expecting?

In a short time, they visited the hospital and saw the baby. It was a wonderful boy. However, he lacked radial bones in both of his arms. They had to make a decision and they had to make it quick. As they bowed their heads in a fervent prayer, these future parents in their early twenties, came to Jesus asking for His blessings. They made the decision to take that baby home to be part of their family. This is how the story began and it will last for eternity...

Today, six years and seven surgeries later, little Dennis has functional arms. He was born deaf but is learning to hear and is beginning to make sounds. He is as happy as he can be with his loving and caring father and mother, and a granny and a grandpa, aunts and uncles, and a large church family. They are with their love, prayers, and care. In addition, Dennis now has two brothers and a sister – the sweet results of his parents' prayers. They are all fostered or adopted but with God's grace, they are one loving family!

Dennis was lucky to end up in a loving Christian family. However, the stats show only 10% of all orphans, children like Dennis and his siblings, are able to adjust to life and survive. Most of these children left without loving and caring home live out delinquent or even criminal lives after they graduate from their orphanages. Many become thieves, substance addicts, prostitutes, and die before they turn 40. Sometimes they choose to commit suicide. If children were not able to develop correct and sustainable attachments¹ at the dawn of their life, then they face a deprivation that draws them to an inability to solve the easiest down-to-life challenges. Orphans growing up that way cannot distinguish evil from good, cannot study well, and have no self-care skills as all of their faculties are directed to surviving at any cost. This makes them an easy prey for criminals or drug dealers. It does not matter what country or culture an orphan lives in. The problems are similar. The outcome is easily predictable.

The world we live in is a multifaceted one. Thus, Buddhist and Hinduist cultures discourage taking care of orphans, as they believe orphans bears the consequences of a polluted karma and a child's soul needs to be cleansed of that pollution. It is believed that one may not interfere with the karmic space or else this bad karma will transfer to the one who interferes. When it comes to the Western. Civilization, it is the reverse. It is not always easy to arrange to become an adoptive parent. Either the price of adoption is too high, or the laws say that the child must be placed into its original conditions from which it was taken if it is to be saved. There are many myths in these societies that suggest that the orphans will suffer curses. It is believed that the orphan's genetic code predetermines that these poor children will be like their biological parents – alcoholics, drug addicts, or just villains. Of course, this scares off many would be adoptive parents! However, Christians, those who place their trust in God, are free from the fear of myths. Our God, the One who commands us to take care of the orphans, is stronger than these mythical monsters.

THE MISSION OF THE SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

As strange as it may seem, Christians are not eager to take care of the deprived children. We often hear the calling of the Adventist church is to do literature and medical Evangelism. This is good but we must not stop there! Why do we stop there and leave it to believers in other denominations to focus on special needs children, including orphans? I believe I have a partial answer.

We desperately want the world to pay attention to us, to see us. We are dreaming of great projects. However, the polls in the USA² show many do not know about Adventists. In other countries, like Brazil or the Philippines, people may know something about us, but that knowledge comes from our distinctive doctrines rather than from what we are doing in and for society. For many unchurched persons, a doctrinal distinction is not a crucial aspect of faith unless it causes a real transformation in the lives of their fellow citizens. What we actually do speaks louder than a thousand words.

Charles Mulli, a Kenyan born orphan who became a successful businessperson, left everything behind to fulfill God's desire. He sought to rescue the homeless and fatherless children of his country. He founded a colony that he called Mulli Children's Family³. As he trusted the Lord, Charles was able to rescue more than 150 children from starvation by bringing them into his own family. This is an ongoing ministry even now. But Mulli never dreamed of being great. He just wanted to rescue one more child, and one more child, and one more... and more. Jesus thus said of His own mission that He was sent to "***preach the gospel to the poor; ... to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord***" (Luk. 4:18-19)⁴. Healing the brokenhearted is exactly the ministry to orphans. These are the children who were deeply traumatized and maimed by the closest people; these were the children who were victims of abuse and ridicule; these were the children that the whole world rejected. These were the ones who had no chance for future. Ones like little Dennis... Christ came to give them a chance. And we *are* their chance! We are the ones who can change at least one child's life, suffering of being

unloved and – most likely – unwanted. We are those who can say to a child, “I love you!” when nobody in the world has courage to say these words to a miserable orphan. Christ’s mission becomes ours when we get to know that this is exactly what Jesus did for us. ***“But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus”*** (Eph. 2:4-7). Christ’s mission becomes our mission at that very moment when we start bearing His name.

The Spirit of Prophecy wants us to understand how the people of the last days should treat orphans. Christians have a special calling. ***“Until death shall be swallowed up in victory, there will be orphans to be cared for, who will suffer in more ways than one if the tender compassion and loving-kindness of our church members are not exercised in their behalf. The Lord bids us, “Bring the poor that are cast out to thy house.” (Isa. 58:7). Christianity must supply fathers and mothers for these homeless ones. The compassion for the widow and the orphan manifested in prayers and deeds, will come up in remembrance before God, to be rewarded by and by”*** (Review and Herald, June 27, 1893, quoted in *Christian Service*, 215.5-216.1).

So why is it so important for us to remember and take care of orphans? Simply stated, because God always cares for the defenseless and calls Himself a Father of the fatherless (see Psa. 68:5). If we care for those whose direct father is God, we fulfill Christ’s commandment (“*love ye each other*”) and acknowledge God as our Father with orphans being our brothers and sisters.

WHAT SHALL WE DO?

Think about Apostle Paul’s words in Rom. 8:15-16, ***“For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God”***. An orphan lives with fear. Orphans do not know how to deal with the simplest things in life because they never saw or felt or sensed how a normal family life. They don’t know what it is to be a part of a family where everybody supports, loves and cares for each other. Let us say, your child dropped a glass of water. What do you do? And – most importantly – what does your child do? Your son or daughter always knows that dropping a glass of water is not good, but this is not the worst thing in life. They will respond to your outburst with a sense of guilt, but then they will look to see how you take care of it, and that they will remember! What does an orphan do? The first and only thought an orphan has in a situation like this is drawing the conclusion, “I am *bad*. This is why my mother and father left me. This is why nobody wants me to leave the orphanage and should anybody want to take me home with them, I always mess things up like this. I see why I am being rejected.”.

Orphans are haunted by the fears of rejection, loneliness, and death... But God says He gave us the Spirit of adoption. We must not be afraid that He will somehow reject us. He has already accepted us into His family. This is exactly why we can open our homes and our arms to orphans, adopt them into our families and never leave them alone again. We can be the someone who loves them.

Psychologists describe this process as building meaningful relations or attachments⁵ that result in creating a gravity pole for a deprived child, i.e. a person whose opinion a deprived child can trust and rely on. For orphans, we can become such a meaningful person, a father or mother figures for them. There are multiple ways to do it. I have already mentioned adoption and foster care. However, I should mention other options, too.

First, we can become spiritual mentors for orphans. Sure enough, we will have to sacrifice certain comfort and convenience of our personal life by making ourselves available for orphans. This option is good to serve teenage orphans who are not willing to live with a foster family

because of various reasons (e.g., they might be traumatized by an unfortunate experience of living with a foster family) and want to retain some form of independence. *Second*, we can gather a group of youth and organize a plan of visits to an orphanage or a home for children with limited capacities (as a rule, there are many orphans among them). We can make friends with them and play games, do some handiwork, watch Christian movies and talk with them and while doing so trying to instill Christian values in their hearts and bring them closer to Jesus. *Third*, as we do it, we can call together a group of prayer warriors at our local church to have them intercede and plead for specific boys and girls who need a special manifestation of God's love. And, *finally*, God can move a heart of a Brother or a Sister in the church to sacrifice some amount of money to do this important ministry. Financial commitments aimed at supporting the orphan ministry will become a joyful experience for every member. It can bring encouragement and inspiration for the entire church as it cares for these children in their own community.

And finally, the most important thing. Ellen G. White tells us that the critical mission of a Christian in orphan ministries is to build their attachment to all that is good and Heavenly.

“There is a wide field of usefulness before all who will work for the Master in caring for these children and youth who have been deprived of the watchful guidance of parents and the subduing influence of a Christian home. Many of them have inherited evil traits of character; and if left to grow up in ignorance, they will drift into associations that lead to vice and crime. These unpromising children need to be placed in a position favorable for the formation of a right character, that they may become children of God (Testimonies for the Church, v. 6, p. 282.1).

As surprising as it may seem, Mrs. White was actually the pioneer of the Adventist orphan ministry. In her book, *Selected Messages*, this is how she describes her experience:

“After my marriage I was instructed that I must show a special interest in motherless and fatherless children, taking some under my own charge for a time, and then finding homes for them. Thus, I would be giving others an example of what they could do.

Although called to travel often, and having much writing to do, I have taken children of three and five years of age, and have cared for them, educated them, and trained them for responsible positions. I have taken into my home from time to time boys from ten to sixteen years of age, giving them motherly care, and a training for service. I have felt it my duty to bring before our people that work for which those in every church should feel a responsibility.

While in Australia I carried on this same line of work, taking into my home orphan children, who were in danger of being exposed to temptations that might cause the loss of their souls”

(*Selected Messages*, v. 1, p. 34.1-3). Don't you think these words describe the modern idea of mentoring in its best? Didn't righteous Job live his life the same way? ***“Or have eaten my morsel myself alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof; (For from my youth he was brought up with me, as with a father, and I have guided her from my mother's womb”***

(Job. 31:17-18). According to Job's testimony, true worshippers of Yahweh ministered to orphans' needs that way since ancient times – they showed mercy and care to the helpless children whose only fault was that their biological parents rejected them by some unknown reason. And this mercy and care were shown through accepting orphans into their homes, granting them some authorities and rights inherent to their biological children. Please note well the peculiar motivation that guided both Job and Mrs. White. They do not mean a trendy thing like searching your own place in life, or self-identification, or solving a problem of personal loneliness. The saints of God have always been guided by the care of the child whose fate was eternally at risk of failing to hear the message of salvation. This was the motivation for Job to be a father for orphans; this was the motivation for Mrs. White to take orphans into her own home.

Foster care or adoption are the best possible ways of serving God for the sake of salvation of the orphans. There are so many of them in the world. And if you feel you possess strengths, passion, abilities, or all of these together to make happy at least one child who is left without parental love and tenderness, please do it! If you come to know a group of likeminded people who would love to make a difference in the lives of orphans, become part of that group and start acting! If you want to join an organized form of ministry to realize your potential in the lives of orphans,

find that organization and join your efforts with them in any capacity – a volunteer, a staff member, a donor... The principal idea is to follow Jesus' steps in His care for the stranded and rejected and make a positive contribution once you learned the will of God revealed to you. This way we all can have a hope to hear at the end of our lifetime journey, "***Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me***" (Mat. 25:40). This is going to be the crown we will bring to the feet of Jesus on the glorious day of His return that inspires us, Adventists, to live a righteous life, be a true light, and salt on this earth!

May our good God bless us to serve Him tirelessly in full dedication, to do all we can as we know – whatever we cannot do, He will do it Himself!

Soli Deo Gloria! Maranatha!

¹ As argued by Neufeld, Gordon and Mate, Gabor, Hold On To Your Kids: Why Parents Need to Matter More Than Peers, Ballantine Books, 2008

² As found in Bull, Malcolm and Lockhart, Keith, Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream, Indiana University Press; 2nd edition, 2006

³ You can find the whole story of Charles Mulli in Boge, Paul H., Father to the Fatherless: The Charles Mulli Story, Pickering, Ont.: BayRidge Books, 2005

⁴ All Bible texts are used according to King James Version.

⁵ Purvis, Karyn, Created to Connect: A Christian's Guide To The Connected Child, Empowered to Connect, 3rd Edition, 2013