

GOD'S HEART FOR ORPHANS & VULNERABLE CHILDREN

Scripture Text: James 1:27

Prepared for World Orphans & Vulnerable Children's Day
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Biblical Command

James 1:27 tells us that "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." (NIV)G

God's heart for the fatherless, the orphans, and the widows is a consistent theme throughout the entire Bible. James says serving the fatherless is "pure" and "undefiled" religion. It is not just a concern of God. It is a priority of God.

It is not only James who admonishes us to care for the orphans, it is echoed throughout the Bible. Moses said in Deuteronomy 10:17-18:

"For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing."

In Isaiah 1:17, God reminds His people, and that means all of us, not to hurt this group of children. God said: "Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow."

Indeed, it is very clear here that we as The Church, the Body of Christ MUST become aware of the plight of orphans and vulnerable children and youth in the world. Rebuke those who oppressed the vulnerable children. The church is not called to "turn a blind eye" to the disturbing plight of our world's children. Rather, the church is called to "expose" this "shameful" state of affairs by "shining a light" on the problem.

David in Psalms 82:3 again reminds us how we should deal with the orphans: "Defend the poor and fatherless; Do justice to the afflicted and needy." Throughout the Bible God is calling us, reprimanding us if we oppress the orphans and children who have for one reason or another are left in adverse conditions, He will come to avenge them.

But for those who **do not** oppress the fatherless and the widow, God promises a reward as He did in Jeremiah 7:6-7: "If you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. . . then I will cause you to dwell I this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever"

Spirit of Prophecy Counsels

What does the Spirit of Prophecy counsel us about orphans and vulnerable children? Ellen G White in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 511 admonishes us:

“I saw that it is in the providence of God that widows and **orphans**, the blind, the deaf, the lame, and persons afflicted in a variety of ways, have been placed in close Christian relationship to His church; it is to prove His people and develop their true character. Angels of God are watching to see how we treat these persons who need our sympathy, love, and disinterested benevolence. **This is God’s test of our character.** If we have the true religion of the Bible, we shall feel that a debt of love, kindness, and interest is due to Christ in behalf of His brethren; and we can do no less than to show our gratitude for His immeasurable love to us while we were sinners unworthy of His grace, by having a deep interest and unselfish love for those who are our brethren, and who are less fortunate than ourselves.”

Yes, God has revealed this special message to Ellen White to speak to each of us. Her counsel is very clear.

Statistics of World Orphans

Over 2,000 years ago the early church had to deal with orphans and widows. What about today in our world? Do we face the same problem? 2018 statistics from UNICEF reveal

staggering figures of the plight of orphans in the world. to

- 140 million children have lost one or both parents,
- 15.1 million children have lost both parents
- 60% of girls fall into prostitution to survive,
- 40% of boys enter a life of crime when they are out of orphanages

Leading Causes of Orphaned Kids

Why are there so many orphans in the world? Among the leading causes are that many orphans lost both parents to war, disease, poverty, natural disasters, abandonment, and accidents.

What about the recent COVID-19 pandemic? Did it have an impact on the children in the world? UNICEF is expecting an increase in the number of children with either one or both parents having died from the virus, and they are left with no care givers.

The Wall Street Journal reported that the coronavirus pandemic has ravaged families, and it’s difficult to figure out exactly how many children have lost a caregiver or have been orphaned, but experts say the scale of the losses is likely staggering.

According to a July study written by researchers from Pennsylvania State University, the University of Southern California and the University of Western Ontario. For every 1 death caused by coronavirus, roughly 9 people will lose a grandparent, parent, sibling, spouse or child.

Vulnerable Children

Besides the millions of orphans in the world, we have many vulnerable, at-risk children who suffer the same plight. Who are these vulnerable children? The Highly Vulnerable Children Research Center identified 1 Billion children are deprived of at least one basic need, such as shelter, water, nutrition, health, education, and sanitation. <https://hvc-tulane.org/about-hvc-rc/our-mission/>

There are many categories of vulnerable children:

1. Children of Needy Families
2. Children Whose Parents Are Incarcerated
3. Street Children
4. Slum Children
5. Trafficked Children
6. Refugee Children
7. Children with Alcoholic or Drug-abuse Parents
8. Children Exposed to War
9. Children Exposed to Famine
10. HIV/AIDS Children and Other Deadly/Life Limiting Diseases
11. Children Who Are Neglected

Yes, the list goes on, but God's heart goes out to these little ones. God knows the name and location of every child on the face of the earth. In God's sight, each child has a purpose. Each child is special. God has a plan for every child (Jeremiah 29:11).

Hence, He wants all of them, every last one of them, to experience being loved by an earthly family and to know the love of their heavenly Father. God is calling you and me to be that family, that person, that church who show love to orphans and vulnerable children. Is God asking too much of us?

Roman Practice

In the early church, God's people became family to those who had no family. However, it wasn't so among the Romans. In the Roman practice when a baby was born, the baby was set at the feet of the father. If he picked up the child, the boy or girl was legitimized and became part of the family. Babies that were not picked up, perhaps because they looked weak, or have birth defects were outcast, and were taken outside the city to designated places where they would die of exposure or from being eaten up by wild animals. The early Christians reversed this horrible practice. They went out and

brought the babies back, adopting them into their own families, and eventually putting pressure on the government to outlaw the practice. What a change in society when God's people act enthusiastically to help support orphans and vulnerable children!

Marta, From Orphan to Helping Orphans

Personally, I never forgot the faces of orphans I met in orphanages operated by many compassionate and loving lay people of the church. These children are always wanting to hug me, get close to me, holding my hand, touching my clothes. She had no one to take care of her. She roamed the streets and tried to find food to survive. Fortunately, one day someone found her and brought her to the orphanage. Her life was changed from that day on. She received love and care as well as lessons of responsibility, loyalty, and kindness. Above all she learned about the love of Jesus. Today Marta is a nurse, serving the Lord and her community. Her priority is helping other orphans and at-risk children find the love and joy of being part of a family. This was what she found when God heard her cry.

Mephibosheth

Do you remember the story of Mephibosheth in the Old Testament? Mephibosheth was the son of Jonathan, the grandson of King Saul. According to 2 Samuel 4:4, Mephibosheth was 5 years old when both his father and grandfather died at the Battle of Mount Gilboa. When his nurse took him and fled, he fell and became lame. Mephibosheth became an orphan.

Years later when King David had his kingdom well established, he enquired if there was anyone left from the house of Saul. He wanted to show kindness to the person from the house of Saul. He was told by Ziba, one of Saul's servants that Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth was left. King David immediately summoned him to the palace.

David said to him, "Do not fear, for I will surely show you kindness for Jonathan your father's sake and will restore to you all the land of Saul your grandfather; and you shall eat bread at my table continually." Then he bowed himself, and said, "What is your servant, that you should look upon such a dead dog as I?" (II Samuel 9: 7-8).

Mephibosheth thought he would be killed, but instead was shown loving kindness by the King of the land.

So Mephibosheth ate at the king's table. Every time David saw or heard of Mephibosheth, he didn't see or remember a crippled, No! David saw a person who needed loving kindness.

Through God's Eyes

When God looks at you, He doesn't see mere flesh, but He sees you as a special person. Exodus 19: 5 tells us that we are God's peculiar treasure if we obey Him; David asks God to keep him as the apple of His eye!

When God thinks about you, He remembers that Jesus has redeemed you. You are highly valued! Every time God looks at an orphan or at a vulnerable child, His heart is filled with love and compassion for him. His heart is out there searching for him, searching for her.

Every orphan can say: "I Am A Child of God"

Call to Action

God has called the church to span the gap between His heart for orphans and at-risk children and the huge problem that exists today, both internationally and domestically. The church is God's vehicle to reach the hurting and the lost. There is no "plan B."

The church is not a disinterested bystander. We were all at-risk youth (Eph. 2:12-13) but God chose to get involved. In fact, He took the ultimate step and adopted us into His family.

Out of the overflow of God's amazing involvement in our lives, we must choose to get involved in the lives of orphans and vulnerable children.

Involvement will get messy. It was messy for Christ to get involved in the mess of our lives before meeting Him. He did it anyway. He chose to get involved. It's a choice He's asking us all to make.

God will do even more than we can imagine as we allow Him to work in us. To Him be glory "in the church" (Eph 3:21).

How Can You Minister to Orphans and Vulnerable Children?

- Select an orphanage that members can participate in.
- Volunteer for a day with an orphan.
- *Secret Buddy* – members can select one orphan and befriend him/her, writing him/her notes or cards. Send the child a birthday gift, a Christmas gift, etc.
- Children's choir or singing group can go and sing to the orphans on Sabbath.
- Foster care or adoption of orphans.
- Sponsor an orphan on a monthly basis.
- Donate clothes and personal items to orphans.
- Organize programs for refugee children.
- Host the orphans on special days like Children's Sabbath, Creation Sabbath, Christmas, Thanksgiving, Children's Day, etc.
- Ice-cream night, pizza night or any special treat to get to know the orphans.
- Work with local NGOs to run a Street Children Project

- Run a special weekly program for orphans.
- Care package for orphans.
- Pray for the orphans and adopted children.
- Children can donate their Bible story books, mission story books, Bible DVDs to the orphans.
- Involve church kids to write letters to children of incarcerated parents.

There are so many ways we can reach out to this unfortunate group of children. Be creative and God will give you ideas on how to minister to these children.

It is my prayer that God will reveal His heart for orphans and vulnerable children to you today. God has commanded our involvement in the lives of thousands of these unfortunate ones – the orphans and vulnerable children. It is one of His stated priorities. May it be your priority too, brothers and sisters.

Living in His Love – Give Love

Be Actively Involved in the Lives of Orphans and Vulnerable Children

Paul's Teaching

Faith Hope Love

But the Greatest of These is LOVE.

God bless you all.