

“The Call of the Orphans”

James 1: 27 - “Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.”

"Girls, come quickly," my mother's voice pierced the early morning silence, "There is a baby on the porch and it's not dead." We quickly scrambled out of bed and rushed to the verandah. There was mom, bending over a brown paper shopping bag lying on its side with the precious baby inside. Quickly, Mom called the police who, in turn, called a midwife who cautiously cut the bag open to reveal a healthy bloodstained newborn baby boy, wrapped in a threadbare receiving blanket.

At age 12, I experienced the plight of an abandoned child. Much to my delight, my mother decided to care for the baby, and I assumed a big sister role.

What does it mean to be an orphan? It means separation from parents due to social, political, medical or economic reasons. Whatever the situation, a helpless human being is left without the love and care of his or her parent or parents.

“UNICEF and global partners define an orphan as a child under 18 years of age who has lost one or both parents to any cause of death. By this definition, there were nearly 140 million orphans globally in 2015... Of the nearly 140 million children classified as orphans, 15.1 million have lost both parents. Evidence clearly shows that the vast majority of orphans are living with a surviving parent, grandparent, or other family member. 95 per cent of all orphans are over the age of five...”

So, if you choose to define an orphan with the higher number, where a child has lost at least one parent, there are 140 million as of 2015.

Is it any wonder the Bible is vocal about our responsibility to this class of humanity? James 1:27 states, “Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.”

In ancient times, orphans and widows were the most vulnerable and poorest class in society. They owned nothing, neither did they have the means to acquire anything. They were totally dependent on handouts and the kindness of others.

Today, orphans and the poor are still dependent on the goodwill of the government and society at large. However, for those who profess to be believers, the responsibility of caring for orphans is not only our social duty, scripture after scripture links our responsibility to orphans and widows to spiritual growth and repentance. An outstanding example is the story of king Nebuchadnezzar when God, through the prophet Daniel, spoke with Him.

Daniel 4:27 - “King Nebuchadnezzar, please accept my advice. Stop sinning and do what is right. Break from your wicked past and be merciful to the poor. Perhaps then you will continue to prosper.”

When God, through Isaiah called the Israelites to repentance, He instructed:

Isaiah 1:16

“Wash yourselves and be clean!
Get your sins out of my sight.
Give up your evil ways.

17

Learn to do good.
Seek justice.
Help the oppressed.
Defend the cause of orphans.
Fight for the rights of widows.”

Ellen White counsels:

“He will not hearken to the prayer of His people while the orphan, the fatherless, the lame, the blind, and the sick are neglected among them.” —Testimonies for the Church 3:518. – {ChS 217.1}

“There is a wide field before all who will work for the Master in caring for these friendless children and youth, placing them in a position favorable for the formation of a right character, that they may become children of God. There are unpromising children that need to be tenderly sought for; many that would otherwise grow up in ignorance, and drift into associations that lead to vice and crime, may be brought into favorable surroundings, and under Christlike, tender watchcare may be saved to Christ.... This work for others will require effort and self-denial and sacrifice; but what is the little sacrifice that we can make, in comparison with God’s great gift of His only begotten Son? God has granted us the privilege of becoming laborers together with Him.” —The Review and Herald, June 27, 1893. – {ChS 217.2}

“Those who have pity for the unfortunate, the blind, the lame, the afflicted, the widows, the orphans, and the needy, Christ represents as commandment keepers, who shall have eternal life.... Christ regards all acts of mercy, benevolence, and thoughtful consideration for the unfortunate, the blind, the lame, the sick, the widow, and the orphan, as done to Himself; and these works are reserved in the heavenly records and will be rewarded. On the other hand, a record will be written in the book against those who manifest the indifference of the priest and the Levite to the unfortunate, and those who take any advantage of the misfortunes of others, and increase their affliction in order to selfishly advantage themselves. God will surely repay every act of injustice, and every manifestation of careless indifference to and neglect of the afflicted among us. Every one will finally be rewarded as his works have been.” —Testimonies for the Church 3:511-513. – {ChS 192.3}

“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.” – {3T 511.2}

Caring for orphans is not just the duty of the individual or the local church as God revealed to Ellen White:

“Provision should also be made for the orphans. If these cannot be taken care of by their relatives, then the church or the conference must take the care of them, and place them in suitable homes.” –Manuscript 151, 1898. – {2SM 331.3}

God is so passionate about caring for orphans that He gave specific instruction through Moses in Deuteronomy 26:12 - “Every third year you must offer a special tithe of your crops. In this year of the special tithe you must give your tithes to the Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows, so that they will have enough to eat in your towns.”

As already noted, according to UNICEF, in 2015 there were 140 million orphan children worldwide who had lost one or both parents. The reality that we face is that each orphaned child is in need of love and care. Yet, the crucial question, “How can I be supportive of these children?”

In my quest to be involved, I discovered that there are several institutions and ministries operated by dedicated Seventh-day Adventist workers who are sacrificing for the well-being of orphans. I chose to support International Children's Care. My plea is that each of us church members open our heart and contribute toward the well-being and care of these orphaned children. There are so many ways to be a part of this ministry. For as little as \$1.00 per day, you can sponsor an orphan child who needs the loving support that you can provide. For more details, visit the International Children’s Care website at <http://www.forhiskids.org/> or call 800-422-7729. Together we can make a lasting difference in the lives of children whom God has placed within our reach. This reward is for eternity as recorded in the following scripture:

The words of Jesus in Matthew 24:34-39 gives a clear picture of how our care of orphans relates to our salvation:

34 “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. **35** For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. **36** I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.’

37 Then these righteous ones will reply, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? **38** Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? **39** When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?’

40 And the King will say, ‘I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!’”

What a privilege! Caring for an orphan means caring for Jesus! Is not this evangelism in the highest sense?

The Apostle Paul admonishes us in Titus 3:14, “Our people must learn to do good by meeting the urgent needs of others; then they will not be unproductive.”

The needs of orphans are urgent. Let’s now join hands in meeting these needs as the apostle Paul concludes in Titus 3:7-8, “Because of His grace He declared us righteous and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying, and I want you to insist on these teachings so that all who trust in God will devote themselves to doing good. These teachings are good and beneficial for everyone.”

Hebrews 10:24

“Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works.”

Hebrews 13:15-16

“Therefore, let us offer through Jesus a continual sacrifice of praise to God, proclaiming our allegiance to His name. 16. And don't forget to do good and to share with those in need. These are the sacrifices that please God.”