

Orphan Care and the Local Church: The What, Why and How (Why We Should Care About It And What We Should Do About It)

Video Link: <https://vimeo.com/153958485>

Introduction

People who live in very privileged settings like us often have a hard time identifying with the poor and the powerless. We even have a hard time identifying with it when we read it in the Bible. We often read right over it. But if you look at the Scriptures, you see from cover to cover there is a great emphasis on God's concern for the oppressed, the powerless and the orphan. In Psalm 146, God is praised for watching over the sojourner, feeding the hungry, setting prisoners free, sustaining the fatherless and sustaining the widows. This is who God is. Therefore, we should do something! That's the point of James 1:17-27! Many are charmed by the Word, but not changed by the Word.

The Global Orphan Crisis: Statistics

A word about statistics: One of the greatest weaknesses in these global orphan estimates is that they include only orphans that are currently living in homes.

- They do not count the estimated 2 to 8+ million children living in institutions.
- Nor do current estimates include the vast number of children who are living on the streets, exploited for labor, victims of trafficking, or participating in armed conflict.

These statistics significantly underestimate the number of orphans worldwide and fail to account for many children who are among the most vulnerable and most in need of a family.

With that caveat:

- There are 153 million orphans worldwide. 17.6 million children worldwide have lost both parents and are considered a "double orphan."
- Every day 5,760 more children become orphans.
- Each year more than 14.5 million children grow up as orphans and age out of the system by age 16.
 - Each day 38,493 orphans age out.
 - Every 2.2 seconds another orphan ages out with no family to belong to and no place to call home.
 - Studies have shown that 10-15% of these children commit suicide before they reach age 18.
 - These studies also show that 60% of the girls become prostitutes and 70% of the boys become hardened criminals.

- The IQ of children raised in orphanages is 20 points lower than children raised in a family.
- In Sub-Saharan Africa, 1 out of 9 children die before the age of 5.
- Asia is home to the largest number of orphaned children in the world (60 million at last count).
- Deaths under the age of 5 are increasingly concentrated in Southern Asia (India and China are two of the countries with the highest rates of early childhood mortality).
- There are 10.2 million orphaned children in Latin America, which accounts for 5% of all children in the region.
- Women and children are especially vulnerable in Latin America with underage minors representing 50% of people living in extreme poverty.

Do you realize that when we talk about getting the gospel to the nations, many of the people living in the nations include orphans!

- If orphans were a country, they would make up about the eighth or ninth largest nation in the world.
- Further, we're often talking about the same places of ministry – unevangelized places are often places of poverty and great need:

According to John Piper, half of the least developed countries are also the least evangelized countries. The other half have very few Christians. One study of poverty and spiritual need expressed this observation: the most dominant impression one gains from looking at the world in this way is that the poor are the lost and the lost are the poor. Whether one approaches the data from a desire to learn where the Good News needs to be heard, or a desire to find the poorest of the poor, the answer is the same.

God's people have cared for the orphan, the oppressed, the widow, the stranger for years. This isn't new. This is basic Christianity.

The philosopher Aristides wrote to the Roman Emperor Hadrian in 125 AD: "Falsehood is not found among them; and they love one another, and from widows they do not turn away their esteem; and they deliver the orphan from him who treats him harshly. And he, who has, gives to him who has not, without boasting. And when they see a stranger, they take him into their homes and rejoice over him as a very brother; for they do not call them brethren after the flesh, but brethren after the spirit and in God... And if there is among them any that is poor and needy, and if they have no spare food, they fast two or three days in order to supply to the needy their lack of food."

In a letter to the bishop of Antioch in 251, the bishop of Rome mentioned that "more than 1,500 widows and distressed persons" were in the care of his congregation.

So, why orphan care? Here are nine theological motivations that drive and sustain orphan care.

9 Biblical Motivations

1. Because of our vision of God.
 - Drives and sustains
 - Psalm 146. “The Lord’s Famous Titles”
 - We should daily stand in awe of God; that’s the first need. Then seek to imitate Him. Sustained praise.
 - “There’s nothing more dangerous than to be devoid of awe.”
 - Not only drives us, but it will cause us to overcome despair, anxiety, and apathy in the work of mission.

2. To imitate God.
 - Tim Keller: How do you want to be introduced? (Ps 68:5)
 - “Father to the fatherless”
 - Ephesians 5:1, imitate God as beloved children
 - Joshua – adopt from every country

3. Because people matter to God.
 - You see that in Psalm 146, and elsewhere – He made them.
 - Being made in the image of God (or *the imago Dei*) means that people have the capacity to think, feel, reason, love, rejoice, reproduce, choose, and most of all know God personally and eternally through Jesus Christ.
 - There are no gradations in the image of God.
 - If you dishonor anyone made in God’s image, you dishonor God Himself. “*Whoever mocks the poor insults his Maker*”
 - Value people because you treasure their Maker.
 - When we refuse to act on behalf of God’s image bearers, we are demeaning God Himself.

4. As a response to the grace of God.
 - a. In Psalm 146, but even fuller sense in the NT. Jesus opens eyes, sets prisoners free, satisfies hunger, and brings orphans into the kingdom.
 - b. The gospel teaches us that we identify with the orphan, widow, stranger
 - We aren’t superior to the poor; we are the poor.
 - We aren’t superior to the blind; we’re blind.
 - We aren’t superior to the lame; we’re the lame.
 - We don’t deserve to sit at his Table, but here we are!

The proper response to grace is grace. Those who truly understand grace, serve, give, sacrifice, love – with joy. They live a life of generosity and compassion and justice.

5. As doers of the Word of God.

- James 1:27
- Spiritual maturity isn't about knowledge; it's about obedience.
- It's about how you live your life.

People who grow up in privileged settings often struggle to identify with the plight of the vulnerable and the abused. But social justice is a big concern of the biblical writers, and it should be a big concern for us.

6. To display the coming Kingdom of God.

- We get to bring the future into the present
- We get to show people just a foretaste of the day in which the lion and lamb play together; peace and righteousness dwell.

7. Because everything we do in Jesus' Name matters to God.

- The Lord is the judge. Psalm 146, He watches over, He reigns, He will judge the wicked.
- Luke 14:12: Who to invite
- Jesus fills up ordinary acts with eternal significance. (Rewards later.)
- Why do this? This life is short. The next one is long.
- This life is about a cross; the next is about a crown.
- If you want an easy life, don't bother reading the Bible.
- Good news: Every meal you have; every time you welcome that snotty nosed, functionally fatherless kid into your life; every kid you sponsor; it gets heaven's attention.

8. As an act of honor to the Son of God (Matt. 25).

- Jesus takes texts like Psalm 146 and deepens the application: You've done it unto Me!
- The orphan has a face.

9. Because orphans need the gospel of God!

- The greatest need for an orphan is to know God.
- They need to know Abba Father.
- We aren't the Savior, Jesus is.
- There are no natural born children in the kingdom of God. If we are in this family, it's because God has adopted us. These children need this gospel.

- Theologian J.I. Packer said, “Adoption is the highest privilege the gospel offers.”
- They may not receive many earthly privileges, but they can enjoy the greatest of all privileges.

How can we respond? (Practical application and engagement)

1. Acknowledge your insufficiency.
 - Orphan care is warfare.
2. Accept your responsibility. Do Something
 - Few people would say they “hate orphans,” but they’ve done nothing.
 - The opposite of love is not hate, but indifference.
3. Start sensibly. Start small. Can’t do it all right now – Don’t be idealistic –
 - “Should I go pro after my freshman or sophomore year” How about you make the middle school team.
4. Act wisely.
 - In our zeal, we can actually create problems.
 - Work with specialists. Become a specialist.
5. Act holistically.
 1. Pray
 - Father, “What do you want me to do?”
 - Go on a prayer walk and talk to the Father
 2. Start small. (Talk, read, write)
 - Can’t do it all right now. Don’t be idealistic.
 - Talk (Have a conversation).
 - Read (Do some studying).
 - Write
 - o Write a letter to an orphan
 - o Journal about it
 - o Do some art work
 3. Support good organizations
 - There are many who do this full-time.
 - Partner with them, pray for them, support them, etc.
 4. Speak up
 - Orphans are not only powerless, they are voiceless.
 - The purpose of influence is to speak for those who have no influence (Prov. 31:8-9).
 - Create awareness with whatever platform you have.

- Class president, coach, teacher, principal, lawyer, pastor, writer, etc.
5. Be alert and practice hospitality
 - Have your eyes open to needs.
 - Be a consistent and compassionate pro-life advocate
 6. Adopt
 - Have you seriously considered this?
 7. Foster
 - Consider fostering.
 - Contact agencies and see what can be done.
 - Give supplies.
 - Care for case workers. (Throw them a party to say thanks.)
 8. Sponsor
 9. Care for the functionally fatherless.
 - Keep your eyes open for needs.
 - Get involved.
 - Volunteer at local ministries, programs, schools, etc.
 - Practice hospitality.
 10. Provide practical care for adoptive/foster parents (e.g., respite care)
 - You can provide respite care through the foster care system
 - Help adoptive parents for a weekend.
 - Baby-sitting
 - Meals
 11. Fund adoptions
 12. Provide for needs as you hear about them
 - Shoes
 - School supplies
 13. Train leaders
 - Churches and church leaders aren't doing it.
 - Seminaries need to be teaching on it
 14. Promote/Support in-country adoption
 - Lost of myths abound
 - Much cheaper
 15. Move
 - Go live among the poor and the orphan.
 16. Visit
 - Visit with a purpose and a plan.
 - Grateful for organizations that are there all the time, with people on the ground; and we actually meet a need.
 17. Provide transitional assistance
 - This is a big need around the world for those who age out.
 - "Un-adopted" Program through Lifeline.
 - Strengthen relationships with orphanages.

- Turn business leaders loose.
- 18. Use your vocational skills
 - Don't leave your calling, leverage calling.
- 19. Fight trafficking (Many are orphans, or those aged out)
- 20. Prevent orphans.
 - Poverty often leads families to put their children up for adoption. So we must fight poverty wisely and compassionately.
 - Relief
 - Restoration
 - Development.

Conclusion

We have everything we need to invest in orphan care ministry. There are many ways to do it. We have a great Savior who demonstrated care for the least of these. Jesus Christ died, rose and poured out His Spirit to empower us for His mission. In John 14:18, Jesus said, "I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you." He has come to us. Let us go to them.

Sermon by Tony Merida, lead pastor of Imago Dei Church in Raleigh, N.C. Permission has been granted for you to use these teaching materials for sermon preparation, small group Bible studies, personal study, etc.