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TRAINING THE MEMBERS OF PINCKARD BAPTIST CHURCH
IN PINCKARD, ALABAMA, FOR WHOLISTIC CARE
TO THOSE WHO ARE IN FOSTER CARE
AND ELIGIBLE FOR ADOPTION

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TRAINING THE MEMBERS OF PINCKARD BAPTIST CHURCH
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This project is dedicated to

Stacy Woodall,

My love and helpmate;

Robert, Adrian, Judy Beth, and Carter

My treasure and joy;

All for the glory of God.

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PREFACE

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The gospel motivates Christians to provide care to orphans, those who are in foster care and eligible for adoption. Russell Moore states, “The gospel of Jesus Christ means our families and churches ought to be at the forefront of the adoption of orphans close to home and around the world.”¹ The gospel of Jesus Christ shapes and fuels the individual Christian and local church to fully engage in the care of orphans, to their good and God’s glory. Pinckard Baptist Church (PBC) is to fulfill its role in gospel witness through the ministry of caring well for orphans. As the membership of PBC engages in orphan care, families will make positive impacts on the lives of children through foster care ministry and adoption, as well as supportive care to those engaged in fostering and adoption. PBC’s participation in caring well for those in foster care and eligible for adoption will serve as an expression of spiritual growth and reflects the fruit of sanctification. The church’s engagement will shine as a visible witness to the surrounding world concerning authentic discipleship and genuine faith. The apostle James notes that the church’s care for orphans reflects this genuineness: “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble” (Jas 1:27).² This project moves the body of PBC to answer God’s call to care well for this vulnerable population as a means of good to others and to bear witness of the effect of grace on the lives of His people.

¹ Russell Moore, *Adopted for Life: The Priority of Adoption for Christian Families and Churches*, updated and exp. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 14.

² All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

Context

Pinckard Baptist Church is a traditional, small Southern Baptist Church (SBC) located in Pinckard, Alabama. Pinckard is a small community nestled between Dothan and Ozark, Alabama, and roughly two hours south of Montgomery. It is a township with approximately six hundred citizens. Four churches are located in Pinckard, with PBC being the only SBC church in the area.

PBC averages approximately sixty-five in Sunday morning worship attendance. The congregation, despite being a small church, is multi-generational. Doctrinally, PBC is conservative in its understanding of Scripture, holding to the most recent edition of the *Baptist Faith & Message* (2000). The church's ecclesiological makeup is congregational led under the leadership of the senior pastor. The church also has bi-vocational staff ministers and is supported by the servant leadership of deacons. In addition, the church functions with ministry directors and a variety of committees.

PBC's motto is "where love abounds." This motto is derived from the scriptural references of Matthew 22:36-40 and John 13:34-35 where Jesus issues the "Great Commandments." In general, the disposition of PBC is one of genuine care and concern for one another as well as those in the community. Yet, the membership consists largely of "homegrown" Pinckard residents, resulting in a leaning of inward focused behavior. While the church is open and welcoming to those who are "outsiders," there is a hesitancy within many in the church to extend beyond their comfort zones. This creates a barrier to the church's response to caring well for orphans.

Caring well for orphans, those who are in foster care or eligible for adoption, is an urgent need to which the church must respond. James 1:27 addresses this matter clearly: "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." Prior to the development and implementation of this project, PBC's ministry to orphans was limited to budgetary allocations to the Alabama Baptist Children's Home & Family Ministries (ABCHFM) and an annual collection taken for Dale County Save-a-Life, a pro-life pregnancy crisis center.

While much of the membership of PBC would affirm the importance of a ministry that cares well for those in foster care and those eligible for adoption, direct engagement is non-existent.

Various reasons for this inaction include apathy, ignorance, and fear. For much of the membership of PBC, there is an indifference to the urgent call to engage sinners with the gospel as well as minister to those who are the least among us. This apathy is seen throughout the body in a general lack of initiated ministry and care within the body, much less outside of the body. This apathy was exasperated during the pandemic period as many members expressed concerns with gathering and attendance. Outreach visitation, personal evangelism, and various care ministries were already anemic among many within the body. Age and burnout are explanations for the apathy among the senior adult population in the church. Recreational, sports, and school activities have greater influence for many in the young and mid-adult population. Interestingly, these activities stalled temporally and returned to “normal” quickly, whereas ministry commitment and worship engagement was slower in its return to “normal.”

This apathy is transposed to the area of orphan care. Apathy is expressed in the sentiment by many, in this context, as a ministry for others. This mindset is summarized in the idea that if one is not called to be a foster or adoptive parent, then there is nothing to do in this area. Therefore, PBC needs a broader view of orphan care ministry. This broader view is cultivated with a deeper understanding of the biblical revelation of the doctrine of the *imago Dei* as well as the plethora of ways to participate in orphan care beyond being a foster parent or adoptive parent.

The second reason for inaction is reflected in ignorance of the issue. Ideally, the church would seek to break free of the lack of understanding and pursue more knowledge about orphan care ministry. This ignorance includes but is not limited to (1) lack of knowledge of the broad spectrum of support and care opportunities to those who are foster parents or adoptive resources; (2) lack of awareness to the weight carried by

those honoring God in orphan care; and (3) lack of understanding to the extent of abuse in the community that surrounds PBC.

Much of the membership of PBC is insulated from the horror and trauma experienced and endured by those who have been abused and neglected. While there is a general understanding that abuse occurs, it is often relegated to inner city contexts, not the stereotypical small town “Mayberry” environments such as Pinckard or Dale County. This ignorance is noted in a lack of understanding the extent of the problem in our area, the trauma experienced among the abused, the proper way to handle suspected abuse and neglect situations, as well as how to engage in orphan care ministries.

Third and finally, there is a sincere fear to engage. This fear, in part, is based on the ignorance of issues related to abuse, neglect, foster care, and adoption. Many members are unaware of the crisis that some children in our county and town experience in their home. The fear of the unknown; fear of the thoughts of others; fear of failure; and fear to get hurt (physically or emotionally) when engaging in this ministry present as barriers to PBC’s participation in compassionate, caring ministry to children in orphan care.

Rationale

Orphan care is a gospel issue. While the tendency in modern day evangelicalism, in particular SBC culture, is to refer to every issue confronting the church as a “gospel issue,” orphan care undeniably is a gospel issue. Paul uses adoptive language to convey the excellency of Christ’s redeeming work (Eph 1:4). David captures the posture of Yahweh concerning orphans when he writes that He is “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation” (Ps 68:5). James conveys the heart of God by calling the Christian to “visit orphans and widows in their trouble” (Jas 1:27). Orphans and widows are classifications of humanity that are defenseless and hopeless due to being void of parental or spousal supports. These two categories of humanity are often associated together in verses and passages demonstrating their vulnerable nature. Therefore, the

biblical rationale becomes clear as a hopeless and helpless people need gracious intervention. The need is identified, the divine posture is portrayed, and the imperative is given. Christian families and households of faith are to intervene on behalf of the “least of these,” and by doing so demonstrate the love of God and the genuineness of their faith.

The need to train PBC members to care well for foster children and those eligible for adoption is a pressing matter. Children are often removed from their biological family due to various forms of abuse and neglect, which result in a family placement via a safety plan or, in the absence of such a plan, placement into foster care. Abuse can come in the form of physical and sexual abuse as well as the neglect of a child. Children who experience forms of abuse and neglect that result in foster care placement experience real, lasting trauma. A 2015 study revealed that approximately 160,000 children experienced forms of physical or sexual abuse resulting in post-traumatic disorder and trauma related behavioral disorders.³ The church has an opportunity to respond to God’s clarion call to care well for the abused.

According to Jennifer Roessel, a social worker with Dale County Department of Human Resources (DHR) Child Protective Services (CPS), there are approximately 5,900 children in foster care throughout the state of Alabama with approximately 60 in Dale County.⁴ Furthermore, she notes that approximately six children per month enter the foster care system as a result of abuse or neglect.⁵ There is an ongoing need for foster parents and adoptive resources in our ministry context. Due to the influx of children entering foster care, there is an increased need for foster parent resources. Roessel shares that there are fourteen licensed foster homes and adoptive resources in Dale County.⁶

³ Marianne Celano et al., “Predictors of Treatment Completion for Families Referred to Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy after Child Abuse,” *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 31, no. 3 (2018): 454-59.

⁴ Jennifer Roessel, Dale County DHR Resource Worker, e-mail questionnaire, February 2022.

⁵ Roessel, interview.

⁶ Roessel, interview.

Kim McGainey, director with the ABCHEM Dothan region, states that there are only three licensed foster homes in Dale County through her agency.⁷ Both agency representatives articulate the urgent need for foster parents and adoptive resources to provide a safe and secure home for these vulnerable individuals.

Additionally, many children who enter foster care can become eligible for adoption. Children become eligible for adoption after parental rights are terminated (TPR: Termination of Parental Rights). TPR occurs through judicial action when parents fail to fulfill the requirements to regain custody of their children. In a 2020 press release, Alabama Governor Kay Ivey celebrated Alabamian response to adoption, citing over 800 children were adopted in 2019.⁸ She continued by stating that over 460 children are eligible for adoption, awaiting a forever home.

PBC members are in a position, due to biblical instruction and practical realities, to answer the call to care well for foster children and those eligible for adoption. However, there is much work to be done. There is a need for education, equipping, and exercising God's gifts and callings in the lives of the people of PBC to meet this need. There is a need for the Holy Spirit to transform hearts and renew minds to see the biblical mandate to intervene. PBC's engagement will be for the good of others and to the glory of God.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to train the membership of Pinckard Baptist Church in Pinckard, Alabama, for wholistic care to those in foster care as well as eligible for adoption.

⁷ Kimberly McGainey, Alabama Baptist Children's Home & Family Ministries, e-mail questionnaire, February 2022.

⁸ The Office of Alabama Governor, "Press Release: Governor Ivey Announces Third Year of Record Number of Alabama Foster Care Adoptions," November 24, 2020, <https://governor.alabama.gov/newsroom/2020/11/governor-ivey-announces-third-year-of-record-number-of-alabama-foster-care-adoptions/>.

Goals

The following goals helped determine the effectiveness of this project.

1. The first goal was to assess PBC members' current understanding of the biblical instruction and contextual needs concerning orphan care.
2. The second goal was to develop a seven-week curriculum for participants.
3. The third goal was to increase knowledge through the participation of a seven-week curriculum.
4. The fourth goal was to develop a specific and robust ministry plan to engage participants for future service in orphan care.

These four goals provided a roadmap to inform, empower, and equip PBC members to find their unique role in the ministry and care of orphans. These goals laid a biblical foundation to shape worldview alongside practical truths about the prevalence of abuse and neglect in the ministry area. PBC was prepared, through this project, to answer the call of God as revealed in James 1:27, which is to extend compassion to orphaned children. Definitive research methodology measured when these four goals had been accomplished.

Research Methodology

This project was considered successful based on the completion of the four goals. The first goal was to assess PBC members' current understanding of the biblical instruction and contextual needs concerning orphan care. Members participated in a pre-curriculum assessment, called the Orphan Care Inventory and Assessment (OCIA), to measure and gauge understanding.⁹ This tool gathered information and then assessed participant knowledge in the following areas: (1) demographic information; (2) theological and biblical worldview related to orphan care; and (3) contextual and cultural need for orphan care ministry engagement. While failing to reach the desired goal of twenty completed surveys, the completed surveys provided rich data and assessment

⁹ See appendix 3. All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use.

information.

The second goal was to develop a seven-week curriculum for participants. This goal sought to increase participant knowledge in the realm of orphan care. This goal sought to increase participant knowledge in the realm of orphan care. The curriculum included the following seven sections: (1) Biblical Foundations I: The Bible and the Care of Orphans; (2) Biblical Foundations II: The *Imago Dei* and the Care of Orphans; (3) Biblical Foundations III: Developing a Culture of Care; (4) Biblical Foundations IV: The Christian's service to God through the Care of Orphans; (5) Engagement: Implementing a Family Advocacy Ministry Model of Ministry; (6) Expertise: Participation in a Panel Night with Q&A; and (7) Nex Steps: Review, Recruit, Refer for Ongoing Training and Certification. The curriculum was measured by an expert panel consisting of two pastors with at least ten years of pastoral ministry, a professor from a Southern Baptist college or seminary, and a social worker with DHR or related entity (i.e., Alabama Baptist Children's Home and Family Ministry). The panel used a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, clarity, and relevance of the topic of orphan care.¹⁰ The curriculum was considered effective when it received 90 percent marks of satisfactory or higher. The curriculum would be re-evaluated for improvements if the rating is under the 90 percent threshold.

The third goal was to increase knowledge through the participation of a seven-week curriculum. This goal was measured by readministering the OCIA after teaching the seven-week curriculum. The goal was considered successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-assessment scores.

The fourth goal was to develop a specific and robust ministry plan to engage participants for future service in orphan care. This ministry plan would seek to arouse

¹⁰ See appendix 1.

members to participate in orphan care, including recruiting and licensing foster parents, adoptive parents, and/or support ministry roles. To craft a sound strategic ministry plan, three models of active orphan care ministries were evaluated. This goal was measured by an expert panel consisting of three pastors or ministry leaders of churches that have a current ministry plan that focuses on orphan care ministry. The expert panel employed a rubric for evaluation.¹¹ This goal was considered successful when 90 percent of the rubric items were scored as satisfactory or higher following the review of the panel comments.

These goals assisted in engaging and equipping PBC members to fulfill the biblical mandate and cultural need to serve those in foster care and eligible for adoption.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms are used in the ministry project:

Adoption. The term *adoption* has two primary meanings. First, *adoption* refers to “the social, emotional, and legal process through which children who will not be raised by their birth parents become full and permanent legal members of another family while maintaining genetic and psychological connections to their birth family.”¹² Second, *adoption* refers to the legal and relational change between God and sinner through the redemptive grace and work of Jesus Christ in justification. This spiritual adoption is revealed and expounded in numerous New Testament texts such as Ephesians 1:3-14.¹³ While this project will primarily focus on the need to engage in physical adoption, one

¹¹ See appendix 2.

¹² Child Welfare Information Gateway, “Glossary-A: Adoption,” accessed July 12, 2022, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/glossary/glossarya/>.

¹³ The language of Eph 1:3-14 speaks to the justified in terms of being “predestined to adoption as sons.” The Pauline language communicates the glorious truth and reality of the gospel as the justified sinner, through faith in Christ, has a change in status and relationship with God. No longer does the sinner possess an antagonist status or relationship with God (i.e., enemy, alien, strangers) but now is declared righteous and right with God possessing sonship and heirs to the glories of grace in Christ. Paul deals with this status change of the justified in other texts (see Rom 8:15-17; Eph 2:14-18; Gal 3:26-29). This theme of spiritual adoption, as it relates to the church’s engagement in orphan care, will be further developed in chap. 2.

must recognize that the gospel, and its presentation of spiritual adoption through Christ, motivates the church to care well for orphans through adoption.

Child Protective Services. The *Child Protective Service Unit (CPS)* is a division of the Alabama Department of Human Resources. This unit handles all abuse and neglect investigations, ongoing family services, and foster care, as well as the licensing of foster and adoptive families.

Department of Human Resources. The *Department of Human Resources (DHR)* is the state governmental institution for Alabama and houses three departments: (1) Child Protective Service Unit; (2) Child Support Unit; (3) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (food stamps). Each county in the state of Alabama houses a local DHR.¹⁴

Foster care. *Foster care* refers to the “temporary service provided by States for children who cannot live within their families.”¹⁵ This placement is out of the home with an approved foster family. The placement can be at least twenty-four hours or extend several weeks or months depending on the circumstances related to placement.

Orphan care. For this project, *orphan care* will serve as an umbrella term for those who are in foster care as well as those who are eligible for adoption. Children who are eligible for adoption are those currently in foster care and parental rights have been terminated, resulting in them becoming eligible to be adopted by an approved adoptive resource. Specifically, *orphan care* relates to the church’s involvement in providing care to those in the system by serving as a foster or adoptive parent, or in supportive role.

Termination of parent rights. *Termination of parent rights (TPR)* refers to the “voluntary or involuntary legal severance of the rights of a parent to the care, custody,

¹⁴ Alabama Department of Human Resources, accessed July 12, 2022, <https://www.dhr.alabama.gov>.

¹⁵ Child Welfare Information Gateway, “Glossary-F: Foster Care,” accessed July 12, 2022. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/glossary/glossaryf/>.

and control of a child and to any benefits that, by law, would flow to the parent from the child, such as inheritance.”¹⁶

Wholistic. The term *wholistic* in this project refers to the three-fold care ministry to orphans: (1) training to serve as a foster parent; (2) training to serve as an adoptive parent; and (3) training to serve alongside, in supportive roles, those engage in fostering and adoption.¹⁷

Three limitations applied to this project. First, the accuracy of the pre- and post-assessments were dependent upon the participants’ honesty related to their knowledge and understanding of the biblical instruction and practical needs related to orphan care. To mitigate this limitation, participant responses were anonymous. Second, the success of participant engagement in orphan care ministry was dependent on the willingness of individuals and families to take the next step in caring well for orphans. Since this project focused primarily on training with the aim of engagement, there was a dependency on the individual/family response to the training outside of the control of the author. To mitigate this limitation, participants received additional counsel, ongoing exhortations, and were redirected to the strategic ministry plan. Lastly, this project did not contribute toward the minimum standards required by DHR for those who desire licensure.¹⁸ To mitigate this, participants were introduced to the specific requirements for licensure through interaction with the expert panel in session 8 of the curriculum.

¹⁶ Child Welfare Information Gateway, “Glossary–T,” accessed July 12, 2022, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/glossary/glossaryt/>.

¹⁷ This project primary targeted orphan care ministry in the general context of Dale County (and statewide). However, the Holy Spirit, through this process, may set apart some families to apply this training to international adoption.

¹⁸ Alabama Department of Human Resources, “Minimum Standards for Foster Families,” accessed July 12, 2022, <https://dhr.alabama.gov/foster-care/resource-management-division/office-of-residential-licensing/minimum-standards-for-foster-family-homes/>. These standards also apply to families who will adopt. Families who desire licensure to serve as foster parents or become adoptive parents will have to engage in the DHR requirements, which include but are not limited to background checks, home studies, participation in a thirty-hour training class (ten, three-hour classes), among other requirements.

Four delimitations applied to this project. First, the participant pool was limited to adults 19 and older with married couples having to be married for, at minimum, one year. While children are, by default, involved in orphan care ministry due to their parental involvement, the project focused on cultivating parent knowledge, understanding, and practice because parents are licensed resources or leading the way in supportive care roles. Additionally, State DHR has minimum standards for licensed resources.¹⁹ Second, the scope of this project was three-fold: to train individuals and families to (1) be foster parents; (2) be adoptive parents; and (3) engage in supportive care roles. This scope recognizes that not every person or family is called of God to be a foster parent or adoptive parent, yet every Christian is called to provide care to orphans. Thus, this scope creates avenues for members to engage in their preferred form of care. Third, the project involved a small group study consisting of a seven-week curriculum that provided training and education according to the three-fold scope. This timeframe allowed for in-depth study and preparation. Finally, partnerships were limited to Dale County DHR and the Alabama Baptist Children’s Home and Family Ministry due to proximity of the entities to the church. Additionally, families received licenses through these two agencies, enabling PBC to partner with them to serve foster and adoptive families.

Conclusion

Dietrich Bonhoeffer remarks, “The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer.”²⁰ The call to care for orphans is uniquely Christian and rooted in the purview of gospel ministry. The church has been given the mandate to make disciples and communicate the gospel. Making disciples and proclaiming the gospel is done through teaching, preaching, evangelism and the like.

¹⁹ Alabama Department of Human Resources, “Minimum Standards.”

²⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community* (Broadway, NY: HarperCollins, 1954), 19.

However, the witness of Christ's gospel is also seen through compassion and care, which is primarily through the local church as they seek to care for one another. The next chapter will provide a robust biblical and theological basis for the Christian and local church to engage in orphan care.

CHAPTER 2

THREE PILLARS THAT SHAPE CHRISTIANS' UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S DISPOSITION TOWARD THE CARE OF ORPHANS

The care for orphans, those who are in foster care and/or eligible for adoption, is a gospel issue.¹ As a gospel issue, the Bible serves as the foundation for the church's understanding of God's disposition toward the care of orphans. Similarly, a biblical worldview shapes the Christian's understanding of the care for this vulnerable population as well as motivates the church to respond. Randall Burns rightly shares in his thesis that "the orphan care movement is not merely a response to disturbing images and orphan horror stories. It is a response to something bigger than that. The driving force behind the movement is biblical and theological."² Russell Moore adds, "Not every Christian is called to adopt or foster a child. But every Christian is called to care for orphans."³

Three key passages shape the Christian's understanding. First, Genesis 1:26-27 informs Christians on the value of all life, including the vulnerable, through the doctrine

¹ The phrase "gospel issue," in the context of orphan care, refers to the care for orphans as a reflection of the gospel of Christ. First, the quality of sacrificial love observed by Christians in their participation in the variety of expressions of ministry to orphans serves as an example of Christ's love toward the redeemed. Second, the specific language of "adoption" is nestled in Paul's doxology of praise (Eph 1:3-14), which is an expression of joy and praise to God for His saving work in Christ. Sinners are redeemed and "adopted" in Christ. Lastly, orphan care sets forth the pattern and reinforces the grace of God in His saving work. Whether through the lens of foster care service, reconciliation of relationships (i.e., parent-child through foster care), families adopting children, or Christians supporting those engaged in fostering or adopting, there is a pattern of God's grace, agape love, and a testimony of saving and sanctifying grace. While orphan care is not exclusively a Christian practice, its roots are from God as expressed in His care and concern for orphans and, through God's people, a vehicle to promote the glorious character and work of God.

² Randall Damon Burns, "Creating and Nurturing a Culture of Adoption and Orphan Care in the Local Church: A Multiple Case Study" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 1-2.

³ Russell D. Moore, "Abba Changes Everything: Why Every Christian Is Called to Rescue Orphans," *Christianity Today* 54, no. 7 (July 2010): 22.

of the *imago Dei*. Second, Ephesians 1:3-6 celebrates the believer's adoption in Christ, which serves as a picture of the blessing of permanency through the adoption of orphans. Lastly, James 1:27 identifies that authentic and genuine faith is expressed in ministry to the vulnerable, specifically widows and orphans. These three passages express God's disposition of care to orphans to be embraced and practiced by the church.

Genesis 1:26-27

The first foundational passage that informs the Christian of orphan care is the *imago Dei*. Christians are to take seriously the biblical mandate and pattern to engage in the caring of orphans. The seriousness of the Christian's participation in the care of orphans is found in Tony Merida and Rick Morton's first of four biblical convictions: "God is concerned with all who are made in His image."⁴ One's view of personhood and value will influence participation (or lack thereof) in the care of orphans.

The doctrine of the image of God positions the Christian to contemplate the dignity, value, and life of every person, particularly those in the category of orphan. The Holy Spirit makes clear in Genesis 1:26-27 that humanity, corporately and individually, has inherent worth due to being created in the image and likeness of the Creator. The doctrine of the *imago Dei* provides three motivators for the care of orphans: (1) God's intimate engagement in the creation of man; (2) God's image through the act of the creation of man, and (3) God's instruction on the preservation and care of man.

God's Intimate Engagement in the Creation of Man

The divine dialogue indicates that God said, "Let Us make man" (1:26), whereas the inspired author's commentary states, "God created man" (1:27). Both "make" and "created" serve as a reference to the activity of the Creator. He is actively engaged in

⁴ Tony Merida and Rick Morton, *Orphanology: Awakening to Gospel-Centered Adoption and Orphan Care* (Birmingham, AL: New Hope, 2011), 61.

creative activity that brings about the expanse of the heavens as well as the birth of vegetation, creatures, and humanity. Kenneth Matthews posits that there is great significance to God's making and creating man "simply on the space and details allotted" in the narrative.⁵ Matthews continues by explaining that the height of creation is seen in the making of humanity as he observes the "ascending order in creation with humanity as the final act."⁶ This affirmation of man's prominence in creation is observed in the doctrine of the *imago Dei* as God makes humanity in His image.

The pattern in the days of creation consists of the phrase "Let there be" or "Let there be." However, this pattern is interrupted in the creation of man as the divine dialogue is recorded. John Sailhamer observes the shift from the "impersonal (third person) of 'let there be' to the more personal (first person) of 'Let us make.'"⁷ The theme of God's personal nature and involvement with His creation is sewn throughout the pages of Scripture. The intimacy of God in creation is best expressed in Psalm 139. The psalmist communicates the omniscience and omnipresence of God, which culminates in the refrain, "For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps 139:13-14). This passage informs of the intricacy in the creation of man and conveying his worth.

The specificity of "make" and "create(d)" in these two verses, along with the doctrine of *imago Dei*, develops the importance of this moment in creation history. Herbert Leupold, speaking to the dignity of mankind, states, "Man is not only made after the deliberate plan and purpose of God but is also very definitely patterned after Him."⁸

⁵ Kenneth Matthews, *Exposition of Genesis 1-11:26*, New American Commentary, vol. 1 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 160.

⁶ Matthews, *Exposition of Genesis 1-11:26*, 160-61.

⁷ John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 37.

⁸ Herbert C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1942), 1:88.

Mark Ross observes, “When God makes man, He breaks the pattern that He has set by creating living things according to their kinds.”⁹ He adds that humanity is not made in similar fashion of the rest of creation; rather, “man is made according to God’s ‘kind,’ made in the image of God.”¹⁰

God, according to Genesis 1:26, created man. Man is the term *adam* and is used in several ways in the Old Testament. In some uses, the term refers to humanity in general (mankind), whereas in other applications *adam* refers to males as well as properly as the first man, Adam. According to Leupold, *adam* means “cultivator of the soil.”¹¹ The biblical creation narrative states that mankind is made distinctly as “male” and “female” (1:27), which is elaborated in Genesis 2:4ff.

Humanity, male and female, is special given that “humanity is in certain respects created in the divine likeness . . . thus humanity by creation bears the image of God.”¹² The terms “make” and “create(d)” are noteworthy in the text. Genesis 1:26 refers to “make,” which is *asah*, meaning “to do.” *Asah* can be used in respect to God doing, whether it is God’s creation, His issuing commands and statutes, or the extension of His goodness and kindness to humanity. Genesis 1:27 uses the term *bara*, which is translated to create and used three times. *Bara* means to bring into being out of nothing, or *ex nihilo*.

Matthews indicates that there is an “inverted repetition” of Genesis 1:27, elevating the creative work of God in conjunction with the *imago Dei*.¹³ This repetition provides emphasis on the creative work of God, the creation of humanity (singular) in

⁹ Mark Ross, “Imago Dei,” Ligonier Ministries, March 25, 2013, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/imago-dei>.

¹⁰ Ross, “Imago Dei.”

¹¹ Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 1:88.

¹² C. F. Henry, “Image of God,” in *The Evangelical Dictionary on Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 591.

¹³ Matthews, *Exposition of Genesis 1-11:26*, 172.

that image, and the binary distinction of this singular race (male and female).

Theologically, Genesis 1:27 reinforces the doctrinal and observable realities about the human being in terms of gender identification, marriage compatibility, as well as sexual functionality as the means of procreation for the fulfillment of the “fruitful/multiply” mandate (Gen 1:28). Consequently, mankind, both in the general sense of humanity as well as the individual sense of male and female, finds “personhood” and value based on God’s creative work, specifically according to the *imago Dei*.¹⁴

God’s Image in the Creation of Man

God’s character is further developed in the *imago Dei*. Veli-Matti Karkkainen describes the *imago Dei* as “Christian theology’s most significant anthropological concept which claims to provide a foundational account of the human person and humanity in relation to the Creator, other creatures, and the cosmos as a whole.”¹⁵ Millard Erickson identifies three prevailing views related to the *imago Dei*: (1) the substantive view, (2) the relational view, and (3) the functional view, with each providing insights to a wholistic grasp of this great doctrine.¹⁶ This substantive view focuses on the structure or stature of man (form). The second view, relational, is summarized in terms of man’s relationship before God compared to the rest of creation with specific attention to capacities (i.e., reason). Lastly, the functional view as revealed in the authority is given to man to govern and steward creation.

To rightly deal with the *imago Dei* one must interact with terms *tselem* and *demuth*. These two terms provide clarity on God’s creation of man in His image, increasing one’s awareness of the worth of mankind. The term image is *tselem*, which carries the

¹⁴ Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *Creation and Humanity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2015), 282.

¹⁵ Karkkainen, *Creation and Humanity*, 269.

¹⁶ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 520.

meaning of an image, cut out, or resemblance. In respect to the *imago Dei*, *tselem* is used in Genesis 1:26-27 (the creation narrative), Genesis 5:3 (the restored elect line of Adam through Seth), and Genesis 9:6 (the post-flood world and justice for the destruction of the *imago Dei* in murder).

The term *demuth* carries a similar meaning to *tselem* as it means likeness or similitude. Likeness can be expressed through appearance or the external as well as adverbially in one's character or makeup. Oladotum Kolawole indicates that the "Hebrew *demuth* relates to being approximate to or like an original."¹⁷ Leupold suggests that the combination of *tselem* and *demuth* is a "grammatical tool" used to convey the status and dignity of mankind compared to the rest of His creation.¹⁸ Michael Puffer affirms this argument, noting, "God has impressed His image on this particular creation; man is thus the one God-like creature in creation."¹⁹ Furthermore, Puffer offers the thought that *demuth* refers to God's qualities revealed in humanity (i.e., man's self-consciousness, intellectual capacity being related to qualities seen in God).²⁰ Therefore, God creating man in both His *tselem* and *demuth* reinforces the biblical revelation that man reflects the image of God to creation—image bearers of the living LORD.

Matthews proposes that this *imago Dei* is expressed three ways: (1) metaphysically, (2) intellectually, and (3) spiritually.²¹ The metaphysical refers to man's distinction from the created animals that fill the earth. The intellectual refers the man's relational, rationale, and reasoning capacity with God and His creation. The spiritual is

¹⁷ Oladotum Paul Kolawole, "God's Image in Man: A Biblical Persepctive," *Journal of Biblical Theology* 2, no. 3 (2019): 43.

¹⁸ Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 1:94.

¹⁹ Matthew W. Puffer, "Human Dignity after Augustine's Imago Dei: on the Sources and Uses of Two Ethical Terms," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 37, no. 1 (2017): 181.

²⁰ Puffer, "Human Dignity," 185.

²¹ Matthews, *Exposition of Genesis 1-11:26*, 164-65.

associated with man's will and agency capacity. Leupold gives voice to this subject: "The body of man is the best receptacle for man's spirit and bears at least an analogy to the image of God, an analogy that is so close that God and His angels choose to appear in human form when appearing to man."²²

Moshe Reiss, among other scholars, hold to the truth that the *imago Dei* affirms humanity's dignity, value, and worth.²³ Matthews offers the practicality of the *imago Dei* in man observed through the functional capacity as male and female receive a delegated authority to govern and steward God's creation.²⁴ Yet, with the advent of sin, the image is "faded" but not "lost" due to the fact that it is "mortally wounded in the fall."²⁵ The image is recovered through the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ as one is reconciled to God through faith.

God's Instruction on the Preservation and Care of Man

The biblical worldview promotes the sanctity of human life. Scripture reveals the character of God in that He provides, preserves, and protects life, and calls His people to reflect His character in the care of life. The emphasis of the sanctity of human life is reflected in full spectrum of conception to natural death, or the mantra, "from the womb to the tomb." God's Word addresses the preservation of life and the care for humanity. In the Mosaic Law, the LORD provides prohibitions against the unjust taking of life along with counsel for the care of others. The LORD commands, "You shall not murder" (Exod 20:13). God's design for humanity is to protect life rather than unjustly take life. Murder

²² Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 1:90.

²³ Moshe Reiss, "Adam: Created in the Image and Likeness of God," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (2011): 182.

²⁴ Matthews, *Exposition of Genesis 1-11:26*, 166.

²⁵ Matthews, *Exposition of Genesis 1-11:26*, 164.

is an assault on the *imago Dei* and a means to malign the character and glory of God.²⁶ This theme to protect life rather than take it is seen in God's condemnation of the grotesque practices of the Canaanite worshippers of Baal and Molech who sacrificed their children in the fire. Israel was judged by God for such practices (2 Kgs 16:3).

The Christian's understanding of the sanctity of human life is established on the *imago Dei*, with implications for the protection, preservation, and care for all types of people from conception to natural death. This theme of compassionate care is extended from God's people to the poor (Prov 19:17), infirmed (Matt 4:23), alien and stranger (Lev 19:34; Deut 27:19), family members, such as care taking for parents (1 Tim 5:8), and the widow and orphan (Exod 22:22; Jas 1:27). Jesus's exposition in Matthew 25:34-40 demonstrates the model and practice of His people in the extension of compassionate care to the various types of need. When Christians possess a full understanding of the *imago Dei*, they are drawn to protect, preserve, and care for life.

A proper view of the *imago Dei* leads the Christian to see the intrinsic value of each human regardless of context or condition. Human value is not determined by one's age, development, physical condition, socio-economic conditions, societal status, or race and ethnicity. The value of human life is rooted in the essential truth cemented in God's inspired Word, in particular Genesis 1:26-27. The dignity and value of human life is universal, as Karkkainen observes, "Each and every human being has been set apart for designation as being of elevated status and dignity. Each human being must therefore be viewed with reverence and treated with due respect and care with special attention to preventing any desecration or violation of a human being."²⁷ Winston Smith promotes the consequence when the proper view of the image of God, applied to man as His image

²⁶ God's heart is grieved due to the "violence" among humanity in Gen 6:11. The term for violence is *chamas*, referring to a variety of immorality and injustices, including acts of violence and death. For example, see Gen 49:5-7 and the condemnation spoken of Simeon and Levi. This condemnation includes reference to "instruments of cruelty" and anger leading to the murder of a man.

²⁷ Karkkainen, *Creation and Humanity*, 287.

bearers, is inverted, stating, “To dismiss God as God, one must also dismiss His image bearers as nothing more than a population of meaningless creatures.”²⁸

Moore, in his relevant book *Onward*, applies the dignity of human life by rendering a robust understanding of the pro-life ethic, stating,

The pro-life movement has, of all the recent Christian forays into public engagement, been the most holistic in its work, seeing the need for laws to protect unborn children but also a cultural witness to persuade women not to abort, men not to abandon their children, and society to see the goodness and value of every person even when shielded from sight in the womb or when sick or diseased or developmentally challenged. . . . While a pro-life, whole-life witness has a long way to go yet, the church does not live up to its caricature as those who, in the words of one critic; believe that life beings at conception and ends at birth.²⁹

The church’s grasp of this essential doctrine equips one to engage in the full spectrum of pro-life care. The church’s engagement includes the articulation of pro-life convictions as well as tangible ministry, specifically orphan care. The doctrine of the *imago Dei* promotes the Christian’s understanding of personhood. This biblical worldview renews the mind and transforms the heart, which produces obedience. Thus, the church transitions from being hearers only of the Word to doers of the Word (Jas 1:22).

Ephesians 1:3-6

In his epistles, Paul deals with a variety of soteriological themes, including justification, sanctification, glorification, substitutionary atonement, and reconciliation. In his explication of the gospel, Paul employs the metaphor of adoption to convey the Christian’s positional and relational standing before God in Christ. As a metaphor, adoption demonstrates God’s grace, love, and care for sinners through the redemptive work

²⁸ Winston T. Smith, “What’s Right about Sex?” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 26, no. 2 (2012): 20.

²⁹ Russell D. Moore, *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2015), 114.

of Christ granting to believer's a new identity and placement in a new family.³⁰ Paul's adoption language motivates Christians to care for orphans as God cares for them.

The Christian's Praise

Following his introductory remarks, Paul moves into a lengthy doxology to God for the great salvation found and secured in God, through Christ, and by the Holy Spirit. J. H. Barkhuizen calls this passage a "hymn and praise," as Paul eulogizes the great salvation in Christ.³¹ Leslie Crawford says that God is blessed because of "His intrinsic character," and this doxology is the means of "how God expressed this blessedness toward humanity in salvation."³²

Paul's doxology in Ephesians 1 is notable for its content, revelation of the work of the Triune God in salvation (each Person of the Godhead working in the redemption of sinners), profound attention to God's saving purposes in election, and the prominence of the "in Christ/in Him" clause. John Lewis calls this passage a "celebration of God's grace and redemption in Christ."³³ For the purpose of this section, attention will be given primarily to verses 3-6, with exposition of the ministry of reconciliation, sonship via adoption, and the work of justification as it pertains to the positional/relational righteousness and standing before God in Christ.

³⁰ Russell D. Moore and Andrew T. Walker, eds., *The Gospel & Adoption*, The Gospel for Life Series. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2017), 30-31.

³¹ J. H. Barkhuizen, "The Strophic Structure of the Eulogy of Ephesians 1:3-14," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 46 (September 1990): 390.

³² James Leslie Crawford, "Ephesians 1:3-4 and the Nature of Election," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 11, no. 1 (2000): 77.

³³ John Lewis, "Doing Theology through the Gates of Heaven: A Bible Study on Ephesians 1:3-14," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 28, no. 4 (2004): 363.

Adoption and Reconciliation

Some of the most intimate language related to the good news of Christ is found in this doxology, especially the language of adoption found in verse 5. The phrase “adoption as sons” is the term *huiiothesia*, which is developed from *hyios* (son) and *tithemi* (to place). Thus, *huiiothesia* refers to those who are in Christ are now spiritually grafted and placed into the family of God through the merit of Christ. This adoption is not exclusive to certain peoples based on a grid of demographics, but for all types of peoples: Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free (Gal 3:28). Michael Wilkinson observes based on Galatians 4:6 that God adopts Gentiles into His family, not on merit but by His grace and therefore can call God “Abba” due to Christ and by the Spirit.³⁴

Adoption language is deeply relational. Wilkinson notes, “Salvation is relational rather than transactional; therefore, the essence of salvation is adoption.”³⁵ The relational nature of salvation is expressly observed within the Godhead, specifically the Father-Son dynamic and transposed in the relationship between Christ and His redeemed. Furthermore, this relationship is seen in God’s grace rescuing those who are “far off” and now, in Christ, brought “near” to God through faith in Christ (Eph 2:13). Christ’s grace is expanded through the networking of reconciliation and adoption described by Phillip Goble when he notes its preciousness: “Place and condition of a son given to one to whom it does not naturally belong.”³⁶ The relational application of adoption and the relationship that now exists between God and the redeemed sinner is used three times in the New Testament (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5).

Adoption and reconciliation are partners in God’s saving grace through Christ. Paul elaborates on reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5:14-21. He introduces several important

³⁴ Michael Wilkinson, “Adoption in Calvin’s Soteriology: Basis for Redemption or Benefits of Union?,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 63, no. 1 (2019): 59.

³⁵ Wilkinson, “Adoption in Calvin’s Soteriology,” 61.

³⁶ Phillip Goble Jr., “Blessed Assurance: Adoption Divine: Understanding Paul’s Adoption Imagery as Evidence of Eternal Security,” *American Journal of Biblical Theology* 4, no. 3 (2021): 45.

realities associated with the gospel of Christ. These realities deal with the nature of reconciliation, the work of God through Christ's substitutionary sacrifice on behalf of sinners, and the gift of regeneration along with the believer's set apartness to the ministry of reconciliation. Gary Shultz describes that reconciliation "in a salvific sense refers to God's work in which He acts out of His love to bring about harmonious relationship between Himself and others."³⁷ David Garland sheds light on reconciliation through three divine actions: (1) God is the driving force as He initiates the act of redemption that renders reconciliation; (2) God, in Christ through His death, is the means of one's redemption and reconciliation; and (3) God continues to act through those He has redeemed and reconciled.³⁸

Adoption and Sonship

When dealing with adoption language in the Pauline Epistles, the fruit of reconciliation and adoption is sonship. Goble states that the reconciled relationship between God and believer promotes the divine promise of eternal security of the believer, especially in light of the entire context of verses 3-14.³⁹ Goble argues that adoption is a "legal" term which is common in the Roman culture and enshrined in Roman law. In the Roman culture, adoption is seen as a "treasured status," as individuals were legally secure in their adopted family, possessing the rights and privileges and securities therein.⁴⁰ The focus on the phrase "adoption as sons" speaks to the permanency and security of those adopted having a status that guaranteed them as recipients of an inheritance. This language is reflected in the spiritual blessings of adoption through Christ (Eph 1:11; see also 1 Pet 1:4).

³⁷ Gary L. Shultz Jr., "The Reconciliation of All Things in Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167, no. 668 (2010): 442.

³⁸ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, New American Commentary, vol. 29 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 288-89.

³⁹ Goble, "Blessed Assurance," 41.

⁴⁰ Goble, "Blessed Assurance," 42.

The adoption of sinners brings about an eternal union with Christ. John MacArthur observes that this is God’s eternal plan: “From all eternity, before the foundation of the world, and therefore completely apart from any merit or deserving that any person would have; by God’s sovereign election those who are saved were placed in eternal union with Christ before creation even took place.”⁴¹ In addition, through the perspective of Romans 8:17, one can determine that adoption is the act of bringing one into the family of God. Paul indicates that Christians are positionally and relationally declared a “sons,” enabling them to receive divine inheritance.

This adoption is both present and future. The present application is observed in Romans 8:13-14 as Paul indicates that a marker of one’s conversion in Christ is a life led by the Spirit and according to the Spirit. Yet, the future application promoted in Romans 8:23, where Paul exclaims that the Christian is “eagerly awaiting the adoption, the redemption of the body.” This gives way to the dichotomy of salvation. The present redemption and adoption experienced in Christ is related to the soul. However, the Christian’s future redemption and adoption will transpire in the body.

The theme of the Christian’s reconciliation and adoption in Christ manifests in practical application as the Christian engages in the adoption of a child. Paul’s doxology highlights that, in Christ, the sinner experiences a relational and status change. The former condition is as a dead sinner, alienated creation, and spiritual orphan with no hope. However, through the grace of God, the former identity is done away (2 Cor 5:17) as the believer is now adopted in Christ, part of the elect, heirs with Christ, recipients of all the spiritual blessings in Christ, and have a hope of glory. This shift from orphan to son is transposed on families who answer God’s call to adopt orphans. Children who are adopted experience a relational and status change. In a legal adoption, the orphan receives a new name, inherits the same rights and privileges as a biological child, and is an heir to the

⁴¹ John MacArthur, *Ephesians, MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 11.

blessings associated with the adoptive family. The adopted child is “accepted,” “chosen,” and finds permanency in the family.

James 1:27

Writing to a scattered church, James pens this great epistle that teaches what true faith and authentic Christian discipleship, and piety consists of in a sinful world. Thus, genuineness and authenticity become the central theme in the exercise of one’s faith in Jesus. Authentic and genuine faith is birthed from James 1:22 as the apostle charges the church to “be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” The aim is to shift Christians from empty platitudes and vain religious piety toward a life that honors God through sincere obedience to the “implanted word” of God. James poses, does the Christian’s faith rests in a profession of faith alone or is it marked by a distinct life of holiness and obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer challenges twentieth-century Christians to consider the cost of discipleship. In his autobiography entitled *Bonhoeffer*, Eric Metaxas states that Bonhoeffer “had theologically redefined the Christian life as something active, not reactive. It had everything to do with living’s whole life in obedience to God’s call through action.”⁴² This theme in Bonhoeffer’s understanding of discipleship is expressed in the epistle of James and is central to the working of the gospel through the redeemed as one engages in orphan care. James presents a living faith that is active and engaging, moving Christians to demonstrate their devotion to God through the compassionate care of others, namely orphans and widows (1:27).

James asserts, “Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (2:17). The work of grace in the Christian’s life produces “good works” for the glory of God and the good of others (Eph 2:8-10). The expressions of grace and good works authenticate the

⁴² Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 446.

profession of faith in Christ. These works do not save the individual; rather, they substantiate the testimony that the individual is indeed in Christ. James focuses on one aspect of this work of grace in James 1:27, noting that the Christian will care well for orphans.

Pure and undefiled Religion

The immediate context for James 1:27 must include 1:26. This portion of the text targets the nature of religion distinguishing the authentic from the façade. The importance of an actionable faith is seen in the practice of the disciple. Peter Davids insists that “true piety helps the helpless.”⁴³ Authentic piety is married to an actionable faith; they are not divorced from one another. This is accentuated with the language of “pure” and “undefiled” in terms of one’s “religion before God and the Father.”

The term “pure” is the word *katharos*, which means clean, pure, without stain, or upright. *Katharos* is understood within the framework of either ceremony or spiritual. The term “undefiled” is the word *amiantos*, which carries the meaning to be untainted or free from contamination. The usage of similar terminology has been referred to as a possible idiom for “absolute purity, in the ethical sense rather than cultic.”⁴⁴ This purity is associated, in this text, with religion. In James 1:26, the apostle leads his audience to evaluate their religiosity. Then, in James 1:26-27, he defines the right religion of God’s people.

Here, the term “religion” or “religious” is the word *threskeia*, which refers to acts of worship. James details these acts of worship, genuine expression of religion, in three distinct actions: (1) taming the tongue, (2) caring for orphans and widows, and (3) striving

⁴³ Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1982), 103.

⁴⁴ Davids, *The Epistle of James*, 102.

to live unspotted. Scott McKnight categorizes these as acts of compassion and holiness.⁴⁵ Furthermore, Vitrus Gideon identifies these as outward acts of worship shaped by inward heart change.⁴⁶ Gideon also stresses, “Genuine religion manifests itself in practical activities.”⁴⁷ For James, *threskeia* is practical conduct that reveals the character of the professing Christian. It is not limited to cultic or ritual but extends to one’s daily life demonstrated through a lifestyle of compassion and holiness. James Boyce rightly contends that pure and undefiled religion is not detached or unengaged but is fueled by care for others and holiness to God.⁴⁸ This epitomizes the Great Commandments to “love God, love neighbor.”

The phrase “before God and the Father” is not accidental. The Christian’s worship is done in the presence or sight of God who is Father. One explanation for the reference to “Father” is the contextual placement as he calls the church to authenticating acts of worship. As the Father, God cares benevolently for those who are vulnerable. In this immediate context, God’s compassion and care is aimed for orphans and widows. However, McKnight connects the phrase “before God and the Father” to the temple and Torah: “A life before God the Father, who is Creator, can be a life of Torah, keeping purity, understanding that transcends the outwardly observant and include deeds of merit.”⁴⁹ The correlation between worship and service is plausible as James calls for the benevolent care of the vulnerable as well as a life of purity in 1:27, reflecting the moral code of God’s

⁴⁵ Scott McKnight, *The Letter of James*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2011), 163-64.

⁴⁶ Vitrus E. Gideon, “An Exposition of James 1,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 29, no. 1 (1986): 12.

⁴⁷ Gideon, “An Exposition of James 1,” 18.

⁴⁸ James L. Boyce, “A Mirror of Identity: Implanted Word and Pure Religion in James 1:17-27,” *Word & World* 35, no. 3 (2015): 219.

⁴⁹ McKnight, *The Letter of James*, 118.

people through the Old Testament law (more in the following subsection “pursuing holiness”).

Boyce speaks to the identity of the Christian. The believer’s identity is found in Christ expressed through this pure and undefiled religion; a religion that is active, engaging, caring, and morally upright. Boyce notes four keys that shape the Christian’s identity: (1) the implanted Word, (2) hearers and doers of the Word, (3) caring for the vulnerable including orphans and widows, and (4) living an unspotted life to God.⁵⁰ This new identity results in a new life manifested through the “perfect law of liberty” (1:25). Mariam Kovalishyn indicates that the “Torah is moderated through the new covenant in Christ’s death, resurrection, and life providing the normative basis for the Christian’s actions.”⁵¹ Gideon rightly defines authentic acts of worship as “ceremonial observations and pious attitudes are woefully inadequate as evidence of genuine commitment to Christ. . . [they] deceives self, others, but not God.”⁵²

The apostle Paul says, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom 12:2). Paul indicates that the transformative work of the Holy Spirit by means of renewing one’s mind and transforming one’s life proves that God’s will is “good and acceptable and perfect”—it is the preferable way of living. Paul’s remarks in Romans 12:2 are applicable to James’s statement in James 1:27 informing the Christian that compassionate care for the vulnerable and the pursuit of personal holiness is not only the preferred way to live but demonstrates the goodness of God’s will manifested in authentic faith.

⁵⁰ Boyce, “A Mirror of Identity,” 213.

⁵¹ Mariam Kamell Kovalishyn, “James 1:27 and the Church’s Call to Mission and Morals,” *Cruce* 46, no. 4 (2010): 18

⁵² Gideon, “An Exposition of James 1,” 18.

Caring for the Vulnerable

Ministering to the vulnerable, particularly orphans and widows, is a marker of genuine religion before God. Douglas Moo presses this point when he says, “Obedience to the word is the mark of genuine Christianity.”⁵³ Jesus’s life and earthly ministry establishes the tone for Christian care and visitation as He was “moved with compassion” for those who were “scattered” (Matt 9:35-38). James offers various ways this obedience is seen, including the care of the vulnerable. Thematically, the care for the “helpless,” as Moo refers, is seen elsewhere in this epistle (2:1-18; 5:1-6).⁵⁴ Moo insists, “James is not polemicizing against religious rituals per se but against a ritual that goes no further than inward show and mere words.”⁵⁵ The failure of empty religion, born out of a sinful heart, is one of the concerns observed in Scripture. Jesus addresses His critics, particularly the Pharisees, for their empty religious piety.⁵⁶

The apostle introduces this category of people by issuing the mandate to “visit” them in their “trouble.” The term “visit” is *episkeptomai*, which means to look upon, to go and see, or inspect. Boyce defines the Christian’s *episkeptomai* of the orphans (and widows) as an exercise of gracious and merciful visitation and engagement.⁵⁷ Gideon amplifies the meaning of this term by noting *expiskeptomai* “suggests more than a social visit” as it speaks to “meeting of the needs of the individual.”⁵⁸ Furthermore, the need for

⁵³ Douglas Moo, *The Letter of James*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 95.

⁵⁴ Moo, *The Letter of James*, 95.

⁵⁵ Moo, *The Letter of James*, 96.

⁵⁶ This account in Matt 23 is where Jesus harshly condemns the self-righteous of the religious elite in His day. So strong is Jesus’s condemnation that He issues a series of “woes” to the Pharisees and Scribes for their hypocrisy and empty religion. Jesus opens with these startling words, “Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying: ‘The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Therefore, whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do’” (vv. 1-3).

⁵⁷ Boyce, “A Mirror of Identity,” 219.

⁵⁸ Gideon, “An Exposition of James 1,” 18

Christian *episkeptomai* of orphans is great due to their “trouble.” This term is *thilpsis* and refers to one in distress and experiencing bereavement or poverty. Gideon notes that *episkeptomai* is used in the present tense, meaning there is an ongoing and continuous action. Thus, Christians are to regularly engage the care of orphans as a means of honoring God in their religion. There will always remain, on this side of heaven, a need to serve and care for orphans due to the present reality of sin, abuse, and neglect. Many children find themselves in *thilpsis*, thus underscoring the church’s need to *episkeptomai*.

The care of orphans is normative in Scripture and is to be the practice of God’s people. A robust supply of biblical texts and references support this position. Much of this collection is derived from the Old Testament.⁵⁹ Psalm 68:5 says that God is “a Father to the fatherless.” The character of God’s people is defined in their treatment of God and others (Matt 22:34-40). Thus, the fatherly nature of God is to be replicated among God’s people as the church engages in meeting the needs of orphans.

The care for orphans serves as a picture of authentic faith and love for the Lord. Boyce, speaking on the seriousness of vain religious piety, states, “James continues to speak to any community among whom there is the risk of forgetting our image revealed in the mirror of identity in Christ, where there is the risk of faith becoming mere performance and losing its dynamic power.”⁶⁰ McKnight indicates that, rather than neglecting the vulnerable or engaging in forms of prideful performance, “James says that the messianic community is to be characterized by compassion care” to the vulnerable, specifically orphans and widows.⁶¹ Furthermore, Kovalishyn considers the care for orphans as “essential” to God’s will for His people.⁶²

⁵⁹ See Exod 22:22; Deut 10:18; 24:17, 19-21; 27:19; Job 6:27; 24:9; 31:18,21; Pss 10:14, 18; 82:3; 94:6; 146:9; Isa 1:17, 23; Jer 5:28; 7:6; 22:3; Ezek 22:7; Hos 14:3; Zech 7:10; Mal 3:5.

⁶⁰ Boyce, “A Mirror of Identity,” 221.

⁶¹ McKnight, *The Letter of James*, 170-71.

⁶² Kovalishyn, “James 1:27 and the Church’s Call,” 16.

An orphan, as depicted in Scripture, refers to one that is “fatherless, not parentless.”⁶³ An orphan is described as “helpless, hopeless, and without means and resources” due to the absence of a father.⁶⁴ Moo adds that orphans in both Old and New Testament contexts are vulnerable due to “the absence of money-making opportunities” as well as the lack of “any kind of social welfare.”⁶⁵ Thus, there was a strong need for God’s people to engage, serve, and meet the needs of this group who found themselves in unfortunate circumstances. This remains true in today’s culture and context. While many “orphans” in the United States are removed from their parents due to abuse and neglect, the need to *episkeptomai* foster children and those eligible for adoption remains a vital call to the church as an expression of care and demonstration of true religion before God.

Boyce espouses that God’s grace in Christ produces a commitment to Him demonstrated through the care for orphans. He states, “The truth of the incarnation of our Lord, that implanted word living in us, that continues to lead us into the kind of wholeness of willing and doing that sees the true end of God’s gifts among us as the care of the orphan and widow, those who are in the most need among us.”⁶⁶ This renewed mindset through one’s regeneration has historically brought about a host of social care ministries and services that range from hospitals to hospice care to child welfare and protection services, among many others.⁶⁷

Pursuing Holiness

The second prong of pure and undefiled religion is seen in the Christian’s pursuit of holiness. James rounds out this section of the epistle by driving home the call to

⁶³ McKnight, *The Letter of James*, 170.

⁶⁴ Kovalishyn, “James 1:27 and the Church’s Call,” 16.

⁶⁵ Moo, *The Letter of James*, 97.

⁶⁶ Boyce, “A Mirror of Identity,” 220.

⁶⁷ McKnight, *The Letter of James*, 169.

separation from the world as a means of honoring God in authentic faith and worship. The theme of personal holiness is routine in Scripture. For example, Peter notes in 1 Peter 1:16 that the redeemed of Christ are “to be holy” because “I (the LORD) am holy.” Peter’s statement is a quote from Leviticus 19:2. Therefore, no one should be surprised that the expectation of God’s people is to live holy unto the Lord.

James uses the term *aspilos*, which means to be unspotted, unstained, undefiled without spot or blame. Other New Testament writers use *aspilos* to convey the importance of personal holiness (Paul in 1 Tim 6:14; Peter in 2 Pet 3:14). Purity and holiness have roots in the Mosaic law. McKnight summarizes it by stating the Mosaic law “describes the condition of a person and his aptness to live in the land or enter the temple for worship in utter fidelity to God and Torah.”⁶⁸ McKnight adds, “To be pure means to be marked off in worldview from those who are unjust, oppressive, worldly, and the marking off was more internal-moral versus external-moral.”⁶⁹ Additionally, Gideon professes that to keep oneself unspotted from the world is to “preserve self from the influence of evil.”⁷⁰ The *tereo* means to guard oneself and is used in the present infinitive meaning to “continue keeping or guarding.” The term *kosmos* here is not used for the physical world but rather the “order or system of this world,” which is presently under the limited rule and influence of Satan.

Again, addressing the internal or heart condition is central to Scripture and demonstrated in Jesus’s preaching/teaching ministry. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus expounds on the depth of meaning of the Torah as it truly reveals the depth of man’s sinfulness. One illustration was His remarks on marriage fidelity, citing lusts in the same category of physical adultery—a spouse is adulterous for lusting after another,

⁶⁸ McKnight, *The Letter of James*, 168.

⁶⁹ McKnight, *The Letter of James*, 167.

⁷⁰ Gideon, “An Exposition of James 1,” 18.

thus becoming defiled and standing in need of cleansing (Matt 5:27-30). Jesus refutes the facade of righteousness that one might display externally while one disregards their internal sin. In other words, that which is done (or thought) in the dark will be exposed and brought in the open.

Continuing in the vein of being *aspilos*, Moo describes “unspotted” as avoiding the world’s contaminating influence.⁷¹ Kovalishyn adds that *aspilos* refers to “living in accordance to God’s compassion for the poor.”⁷² This understanding of *aspilos* adds a layer of depth in respect to the care of orphans and widows. There now rests a sense of intentionality and care associated with biblical morality expressed in social care. Vulnerable groups are often disregarded or treated in a “less-than” respect to those who are of greater stature. However, the gospel of Christ compels the Christian to forget status and to enter into the troubles of others and to do good them (Gal 6:1-10). This theme was central in the Torah (Exod 22:22; Deut 10:18) and continues to be true in the New Covenant of Christ exercised in the ministry of the church.

Kovalishyn, referencing Karl Barth, indicates that there exists a “dichotomy of moral purity and social activism as a theological failure to understand the unity of justification and sanctification.”⁷³ This dichotomy raises an interesting interpretation and creates vivid discussion on the individual Christian’s, and the church’s, engagement in social issues. Without question, the gospel, and the whole of scriptural teaching, articulates those who have been justified by faith in Christ and being sanctified by the Word and Spirit will care for orphans and widows. Maturing believers will exercise Christian charity and compassion to those who are defined scripturally as vulnerable. This truth is expounded

⁷¹ Moo, *The Letter of James*, 98.

⁷² Kovalishyn, “James 1:27 and the Church’s Call,” 18.

⁷³ Kovalishyn, “James 1:27 and the Church’s Call,” 16.

throughout James's epistle and continues to serve as the driving force for the church to engage, today, in foster care and adoption.

Conclusion

Genesis 1:26-27, Ephesians 1:4-6, and James 1:27 serve as key passages that shape the hearts and minds of Christians to respond through the care of orphans. God's natural disposition is one of care and concern for the vulnerable, especially the orphan. Yet, this care and concern is not a detached pity or intellectual acknowledgement. The Father's care and concern is manifested in the extension of justice, grace, and provision. The ultimate provision comes through Christ and the Word as believers see their own need for adoption in Christ and respond to Him by faith.

The *imago Dei* informs that all of humanity, especially orphans, have value, dignity, and worth as they are created in the image of God. The Christian's action in coming to the aide of orphans in their distress reflects authentic and genuine faith as an exercise of care and concern. Grace, as seen in the work of God reconciling sinners to Himself through Christ, speaks of the mercy given to sinners and promotes the confidence of reunification between the two. In application to foster children, the gift of reunification can occur when parent's hearts change toward God and seek to do right for their children. Lastly, the adoption language found in the New Testament reveals the new status and relationship sinners have with God through Christ. This permanent and legal change is relevant to the orphan who is accepted into new families, receiving the benefits associated with that family name, and experiencing the love expressed in the gospel and Christ.

CHAPTER 3

THE CHURCH'S PRIORITY IN CARING FOR ORPHANS

Orphan care is to be a priority in the local church. Historically, the church has engaged in the care of orphans. Christian engagement in caring for orphans is established in God's revelation etched in Scripture, the believer's understanding of the gospel, and the ongoing work of sanctification in the life of the Christian. The care of orphans, therefore, is not limited to activism in a general religious sense, but out of a direct connection to adoption as part of the gospel. Caring for orphans is a natural outworking of saving grace in the life of the Christian.

This observation is supported by Brent Waters as he states that this type of care is rooted in the church's doctrine "in the context of soteriological teaching" as well as demonstrated practically "through orphanages, indentureships, and foster care."¹ In addition to the clear exhortation to care for orphans (and widows) found in James 1:27,² an extensive presentation of Scripture, both in the Old and New Testament, shapes the church to prioritize ministry that is focused on this vulnerable population. There is a precedent set forth in multiple examples in the Old Testament of natural adoption.³ The church's priority of orphan care is seen as fruit of the gospel as the Holy Spirit conforms the individual Christian and the local church to share in the heart of the Father as revealed in his Word. A robust practical and personal engagement in orphan care communicates that

¹ Brent Waters, "Christian Adoption?," *Dialog* 51, no. 4 (2012): 305.

² Sanire M. DeBeer and Jordan Johan Pierre, "Heeding the Voices of Ὁρφανοὶ Καὶ Χήραι (Fatherless Households) in James 1:27: Utilising the Greimassian Semiotic Square," *Neotestamentica* 55, no. 1 (2021): 23.

³ See the biblical account of the adoption of Moses by Pharaoh's daughter (Exod 2:1-10) or the adoption of Esther by Mordecai (Esth 2:15-17).

the church⁴ takes the gospel seriously as it prioritizes those who are in foster care or eligible for adoption.

Sadly, this personal and practical engagement is often lacking in the church, specifically the American church. A 2018 Lifeway research survey indicates that while American Christians and churches are engaging in foster care and adoption, there is still much room to improve and grow. In the survey of approximately 1,000 participants, almost half (45%) of respondents indicated that their church “has no involvement with or conversation about foster care and adoption.”⁵ Interestingly, the tendency to engage in orphan care related ministry is predominantly seen in larger churches rather than smaller churches. For example, the survey findings reflect that larger churches of 250 or more see a 37 percent engagement in foster care and adoption with only 20 percent engagement of churches smaller than 250.⁶ Additionally, in respect to denominational engagement, nondenominational churches lead the way in orphan care engagement compared to other denominations. This survey can be interpreted in two ways. It is encouraging to see Christians and local churches involved in foster care and adoption, but it is discouraging to see a large swath of churches, across a diversity of denominations, unengaged.

Russell Moore assesses, “For most churches, adoption isn’t a priority, and this isn’t because the church members are anti-adoption. It’s because adoption seems strange to some of them, and irrelevant to others.”⁷ Moore continues his lament noting that, apart from cases of infertility or “particular children without parents,” the church will remain

⁴ The reference of “church” is related to the local church unless otherwise specified. In addition, the principles, characteristics, and challenges ascribed in this chapter are applicable to the individual Christian with the desire for them to be universally accepted and practiced through the local church. The individual’s heart change will be a conduit for culture change in the church, resulting in larger representation of church members participating in the care of orphans.

⁵ Bob Smietana, “Adoption, Foster Care Commonplace in Churches,” Lifeway Research, January 24, 2018, <https://research.lifeway.com/2018/01/24/adoption-foster-care-commonplace-in-churches/>.

⁶ Smietana, “Adoption, Foster Care Commonplace in Churches.”

⁷ Russell D. Moore, “How Churches Can Create a Culture of Adoption,” November 23, 2015, <https://www.russellmoore.com/2015/11/23/how-churches-can-create-a-culture-of-adoption/>.

inactive to the plight of those in foster care or eligible for adoption.⁸ John Yeats echoes this sentiment: “While many Christians have already stepped into the challenging areas of orphan care, there is too much at stake for us to allow the *status quo* to continue.”⁹ There is hope among many evangelicals that the day is coming when fostering and adoption is normative in the life of Christian families with the support of their church. This hope is expressed in a 2013 survey completed by the Barna research group noting that the percentage of American Christian orphan care engagement exceeds that of Americans who are non-Christian. This survey is insightful as it demonstrates that Christians are twice as likely to engage in orphan care than non-Christians with 5 percent of American Christians having adopted at least once contrasted to 2 percent of non-Christians.¹⁰ Additionally, Christians are twice as likely to consider adoption (38%) contrasted to non-Christians (20%).¹¹ Therefore, there is great optimism seen through Christian engagement in orphan care as Christian characterization affirms not just what the church is against, but what the church advocates.

In this chapter, a survey of the biblical worldview will provide a helpful and instructive framework to further shape the Christian’s understanding of God’s concern for this vulnerable group. This chapter will answer the question: How does the care of orphans “illuminate the gospel”?¹² The gospel will be illuminated through understanding three key principles. First, the believer’s spiritual adoption results in a restored *imago Dei* cultivating a robust pro-life ethic that includes the care of orphans. Next, the believer’s

⁸ Moore, “How Churches Can Create a Culture of Adoption.”

⁹ John Yeats, “The Biblical Model of Adoption,” *Journal of Family & Marriage* 2, no. 1 (2011): 8.

¹⁰ Barna Group, “5 Things You Need to Know about Adoption,” November 4, 2013, <https://www.barna.com/research/5-things-you-need-to-know-about-adoption/#.UnvPco2E7Tw>.

¹¹ Barna Group, “5 Things You Need to Know about Adoption.”

¹² Rick Morton, *Knowing Orphans: Mobilizing the Church for Global Orphanology* (Birmingham, AL: New Hope, 2014), 18.

spiritual adoption is a pattern for the care of orphans, particularly through adoption. Third, spiritual adoption is a motivator to the church to represent Jesus through orphan care. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a cursory glance of several churches that have an active orphan care ministry.

The Recovery of the *imago Dei* as a Motivator for Orphan Care

The doctrine of the *imago Dei* is foundational and formative to the Christian's understanding and engagement in the care of orphans. The recognition that every human is made in God's image speaks to the individual's personhood denoting value, dignity, and worth. Sin, however, has fractured and marred the *imago Dei* in humanity. David Prince underscores the product of sin, stating, "As a result of the fall, the entire world became a spiritual orphanage" and has produced "rebellion against God."¹³ However, in the ultimate expression of grace and mercy, God the Father renders His Son as the means and ways to reconcile sinners and recover the image of God in the believer. The provision of the Son, along with the redemption found in Him, brings about the recovery of the *imago Dei* in the adopted child of God. Therefore, the recovery of the *imago Dei* steers the believer to reflect on the truth of the Fatherhood of God and the church's expression of reflecting his fatherly love through the care of orphans.

The *imago Dei* Positions the Church to Stand for Life

Orphan care is nestled into the larger framework of compassion ministry and represents a Christian pro-life ethic. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is to be the loudest and most ardent advocate of life. But what does it mean to be pro-life? The vast revelation in Scripture presents a framework for a pro-life ethic that is comprehensive as it begins with conception and continues to natural death. At the center of the pro-life worldview is

¹³ David Prince, "What Are We For?," in *The Gospel & Adoption*, Gospel for Life (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2017), 12.

the *imago Dei*. This doctrine informs humanity of one's inherent value and worth as well as charges the church to advocate and defend life. Pro-life positions and advocacy are not just to be anti-abortion but to strive for the preservation and prosperity of each life, including the unborn and the orphan.

The war over the definition and meaning of *life* continues to rage. A simplistic understanding sees that pro-life advocates affirm life begins at conception and must be protected, whereas pro-choice proponents assert that women can terminate their pregnancy for various reasons including unwanted pregnancy, economic burdens, understanding of the conception of life, among others. There is a view, whether inferred or characterized within the pro-choice argument, that life does not start until birth.

To be fair, the issue of life and the expanse between the two movements is rather nuanced. For example, in an enlightening interview entitled "Pro-Choice Does Not Mean Pro-Abortion: An Argument for Abortion Rights Featuring the Rev. Carlton W. Veazey," Veazey argues that in his experience growing up in an impoverished setting, many black women and poor women were "disproportionately impacted by the fact that they had no choices about an unintended pregnancy."¹⁴ He continues by categorizing the decision to terminate an unintended pregnancy is a moral choice within the context of personal autonomy and free will. Therefore, those who hold similar positions can justify the termination of this pregnancy due to circumstance of the mother rather than the potential of the unborn child. Lastly, Veazey denies that a "fetus" has greater rights than the mother, stating that the "implications of a fetus having legal rights could pit it against the woman carrying the fetus," therefore placing her life at risk if a medical procedure is needed.¹⁵

¹⁴ David Masci, "Pro-Choice Does Not Mean Pro-Abortion: An Argument for Abortion Rights Featuring the Rev. Carlton W. Veazey," Pew Research Center, September 30, 2008, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2008/09/30/pro-choice-does-not-mean-pro-abortion-an-argument-for-abortion-rights-featuring-the-rev-carlton-veazey/>.

¹⁵ Masci, "Pro-Choice Does Not Mean Pro-Abortion."

Pro-choice defenders gained much traction during the women's liberation movement and rise of the feminists who argued for "bodily autonomy" as the priority over the rights of the unborn child.¹⁶ Tina Beattie posits that the feminist sought to reduce the value and personhood of the unborn child(ren) through a political offense and conflict and the stance of women's bodily autonomy, among other issues.¹⁷

Pro-life issues are not simply relegated to the political arena, however; nor is the church exempt from engaging in the pro-life debate even though there are political consequences. The misnomer of "separation of church and state" often puts the burden upon the church to stay silent on matters of politics. Yet, as Andrew Lewis reminds Christians, separation of church and state functions to "protect the church from the state."¹⁸ This understanding moves the church into activism against immoral legislation and court precedent (i.e., *Roe v. Wade*) as well as primes one to engage further in the care for orphans. Christian engagement with pro-life priorities consists of peaceful protests of ungodly legislation and practices through civil cooperation with the legislative processes, and most importantly through making disciples.

The *imago Dei* informs believers that unborn and born children possess personhood. Beattie notes, "The Christian understanding of personhood developed in the context of theological reflections of the truth and refers to the human [who] is made in the image of God."¹⁹ Since God forbade the unjust taking of life (Exod 20:13) and condemns the immoral practice of the pagans such as the death of children in the worship of Molech

¹⁶ Daniel K. Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn: The Pro-Life Movement before Roe V. Wade* (New York: Oxford University, 2016), 458.

¹⁷ Tina Beattie, "Catholicism, Choice and Consciousness: A Feminist Theological Perspective on Abortion," *International Journal of Public Theology* 4, no. 1 (2010): 51-75.

¹⁸ Andrew R. Lewis, "Abortion Politics and the Decline of the Separation of Church and State: The Southern Baptist Case," *Politics and Religion* 7, no. 3 (2014): 524.

¹⁹ Beattie, "Catholicism, Choice and Consciousness," 62.

and Baal (Lev 18:21), it is clear then that “abortion must be viewed with a moral framework that admits the death of a fetus is a real death.”²⁰

Daniel Williams offers a view that aligns with the medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas, that life is “derived from natural law—an unwritten code, could be discovered through reason and reflection on the purposes for which God had created human beings.”²¹ Williams reflects, interestingly, that “true guardians of liberal values and human rights traditions . . . all people, born and unborn, have the right to life.”²² Beattie provides insights that compliments William’s view of guardianship of life as she explains one of the issues with the high number of abortion is due to lack of “knowledge needed to make responsible decisions” related to fertility, sexual activity, and family development.²³ Beattie summarizes the arguments in this manner:

For pro-life advocates, the statistics of maternal death and suffering mean little when compared with the fate of millions of murdered babies. For pro-choice advocates, any argument which focuses on the status of the foetus constitutes an attack on women’s rights and an attempt to deprive women of the personal and bodily autonomy which some have so recently acquired, and which many others are still denied.²⁴

Williams and Beattie provide some defense for life but fall short of the sound and clear revelation of God’s Word through the *imago Dei*. Adding perspective and helpful insight, David Novak wrestles with the quintessential question of “When does life begin?” by observing, “Birth is more of a transition from mediated to immediate human presence in this world.”²⁵ Novak continues by invoking the *imago Dei* as a means to defend the protection of unborn life:

²⁰ Beattie, “Catholicism, Choice and Consciousness,” 64.

²¹ Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn*, 454-55.

²² Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn*, 455.

²³ Beattie, “Catholicism, Choice and Consciousness,” 55.

²⁴ Beattie, “Catholicism, Choice and Consciousness,” 62.

²⁵ David Novak, *The Sanctity of Human Life* (Washington DC: Georgetown University, 2007),

Does our reverence for human life as the image of God not require that we treat every human life, even the minuscule human life of the newly conceived embryo, with what the tradition calls “human dignity?” . . . Surely we are not obligated or even permitted to kill a human life, however prehuman it now looks, for the sake of somebody else’s therapeutic needs—that is, for the sake of somebody to whose life the embryo is not a direct threat. We certainly are not obligated or permitted to kill an embryo for the more indirect benefit of the advancement of possibly helpful scientific information. I believe that we are neither obligated or permitted to do so. I believe that we are prohibited from doing so.²⁶

Whether through an empirical, ethical, or theological lens, life is only to be understood beginning at conception. Empirically, one observes the biological process for the development of life. The ethical defense then naturally unfolds in the ascription of life seen in the unborn who has yet to see life transition from one context to another (womb to birth). Theologically, one witnesses the prescription of personhood and value in each life through the *imago Dei*. God’s glory is seen in the protection and preservation of life with its zenith in the redeeming work of the gospel. How valuable is human life according to the gospel? The value of life is seen in the voluntary, substitutionary, and atoning sacrifice of the Lamb of God (John 3:16-17; 10:10-11).

The *Imago Dei* Fuels Compassionate Care

Advocacy for the protection of human life must not be limited to the pre-born but extends to the born, particularly those who are orphans. Herbie Newell strongly asserts, “Being pro-life means that not only do we see abortion as murder, but we also see our apathy against injustice toward life outside of the womb as a co-conspirator in the fight for life.”²⁷ He adds that Christians must understand the *imago Dei*, reminding the church that “we are made by God, crafted in His image, and responsible to show His character to a lost and dying world.”²⁸ Respect for all of life is seen in compassion and care for others. This is articulated in Jesus’s summary of the Law and His call to Christians stating that

²⁶ Novak, *The Sanctity of Human Life*, 68.

²⁷ Herbie Newell, *Image Bearers: Shifting from Pro-birth to Pro-Life* (Birmingham, AL: Lifeline Children’s Services, 2020), 13.

²⁸ Newell, *Image Bearers*, 13.

His people will love God and love others (Matt 22:36-40; see also John 13:44-45). The apostle Paul practically applies the character of God's love within the context of the care and concern of others. For instance, in Galatians 6:1-10 Paul presents the beauty of a caring community and culture. This comprehensive love is seen in three broad ways: (1) care for one another through mutual concern over our struggles (vv. 1-5); (2) care for one another through the ministry of the Word (v. 6); and (3) care for one another through the practice of doing good (vv. 7-10). This culture of care is the result of the gospel (Gal 5:16-26), which is undergirded in the application of the *imago Dei* or value of humanity (Gal 3:26-29).²⁹

The Southern Baptist Convention has not always staunchly advocated for the total absolution of abortion. The lack of total absolution is expressed, for example, in the 1971 SBC Resolution making concessions for abortion.³⁰ These are generally in the realm of danger to the mother's health, the condition of the unborn child, and trauma related issues such as rape or incest.³¹ However, as the convention moved from liberal tendencies to a conservative majority, its position on the sanctity of life continued to grow more conservative. Lewis observes that the shift from a pro-choice convention to a

²⁹ Paul's exposition on the doctrine of justification by faith brings up an important truth about the inclusion of all types of sinners and peoples. Paul indicates that, in the body of Christ, those who are justified by faith are united in the mantra of "grace alone, faith alone, and Christ alone" rather than divided by ethnicity, social-status, or any other demographic box. This passage, among many, recognizes the power of gospel through the recovered *imago Dei* as one finds identity and worth in Christ alone. When grasped by the Christian, this is truly transformative as it reshapes the way one looks at another and conversely influences relationships that honor God. This principle and mindset is vital in shaping Christian's response to the care of orphans.

³⁰ The Southern Baptist Convention, "Resolution on Abortion 1971," accessed March 7, 2023, <https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/resolution-on-abortion-2/>.

³¹ The 1971 SBC "Resolution on Abortion" states, "Be it further RESOLVED that we call upon Southern Baptists to work for legislation that will allow the possibility of abortion under such conditions as rape, incest, clear evidence of severe fetal deformity, and carefully ascertained evidence of the likelihood of damage to the emotional, mental, and physical health of the mother." The Southern Baptist Convention, "Resolution on Abortion 1971." This addition to the resolution is unfortunate due to the totality of Scripture's instruction and call to care for the vulnerable. There are numerous vulnerable categories identified in the resolution. Rather than being resolute on the termination of life, Southern Baptists are (as hard as it may be in the aforementioned circumstances) to strive to be ministers of grace and provide sound biblical counsel to help those in difficult circumstances to navigate them in an honorable way to Christ.

pro-life convention manifested during the conservative resurgence.³² The growth of the SBC's pro-life worldview and convictions is not limited to the protection of the unborn but is extended to the continuum of all life. By God's grace and through His providence, during the 1980s both the United States and SBC leadership steered toward a greater conservatism with the strengthening of a biblically sound approach to pro-life. During the transition toward conservatism, the church continues to develop an extensive pro-life ethic that involves anti-abortion rhetoric as well as, recently, a growing advocacy for crisis pregnancy centers, ultrasound fetal detection, counseling, commitment to orphan care ministries, and personal evangelism. All these approaches, and many others, position the church to engage in compassion care ministry.

Compassion is central to the Christian's response to orphan care. Brent Waters notes that compassion (*caritas*) is the root for the believer's "moral act" to care for orphans.³³ Waters expounds, noting that the exercise of *caritas* is "responsive rather than proactive" as in the illustration of the Good Samaritan parable.³⁴ The example of the Good Samaritan reveals the motive and practice of this love and compassion through concern for the need regardless of the person (type of). Response comes as the Samaritan is made aware of the need. Christians are made aware of the suffering of orphans through the revelation of Scripture along with the presence of children entering foster care and those who are eligible for adoption. The church must respond as the Samaritan did in this parable. Rather than turning a blind eye to the man's needs as the religious leaders did, the Samaritan saw the need and responded. Christians must respond rather than turn away from the need to respond.

³² Lewis, "Abortion Politics," 528.

³³ Waters, "Christian Adoption?," 306.

³⁴ Waters, "Christian Adoption?," 306.

Furthermore, the Samaritan's response is one of humble service birthed out of natural concern and care brought about in the situation or circumstance. Waters refers to this as an appropriate form of "self-interest," which is seen in a "personal satisfaction in helping the beaten man."³⁵ The proper motivation in orphan care (or ministry to any type of vulnerable person) is to honor God. Christians can honor God as they find personal joy and satisfaction in helping those in need. Mark Sneed surmises that the "concern for the vulnerable and poor is an example of a universal value" of humanity, which carries over into the care of orphans.³⁶ There is a sense of personal fulfillment and joy in tangibly demonstrating God's love through care. Compassionate care ministries and movements are on the rise within the SBC. For example, consider the posture of the convention's domestic mission's entity. The North American Mission Board (NAMB) identifies foster care and adoption as a "compassion ministry." NAMB's position speaks to this vital ministry, noting, "At the heart of this ministry is compassion for vulnerable families. Often, lives are touched by drug and alcohol use, abuse, neglect, disease, and poverty. Our goal is to demonstrate Christ's unconditional love to at-risk children all over the world and help foster and adoptive families as they become the hands, feet, and voice of Jesus."³⁷

The Christian's understanding of the *imago Dei* equips the church to defend the sanctity of human life as well as positions the church to strive as a zealous defender of compassionate care to orphans. The defense for life and exercise of compassionate care, expressly seen in the service to orphans, is further developed through the gospel of Jesus Christ and the salvation of sinners.

³⁵ Waters, "Christian Adoption?," 306.

³⁶ Mark R. Sneed, "Israelite Concern for the Alien, Orphan, and Widow: Altruism or Ideology?," *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 111, no. 4 (1999): 501.

³⁷ The North American Mission Board: Send Relief, "Adoption and Foster Care," accessed March 7, 2023, <https://www.sendrelief.org/projects/adoption-and-foster-care/>.

Spiritual Adoption as a Pattern for the Care of Orphans

Spiritual adoption serves as a pattern for the care of orphans. God saving and adopting sinners through Christ establishes the tenor of Christian care for orphans through fostering, adoption, or supportive care. The Father acts in love and compassion, taking specific steps to visit and adopt sinners. The Christian couple who fosters or adopts similarly acts in love and compassion, taking steps to care through fostering and adoption. The pattern involves initiative, investment, and covenant. In initiative, Christians reflect the Father by responding to the need of orphans through visitation and care. In investment, Christians reflect the Father by making necessary sacrifice to care for orphans. Lastly, in covenant, Christians reflect the permanency of the believer's relationship as "son" to God the Father in Christ by establishing a permanent family relationship through judicial action.

John Calvin's theological lens concerning adoption of believers in Christ is helpful in showcasing adoption as a pattern for the care of orphans. Michael Wilkinson, writing about Calvin's understanding of adoption, observes it is seen both as a synonym for election as well as a benefit found through Jesus Christ.³⁸ Maarten Kuivenhoeven and Michael Dewalt summarize Calvin's understanding of the believer's adoption to be central to the fatherhood of God: "In Calvin's thought, the fountainhead of adoption and its privileges found in God the Father."³⁹ Thus, through Christ, Christians are adopted into God's family, and receive the blessings of this new status and family, which enables them to reflect this fatherly love and care for others. The recipients of God's unmerited favor through adoption are to duplicate grace to others, particularly orphans. Therefore, spiritual adoption serves as a pattern for the care of orphans.

³⁸ Michael Wilkinson, "Adoption in Calvin's Soteriology: Basis for Redemption or Benefit of Union?," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 62, no. 1 (2019): 66.

³⁹ Maarten Kuivenhoven and Michael Dewalt, "Calvin's Practical View of Adoption: Its Privileges and Duties," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 6, no. 1 (2014): 45.

The Father to the Fatherless

One must concede that the contemporary cultural context of orphan care is vastly different from the context of the Old Testament and New Testament. The Old Testament dealings with orphan care are centered on the preservation of the family through the patriarchy. A family's name and posterity are passed on to subsequent generations through the male child/heir. In the Scriptures, particularly in the context of the Old Testament, orphans are identified as the "fatherless."

The designation of an "orphan" differs vastly in the Old Testament context (as well as New Testament) compared to today's current American context. Orphan care in American culture is often birthed from abuse and safety issues that merit social service entities to intervene. In many cases, children are removed and placed in temporary settings via safety plans or foster care.⁴⁰ Children become eligible for adoption when they remain in foster care for an established length of time resulting in the termination of parental rights.⁴¹ Nonetheless, many of the principles and dispositions observed serve Christians well in shaping orphan care ministry, particularly in the Old Testament lens and New Testament instruction.⁴²

Adoption in the Old Testament Jewish culture is typically viewed through the lens of the patriarchal and lineal succession of the family. The Hebrew people, to maintain

⁴⁰ This is standard practice developed from the policy of Alabama DHR. As a former social service caseworker in the Child Protection Service (CPS) Unit, I have much experience in this practice of the policy. For detailed information about the policies and procedures, see the Alabama Department of Human Resources, "Children and Family Services Policy," accessed March 18, 2023, <https://dhr.alabama.gov/family-services/children-and-family-services-policy/>. This link includes specific areas of interest, such as the section for "safety assessments."

⁴¹ See Alabama Department of Human Resources, "Termination of Parental Rights," accessed March 18, 2023, <https://dhr.alabama.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Adopt-02-Termination-of-Parental-Rights.-doc..pdf>.

⁴² For much of chap. 3, orphan care will predominately focus on adoption language. Due to the phenomenon of foster care in America, one must consider the principles related to orphan care and adoption seen through the lens of Jewish culture, Scripture, and the gospel to apply that to the current context. For the cultural context, fostering is the temporary rearing of children who have been removed due to abuse, neglect, or other safety related issues.

solidarity and continuity, exercised the adoption of an orphan (fatherless child, particularly male).⁴³ Furthermore, the father, according to God’s design in creation, provides identity and inheritance.⁴⁴ David Prince identifies the sorrow of being motherless in the Old Testament economy while explaining the greater issue of being “fatherless,” stating, “To be motherless was to be pitied and to know the deepest pain, anguish, and agony; but it was not to be completely stripped of your ability to take of yourself and to have future inheritance obliterated.”⁴⁵ The Holy Spirit inspires the biblical writers to reflect on God’s disposition for this vulnerable category and commands his people to reflect his care and concern by providing care to them.

There is a correlation of principle and practice observed in contemporary adoption and in the Old Testament. John W. Carter observes that while the Bible may be void of a “law showing the process, rights, or responsibilities involved in adoption . . . the application of natural adoption is relatively consistent in the world’s cultures, and it provides a type for the analysis of national and spiritual adoption as described in the Scriptures.”⁴⁶ Carter continues by citing seven related characteristics between natural and spiritual adoption: (1) adoption involves two parties: adopter and adoptee; (2) the adoptee receives the name of the adopter; (3) the adoptee is welcomed into and becomes part of the family of the adopter; (4) the adoptee receives inheritance from the adopter; (5) the adoptee’s status is permanent; (6) the adoptee’s adoption experience fosters good pride in his new name; and (7) the adoptee’s reflection of past experience and current relationship

⁴³ Manuel Baelo Álvarez, “Levirate Marriage & Adoption in the Old Testament: Socio-Legal Role,” *Estudios Bíblicos* 75, no. 3 (2017): 408.

⁴⁴ Prince, “What Are We For?,” 7-8.

⁴⁵ Prince, “What Are We For?,” 12.

⁴⁶ John W. Carter, “Twice Saved: A Pattern of Adoption in Salvation,” *Journal of Biblical Theology* 2, no. 3 (2019): 154.

drives him to honor his new parents thus reflecting the Christian's attitude and response to spiritual adoption and reconciled relationship to Christ.⁴⁷

Orphan Care: Adoption and Sonship

Sin continues to bear its mark on creation and its consequence has brought about the breakdown of the family. In his doctoral thesis, Michael Scott Thompson reminds believers that “the act of adoption, though good by design, finds its origins in the fact that orphans exist due to the fall of mankind.”⁴⁸ Kasi Pruitt, in her article for Lifeway Research, echoes this truth, observing that “adoption exists because of the fall” noting that sin has broken relationship resulting in the fracturing of families.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, in the wisdom and grace of God, the church can develop a richer understanding of how He uses circumstances that are seen as evil or harmful as an opportunity for good (Gen 50:20).

One of the products of sin is the presence of orphans, but the fruit of the gospel is the care of them. Thompson writes, “The ultimate example of care for the orphans is found in God Himself. He acts according to His character and consistently does what He commands of His people. He commands for His people to care for the orphans and to do no injustice to them.”⁵⁰ Pointing to God's grace in redemption, Thompson focuses on the relationship of God and His people: “Aside from His emphasis on caring for the orphan, there is a stronger demonstration of adoption, namely in the idea of God as Father and His people as sons.”⁵¹

⁴⁷ Carter, “Twice Saved,” 154-55.

⁴⁸ Michael Scott Thompson, “Adoption Rates among Evangelicals: A Mixed Methods Study” (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 13.

⁴⁹ Kasi Pruitt, “6 Insights for Teaching Your Church the Theology of Adoption,” Lifeway Research, January 19, 2023, <https://research.lifeway.com/2023/01/19/6-insights-for-teaching-your-church-the-theology-of-adoption/>.

⁵⁰ Thompson, “Adoption Rates among Evangelicals,” 42.

⁵¹ Thompson, “Adoption Rates among Evangelicals,” 24.

The theme of familial relationship in orphan care, specifically through adoption, is sewn throughout the Scriptures. Drawing a connection between the relationship of the believer to God and that of adopted children, Joshua Maurer and Ty Kieser state, “A proper definition of adoption requires that the adoptee first exists outside a filial relationship with their adoptive parent prior to the act of adoption. In order for a judicial declaration of sonship to ‘constitute’ one person as a ‘son’ or ‘daughter’ that person must initially exist outside of that familial relationship.”⁵² Sin alienates the created from the Creator thus resulting in an estrangement between God and humanity that can only be rectified through spiritual adoption.

The Father’s intervention and remedy to humanity’s spiritual condition of estrangement and orphanage is resolved through regeneration and faith. Those who are born-again by grace through faith in Christ are now declared judicially by God as sons and daughters (John 1:12-13). Orphan care, particularly the imagery and language of adoption, highlights the act of God electing or choosing repentant sinners into the family of God. Carter zeros in on this imagery: “Just as natural adoption serves as a type for national adoption, this national adoption (God electing Israel) serves as a type for spiritual adoption. Spiritual adoption is described in the New Testament as God’s choosing all of the faith as His children, regardless of their ancestry; either Jew or Gentile.”⁵³

The language of God choosing is replete in the New Testament adoption texts. For example, the Holy Spirit leads Paul to write, “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren, beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth” (2 Thess 2:13). Elsewhere Paul writes, “For the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him

⁵² Joshua Maurer and Ty Kieser, “Jesus, ‘Adopted Son of God?’ Romans 1:4, Orthodox Christology, and Concerns about a Contemporary Conclusion,” *Themelios* 46, no. 2 (2021): 326.

⁵³ Carter, “Twice Saved,” 158.

who calls” (Rom 9:11). Of course, the strongest language of the God choosing “us” is found in Ephesians 1:4-5 where the apostle exclaims, “Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.”

This act is replicated in the process of natural adoption as parents “choose” a child(ren) to adopt and welcome them into new families granting them the same rights, privileges, and love as natural or biological children. Children who are adopted possess equal status and standing as children who are biologically born into a family. Adopted children and families that expand their families through adoption are not to be viewed as “inferior” to biological families nor as a “plan B.” In the context of infertility and IVF, Kristin Johnston Largen defends this view stating, “While certainly recognizing and celebrating parent’s desire to bear children, the church would do well to lift up adoption more explicitly as an equally legitimate and valid means of increasing one’s family.”⁵⁴

A Pattern for Christians: Visiting, Suffering, Calling, and Community

Visiting. The Christian’s spiritual adoption sets forth a pattern for the care of orphans. God’s redemptive work reveals His character and action toward sinners. God is the provider of salvation through the selfless sacrifice of the Son, in whom believers find refuge, security, and identity. This becomes the pattern for God’s people who engage in the care of orphans. The Christian’s visitation of orphans reflects God’s care and rescue of sinners through Christ. For example, in foster care, Christians “visit” children through providing a temporary home for those who have experienced abuse or neglect. Furthermore, during this respite parents and families are given time to reorient their lives with the aim of reunification. In adoption, Christians “visit” children who have gone

⁵⁴ Kristin Johnston Largen, “I Love to Tell the Story: Reshaping the Narrative of Adoption,” *Dialog* 51, no. 4 (2012): 290.

through the TPR process and are eligible for adoption by providing them “forever homes.” Lastly, Christian visitation of orphans is seen through those who support others who foster and adopt to provide care, encouragement, and respite to families.

Suffering. Christians must be cautious in identifying or assuming the role of a rescuer. Christians must not romanticize orphan care through the lens of being a rescuer; rather, they must embrace the required suffering and sacrifice necessary in serving this vulnerable population. Yeats, while writing specifically about adoption, warns and encourages Christians as it relates to orphan care: “Adoption is frequently romanticized and idealized with little consideration of the real cost. The challenges and concerns are real, yet we can learn from Scripture of the word and mandate for God’s people in orphan care.”⁵⁵ Often individuals or couples enter foster care or start/expand their families through adoption with the allusion of perfect bliss thus failing to recognize the innate challenges that exist.

Michael Firmin et al. explain that many families enter orphan care, specifically adoption, due to infertility or due to a desire to expand their families.⁵⁶ In the study the researchers cite a variety of struggles that are often experienced (expected or not) as it relates to adoption. These issues can be experienced in fostering as well. Firmin et al. summarize the struggles as “psychological stress,” including but not limited to problems with a “difficult child,” “parent-child conflict,” and “social conflicts,” among others.⁵⁷ Bethany Lee et al. inform, “Most families are adopting (or fostering) through the child welfare system, and these children have commonly been exposed to preplacement

⁵⁵ Yeats, “The Biblical Model of Adoption,” 15.

⁵⁶ Michael W. Firmin et al., “Perspectives Regarding Motivations for Adoption by Christian Adoptive Parents: A Qualitative Study,” *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 45, no. 1 (2017): 58-59.

⁵⁷ Firmin et al., “Perspectives Regarding Motivations,” 58.

adversity, such as trauma, prenatal substance exposure, or multiple foster placements.”⁵⁸ Many enter orphan care with an idealism that is often shattered due to the inevitable and unique challenges in caring for children in foster care or in adoption.

Calling. As a scriptural mandate and divine calling, Christians must recognize their dependence on the Holy Spirit to enable them to live out Christ in the ministry to orphans. Carter explains this mandate and calling by reflecting on the functional aspect of the believer’s spiritual adoption: “Those who have been adopted as children of God have this mission: to carry the gospel message to the lost world so that more can be saved.”⁵⁹ Justin Taylor notes that the child of God will manifest God’s love through the practice of righteousness and love for others (1 John 3:10).⁶⁰ The Christian’s engagement in the care of orphans is indicative of God’s call and can be categorized in three distinct ways: (1) foster parenting, (2) adoption, and (3) supportive care ministry.

Community. Much scholarship and writing are committed to viewing orphan care through the lens of salvation-metaphor with emphasis on God as Father. However, Katarina Westerlund contends that through the care of orphans, specifically through the adoption of children, one can also emphasize a sense of community. She expands the principles viewed in adoption to the care of all types of vulnerable categories, thus “adoption serves as a model for Christian living emphasizing the care of orphans and the Christian duty to take care of the least in their midst.”⁶¹ This expanded application fits into the schema of the Lord Jesus who calls for His people to care for the least of these

⁵⁸ Bethany R. Lee et al., “Parent, Child, and Adoption Characteristics Associated with Post-Adoption Support Needs,” *Social Work Research* 44, no. 1 (2020): 22.

⁵⁹ Carter, “Twice Saved,” 162.

⁶⁰ Justin Taylor, “Equipping the Generations: From Adopted to Adopting,” *The Journal of Family Ministry* 2, no. 1 (2011): 82-83.

⁶¹ Katarina Westerlund, “Adoption as Spiritual Praxis in Individualized Times,” *Dialog* 51, no. 4 (2012): 326.

(Matt 25:40-45) as well as aligns with the Holy Spirit's inspiration for a community and culture of care within the church (Gal 6:1-10).

As the Father intervenes on behalf spiritual orphans through Jesus as well as cares for the fatherless, the church is to replicate this care through serving orphans. The joy of the Christian's experience with God's grace in salvation (spiritual adoption) now serves as a motivator to the body of Christ to engage those who are in foster care or eligible for adoption.

Spiritual Adoption as a Motivator to Care for Orphans

Specific to adoption, but principally applied to the care of orphans, Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner powerfully describes the love of God in His adopting of sons and daughters: "A homecoming of a long-for child is parabolic for God's welcome of us, a glimpse of God's embrace, of God's hospitality."⁶² Kristen Johnston Largen cautions Christians not to view the limited usage of the term "adoption" in the New Testament as a marginalized category, but instead to recognize it is "an important way of speaking about the experience of being welcomed by God into God's eternal family as beloved sons and daughters."⁶³ The believer's spiritual adoption and experience with God's unmerited favor serves as a primary motivator to the care of orphans. This experience primes Christians to engage in the care of orphans as an expression of compassion but also as a witness to authentic faith and worship.

Authentic Faith, Worship, and Orphan Care

James's view of authentic faith and worship is connected to the care of orphans. James 1:27 practically conveys the language of loving God and loving others

⁶² Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner, *The Spirit of Adoption: At Home in God's Family* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 2.

⁶³ Largen, "I Love to Tell the Story," 286.

(Matt 22:37-40) with love of God through obedience to Christ's commands (1 John 5:3). However, not all Christians are primarily motivated to engage in the care of orphans due to an understanding of and desire to express authentic faith and worship. Amanda Keys et al. identify three motivations that prompt some Christians to participate in the care of orphans. First is the child-centered motivation that stems from a genuine concern for abused and neglected children with their purpose of providing a safe home.⁶⁴ Additionally, some Christians possess a self-oriented motivation and dabble with the idea of adoption but want to test themselves through fostering first.⁶⁵ Lastly, some Christians have a social-oriented motivation that stems from a desire to "give back" or "fulfill a religious calling."⁶⁶ While these are not negative motivations to care for orphans, they fall short in representing the fullness of the gospel, specifically viewed in the Father's redemptive love through His Son.

In the Christian's pursuit to care for orphans, one must be mindful of two unfortunate extremes. These can develop if unchecked by the Word of God and Holy Spirit. First, the callous nature akin to the Pharisees. They were stoic and ritualistic; dogmatic to the written and oral law and added traditions. Often observed in Scripture as unconcerned with the plight of humanity, the Lord Jesus would chastise them for their hardness and failure to demonstrate the pattern of authentic love for the Father through the care of others. The other end of the spectrum is a false altruism. That is to say that many Christians may articulate right positions but do not address them personally or practically. Additionally, this false altruism is seen with the end for self-promotion rather than genuine care and concern for the vulnerable. The gospel calls sinners to Christ through

⁶⁴ Amanda M. Keys et al., "Who Are Christian Foster Parents? Exploring the Motivations and Personality Characteristics Associated with Fostering Intentions," *Social Work & Christianity* 44, no. 4 (2017): 70.

⁶⁵ Keys et al., "Who Are Christian Foster Parents?," 70.

⁶⁶ Keys et al., "Who Are Christian Foster Parents?," 70.

repentance of sin and faith in Him. The Holy Spirit, through His Word, conforms believers to Christ. Thus, the result is a growing love for God and love for others (John 13:34-35).

Sneed argues that a justified shame falls on the disengaged as they see believers live authentically and sincerely in their care for the vulnerable.⁶⁷ Sneed emphasizes that ultimately human instruments that are praised for fulfilling the compassion of God ultimately bring praise to Yahweh, thus “legitimizing” Him as God through His protection of the vulnerable.⁶⁸ This principle, at least in a general sense but can be applied specifically to orphan care, is the epitome of Jesus’s declaration in John 13:45. Therefore Jesus asserts that the Christian’s love for others will be a testimony of their relationship with God in Christ. In a sense, God is legitimized as the One True God and His will and way is good (Rom 12:1-2).

Samire DeBeer and Jordan Pierre reflect on James 1:27 and the understanding of Christians doing the will of God through the care of orphans: “Pure and undefiled worship before God and the Father is defined as social action and linked with keeping oneself unstained from the world.”⁶⁹ They continue asserting that Christians are “urged to fulfill God’s role as Father” in addressing the plight and sufferings of orphans and widows. Building on this action, they state that Christians can start to feel “motivated to represent God by acting as protectors and fathers of fatherless households.”⁷⁰ This ministry and engagement serves as a tangible expression and “manifestation of God the Father’s love and support.”⁷¹ Thus, Christian participation in orphan care makes known the Father’s love and, again, proves that God’s will and way is good. He is honored in His people’s

⁶⁷ Sneed, “Israelite Concern,” 501-2.

⁶⁸ Sneed, “Israelite Concern,” 502.

⁶⁹ DeBeer and Pierre, “Heeding the Voices,” 24.

⁷⁰ DeBeer and Pierre, “Heeding the Voices,” 32.

⁷¹ DeBeer and Pierre, “Heeding the Voices,” 32.

duplication of His care and concern for orphans through practical visitation. Newell expounds on the understanding of God acting fatherly in that He has visited believers; therefore, Christians are to replicate this care through the visitation of orphans. He charges the church to recognize that “according to James, a religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to go to orphans and widows, and not just visit them but to have ownership and responsibility for their needs; to go to them with deep concern.”⁷²

The purity of the Christian’s faith and the authenticity of worship is not simply seen through a diversity of rituals or expressions of pious activity. According to God the Holy Spirit through the apostle James, true worship is embodied in loving God and loving others, specifically the care for orphans and widows. If Christians are to be known as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ through the love of one another (John 13:34-35), how rich then is this type of love when demonstrated to ministry to orphans. Thus, churches have ample opportunity to demonstrate their love for God through the love of orphans.

Key Insights from Churches Engaged in Orphan Care

Today, there is much to celebrate as God works through different churches and various ministries to call His people to engage in orphan care. The church is to lead the way in the care of orphans. The Christian Alliance for Orphans (CAFO) aptly describes the role of

the church in every nation possesses both the Christian mandate and many other resources needed to care for the world’s orphans in a nurturing, relationship rich environment. Every initiative to care for orphans should prioritize and honor the role of the local church, carefully pairing what foreign resources may be necessary with local believers willing to open their hearts and homes to orphans in their community.⁷³

For this final section, content is derived from interviews with ministry leaders in local church contexts as well as through the NAMB. The content will primarily be a

⁷² Newell, *Image Bearers*, 132.

⁷³ Christian Alliance for Orphans, “Principle #7 from ‘On Understanding Orphan Statistics,’” January 1, 2014, https://issuu.com/christianalliancefororphans/docs/orphan-statistics-web-10.2017__1.

summary of insights that will reflect the biblical worldview and Father’s disposition to care for orphans. Furthermore, several principles and practices will be highlighted that will be useful in training and leading the membership of Pinckard Baptist to engage in orphan care ministry.

First Baptist Church Woodstock

The First Baptist Church of Woodstock (FBCW) is in Woodstock, Georgia. FBCW has a vibrant, engaging, and impactful orphan care ministry called “We Foster.” The We Foster ministry is currently under the stewardship and leadership of Robin Geradi. Geradi shared the following insights.⁷⁴

The first key principle in the We Foster ministry at FBCW is the intentionality to create a “community of care.” As the ministry volunteers serve, they seek to exemplify compassion and care to families. Second, there is an established partnership with the local child welfare service entity, the Department of Family and Children Service (DFACS). FBCW works with DFACS in serving prospective foster families, families going through the licensure process, as well as established and current foster families. In this partnership FBCW can provide a variety of tangible services, including but not limited to providing CEU training through We Foster University, provide women’s support group, offer monthly parent night out events, and periodic family events, as well as a ministry resource room where families can get items to help them in fostering children. Lastly, this is a well-established ministry fully supported by FBCW.

Calvary Baptist Church

Calvary Baptist Church has seen the grace of God work through many in their church. Calvary Baptist is in Dothan, Alabama, and is currently predominantly focused on adoption, specifically international adoption. Calvary’s orphan care ministry is under

⁷⁴ Robin Geradi, interview with author, First Baptist Church Woodstock, Woodstock, GA, July 21, 2022.

the stewardship and leadership of Eric Donop. The following summary and insights were gained through a face-to-face interview.⁷⁵

The ministry at Calvary Baptist is “informal” and “organic” with emphasis on adoption. Donop noted that this ministry began in 2018 when the church hosted an Orphan Care Sunday. One family had gone through the process to adopt and shared their adoption journey. This sparked a movement to emerge in the church as the next year there was a second family who adopted and testified. Currently, Calvary Baptist has seen a multiplication as fourteen families have or are adopting with eight of those families adopting internationally through Lifeline Ministry based in Birmingham, Alabama.

Calvary Baptist serves families in several ways. First, they provide an annual Orphan Care Sunday to promote the call of God to care for orphans, position adoptive families to share their stories, provide basic information about the process, as well as connect prospective families to leaders and CPS entities. Second, participants engage in member/family care through ongoing connections between meetings. These connections include phone calls, visits, fellowships, and “check-ins” as well as identifying and addressing needs.

NAMB

The North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, under the “Send Relief” ministry, provides a strong model for orphan care engagement called the Family Advocacy Ministry (FAM).⁷⁶ A FAM model is a highly individualized strategy that the local church can implement to provide wholistic care to foster families, adoptive families, as well as supportive care to biological families involved in CPS. FAM’s focus

⁷⁵ Eric Donop, interview with author, Calvary Baptist Church, Dothan, AL, August 8, 2022.

⁷⁶ The North American Mission Board: Send Relief, “Family Advocacy Ministry (FAM),” accessed April 19, 2023, <https://www.sendrelief.org/projects/family-advocacy-ministry/>.

on assisting the local church in identifying “advocates” who will recruit, train, and facilitate members to engage in orphan care ministry.

As a robust ministry, FAM identifies needs within the orphan care community, connects and work with CPS and CPA entities, and focuses on “care communities” to support families. These care communities’ position local church ministry teams to focus on one assigned family and provide wrap-around services. These services include counseling, meals, respite care, and a variety of other supportive care. The NAMB underscores the vital role of supportive care to foster families stating, “The national average of families who continue fostering after their first year is about 50%, but when supported by a FAM and its wrap-around support, 90% continue fostering into a second year.”⁷⁷

The FBCW, Calvary Baptist, and NAMB provide encouraging examples for local churches to engage in the care of orphans. These models and ministries are insightful as common themes are cultivated through them. Some themes include purpose driven ministry to orphans, compassionate care for the whole family, strategic plans, diverse opportunities for service, and the cultivation of genuine communities of care. As one peers into the windows of these ministries, there is a sense of joyful service as the two churches and mission board entity seeks to replicate the gospel in the service to others.

Conclusion

There is reason to rejoice as the number of children in foster care continues to decrease (slightly). This has occurred in part as those foster children eligible for adoption have found their “forever home and families.” Yet, there is still much work to be done in answering the call of God to care for orphans. There is much room for the church to respond to the glory of God. The US Department of Health and Human Services released this statement as part of their November 2021 report:

⁷⁷ The North American Mission Board: Send Relief, “FAM Pastor Booklet,” accessed April 19, 2023, <https://www.sendrelief.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/2022/05/Send-Relief-Pastor-Booklet-051722.pdf>.

The Children’s Bureau at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Administration for Children and Families (ACF) published the FY 2020 Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). The newly released data indicates the number of children in foster care decreased for the third consecutive year, to an estimated 407,000 at the end of Fiscal Year (FY) 2020. The number of children waiting to be adopted also fell in FY 2020 to 117,000. The FY 2020’s decrease is more than double that of FY 2019’s decrease, 1.8 percent, and 4.7 percent respectively. And while the FY 2019 numbers of adoptions reached an all-time high, the FY 2020 adoption number totaled 57,900.⁷⁸

Faith, the understanding of Scripture and the Christian’s response to obey, is a primary motivator to engage in orphan care. In a study focused on African-American children in foster care and eligible for adoption, Kathleen Belanger, Sam Copeland, and Monit Chung concluded, “In context of the study of adoption among African-Americans, 53 African-American parents/families adopted 98 African-American children as well as 10 bi-racial children. . . . Faith in God was the single greatest reason for adopting.”⁷⁹ Marshall Henderson uniquely adapts Jason Johnson’s attitude toward the church’s engagement in orphan noting their framework: “At FBCFP we care about orphans. Some of us are going to bring children into our homes; the rest of us are going to find ways to serve and support them.”⁸⁰ This is the priority and practice of the local church—everyone has a place and part in the care of orphans. As Jason Johnson exclaims, “Everyone can do something . . . so find your something!”⁸¹

⁷⁸ Administration for Children and Families, 2021 Report, “National Data Shows Number of Children in Foster Care Decreases for the Third Consecutive Year,” accessed March 10, 2023, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/media/press/2021/national-data-shows-number-children-foster-care-decreases-third-consecutive-year>.

⁷⁹ Kathleen Belanger, Sam Copeland, and Monit Cheung, “The Role of Faith in Adoption: Achieving Positive Adoption Outcomes for African American Children,” *Child Welfare* 87, no. 2 (2008): 118.

⁸⁰ Marshall Smith Henderson, “Leading Families of First Baptist Church in Fort Payne, Alabama, to Participate in Orphan Care through Foster Care and Adoption” (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022), 82.

⁸¹ Jason Johnson, “Everyone Can Do Something! Building a Foundational Culture of Orphan Care in Your Church,” Christian Alliance for Orphans, 2016, <https://cafo.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Everyone-Can-Do-Something-PDF-GUIDE.pdf>. 8.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

This chapter details the process of the project implementation. This project set out to accomplish several goals. First, I sought to assess PBC members' current understanding of the biblical instruction and contextual needs concerning orphan care. Second, I endeavored to create a seven-week training curriculum to use as a tool to equip participants. The third goal, via the training curriculum, was to see an increase in this knowledge. Lastly, I sought to develop a specific and robust ministry plan to engage participants for future service in orphan care.

In weeks 1-5, I went through the process of preparing the project. These five weeks involved the creation and refining of the training material as well as the development of the church ministry plan. In weeks 4-5, I continued with concurrent preparation of the congregation with two sermons related to the topic of orphan care as well as promoted the project implementation. In weeks 6-12, I implemented the project over the course of seven sessions. In weeks 13-14, I compared the data of the pre- and post- training material survey via the OCIA and evaluated the effectiveness of the ministry project. In total, through this joyous labor, the project accomplished its purpose over the course of fourteen weeks.

Project Preparation

During spring 2023, I began the preparation of the ministry project for Pinckard Baptist Church. I began by reflecting on three key biblical passages to formulate a framework and outline for the training curriculum. The three key biblical passages are Genesis 1:26-27, Ephesians 1:4-6, and James 1:27. In reflecting on the themes, doctrines,

and instruction observed in the three passages, I was able to draft an initial outline for the training curriculum.

Week 1

During the week of July 2, I prepared an initial outline for the training material. The training material was titled “Becoming a Church That Cares for Vulnerable Children.” The training material consisted of seven sessions that were one hour to one and half hours in length. It was divided into two main sections: (1) Education: sessions 1-4, and (2) Engagement: sessions 5-7. The first four sessions provide the biblical and theological foundations and motivations to engage in orphan care. The next three sessions provide the pathway to engage through the presentation of the ministry plan, called “Family Strong,” an expert panel, and discussions of “Next Steps.”

Week 2

During, the week of July 9, I developed an initial rough draft of the training material. I fleshed out the content of sessions 1-4 based on the research of chapters 2-3, as well as expanded the content with key insights and themes derived from Scripture. In addition, I developed the initial rough draft of the ministry plan that would become “Family Strong.” I also considered potential members for the two panels: (1) the training material evaluation panel, and (2) the ministry plan evaluation panel. I compiled lists of prospective members to contact in week 3.

Week 3

During the week of July 16, I attended a two-night training through Promise686. This training included pertinent information related to the development of my ministry plan with specific attention given to the formation and launching of “Care Communities.” During week 3 I also consulted with and conducted interviews with ministry leaders of local churches who currently have active orphan care ministries. In addition, I conducted interviews with professional staff members with Lifeline Christian

Services. These insights went into the development of the training material and ministry plan. Lastly, I contacted prospective members of the training material evaluation panel and ministry plan panel. Each panelist, in the appropriate grouping, received by email copies of the initial rough drafts and rubrics. The caveat rests with the disclaimer that further adjustments would be made once participants completed the pre-training OCIA. In addition, I provided a copy of the ministry plan to the training leaders of Promise686. This was at their request as our church is using their model for the FAM, which is titled “Family Strong.” Their feedback ensured that the ministry is honoring their model of ministry and providing a clear plan for our church to engage in.

Also, the Lord has been working in our church concurrently to my ministry project. In late 2022, I shared my desire for Pinckard Baptist to develop a clear missions strategy and called for members interested to form a “missions team.” This team was tasked to discern God’s purpose in our church related to missions. My initial vision was to identify and partner with an existing IMB missionary and develop a robust prayer ministry and to develop a pathway to send short-term mission teams to serve with them. By God’s providence, this missions team and I were led to develop a specific missions ministry that has two objectives. The first objective is to partner with NAMB and engage in short-term mission trips specifically focused on their “Serve Tours” weekend mission trips. The second objective is to partner with NAMB’s Send Relief Family Advocacy Ministry. Thus, this work of God converged as I arrived at this stage in the ministry project. All praise to God. Therefore, I provided this six-member mission team copies of the rough draft ministry plan for assessment as well.

Weeks 4-5

During the weeks of July 23 and July 30, members were given the pre-training OCIA to complete and return. I also received and adjusted the training material and ministry plan based on the OCIA feedback, evaluation panelist feedback, Promise686 feedback, and missions team feedback. Lastly, I made the final version of the “Becoming

a Church That Cares for Orphans” training material and the “Family Strong” ministry plan.¹

Project Promotion

The month of July 2023 was designated for the promotion and recruitment of church members to serve as participants in the ministry project. Project promotion included bulletin announcements, pulpit presentations, church Facebook posts, and church website information. Church members were invited to utilize the signup sheets located in the sanctuary. Furthermore, members were informed during the promotion period concerning the orphan care study expectations. The training session course outline, summary, and schedule was printed in the weekly bulletin and communicated in the weekly announcements. In addition, during weeks 4-5, two orphan care emphasis sermons were preached with the aim of trusting God to further stir hearts of the body to participate in the ministry project.

Week 4

On Sunday, July 23, I preached the first of two preparatory and promotional sermons on orphan care. I preached a sermon entitled “The Goodness of our Father” from Psalm 68:5-6.² The aim of this sermon was to take a wide-angle lens of God’s character and commitment toward vulnerable peoples. As the sermon progressed, I sought to narrow the focus with application to serving those who are involved in foster care or eligible for adoption.

¹ See appendix 6 for “Becoming a Church that Cares for Orphans” training curriculum and the “Family Strong” ministry plan. The ministry plan is embedded in the training curriculum in session 5.

² See appendix 7 for the sermon entitled “The Goodness of our Father” from Ps 68:5-6.

Week 5

On Sunday, July 30, I preached the second of two preparatory and promotional sermons on orphan care. I preached a sermon entitled “An Authentic and Active Faith” from James 1:27.³ The aim of this sermon was to emphasize that genuine faith is demonstrated in two primary ways. First, authentic, active faith is seen in the Christian’s care for vulnerable peoples, specifically orphans and widows. Second, authentic, active faith is expressed in the Christian’s pursuit of personal holiness. As the sermon progressed, a link was made between the God’s visitation of sinful humanity in the coming of His Son and the Christian’s care for orphans. In His coming, Jesus “visited” us in our time of “trouble” and through Him we are adopted in His family. Therefore, Christians reflect the gospel of Jesus Christ through the engagement and care of the vulnerable.

Project Implementation

The ministry project was implemented during weeks 6-14. Weeks 6-12 included the seven sessions of the training material “Becoming a Church That Cares for Orphans.” Weeks 13-14 were relegated for post-training OCIA gathering and ministry project assessment. Each training session was on a Sunday afternoon scheduled at 4:00 p.m., lasting one hour to one and a half hours. The following is an overview of each training session.⁴

Week 6

Session 1 took place on Sunday, August 6. The title of the lesson was “The Image of God and Orphan Care,” from Genesis 1:26-27. The objective of session 1 was to develop and deepen the Christian’s understanding of being “pro-life” through the doctrine of *imago Dei*. The main idea was that Christians engage in orphan care because of the affirmation of the sanctity of all human life, which fuels engagement and care to

³ See appendix 8 for the sermon entitled “Authentic and Active Faith” from Jas 1:27.

⁴ See appendix 5 for a copy of the training material.

the orphan. In this session I sought to define and describe the doctrine of *imago Dei* with the goal of developing a rich and full understanding of what it means to be “pro-life.” I then sought to apply that through the lens of orphan care.

Week 7

Session 2 took place on Sunday, August 13. The title of the lesson was “The Father and Orphan Care,” from Psalm 68:5. The objective of session 2 was to understand that God the Father’s heart is one of compassion and care to vulnerable people, particularly orphans. Christians should engage in orphan care in response to a personal experience of grace and out of the joy of their spiritual adoption through Jesus Christ. In this session I sought to explore and explain the doctrine of adoption within the soteriological framework and the application to the Christian’s engagement in the care of orphans.

Week 8

Session 3 took place on Sunday, August 20. The title of the lesson was “The Care Culture,” from Galatians 6:1-10. The objective of session 3 was to foster the Christian’s understanding of genuine care for others. The main idea was that Jesus and his Gospels contain the blueprint for a caring culture within his family, the church. Utilizing the paradigm for culture of care within the church found in Galatians 6:1-10, participants were able to examine the particularities of grace fueled care. This paradigm was then applied in the realm of orphan care.

Week 9

Session 4 took place on Sunday, August 27. The title of the lesson was “The Christian’s Service to God through Orphan Care,” from James 1:27. The objective of session 4 was to understand that true worship is expressed in tangible care of orphans birthed from the heart that knows and does the Word of God. The main idea was that authentic discipleship and genuine worship is expressed in the care of the vulnerable (orphans and widows) and in personal holiness. I sought to establish a framework to

understand God’s description of authentic worship, which is not observed in empty piety or rote ritual but through faith and obedience in one’s personal response to his grace. Christians care for the vulnerable child in the same way he cared for humanity.

Week 10

Session 5 took place on Sunday, September 10.⁵ The title of this session was “Family Strong: Our Family Advocacy Ministry.” The objective for this lesson was to identify the model of ministry that cares well for vulnerable children through the body of Pinckard Baptist Church. The main idea was that each Christian has a role in the care of orphans as this model of ministry positions and equips each to honor God through the application of James 1:27. The motivation of this ministry is quality over quantity with the goal to do all things well. Family Strong focuses on the formation of Care Communities, consisting of teams of 5-8 (or more), that commit to one-year of support and service to foster or adoptive families. Care Communities provide wrap-around support. In addition, Family Strong will provide a variety of ministry events for foster and adoptive families.

Week 11

Session 6 took place on Sunday, September 17. This session served as an expert panel night. Participants were introduced to a social worker with Dale County DHR, social worker with the Alabama Baptist Children’s Home & Family Ministries, as well as a foster/adoptive family. The panelists provided information and shared experiences related to orphan care. In addition, participants were able to learn via a Q&A session. Topics covered in this session included an understanding of circumstances that warrant CPS intervention, an overview of the system, means for licensure, effects of trauma, and ways to support and serve.

⁵ The previous Sunday was Labor Day weekend, and some participants were away for the holiday, so there were two weeks between lessons 4 and 5.

Week 12

Session 7 took place on Sunday, September 24. The title of this session was “What Now? Taking the Next Steps.” The objective of this session was to connect members to engage in orphan care by providing clear pathways to answer God’s call. The main idea was that everyone has a role in orphan care. In this session, participants were introduced to three “tracks” for potential next steps and involvement. Track 1 involves the pursuit and participation in the Family Strong FAM. Track 2 involves exploring licensure to become a foster family or adoptive resource. Track 3 involves a prayer ministry, generosity or investment ministry, or other supportive roles.

Weeks 13-14

During the weeks of October 1 and October 8, I gathered data from the post-training OCIA as well as reflections from the ministry project to complete chapter 5.

Post-Project Next Steps

Week 15

The week of October 15 and ongoing, I began consultations with participants for the purpose of guiding them in their next steps. I scheduled visits and follow-ups with each participant to reflect on their experience through the training. In addition, I endeavored to assist each participant to identify the area(s) in which God was stirring their hearts to engage. In this, I provided additional guidance and encouragement to move forward in obedience. Lastly, awareness events were scheduled to continue to keep the ministry in the focus of our church family. On Sunday, November 19, Pinckard Baptist Church hosted an Orphan Care Sunday with Rick Morton as the keynote speaker. Additionally, the advocate team with our Family Strong ministry scheduled semi-annual or quarterly awareness and recruitment fellowships to draw in participants to serve in Care Communities. Ongoing media promotion and announcements in our Sunday services, website, and social media feeds will also solicit participant engagement.

One additional next step involves working with our association's director of missions and pastors of sister association churches to share about our ministry. My long-term vision is to see God not only work uniquely through Pinckard Baptist but to see this ministry replicated in some of our Dale Baptist Churches. I have been in continual communication with our director of missions about this project and was honored that he and his wife attended as guests to two of the training sessions. I hope to leverage existing relationships with the pastors in the association through the weekly Pastor's Conference, promoting the ministry, and making myself available to lead training in their churches. I hope to have some respond and begin to schedule those in the future.

Conclusion

The efficacy of this ministry project rested on the priority of the biblical and theological understanding of God's character and commitment to the vulnerable as captured in Scripture as well as the ministry plan. The "Becoming a Church That Cares for Orphans" housed the biblical and theological framework whereas the Family Strong ministry plan provided the pathway for participation and engagement in the care of those in foster care and/or eligible for adoption. This project was a joyous labor of love birthed from my spiritual adoption in Christ and His knitting of our family through two adoptions.

The research data in chapter 5 will demonstrate that this project was successful in accomplishing its goals. The greater impact of this study has yet to be seen as God continues to transform hearts that are primed for service to the vulnerable. I am encouraged by the zeal that is developing among the body. I am thrilled that God has concurrently developed an advocate team while this project was being developed and implemented. This places the Family Strong ministry in a ready position to serve families and foster awareness. Lastly, I am hopeful of the future. I am hopeful that God will call out some within our faith family to become a foster family or adoptive resource. I am hopeful that God will use our church to be an example to our association of churches and as a result see other Dale Baptist Churches seek to develop and implement similar ministries.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT EVALUATION

This ministry project formed out of my conviction that every Christian has a purpose and role in the care of orphans. By God’s grace and according to His providence, He positioned my wife and I to develop our family through adoption and natural birth. Our life experience, coupled with the clarity of God’s character and commitment, drove us to adopt. This experience and knowledge continue to compel me to advocate for Christians and churches to engage in the care of orphans. Borrowing the language of Marshall Henderson’s church “mantra,” it is my heart’s desire to see the following statement become part of our church’s DNA. We say, “At PBC, we care about orphans. Some of us will seek to bring children into our homes; the rest of us will seek to find ways to serve and support them.”¹ Furthermore, I appreciate Jason Johnson’s conviction as he states, “Everyone can do something . . . so find your something!”² These positional statements and attitudinal reflections drove this project and the associated training curriculum as it cast a “wide net” for opportunities of engagement.

The work completed in this project, while satisfying its four goals, extends beyond them. Due to my engagement in the doctoral program at SBTS and the development of this ministry project, I have channeled a clear pathway for ministry to orphans that comes not simply from sympathy for broken homes and children from hard

¹ Marshall Smith Henderson, “Leading Families of First Baptist Church in Fort Payne, Alabama, to Participate in Orphan Care through Foster Care and Adoption” (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022), 82.

² Jason Johnson, “Everyone Can Do Something! Building a Foundational Culture of Orphan Care in Your Church,” Christian Alliance for Orphans, 2016, <https://cafo.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Everyone-Can-Do-Something-PDF-GUIDE.pdf>, 8.

places but through a robust biblical and theological framework that motivates reflection of the character and commitment of God. Truly, this project helped me to lead our church to understand the gospel in more meaningful ways exercised through practical, tangible, compassionate ministry that is in line with the priorities and heart of God in Christ. My heart is overjoyed at the work God is doing in my own life as well as the life of our church as orphan care ministry is now a prominent conversation within the body known as Pinckard Baptist Church. In this chapter I will endeavor to convey an in-depth evaluation of the ministry project's purpose and goals as well as provide theological and personal reflections.

Evaluation of Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to train the membership of Pinckard Baptist Church in Pinckard, Alabama, for wholistic care to those in foster care as well as eligible for adoption. The faith family at Pinckard Baptist (PBC), despite its small membership, is multi-generational. Average Sunday attendance for worship is 65. I am grateful to serve as the pastor of PBC as the overall disposition of our faith family is warm, friendly, and supportive of one another. This was expressed in the response to the project with 22 participants resulting in approximately one-third engaging in the training curriculum. I remain encouraged as I witness the grace of God work in the life of this body, particularly in his work in crafting hearts for orphan care ministry. Since God's character and commitment is for vulnerable people, specifically the orphan, the purpose of this project becomes a paramount matter for the local church.

A confessional affirmation for the care of orphans has historically been the norm for PBC members. However, through this ministry project the participants were introduced to extensive instruction related to this area. The training curriculum established clear biblical and theological themes and doctrines that provide the framework to inform Christians to engage in the care of orphans. The understanding of the *imago Dei* reminds Christians that all humanity is made in God's image and has inherent value and worth.

Therefore, the Christian, through the lens of this doctrine, sees other types of people as God sees them—individuals with dignity who need compassionate care that mirrors the grace of God in Christ. Furthermore, this project amplifies the ministry to orphans through the prism of the gospel itself. As a fallen race, humanity is in the category of spiritual orphans and categorized as vulnerable people. God, therefore, visited or cared for humanity through His Son. As a result of his care, the recipients of grace are to reproduce that through visiting or caring for orphans.

A robust biblical and theological foundation motivates the church to honor God through an authentic and active faith that embraces the Word of God. This project instructed participants in God’s truth as well as equipped them with the knowledge and resources to effectively embrace the next steps of active engagement. Finally, the roadmap seen in the ministry plan enables PBC to fulfill its role in caring for orphans and honoring the character of God (Ps 68::5-6) and the commitment of God (Jas 1:26-27). Christians care for others because he first cared for the church. Christians love others because He first loved us. The fulfilment of the purpose of this project is the natural product of the gospel.

Evaluation of Project’s Goals

Access Understanding

There were twenty-three registered participants in the “Becoming a Church that Cares for Orphans” training curriculum. One registered participant did not participate in the study, resulting in twenty-two participants. The average age of the group was fifty-eight (57.7) years old with ten males and twelve females. Of the twenty-two participants, seven husband-wife couples participated together. The remaining participants were either singles or their spouse did not participate. Lastly, twenty participants are members of PBC and the other two are categorized as “regular attendees who are not members.”

Each participant was provided with a copy, physical or electronic, of the Orphan Care Inventory and Assessment (OCIA) survey. Of the twenty-two participants, fifteen completed and returned their pre- and post-OCIAs. This survey consisted of a quantitative

and qualitative section. The quantitative section included a six-point Likert scale consisting of twenty-five assessment statements. The qualitative section included six questions promoting short paragraph responses. While the goal was not successful missing the mark of the twenty completed pre- and post-OCIA, the survey was effective in revealing participants' current understanding of orphan care.

Table 1. Pre-OCIA average scores per question

Question	Average
1	5.94
2	5.94
3	5.88
4	5.72
5	5.66
6	5.83
7	5.55
8	5.61
9	5.77
10	5.22
11	5.61
12	4.00
13	4.88
14	2.83
15	3.94
16	3.33
17	2.94
18	4.33
19	4.83
20	4.44
21	5.22
22	5.22
23	5.27
24	5.05
25	3.27

Quantitative. The twenty-five quantitative statements gauged the participants' current knowledge and understanding regarding orphan care. The data collected from the pre-survey was informative and revealing. First, statements 1-7 gathered insights concerning the participants' understanding of God's position, biblically and theologically, regarding orphan care. The average responses for the first seven statements ranged from

agree to strongly agree. There was a clear indication that the participants possessed a base knowledge and worldview that God speaks clearly to the care of orphans. Second, statements 8-11 were structured to gather information and perspective concerning the participants' assessment of PBC's leadership regarding orphan care. The average responses to this collection of statements ranged from agree to strongly agree as well. The next block of statements, 12-18, aimed to assess their understanding of orphan care as well as consider motivations for engagement in this ministry. The results of these statements varied, revealing the need to increase in one's knowledge of orphan care through biblical, theological, and practical categories.

Statement 12 states, "I understand what 'orphan care' is." While the participants clearly affirmed that Scripture speaks to the care of this vulnerable population, the responses to this statement revealed that there is a less-than confident definition. The average response was "agree somewhat" (4). When compared to statement 16 in defining "orphan," the participants have a grasp of who orphans are but not a clear direction on how to care for them. There is a standard deviation of 1.53.

Statement 14 states, "Orphan care is primarily about the adoption of orphans." The average response to this statement ranged from disagree to somewhat disagree (2.83). The assessment reveals in general that the care of an orphan extends beyond the act of adoption, however, leaves room to develop the participants' understanding of how to engage in this care ministry. The standard deviation is 1.29.

Perhaps one of the most intriguing pre-study survey responses came with statement 15. This statement reads, "Every Christian has a responsibility to care for orphans." As the overarching goal is to train and equip church members to respond biblically, theologically, and practically to the care of orphans through active ministry, the statement responses indicate a priority of focus in the training material. The average responses ranged from disagree somewhat to agree somewhat (3.94). Furthermore, there was a standard deviation of 1.95 with four participants indicating "strongly disagree" and

four indicating “strongly agree.”

The responses to statement 15 are intriguing compared to statements 24 and 25. Statement 24 states, “I am willing to explore next steps in becoming involved in orphan care” and garnered an average response of agree (5.05), whereas statement 25 states, “I am willing to explore the next steps in becoming a foster or adoptive home” which had an average response of disagree somewhat (3.27).

This portion of the pre-study survey was enlightening and perplexing because statements 1-7 reflect a clear affirmation that God addresses orphans and their care through Scripture. However, according to statement 15, the affirmation of God’s Word on this matter is not as strongly viewed in the individual’s personal responsibility or engagement to the care of orphans. This suggests that one may view the care of orphans as important and consistent with God’s character revealed in Scripture, but not particularly something entrusted to each individual believer. Interestingly though, responses to statement 24 suggest that there is an interest to take on this biblical responsibility as the average response of participants was to “agree” with exploring “next steps in becoming involved in orphan care.”

Qualitative. In addition to the revealing data derived from the quantitative section, key insights were observed in the qualitative questions. The responses captured in the six qualitative questions enabled me to gain insights of the participants existing knowledge and exposed the areas where growth and change is desired. In respect to question 26, over half of the respondents provided statements defining their understanding of the term “orphan” that could be summarized this way: “An orphan is a child or children without parents to care for, love them, and guide them.” Equally, respondents clarified this by noting that this occurs due to “deceased parents” or “abandonment.”

Responses to question 28 that desired to see how many participants and their immediate family had any type of experience with orphan care, foster care, or adoption resulted in an unsurprising majority stating “no” involvement. However, some of the

specific reasons cited as a hinderance or barrier were enlightening. For example, one respondent noted that she and her husband were not able to foster or adopt due to health issues. Another respondent indicated the reason for her “no” is due to her involvement in her “called ministry” serving senior adults. These types of responses demonstrate a narrow view of the biblical framework for caring for orphans as well as the wide-net opportunities to serve orphans outside of fostering or adopting. One additional insightful response was captured as a wife indicated that this is an area that “did not appeal to her husband.” It is worth noting that she participated in the study without him. Thus, these responses demonstrate the value of this study to develop a deeper biblical understanding of orphan care as well as the variety of ways members can serve fit into their current context and conditions.

Question 29 sought to understand the participants’ current awareness of the need for orphan care in Dale County and beyond. Responses indicated most participants are aware that the need is real. However, over half of the participants noted that they were not aware of the extent of the need. Some responses went beyond the scope of the question, attesting that their awareness was due to biblical teachings (1 respondent), church communication (1 respondent), and pastoral advocacy (2 respondents).

Question 30 attempted to gauge the participants’ perception of the “most significant hinderance(s)” that prevents families from engaging in fostering, adoption, or supportive care. This question allowed participants to provide multiple answers. Participants identified that financial related issues are the largest barrier for families. Some respondents elaborated and noted uncertainty of expenses related to taking on additional children or, in the cases of adoption, legal fees and additional unknown expenses. There was a plethora of other identified hinderances such as age, health, fear, lack of knowledge or skills, government “hoops” and requirements, additional burdens placed on families, and the uncertainty of the impact on one’s family with the shifting of dynamics.

The final question attempts to procure the participants understanding of PBC’s current involvement in “any type of orphan care ministry or pro-life ministry?” I was encouraged that members were aware of our financial contributions to the Alabama Baptist Children’s Home and Family Ministry (ABCHFM) and the Dale County Pregnancy Center. Additionally, I was delighted that over half of the respondents noted awareness of the developing Family Strong ministry that seeks to develop care communities that support foster and/or adoptive families. Lastly, the majority indicated pastor advocacy in relationship to the church’s pursuit of orphan care ministries.

Develop Training Curriculum

The second goal of the ministry project was the development of a training curriculum. This goal involved the creation of a seven-week training curriculum entitled “Becoming a Church That Cares for Orphans,” which aimed to provide biblical, theological, and practical instruction to participants. The objective of the training curriculum was to increase the participants’ knowledge in the realm of orphan care. An expert panel consisting of four evaluators assessed the content via a provided rubric. This panel included two pastors with at least ten years of pastoral ministry, a social worker with the Alabama Baptist Children’s Home and Family Ministry, and a professor from a Southern Baptist college or seminary. This goal was considered successful when it received 90 percent marks of satisfactory or higher. Table 2 shows the individual evaluator scores and the average of their scoring. The maximum score for each evaluator was 32.

Table 2. Scores for each training curriculum evaluator

Evaluator	Score
Pastor	32
Pastor	32
Social Worker	31
Seminary Professor	32
Average	31.75 (99.18%)

The training curriculum was determined to be exemplary. Some of the assessment feedback included clarity of content, structure and flow of the material moving from “education” to “engagement,” and detailed exposition of the scriptural content, as well as visually appealing. The criteria of 90 percent or higher was achieved.

Increase Knowledge

The third goal sought to record an increase in knowledge regarding the Christian’s response to caring for orphans. Of the eighteen participants who completed the pre-OCIA, fifteen submitted their completed post-OCIA survey. Tables 3 and 4 reflect the exclusion of the three participants who failed to complete or submit their post-OCIA. Table 3 demonstrates that fourteen out of the fifteen participants saw an increase in scoring with one participant seeing a decrease in scoring.

Table 3. Pre- and post-OCIA results

Participants	Pre-OCIA	Post-OCIA	Score Change	Percentage Change
0898	108	120	12	11.1%
9505	113	131	18	15.9%
0823	123	130	7	5.7%
2066	120	128	8	6.7%
5309	132	140	8	6.1%
1000	121	127	6	4.9%
3817	124	125	1	0.8%
0876	126	129	3	2.4%
2687	121	130	9	7.4%
4426	121	127	6	4.9%
0433	130	134	4	3.1%
0681	124	130	6	4.9%
6710	118	132	14	11.9%
4182	126	123	-3	-2.4%
8639	124	132	8	6.5%

The most significant change in responses was observed in items 12, 14, and 15. Item 12 stated, “Orphan care is primarily about the adoption of orphans.” The training curriculum produced an expansion of the learner’s understanding that orphan care is not limited to the act of adopting a child but instead is multi-faceted. This is demonstrated as

the pre-OCIA noted that the average response was 4, whereas the post-OCIA average response was 3.33 indicating a shift from “agree” to “disagree somewhat.”

Item 14 read, “Adoption is primarily for families who cannot have biological children.” Similarly, the training rendered insight of the various motivations that would move someone to adopt; namely, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, respondents demonstrated an increased depth of understanding that many engage in adoption beyond simply an inability to bear natural children. This is observed as the pre-OCIA revealed an average score 3, whereas the post-OCIA reflected an average score of 2, indicating a shift from “disagree somewhat” to “disagree.”

Lastly, item 15 stated, “Becoming a foster home is for families who seek additional family income.” Perhaps the most significant swing was observed in this survey item. The pre-OCIA produced an average response score of 5, whereas the post-OCIA average was 1, indicating a major shift from “agree” to “strongly disagree.” This is an encouraging transformation in thinking promoting that money is not the proper motivation for entering foster care ministry.

The results of the pre- and post-OCIA demonstrate an increase in knowledge of the subject matter. Interestingly, there is a diversity of gains with the most significant increase being 15.9 percent. However, one participant had a decrease in their results scoring -2.38 percent. This decrease can be explained when a comparison of the pre- and post-OCIA determined a drastic discrepancy with two items (23, 25). Item 23 stated, “Pro-life is a robust worldview that includes the protection of the unborn as well as the care for orphans, disabled, and other vulnerable peoples.” In the pre-OCIA, this participant selected “strongly agree.” However, in the post-OCIA, the participant left this selection blank. Item 25 stated, “I am willing to explore the next steps in becoming a foster or adoptive home.” In the pre-OCIA, this participant selected “agree somewhat.” However, in similar fashion to item 23, the participant did not offer an answer to the item. The two blank responses dramatically altered the summary score resulting in the appearance of a decrease. Yet, the

two blank responses may be the result of an oversight or accidental omission of scores. Due to the anonymity of the survey and despite the small group, it was difficult to determine which participant completed this survey. Thus, the outlier score remains as it is presented.

The *t*-test results affirm the effectiveness of the training curriculum. During the implementation period, fifteen participants completed and submitted pre- and post-OCIA surveys. A *t*-test demonstrated a significant positive change in participant knowledge related to orphan care as ($t_{(14)} = 5.405, p < .05$).

Table 4. *T*-test results

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	Pre-Test Total	Post-Test Total
Mean	122.066667	129.2
Variance	36.352381	22.3142857
Observations	15	15
Pearson Correlation	0.57130465	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	14	
t Stat	-5.4053011	
P(T<=t) one-tail	4.6361E-05	
t Critical one-tail	1.76131014	
P(T<=t) two-tail	9.2722E-05	
t Critical two-tail	2.14478669	

Ministry Plan

The fourth and final goal was to develop a specific and robust ministry plan to engage participants for future service through orphan care. This ministry plan sought to arouse members to participate in the care of orphans by providing a biblical foundational and clear pathway for (1) considering and exploring licensure as a foster or adoptive family, and (2) the engagement in support ministry roles. The second pathway became the primary objective for the church through the development of our Family Strong FAM.

The Family Strong ministry is detailed in session 5 of the training curriculum and has emphasis on the creation of “Care Communities” that provide a one-year commitment of wrap-around care and support to an identified foster or adoptive family.

The ministry plan was measured by an expert panel consisting of three pastors or ministry leaders of churches that have a current ministry plan that focuses on orphan care ministry. The panel consisted of one pastor, one church ministry leader, and one entity ministry leader who are engaged in orphan care ministry. This goal was considered successful when 90 percent of the rubric items were scored as satisfactory or higher. The following table reflects the evaluator scores.

Table 5. Scores for each ministry plan evaluator

Criteria	Pastor	Church Ministry Leader	Entity Ministry Leader
The goal of the ministry plan is to train members for wholistic care to those in foster care and eligible for adoption is clearly stated.	4	4	4
The need to train members for orphan care engagement is clearly stated in the ministry plan.	4	4	4
The material presented in the ministry plan is faithful to the Bible.	4	4	4
The material presented in the ministry plan is theologically sound.	4	4	4
The components of the ministry plan are well-organized and concise.	4	4	4
A timeline for implementing the ministry plan is clearly stated.	4	4	4
The number of people necessary for implementing the ministry plan have been stated.	4	4	4
Obstacles that may hinder implementing the ministry plan have been stated.	3	4	3
Overall, I believe the plan, when executed will move the members at PBC to engage in orphan care ministry.	4	4	3
Totals: 105 out of max 108	35	36	34
Average: 3.83 (95.75%)	3.88	4	3.77

While the ministry project exceeded the benchmark of 90 percent, scoring at 95.75 percent, some helpful feedback was incorporated to enhance and strengthen the plan. First, criteria 8 states, “Obstacles that may hinder implementing the ministry plan have

been stated.” Two of the three scorers rated this with a “3” rather than “4.” Both noted that some obstacles were identified in the introduction and other areas of the plan but could have been detailed more intentionally in the presentation. In addition, one evaluator rated criteria 9 with a “3” as well. He noted that this score was due to the printed language of the item stating that the use of “move *the* members” implied that “all” would engage. The constructive feedback suggested shifting the language to “move *some* members” to allow space to stretch and grow, avoiding potential disappointment when some delay engagement or choose not to engage at all.

Strengths of the Project

Several strengths stand out during the development and implementation of this ministry project. First, the driving force behind the project and the training curriculum is biblical and theological. The training material, for example, consisted of four in-depth sessions that focused on a diverse palate of key biblical passages and theological themes. These were instrumental in establishing the primary motivator for orphan care as viewed through the character and commitment of God expressly experienced through an encounter with his grace in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, this approach empowers Christians to engage by bursting perceptions that orphan care is limited to fostering or adopting. Orphan care is not simply for a “special called elite Christian” but for all believers to engage.

Second, the training material was well received and highly scored by the expert panel. The conclusions of the panel highlighted the richness of the biblical text, theological themes, structure, and flow of the content, as well as the appealing visual images and layout of the material. I developed the material in a way that enabled participants to move freely from theme to theme while maintaining cohesiveness in the overall purpose. Also, the aesthetics of the material was inviting for participants, making it more readable and easier to engage.

A third strength was seen in the response to participation. At the time of this

project, I am in my ninth year as the pastor of PBC. I am blessed to have established intimate relationships with so many in our faith family. As a result, I was overjoyed that about one-third of the congregation participated. I believe that there was a two-fold motivation for this response. First, there was a strong desire to support me in my doctoral adventure. My faith family desired to come alongside me in this journey and support me through participation. However, more so, there was and remains a genuine response to God's Spirit in shaping our church to care for orphans. Thus, there was a curiosity and eagerness to learn more about God's position on this matter and an inclination to partner with him through faithfulness in order to care for orphans.

Fourth, the providence of God brought together this DEdMin project with the fruit of our missions team. Our church was concurrently developing our Family Strong ministry at the time of the development and implementation of the ministry project. Thus, our church was already being introduced to biblical motivations and relevant needs for orphan care. As a result of the training and the vision casting for Family Strong, at the conclusion of this training we have four trained advocates and started the process of developing our first care community. This training has positioned others to explore more of our Family Strong ministry, creating the potential for additional care communities in the near future.

Weaknesses and Improvements of the Project

In addition to the strengths of this project, there are some notable weaknesses and areas of improvement. The first weakness I observed is in respect to the implementation of the project and the allotted time for each training session. I allotted one hour for sessions 1-5, and 7, and one and a half hours for session 6 (the panel night). While I originally indicated that all sessions would be allotted up to the hour and a half mark, due to church calendaring events, I was not able to go beyond the hour mark. Furthermore, I failed to account for the large amount of content captured in the first four educational sections. The training material consisted of 4-5 pages of study notes for each of the four

educational sessions. However, once engaged in teaching the content, it became clear that there were times that I had to rush through and limit discussion. For future occasions of this study, I would divide those training sessions to allow for more time to teach and discuss.

Second, while there was a positive turnout in the number of members who participated, there was a disappointment in the number of absent young families in this study. Several families in our church are in their 20s and 30s who did not participate. Upon reflection, I would have been more intentional in recruiting them. While I was consistent in marketing the training and using a variety of vehicles to communicate it, I failed to approach individual couples and families about participating. If I had been more intentional in approaching individual couples, I would have gained insights into the rationale for their lack of participation. In a future training session, I will identify prospective families and approach them one-on-one in hopes of their participation.

A third weakness in the implementation of the project rests in the fact that I allowed some flexibility in training sessions. For example, one participant was not able to attend the training sessions, which were on Sunday afternoons at 5:00 p.m., due to work. So, I arranged to conduct one-on-one sessions. These were not as productive in the sense that the training material was created for a small group format that allowed for teaching, discussion, and group activities. Thus, he missed out on some key learning approaches. For future implementations, I would require that participation be restricted to in-person only to maximize the learning experience.

Theological Reflections

In the introduction of this ministry project, I declared that the church, including PBC, is to engage in the care of orphans because this is a gospel issue. While previously being familiar with the standard passages on this matter (i.e., Jas 1:27; Ps 85:5-6), I was moved to delve deeper into the riches of God's Word discovering His disposition. In fact, as presented in the preparatory sermon from Psalm 85, I have been enamored by the

language of “God’s character and commitment.” God has consistently revealed His divine nature and purposes in Scripture and ultimately in the ministry of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Scriptures, we are ongoingly invited to view God act according to His character as seen in His commitment to his great name. God is by nature good and compassionate; thus, He acts out of his character by intervening with those who are vulnerable and in need. This is seen in God’s redemption of sinners through Jesus Christ. This is reflected in the redeemed as they care for those in foster care and eligible for adoption.

I am humbled as I reflect on the centrality of Scripture as the motivator for Pinckard Baptist’s engagement in orphan care. The church is not going to respond simply to statistics or sad stories. Rather, the church will truly be moved to engage because of our growth in grace through mediation and application of the Word of God. When the church truly approaches humanity through the lens of the *imago Dei*, Christians will see that the vulnerable are neighbors who require intervention in the name of the one who first intervened on our behalf. Equally, I am reminded that God works primarily through His people. The Word shapes hearts, the Spirit compels to action, and the church steps into the gap as God’s ambassadors bring the hope of the gospel through proclamation along with tangible, practical care. This care, as observed in this project, is seen through opening the hearts and homes to foster children in care, expanding families through adoption; and/or expending oneself in selfless services through care communities. I am grateful for the work God has done thus far and am hopeful for long-term ministry through our church.

Personal Reflections

A decade ago I was serving as a bi-vocational pastor who also worked at the local CPS agency, Dale County DHR. I was eager to engage in this position because our family had worked with DHR in the adoption of our oldest two sons. While I began my three-year career with DHR as the intake worker, I gradually moved to serve as the

resource officer. My duties ranged from conducting court order home studies for custody cases to licensing foster and adoptive families. During this tenure, I dreamed of the possibilities of building relationships with churches to create a pipeline of endless resources for foster and adoptive children. The Lord led me to Pinckard before I could fully develop this vision. Nonetheless, my burning desire, now, is to lead our church to engage in the care of orphans.

The providence of God is simply mind boggling. The transition to full-time ministry, a challenging start to my tenure at PBC, and COVID, among other trials, lowered the priority of this ministry. About three years ago my heart was stirred to lead our church in identifying our mission DNA. My hope was to form a “missions team” and task this group with prayerfully seeking God’s direction in forming a vision for our church in this regard. My initial thoughts were to identify and partner with an IMB missionary with the aim of offering prayer support and financial contributions, and eventually becoming a sending church—sending ministry teams to engage in short-term trips with this partnership. The Lord answered our petitions but did so in an unexpected way.

I applied to the DEdMin program and was accepted several years ago. However, I did not pursue it at the time due to family dynamics. I reapplied in 2021, accepted and started in 2022. Immediately, my desire was to develop and implement a project related to the care of orphans. As I entered this journey, the providence of God would take two concurrent pathways and merge them. My doctoral studies and project pathway were refined, and the goal was clear as reflected in the project. Yet, the providence of God shaped the heart of our six-person missions team to identify our missions DNA. Two priorities surfaced. First, our church would commit to and facilitate members to engage in NAMB’s “Serve Tours” and short-term mission trips. Three members of our team would helm this prong. Second, our church would cultivate a mission strategy and ministry plan to care for orphans. At this conclusion, the doctoral project and mission’s DNA converged.

In the span of two decades, the Lord formed my family through adoption, placed me on the inside of DHR to grow in my awareness of the ins and outs of CPS to produce a greater zeal for this area, developed key partnerships with CPS and CPA entities and personnel that remain today, and then planted my family in a church that collectively partnered with their pastor and more importantly sought the wisdom of the Holy Spirit bringing us to this climatic moment. The grace of God is seen in the development and implementation of a training program that touched one-third of the congregation, positioning them to care for orphans as well as produce a clear plan to move onward in obedience to the Word of God. I am in awe at his magnificent plan that worked out over these two decades. God faithfully acts according to his character and his commitment through his church!

Conclusion

I am forever grateful to God for stirring my heart to engage in this degree program. I am thankful that He has afforded me the resources to sustain me through this process. I am optimistic and hopeful of his unfolding will being done through our church, a church that cares for orphans. As I close, there are some additional desires that I hope will come to fruition from this program. First, I desire to see God raise up foster families, adoptive families, and multiple care communities through PBC. Second, I desire to see God open opportunities for me to assist churches in our association to replicate this ministry in their ministry contexts. Third, I hope to one day create a ministry “store” that will house new suitcases, new clothes, and housing supplies that foster and adoptive families can come and receive free resources. Lastly, I desire to publish a book that marries my family’s journey with the content found in this project. I can only imagine, if the Lord permits, what the next decade of ministry will look like as we provide holistic care to those in foster care and are eligible for adoption. *Sola Deo gloria.*

APPENDIX 1
CURRICULUM EVALUATION TOOL

The curriculum evaluation tool critically assesses the effectiveness of the material used in the training of the participants. This tool considered (1) biblical accuracy, (2) scope, (3) pedagogy, and (4) practicality. This evaluation tool was used by a four-person expert panel consisting of two pastors with at least ten years of senior pastor experience, the Rev. Jim Peters of Daleville Baptist Church and Dr. Eric Fuller of Ozark Baptist Church, Professor Lucas Sabatier M. Leite of Seminário Bíblico Palavra da Vida, and Kim McGainey LICSW, Southeast Area Director with the Alabama Baptist Children's Home and Family Ministry.

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Accuracy					
Each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture.					
Each lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible.					
Scope					
The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.					
The curriculum sufficiently covers a biblical pedagogical methodology.					
Pedagogy					
Each lesson was clear, containing a big idea.					
Each lesson provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material.					
Practicality					
The curriculum clearly details how to prepare others to live with a biblical worldview concerning orphan care.					
At the end of the course, participants will be able to take next steps in engaging in orphan care.					

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 2

STRATEGIC MINISTRY PLAN EVALUATION TOOL

The strategic ministry plan evaluation tool assessed the ministry plan for PBC. The strategic ministry plan was presented to an expert panel of three pastors or ministry leaders who serve in a church context that has a well-developed and active orphan care ministry/strategy: Eric Donop, ministry leader at Calvary Baptist Church; Marshall Henderson, pastor of FBC Ft. Payne; and Tim Crist, manager of church partnerships at Lifeline Children's Services.

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Ministry Plan Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The goal of the ministry plan to train members for wholistic care for those in foster care and eligible for adoption is clearly stated.					
The need to train members for orphan care engagement is clearly stated in the ministry plan.					
The material presented in the ministry plan is faithful to the Bible.					
The material presented in the ministry plan is theologically sound.					
The components of the ministry plan are well-organized and concise.					
A timeline for implementing the ministry plan is clearly stated.					
The number of people necessary for implementing the ministry plan have been stated.					
Obstacles that may hinder implementing the ministry plan have been stated.					
Overall, I believe the plan, when executed will move the members at PBC to engage in orphan care ministry.					

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 3
ORPHAN CARE INVENTORY AND
ASSESSMENT (OCIA)

The OCIA served as the assessment tool to evaluate participants' biblical, theological, and practical understanding of orphan care. Participants answered each statement honestly to procure accuracy in the data findings. The OCIA was given twice, in a pre- and post- curriculum format, to capture any changes and growth in knowledge and understanding. The OCIA was distributed three weeks prior to the first session with participants returning completed surveys 10-14 days prior to the start of the training. The OCIA is an adapted version of the Orphan Care Assessment (OCA) and used with permission by author Marshall Henderson.¹

¹ Marshall Smith Henderson, "Leading Families of First Baptist Church in Fort Payne, Alabama, to Participate in Orphan Care through Foster Care and Adoption" (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022), 99-103

ORPHAN CARE INVENTORY & ASSESSMENT (OCIA)

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess the current understanding of the role of the church in orphan care and attitudes toward individual involvement in orphan care ministry. Christopher Woodall is conducting this research for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before your involvement in the project curriculum as well as answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project curriculum.

Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project. Given the relational nature of church ministry, providing your name is preferred; however, if you prefer to remain anonymous, please use the last four digits of your social security number or phone number for an ID#. Your name or number will be used solely for the purpose of matching and analyzing your pre- and post- OCIA.

I agree to participate I do not agree to participate

Name _____ or 4-digit ID# _____

Section 1

This first section will obtain demographic information. Please answer honestly and to the best of your knowledge.

Directions: Answer the following questions by filling in the blank space provided.

1. What is your current age? _____
2. Would you consider yourself a Christian? _____ Yes _____ No
3. Are you a member of PBC? _____ Yes _____ No
4. What is your marital status? _____ Married _____ Single _____ Divorced
5. Do you have children? _____ Yes _____ No
If yes, please indicated how many _____
6. Do you have any children age 18 or younger living in the home? _____ Yes _____ No
7. Have you or any member of your family ever been orphaned, placed in foster care, or adopted? _____ Yes _____ No

If yes, please elaborate

Section 2

The second section is an assessment of theological understanding of orphan care as well as an assessment of individual motivations regarding orphan care ministry.

Directions: Respond the following statements by placing a check mark in the box that most closely represents your current practices or beliefs.

The scale is as follows:

SD = Strongly Disagree,
AS = Agree Somewhat,

D = Disagree,
A = Agree,

DS = Disagree Somewhat,
SA = Strongly Agree.

	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
1. The Bible teaches significantly on God’s care for the fatherless/orphan.						
2. The Bible instructs Christians to care for the poor, hurting, or vulnerable in the world.						
3. The Bible commands Christians to care for orphans.						
4. Orphan care is part of how the church fulfills its mission.						
5. I understand how caring for orphans fits within the mission of the church.						
6. The Bible teaches that Christians have been adopted into God’s family.						
7. Christians have ample theological motivation to engage in social causes in the community.						
8. Our church has instructed its members how to care for the poor, hurting, or vulnerable.						
9. Our church has instructed its members to have a biblical perspective on orphan care.						
10. Our church has provided leadership for its members on how to be involved in orphan care.						
11. Our church has taught that foster care, adoption, and support ministry are gospel-motivated issues for Christians.						
12. I understand what “orphan care” is.						
13. I understand how children become orphans.						
14. Orphan care is primarily about the adoption of “orphans.”						
15. Every Christian has a responsibility to care for orphans.						
16. Adoption is primarily for families who cannot have biological children.						
17. Becoming a foster home is for families who seek additional family income.						
18. Some people adopt because they are motivated as Christians to do so.						
19. There is an acute need for foster and adoptive homes in Dale County.						

	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
20. The costs (financial or emotional) of foster care, adoption, and supportive ministry are the most significant hindrances to more Christians becoming involved in orphan care.						
21. Christians can successfully partner with government agencies or other entities to become foster or adoptive homes.						
22. There is an acute need for our church to be involved in foster care, adoption, or supportive ministry.						
23. There are other ways, apart from being a foster family or adoptive family, to care well for orphans.						
24. I am willing to explore next steps in becoming involved in orphan care.						
25. I am willing to explore the next steps in becoming a foster or adoptive home.						

Section 3

This third section is a qualitative assessment of theological understanding and individual motivation regarding Christians and orphan care.

Directions: Please provide a written response to the following questions (you may continue answers on the back if you need additional space):

26. How do you define *orphan* and what do you think caring for orphans in the 21st century entails?

27. Many Christians cite religious motivations for individuals and churches involving themselves in orphan care. In what ways, if any, do you think the Bible instructs or motivates Christians to care for orphans? Reference any texts that might support your response.

28. Is your immediate family involved in any type of orphan care, foster care, or adoption process? _____ Yes _____ No

Please describe any relevant knowledge, reasons, hinderances, or motivations.

29. What is your awareness of the need for foster and adoptive homes for children in Dale County and beyond?

30. What do you perceive is the most significant hindrance that prevents families from becoming foster or adoptive families as well as not engaging in orphan care support ministry?

31. To your knowledge, is PBC involved in any type of orphan care ministry or pro-life ministry? _____ Yes _____ No

Please describe how the church is involved or elaborate why you perceive the church is not involved.

APPENDIX 4
T-TEST RESULTS

T-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	Pre-Test Total	Post-Test Total
Mean	122.066667	129.2
Variance	36.352381	22.3142857
Observations	15	15
Pearson Correlation	0.57130465	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	14	
t stat	-5.4053011	
P(T<=t) one-tail	4.6361E-05	
t Critical one-tail	1.76131014	
P(T<=t) two-tail	9.2722E-05	
t Critical two-tail	2.14478669	

APPENDIX 5

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH LIFELINE CHILDREN SERVICES

Interview Template
For Staff Members at
Lifeline Children's Services
Birmingham, AL
June 22-23, 2023

Purpose: I will be conducting a series of interviews with staff and professionals at Lifeline Children's Services in Birmingham, AL. The purpose of these interviews is to gather additional insights and reflections to be used, primarily, in the development of the training material related to chapter 4 DEdMin project and, secondarily, to potentially cite in chapters 2-3 of the DEdMin project.

Interview Questions/Topics: The following are general areas to cover in the interview of the staff members at Lifeline Children's Services.

**Orphan care is defined, for the purpose of my DEdMin project, as individuals and churches engaging in foster care, adoption, and supportive care ministry.*

1. Discussion on how the Bible informs Christians/churches to engage in orphan care.
 - What does the Bible say about the church and orphan care?
 - What doctrine or theological lens shapes your understanding of God's disposition to care for orphans?
2. Discussion on the barriers that hinder Christians/churches from engaging in orphan care.
 - What barriers hinder individual Christians and Christian couples from engaging in orphan care?
 - What barriers hinder local churches from engaging in orphan care?
 - What measures are effective to help overcome those barriers?
3. Discussion on models within the local church that are effective in creating a culture of orphan care.
 - What leadership traits are evident in those leading these models of ministry?
 - What characteristics are evident in those who are serving through the models of ministry?

- How did these models begin and develop?
 - What supports and barriers are experienced or being experienced?
4. Listening to the stories of those who are engaged in orphan care:
- Why are you involved in orphan care?
 - What are you doing in orphan care ministry?
 - How have you seen the church respond to orphan care in your local context?
 - What partnerships are you and/or your church connected with?

Schedule for Thursday/Friday Interviews

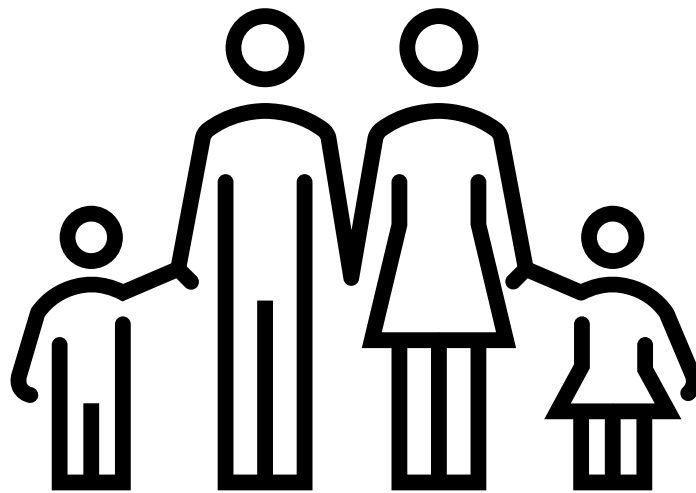
Here are my thoughts on a schedule with name, title, and specific insight they could give:

- Thursday, June 22
 - 9 AM - **Oscar Perez**, Global Orphan Care Latin America Coordinator, Colombian National seeing how the Church in other cultures are implementing orphan care ministries.
 - 10 AM - **Nancy Osborne**, Director of Domestic Services (foster care, domestic adoption)
 - 11 AM - **Beth Perez**, Director of Education Services, Also lived in Colombia (Oscar's wife) and gets to see how we can and are helping to educate foster/adoptive families further as well as the local Church
 - Noon - lunch break
 - 1 PM - **Traci Newell**, Sr. Director of Church-Based Programs, oversees ministry efforts of Families Count parenting class, Heritage Builders teen advocacy/ILP ministry, and a new venture called Worthy (discipleship ministry to those experiencing unexpected pregnancy)
- Friday, June 23
 - 9 AM - **Rick Morton**, Sr VP of Engagement, adoptive dad, taught at NOBTS and Southern, author of Orphanology, engaged many churches in implementing orphan care ministries.
 - 10 AM - **Jana Lombardo** or **Karla Thrasher**, lead our International Adoption ministry.
 - 12:30 PM - **Chris Johnson**, VP of Church Partnerships and Gov't Relations, foster/adoptive dad, former pastor, worked for Gov of KY to bridge the gap b/t church and gov't for foster care needs.

APPENDIX 6
TRAINING CURRICULUM

Participants engaged in a seven-week training curriculum entitled “Becoming a Church that Cares for Orphans.” The teaching manual is found in this appendix.

Becoming a Church that Cares for Orphans



Christopher L. Woodall

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All Scripture passages and references
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All quotes in insert are derived from DEdMin project paper.
All other citations are footnoted and found in the bibliography.

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INTRODUCTION

Thank you for participating in this training material titled “Becoming a Church that Cares for Orphans.” There are several motivations for doing this project. First, there is a clear scriptural mandate for God’s people to engage in the care of orphans as a reflection of His love for the vulnerable and in response to our own spiritual adoption, as God helps us who are hopeless, helpless, and far off. Our spiritual adoption sees God intervening on our behalf, and through Jesus Christ, we find redemption, reconciliation, and restoration with the Father as we are “adopted as sons” (Ephesians 1:5).

Second, this training curriculum is part of my doctoral program. As you know, I am currently pursuing my Doctor of Educational Ministry through The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary with a concentration in biblical counseling. In addition to the four counseling seminars, I am required to create, implement, and evaluate a ministry “project” that is conducted through my local church. My project is entitled “Training the Members of Pinckard Baptist Church in Pinckard, AL for Wholistic Care to Those who are in Foster Care and Eligible for Adoption.” Your participation in this project will enable me to finish chapter 4 and chapter 5 of the project. This ministry project includes the pre-survey entitled “Orphan Care Inventory & Assessment” or OCIA, the seven-session curriculum and training, and the post-survey OCIA. You have completed the pre-survey and the information provided has helped shape this training material. The post-survey will allow me the opportunity to gauge the effectiveness of the training as well as equip you for NEXT STEPS involvement.

The final motivator is personal. Stacy and I know first-hand the joy of adoption. As you know, our oldest two sons, Robert and Adrian are through adoption. I wish our church have had a FAM when we started our adoption journey. We would have benefited from WRAP-AROUND care in raising a special needs child as well as welcoming a teenager. Those who foster and/or adopt experience a gambit of emotions and need support. Statistics show that foster families that have WRAP-AROUND support are 90% more like to continue fostering whereas those who lack the support quit after the first year (FAM Training). This training will lay the foundation for our church to become a faith family that cares for foster families, adoptive families, and those involved throughout the process.

May you find this journey filled with joy. May the Lord give you wisdom from His word that renews your mind and transforms your life (Romans 12:1-2). May we walk in the will of God to “visit orphans in their time of trouble” (James 1:27). May we find our role. Let this vision be true of Pinckard Baptist Church. To God be the glory!

At PBC we care about orphans. Some of us will seek to bring children into our homes;
the rest of us will seek to find ways to serve and support them.

Serving Christ together,

Pastor Chris Woodall

KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Child Protective Services. The term *Child Protective Services (CPS)* refers to state entities that are tasked with investigating, assessing, and dealing with abuse and neglect situations. CPS, for our context, refers to the Department of Human Resources (DHR) division that deals with child abuse cases, adult abuse cases, foster care, adoption, and resources.

Child Placement Agency. The term *Child Placement Agency (CPA)* refers to entities, public or private, that provides training, certification, and oversees foster care and adoptions. Examples of CPAs include the Alabama Baptist Children’s Home and Family Ministry (ABCHFM) or Lifeline Christian Services. These entities deal with domestic and/or international orphan care related services.

Family Advocacy Ministry (FAM). The term *FAM* refers to the model of ministry developed by Promise686 affiliated with the North American Mission Board (NAMB) Send Relief.

Family Strong. Our FAM is called *Family Strong*. Our ministry plan is detailed in session 5 of this training curriculum.

Foster Care. *Foster care* refers to the “temporary service provided by States for children who cannot live within their families.”¹ This placement is out of the home with an approved foster family. The placement can be at least twenty-four hours or extend several weeks or months depending on the circumstances related to placement.

Orphan Care. For this project, *orphan care* will serve as an umbrella term for those who are in foster care as well as those who are eligible for adoption. Children who are eligible for adoption are those currently in foster care and parental rights have been terminated, resulting in them becoming eligible to be adopted by an approved adoptive resource. Specifically, *orphan care* relates to the church’s involvement in providing care to those in the system by serving as a foster or adoptive parent, or in supportive role.

Natural Adoption. *Natural adoption* refers to “the social, emotional, and legal process through which children who will not be raised by their birth parents become full and permanent legal members of another family while maintaining genetic and psychological connections to their birth family.”²

Spiritual Adoption. *Spiritual adoption* refers to the legal and relational change between God and sinner through the redemptive grace and work of Jesus Christ in

¹ Child Welfare Information Gateway, “Glossary-F: Foster Care,” accessed July 12, 2022, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/glossary/glossaryf/>.

² Child Welfare Information Gateway, “Glossary-A: Adoption,” accessed July 12, 2022, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/glossary/glossarya/>.

justification. This spiritual adoption is revealed and expounded in numerous New Testament texts such as Ephesians 1:3-14.

Termination of Parental Rights. *Termination of parent rights (TPR)* refers to the “voluntary or involuntary legal severance of the rights of a parent to the care, custody, and control of a child and to any benefits that, by law, would flow to the parent from the child, such as inheritance.”³

Vulnerable Children. The term *vulnerable children* is the preferred language used by Promise686 and in their FAM model of ministry. This term primarily refers to children who are in foster care but can be generally applicable to other vulnerable children including those who are eligible for adoption, those who have experience trauma, among others. **Notice the language shift in session five in relationship to the model of ministry.**

³ Child Welfare Information Gateway, “Glossary–T,” accessed July 12, 2022, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/glossary/glossaryt/>.

SESSION 1

Biblical Foundations I

Lesson Title: *The Image of God and Orphan Care*

Lesson Objective: To develop and deepen the Christian's understanding of being "pro-life" through the doctrine of the *imago Dei*.

Key Questions:

- (1) What is the doctrine of the *imago Dei*?
- (2) What are the implications of this doctrine?
- (3) How does the Christian's understanding of the *imago Dei* shape one's heart to care for orphans?

Main Idea: Christians engage in orphan care because of the affirmation of the sanctity of all human life, which fuels engagement and care to the orphan.

Foundational Verses:

Genesis 1:26-27: Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So, God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him: male and female He created them.

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for participating in this training series. It is my prayer and desire to see God lead our church in the care of orphans. My hope is three-fold:

- For you to grow in the truth and knowledge of God's word to clearly see His character and activity.
- For you to develop a deeper love for God, His good news, and replicate His love toward serving others, including those involved in the orphan care system: orphaned children, biological parents, foster and adoptive families, child welfare and placement personnel.
- For you to identify your role in orphan care ministry. How will God call you to serve in the care of orphans?

"The orphan care movement is not merely a response to disturbing images and orphan horror stories. It is a response to something bigger than that. The driving force behind the movement is biblical and theological." – Matthew Thompson, *Adoption Rates Among Evangelicals*.

“The gospel of Jesus Christ means our families and churches ought to be at the forefront of the adoption of orphans close to home and around the world.” – Russell Moore, *Adopted for Life*

In this journey, you will participate in seven sessions. The first four sessions are focused on understanding God’s word concerning orphan care. These four sessions are labelled **Education** as we survey the biblical foundations for orphan care. Session five is **Engagement**. In this session, we will discuss the church’s ministry plan to care for orphans. This is the Family Advocacy Ministry

or FAM. Session six is **Expertise** as we will be privileged to have a panel discussion and Q&A with a representative from Dale County DHR, Alabama Baptist Children Home & Family Ministry, as well as a foster/adoptive family. Our final session is **Next Steps** as we will wrap up study and look at responding to God’s word and the need to serve through orphan care.

UNDERSTANDING THE *IMAGO DEI*

Defining the *imago Dei*

In short, the *imago Dei* refers to God’s creation of humanity to be the image bearers of the living LORD. As image bearers, humanity is to represent Him in governing and stewarding creation, to reflect His character, to revere Him through worship, to enjoy in Him relationship, and to render Him glory. Consider the glory of God as He reveals Himself in Genesis 1:26-27.



- The introduction of the Triune God – “Us” and “Our” language.
- The Creator who “make” and “created” humanity.
- The glory of God in the gender distinction as “male” and “female”.
- The image bearers of God would steward creation to His glory.

Biblical Convictions

- 1) God endows humanity with value and worth.
 - God confirms that life begins at conception (Psalm 139:13-16).
 - God commands for the protection of life (Exodus 20:13).
 - God condemns child sacrifice (2 Kings 16:3).

- 2) God is concerned with all who are made in His image.
 - God’s care is expressed in daily provision (Matthew 6:25-34).
 - God’s compassion is extended to vulnerable peoples.
 - The impoverished (Proverbs 19:17).
 - The infirmed (Matthew 4:23).
 - The alien and stranger (Leviticus 19:34; Deuteronomy 27:19).
 - The widow and orphan (James 1:27; Exodus 22:22).

Human value is not determined by one’s age, development, physical condition, socio-economic conditions, societal status, or race and ethnicity. Winston Smith says, “To dismiss God as God, one must also dismiss His image bearers as nothing more than a population of meaningless creatures.”

The Pro-Life Spectrum

What is your understanding of pro-life?

What does it mean for Christians to be pro-life?

The *imago Dei* fosters a pro-life worldview that is wholistic in concern and care. Christians who rightly apply the image of God approach pro-life wholistically. A pro-life ethic operates from a worldview that God is concerned about human life from conception through natural death, regardless of one's condition, cultural status, or

context. Consider this simplistic spectrum.

The Unborn	The Orphan	The Vulnerable	The Elderly
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counsel crisis pregnancies. • Advocate for the cessation of abortion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in foster care or expand family through adoption. • Serve those who are serving through foster care and adoption. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serve individuals and families who have disabilities. • Support ministries that care for the sick, impoverished or who are in vulnerable categories. • Minister to victims of abuse. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support terminally ill patients. • Serve families that have experienced loss and dealing with grief. • Advocate for the widow and widower.

The pro-life movement has, of all the recent Christian forays into public engagement, been the most holistic in its work, seeing the need for laws to protect unborn children but also a cultural witness to persuade women not to abort, men not to abandon their children, and society to see the goodness and value of every person even when shielded from sight in the womb or when sick or diseased or developmentally challenged. . . . While a pro-life, whole-life witness has a long way to go yet, the church does not live up to its caricature as those who, in the words of one critic; believe that life beings at conception and ends at birth. – Russell Moore, *Onward*

The *imago Dei* Fuels Compassionate Care

“Being pro-life means that not only do we see abortion as murder, but we also see our apathy against injustice toward life outside of the womb as a co-conspirator in the fight for life.” – Herbie Newell, *Image Bearers*

The Illustration of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

- Redefining our “neighbor” via *imago Dei*.
- Contrast the Samaritan to the religious leader’s response.
- How does the parable reflect the *imago Dei* and fuel the church to compassionate care?

In session three, we will devote more attention to developing a culture of care by examining several key passages of Scriptures that will shape and inform our hearts to engage in orphan care ministry. For now, consider the grace of God through Christ bestowed on His people as they live our compassionate care to the vulnerable.



Group Activity: Read, reflect, and answer the questions related to Matthew 25:34-40. Discuss the conclusions and consider this passage considering the doctrine of the *imago Dei*.

Matthew 25:34-40

Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’ Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or named and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to me.’

1. What in the passage demonstrates that humanity has value and worth?
2. What in the passage demonstrates that God is concerned with His creation?
3. What does Jesus say about our care for others according to the passage?

CONCLUSION

“Not every Christian is called to adopt or foster a child. But every Christian is called to care for orphans.” – Russell Moore, “Abba Changes Everything”.

The doctrine of the image of God informs us that God has created man in His image, according to His likeness resulting in a universal truth that each human life has inherent value and worth. In God’s word, His people are to protect and preserve all life. Sin has fractured the *imago Dei* in man resulting the breakdown of the family and the product is a global orphan crisis. In response to the *imago Dei*, Christians are to engage orphans through compassionate care in the same manner that our Lord has engaged us with His love and compassion. As we progress, we will see how the gospel of Jesus Christ and our adoption (salvation) through faith in Him compels us to care for orphans.

SESSION 2

Biblical Foundations II

Lesson Title: *The Father and Orphan Care*

Lesson Objective: To understand God the Father's heart is compassion and care toward vulnerable people, particularly orphans.

Key Questions:

- (1) What does the Bible say about orphan care?
- (2) What is the attitude and activity of God toward orphans?
- (3) How does the gospel shape our hearts to care for orphans?

Main Idea: Christians engage in orphan care in response to a personal experience of grace and out of the joy of our spiritual adoption through Jesus Christ.

Foundational Verses:

Ephesians 1:4-5: just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.

INTRODUCTION

“The deepest and strongest foundation of adoption is located not in the act of humans adopting humans, but in God adopting humans. And this act is not part of His ordinary providence in the world; it is at the heart of the gospel.” – John Piper, *Adoption: The Heart of the Gospel*

The Holy Spirit, through the apostle Paul's pen, captures the heart of the gospel in the language of adoption. He communicates this in several of his epistles, specifically observed in Galatians 4:4-5 stating, “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the

adoption as sons.”

Our engagement in the orphan care through fostering, adopting, and serving those who serve is (1) a ministry that reflects the fatherly care of God, (2) a communication of the gospel of Jesus Christ, in whom we find adoption to the Father, (3) a motivation to reflect the gospel in our care for the vulnerable. In this section, we will examine several critical key OT and NT passages that frames our engagement in the adoption of orphans due to our spiritual adoption in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, we will see God's disposition is active care for the orphan.

“For most churches, adoption isn’t a priority, and this isn’t because the church members are anti-adoption. It’s because adoption seems strange to some of them, and irrelevant to others.” – Russell Moore, “How Churches Can Create a Culture of Adoption.”

THE HEART OF THE FATHER

The Compassionate Father

Yahweh reveals His character to Moses as it is stated in Exodus 34:6-7, “The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation.”

“Of all the themes to be found within the pages of Scripture, one that shines with unparalleled clarity and stands with an unmatched prominence and stature is this: God secures and protects the rights of the helpless and the hopeless.” – Jason Johnson, *All In*

This revelation contains much about the character of God. The just and holy God is patient and merciful as He extends grace and forgiveness of sin, yet He also rightly addresses injustices. One of the great injustices is the maltreatment of the vulnerable, particularly the orphan. Reflect on the following passages that reflect the compassionate defender in our Lord.



God is a shelter and refuge for the vulnerable yet comes against those who harm the vulnerable.

- Deut. 10:18-19
- Psalm 46:1
- Psalm 82:3
- Psalm 109:30-31
- Psalm 113:7
- Psalm 140:12
- Psalm 146:9
- Isaiah 25:4
- Nahum 1:7
- Duet. 27:19
- Isaiah 1:23

God is mindful of the plight of the orphan and comes to them. The psalmist declares that God is “A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, God in His holy habitation” (Psalm 68:5). The fatherly care of God is manifested in the public ministry of Jesus as He cares the lost and vulnerable. In Matthew 9:36, “But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.” To create a culture for orphan care within the church, we must grasp onto the character of God who is (1) aware of the need, (2) concerned about the plight, and (3) in compassion, responds with action.

THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

The Gospel and Adoption

A key component embedded in adoption, spiritual and natural, is it is **relational**. Adoption language is deeply relational. Wilkinson notes, “Salvation is relational rather than

transactional; therefore, the essence of salvation is adoption.”⁴ The relational nature of salvation is expressly observed within the Godhead, specifically the Father-Son dynamic and transposed in the relationship between Christ and His redeemed. Furthermore, this relationship is seen in God’s grace rescuing those who are “far off” and now, in Christ, brought “near” to God through faith in Christ (Eph 2:13). Christ’s grace is expanded through the networking of reconciliation and adoption described by Phillip Goble when he notes its preciousness: “Place and condition of a son given to one to whom it does not naturally belong.”⁵ The relational application of adoption and the relationship that now exists between God and the redeemed sinner is used three times in the New Testament (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5).

The apostle Paul is the most prolific provider of theological insights concerning salvation. In his epistles, the Holy Spirit inspires him to exposit the vast well of the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ. In several places, Paul utilizes adoption language and imagery to convey the work of redemption in the life of the Christian. The following are the three clearest passages that employ adoption imagery. This is “**Paul’s Adoption Trifecta.**”

Romans 8:12-17	Ephesians 1:3-6	Galatians 4:4-5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Christ, we are given the "Spirit of adoption" (v. 15). • In Christ, we now call God our Father or "Abba" (v. 15). • The Spirit confirms that we are adopted as the "children of God" (v. 16-17). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Christ, we are "chosen" (v. 4) and "predestined" (v. 5) for adoption. • In our adoption, we experience His love and are presented "holy" and "without blame" (v. 4). • In Christ through our adoption we are "accepted" (v. 6). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In God's perfect timing, He "sent forth His Son" to "redeem" and adopt us (v. 4-5). • In Christ, we have received the "adoption as sons." (v. 5).



Identify the parallels between our spiritual adoption and natural adoption.

- 1) Relationship
- 2) Permanency
- 3) New Identity (“sons”; “children”)
- 4) New Status (“accepted”; “redeemed”)
- 5) It is a *good thing!*

⁴ Michael Wilkinson, “Adoption in Calvin’s Soteriology: Basis for Redemption or Benefit of Union?” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 62, no. 1 (2019): 61.

⁵ Phillip Goble Jr., “Blessed Assurance: Adoption Divine: Understanding Paul’s Adoption Imagery as Evidence of Eternal Security,” *American Journal of Biblical Theology* 4, no. 3 (2021): 45.

The theme of the Christian's reconciliation and adoption in Christ manifests in practical application as the Christian engages in the adoption of a child. Paul's doxology highlights that, in Christ, the sinner experiences a relational and status change. The former condition is as a dead sinner, alienated creation, and spiritual orphan with no hope. However, through the grace of God, the former identity is done away (2 Cor 5:17) as the believer is now adopted in Christ, part of the elect, heirs with Christ, recipients of all the spiritual blessings in Christ, and have a hope of glory. This shift from orphan to son is transposed on families who answer God's call to adopt orphans. Children who are adopted experience a relational and status change. In a legal adoption, the orphan receives a new name, inherits the same rights and privileges as a biological child, and is an heir to the blessings associated with the adoptive family. The adopted child is "accepted," "chosen," and finds permanency in the family.



Group Activity: Read, reflect, and answer the questions related to passage. Discuss the conclusions and consider the language and imagery of adoption in salvation with our cultural context and understanding of caring for orphans.

Ephesians 1:3-6

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

- 1. Why is God to be praised for spiritual adoption? Why is He praised for natural adoptions?**
- 2. Describe your understanding of the terms "chose" and "predestined" and how this shapes our hearts to care for orphans.**
- 3. What is the significance of the phrase "He made us accepted in the Beloved" and its shaping Christians to engage in orphan care?**

CONCLUSION

Spiritual adoption serves as a pattern for the care of orphans. God saving and adopting sinners through Christ establishes the tenor of Christian care for orphans through fostering, adoption, or supportive care. The Father acts in love and compassion, taking specific steps to visit and adopt sinners. The Christian couple who fosters or adopts similarly acts in love and compassion, taking steps to care through fostering and adoption. The pattern involves initiative, investment, and covenant. In initiative, Christians reflect the Father by responding to the need of orphans through visitation and care. In investment, Christians reflect the Father by making necessary sacrifice to care for orphans. Lastly, in covenant, Christians reflect the permanency of the believer's relationship as "son" to God the Father in Christ by establishing a permanent family relationship through judicial action.

God did not have to use the concept of adoption to explain how he saved us, or even how we become part of his family. He could have stayed with the language of new birth so that all his children were described as children by nature only (John 1:12-13). But he chose to speak of us as *adopted* as well as being children by new *birth*. This is the most essential foundation of the practice of adoption. — John Piper, *Adoption: The Heart of the Gospel*

SESSION 3

Biblical Foundations III

Lesson Title: *The Care Culture*

Lesson Objective: To foster the Christian's understanding of genuine care for others.

Key Question: What does a caring church look like?

Main Idea: Jesus and His gospel contain the blueprint for a caring culture within His family, the church.

Foundational Verses:

John 13:34-35, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

INTRODUCTION

The gospel is necessary to bring about heart change. Consider the beauty of the caring community of believers noted in Galatians 6:1-10. There is a picture of "one anothering" ministry through burden bearing, gentle restoration, ongoing self-examination, joyful labor, and the lifestyle of doing good. It is this

"We can be a church that has sound preaching and theologically accurate worship, but without this type of love and care for one another, we are a clanging cymbal to each other and the world." – T. Dale Johnson, *The Church as a Culture of Care*

type of culture and community I desire and long for – as I hope you do too. I agree with Dietrich Bonhoeffer when he wrote in his book *Life Together*, "The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer."⁶

The caring church exists, by God's grace, due to the transformative work of God in the life of the redeemed person. Paul contrasts the life of the unregenerate/lost person to the regenerate/justified/saved person. The change of one's **heart** results in the change of one's **habits**. To live out Galatians 6:1-10, one must be born again and walk daily in the Spirit as seen in Galatians 5:22-26.

Galatians 5:22-26 = God's internal work of grace = The *cause* for change and care.
Galatians 6:1-10 = God's external work of grace = The *effect* that shows change and care.

⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community* (New York: Harper Collins, 1954), 19.

In our sinful condition, we need God to repair our relationship with Him in order for us to live in right relationship with others. The vertical relationship must be right before the horizontal relationships can be right. This culture of care within the church is something that must be taught and trained through the word of God by the Spirit of God as well as one another. Part of God’s grace is the gift of the Holy Spirit; but we also receive the gift of the church – the loving faith family and community of care.



Group Discussion: As a group, reflect and discuss the following:

- 1) What are characteristics of a caring church community?
- 2) How are these essential and tangibly expressed in orphan care?

The Galatians 6:1-10 Paradigm



Core Belief: The Gospel of Jesus Christ produces caring Christians who comprise caring churches.

Immediate context and application of this text is within the community of Christians (the church). This is seen through the bookends of the term “*Brethren*” (v. 1) with the phrase “*especially . . . household of faith*” (v. 10). The text can be applied generally in all types of relationships but specifically in the context of the community of faith, the local church.

Framework that cultivates care communities:



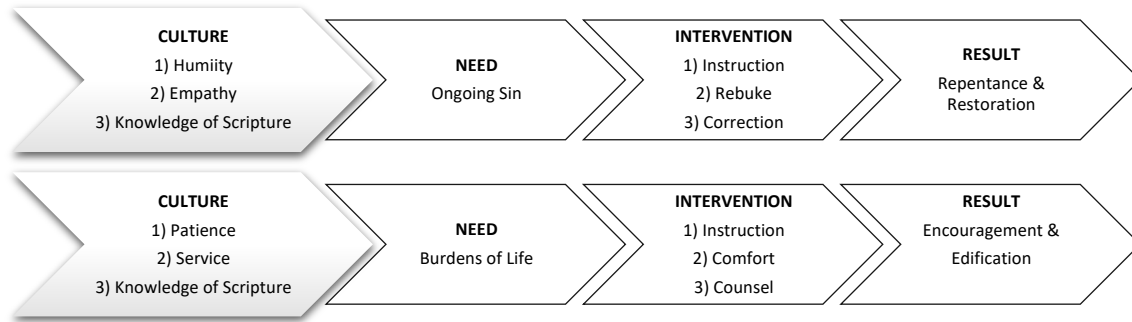
- 1) Care for the one who is struggling with personal sin or the burdens of life (v. 1-5).
- 2) Prioritize the ministry of the word in the care of others (v. 6).
- 3) Press on in doing good trusting God to produce fruit (v. 7-10).



Self-deception Impedes the Cultivation of Caring Churches.

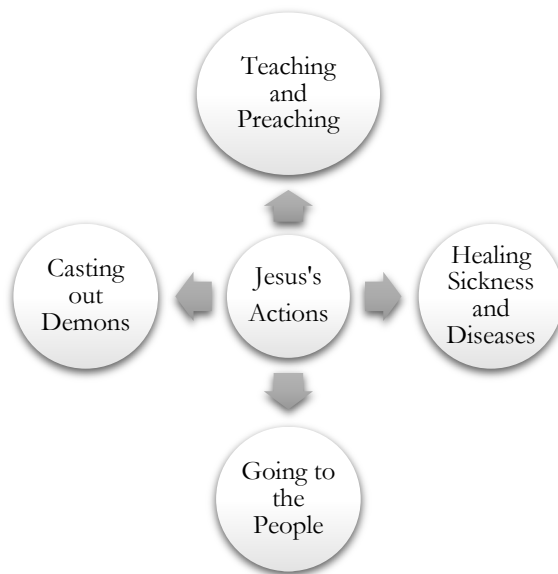
1. The potential of self-deception.
2. The self-deception that produces self-righteousness, hardness of heart, and condemnation of others (v. 1-5).
3. The self-deception that results in a negligence or rejection of the Word (v. 6).
4. The self-deception that knowingly or unknowingly mocks God due to sinful living and/or the opposition to Christian care of others (v. 7-10).

The following visual flow chart demonstrates the fruit of an engaging care community. The first line targets the brother or sister who is struggling with sin. This may be a public or known sin that is confronted or one that becomes aware in conversation or confession. The second line targets the brother or sister who is dealing with burdens of life such as trials or tribulations. These are generally outside of their control. In both paths, the caring Christian and church will apply the principles of Galatians 6:1-10 with endurance. Caring community ministry is long-term, marathon service rather than a quick fix.



Jesus, the Model of Care

The gospel accounts present a robust vision of the model of care exhibited in our Lord. Jesus seeing the multitudes was moved with compassion for them (Matt 9:36-38). Following His baptism and temptation, the public ministry of Jesus is marked with love and compassion in action (Matt 4:23-25). The truth is that true concern and care that is brought about by the work of the Holy Spirit will reflect Jesus through action. Notice the actions viewed in just the Matthew 4:23-25 passage.

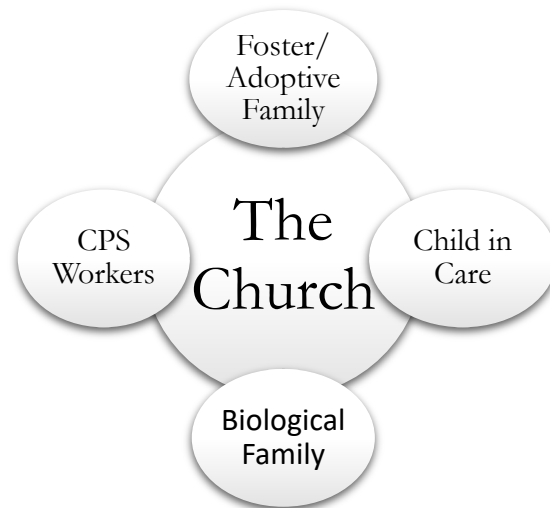


Isaiah 40:11, He will feed His flock like a shepherd, He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young.

Lamentations 3:21-23, This I recall to my mind; therefore, I have hope. Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.

Whole Care

Concern and care for one another is the lens in which we are to view others including those involved in orphan care. The care expressed by the church is applied to all. Consider the following diagram titled “**Wholistic Orphan Care: Caring for All.**” Notice the various people the church can serve. The gospel shapes the way we view each that are involved and seek tangible ways to demonstrate care through service, instruction, admonishing, and support. In session five, we will walk through our ministry plan which will detail targeted ministry including what is referred to as “wrap-around” support or “care community”.



Group Discussion: As a group, reflect and discuss the following:

- 1) How can a caring church community serve these four areas?
- 2) Why is patience and endurance required to demonstrate care to orphans?

CONCLUSION

David Powlison reflects on the caring church and ministry to one another in his book *How Does Sanctification Work*. Powlison writes, “In ministry to others (as in our own lives), we encounter the unpredictability of human experience. Any of these dimensions can arrive front and center in awareness. Often some suffering or personal failure initially catches a person’s attention. Something troubles you. Perhaps you experience loss, betrayal, disappointment, futility—‘any affliction’ (2 Cor 1:4) or ‘trials of various kinds’ (James 1:2). Perhaps you struggle with guilt over past sin or a present pattern of sinning—ill temper, immorality, lying, complaining, an eating disorder, an abortion, selfishness, gluttony, worry, willfulness, or any of a thousand defections. Usually, hardships and sins come tangled together . . . The more you grow, the more you realize that other people and the gathered church matter.”⁷

⁷ David Powlison, *How Does Sanctification Work?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 68.

SESSION 4

Biblical Foundations IV

Lesson Title: *The Christian's Service to God through Orphan Care*

Lesson Objective: To understand that true worship is expressed in tangible care of orphans birthed from the heart that knows and does the word of God.

Key Questions: What is the connection between authentic worship and service with the care of orphans?

Main Idea: Authentic discipleship and genuine worship is expressed in the care of the vulnerable (orphans and widows) and in personal holiness.

Foundational Verses:

James 1:27, Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

INTRODUCTION

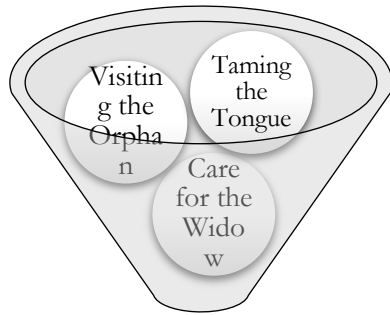
One of the most definitive statements about orphan care is found in James 1:27. This is fitting as the theme of this epistle is faith in action. James, the half-brother of our Lord Jesus, writes to exhort the body of Christ to demonstrate their faith noting that “faith without works is dead” (see James 2:14-26). James reinforces authentic faith is evident in those who are hearers and doers of the word (James 1:22). His emphasis on tangible expressions of a living faith reflects the active and engaging ministry of God. This is clearly presented in James 1:27. God is the “Father to the fatherless” and the “defender of the widow” thus naturally, those who are in Him by faith through Christ likewise will act in this accord.

James asserts, “Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” The work of grace in the Christian’s life produces “good works” for the glory of God and the good of others (Eph 2:8-10). The expressions of grace and good works authenticate the profession of faith in Christ. These works do not save the individual; rather, they substantiate the testimony that the individual is indeed in Christ. James focuses on one aspect of this work of grace in James 1:27, noting that the Christian will care well for orphans.

Pure and Undefiled Worship

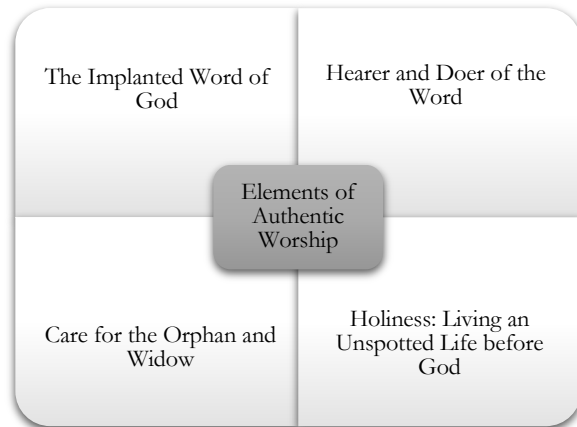
As we approach the quintessential statement concerning the priority of orphan care (v. 27), we must recognize that James is concerned about authentic faith and worship “before God and the Father” (v. 26-27). According to the book of James, authentic worship can be viewed through three acts of compassion as well as four elements (see diagrams).

“True piety helps the helpless.” – Peter Davids, *The Epistle of James*



Authentic Worship
before God

Three Acts of Compassion Model



Four Elements of Authentic
Worship Model

Worship before God, viewed through either model, is a heart issue. Addressing the internal or heart condition is central to Scripture and demonstrated in Jesus’s preaching/teaching ministry. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus expounds on the depth of meaning of the Torah as it truly reveals the depth of man’s sinfulness. One illustration was His remarks on marriage fidelity, citing lusts in the same category of physical adultery—a spouse is adulterous for lusting after another, thus becoming defiled and standing in need of cleansing (Matt 5:27-30). Jesus refutes the facade of righteousness that one might display externally while one disregards their internal sin. In other words, that which is done (or thought) in the dark will be exposed and brought in the open. Sin hinders our worship of God and service to others. Thus, James uses the inspired word to serve as a mirror and diagnostic tool to search the conditions and motivations of God’s people.



Pure = The term “pure” is *katharos* and means “without stain, clean, or upright.”

Undefiled = The term “undefiled” is *amiantos* and means “without contamination.”

In this context, these terms refer to being morally and ethically right in one’s worship before God in the service to orphans.

Visit the Orphans

The apostle uses an important term as it relates to God’s people’s response to the “trouble” of orphans. He uses the term *episkeptomai* which is translated as “visit” in the NKJV. Notice the different translations that provide a beautiful mosaic of the Christian’s care for orphans.

<i>episkeptomai</i>	
Translation	Term
New King James Version	Visit
New International Version	To look after
New Living Version	Caring for
New American Standard Version	Visit
English Standard Version	Visit
Holman Christian Standard Bible	To look after

The combination of “visit” and “trouble” speaks of an urgent action that must be undertaken by the church with respect to some of the most vulnerable people in the historical context: orphans and widows. These are categories of people that were not able to provide for themselves and therefore in “dire” circumstances without intervention.



Reflection: In what ways are children and families that find themselves involved with CPS in “trouble” requiring our “visit”?

The Christian’s spiritual adoption sets forth a pattern for the care of orphans. God’s redemptive work reveals His character and action toward sinners. God is the provider of salvation through the selfless sacrifice of the Son, in whom believers find refuge, security, and identity. This becomes the pattern for God’s people who engage in the care of orphans. The Christian’s visitation of orphans reflects God’s care and rescue of sinners through Christ. For example, in foster care, Christians “visit” children through providing a temporary home for those who have experienced abuse or neglect. Furthermore, during this respite parents and families are given time to reorient their lives with the aim of reunification. In adoption, Christians “visit” children who have gone through the TPR process and are eligible for adoption by providing them “forever homes.” Christian visitation of orphans is seen through those who support others who foster and adopt to provide care, encouragement, and respite to families.

Orphan care is not a social justice activity outside of the gospel but is a ministry and act of worship that is fueled by it.
Chris Woodall, pastor

Motivations to Care for Orphans

James’ view of authentic faith and worship is connected to the care of orphans. James 1:27 practically conveys the language of loving God and loving others (Matt 22:37-40) with love of God through obedience to Christ’s commands (1 John 5:3). However, not all Christians are *primarily* motivated to engage in the care of orphans due to an understanding of and desire to express authentic faith and worship. Amanda Keys et al. identify three motivations that prompt some Christians to participate in the care of orphans. First is the child-centered motivation that stems from a genuine concern for abused and neglected

children with their purpose of providing a safe home.⁸ Additionally, some Christians possess a self-oriented motivation and dabble with the idea of adoption but want to test themselves through fostering first.⁹ Lastly, some Christians have a social-oriented motivation that stems from a desire to “give back” or “fulfill a religious calling.”¹⁰ While these are not negative motivations to care for orphans, they fall short in representing the fullness of the gospel, specifically viewed in the Father’s redemptive love through His Son.



Group Discussion: As a group, reflect and discuss the following:

- 1) While these various motivations are not inherently wrong, how do they “fall short of representing the gospel”?

CONCLUSION

The purity of the Christian’s faith and the authenticity of worship is not simply seen through a diversity of rituals or expressions of pious activity. According to God the Holy Spirit through the Apostle James, true worship is embodied in loving God and loving others, specifically the care for orphans and widows. If Christians are to be known as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ through the love of one another (John 13:34-35), how rich then is this type of love when demonstrated to ministry to orphans. Thus, churches have ample opportunity to demonstrate their love for God through the love of orphans.

⁸ Amanda M. Keys et al., “Who Are Christian Foster Parents? Exploring the Motivations and Personality Characteristics Associated with Fostering Intentions,” *Social Work & Christianity* 44, no. 4 (2017): 70.

⁹ Keys et al., “Who Are Christian Foster Parents?,” 70.

¹⁰ Keys et al., “Who Are Christian Foster Parents?,” 70.

SESSION 5

Family Strong: Model of Ministry

Lesson Title: *Family Strong: FAM Model of Ministry*

Lesson Objective: To identify the model of ministry that cares well for vulnerable children through Pinckard Baptist Church.

Key Questions:

- (1) What does the care of vulnerable children look like for my church?
- (2) What barriers are in the way of engaging in the care of vulnerable children?

Main Idea: Each Christian has a role in orphan care ministry. This model of ministry is to position and equip you to honor God through obedience to James 1:27.

Foundational Verses:

Psalm 68:5-6, A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation, God sets the solitary in families; He brings out those who are bound into prosperity; but the rebellious dwell in a dry land.

Colossians 3:23-24, And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

INTRODUCTION

The overarching goal is to seek the grace of God in the working of the Holy Spirit to create a culture of ministry and service to those involved in foster care and eligible for adoption. This is not a one-off project or an addendum ministry for a select few, but a matter of discipleship and obedience to God's clear communication in His word. This session will lay out our model for ministry which seeks to provide that which is necessary to foster the desired culture of care. It is to develop a culture of compassion and care that seeks to remember those who are often forgotten.¹¹

“We are not simply asking people to meet a need; we’re discipling people to obey a commandment...Our goal is not recruitment; our goal is discipleship first – to get the gospel down deeper and deeper into people so it can more effectively get out wider and wider through them.” – Jason Johnson, *Everyone Can Do Something*



Core Belief: Whatever we do, let us do it well to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). It is about *quality*, not *quantity*.

¹¹ Jim Peters, comments in course evaluation.

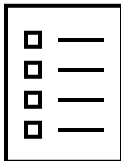
In an interview with leaders of two Southern Baptist Churches and numerous staff with Lifeline Children’s Services, several common themes which provide helpful insights in shaping a culture of care.



Common Themes in Orphan Care Ministry

- 1) The centrality of Scripture in transforming minds and shaping hearts.
- 2) Forming partnerships with CPS and CPA entities to identify families to serve.
- 3) Developing communities of care which provide “wrap-around” service to families.
- 4) Consistent vision casting and communication of the Scripture and ministry to vulnerable children.

Purpose



To train and equip the members of Pinckard Baptist Church to engage in wholistic care to those involved in foster care and eligible for adoption.

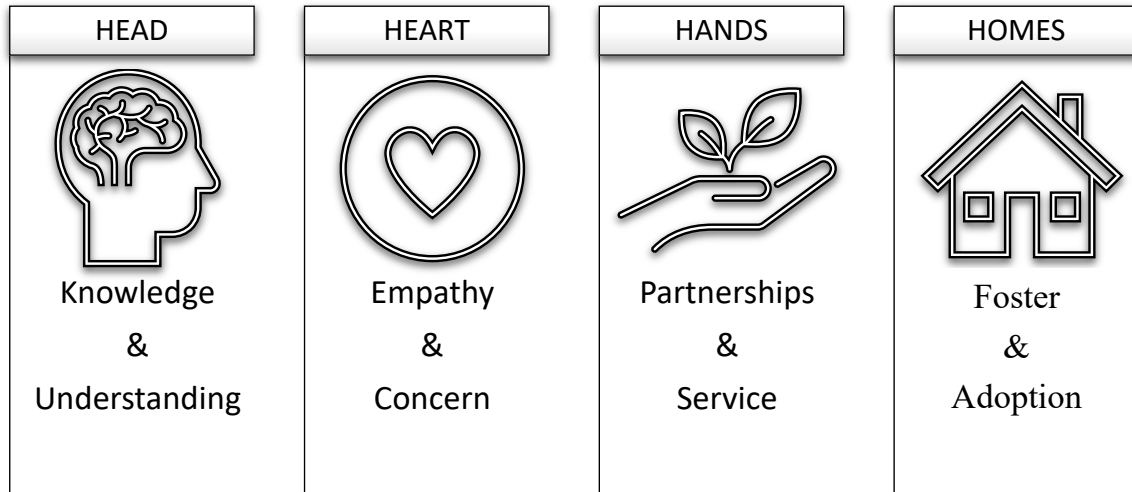
Core Values



- *Every* life has dignity, value, and worth because humanity is made in the image of God.
- *Every* child needs a healthy and stable home, established on the truth of the gospel.
- *Every* broken home has the potential of reconciliation.
- *Every* child eligible for adoption deserves a forever family.
- *Every* member has a role in the ministry to vulnerable children.

Principles

Family Strong is our Family Advocacy Ministry (FAM) which seeks to lead the body of Pinckard Baptist Church to engage in wholistic orphan care. This is accomplished through the 4H’s: Head, Heart, Hands, and Homes. The first principle is HEAD. This principle recognizes the centrality of God’s word by instilling knowledge and understanding of God’s character and action. The second principle is HEART. This principle establishes the necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit to take the Word and produce empathy and concern for orphans and families. The HEART component is saturated in prayer entrusting in the transformative work of the Spirit. The third principle is HANDS. This principle seeks to move the church to create partnerships with CPS and CPA entities as well as move the church into service. Lastly, the fourth principle is HOMES. This final principle aims to partner with God to provide a pathway for members to become foster parents, adoptive resources, or serve through respite care.



Objectives

Certification	Community	Contribution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pathway to licensure • Recruit members for potential foster families, adoptive resources, or respite providers. • Work with CPS and CPA entities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide support to church members who journey through fostering and adoption. • Develop "care communities" to provide wrap-around support. • Host special ministry events and/or serve as a host site for trainings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial investment and support. • Ongoing prayer for the ministry. • Every member involved in ministry to orphans.

THE MODEL OF MINISTRY

Model

Our model for running the FAM at Pinckard Baptist uses the approach of Promise686, a ministry partner with our North American Mission Board Send Relief ministry arm. This model is a viable and doable ministry that moves each member to identify their role and equip them to serve in a variety of ways.

Promise686 Mission + Vision

<https://promise686.org/mission-history/>

Our vision is to fulfill God's promise "to set the lonely in families." We work toward this goal by **mobilizing church communities to care for vulnerable children**. We know many people are unaware of the child welfare crisis. We also know when people become aware, they many times would like to get involved *but aren't sure where to start*. That's where we come in.

Promise686 equips churches to:

- Raise awareness around the needs of vulnerable children,
- Help prevent children from going into foster care by supporting biological families in need,
- Recruit and equip foster & adoptive families,
- Create Care Communities for those caring for at-risk kids.

We call this model **Family Advocacy Ministries (FAMs)**. Ultimately, our hope is to see every child in a safe, loving family, *forever*. FAMs help us get closer to this goal by creating support systems for foster & adoptive families, and biological families in crisis.

Key Roles

The FAM is a structured ministry that seeks to connect members to key areas of service. This is primarily accomplished through the Care Community and secondarily through ministry events. The following are key position titles.

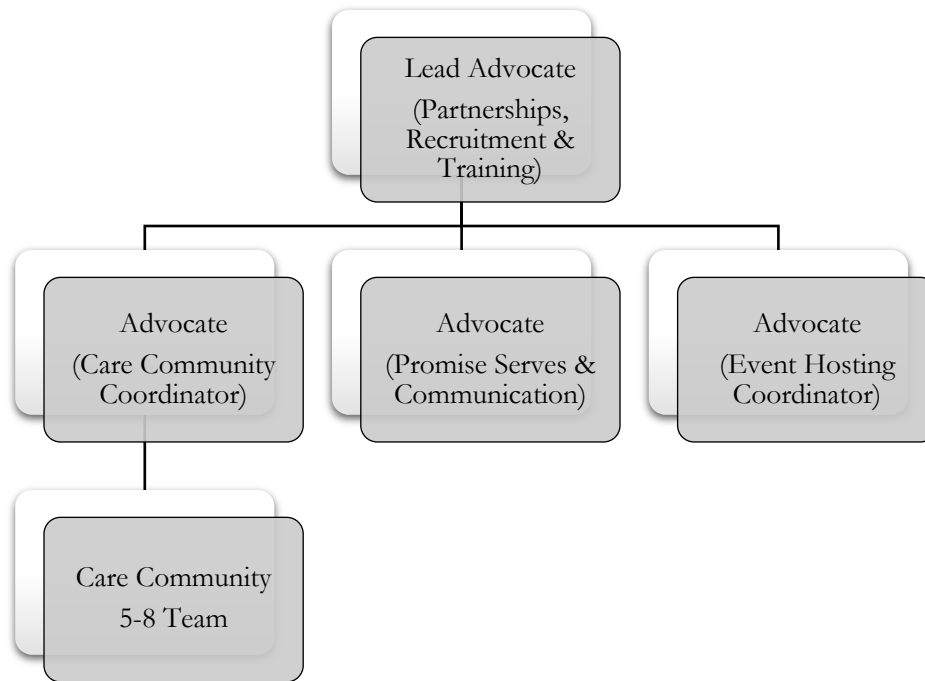
FAM Roles

- Advocate:** The advocate(s) are the “champions” of the FAM and serve as the leadership of the ministry.
- Team Leader:** The leader of an assigned care community, providing oversight and communication between the advocate and care team as they serve their family.
- Care Community Volunteer:** Committed volunteers who are part of a 5-8-member care community that provides tangible ministry to their family based on the need and giftedness.

The **Advocate(s)** are responsible for four primary areas: (1) care community coordinator, (2) training and equipping, (3) administration/Promise Serves, (4) event hosting coordinator.¹² There are additional roles that the advocate team can include such as service project coordinator, small group leader, respite event coordinator, special project

¹² Promise686, “Advocate Handbook: Building a Family Advocacy Ministry,” FAM Care Community Clinic handbook, 19-22.

coordinator, communications, and prayer coordinator. Here is an example of a FAM structure:



Partnerships, Recruitment, & Training

The Lead Advocate will focus on developing partnerships with local CPS and CPA entities with the Care Community Coordinator to connect our Care Communities to families. In addition, in these partnerships, the Lead Advocate will connect church members who are interested in licensure to foster, adopt, or become a respite resource. This role will provide pathways, connections, and encouragement to members who go this route.

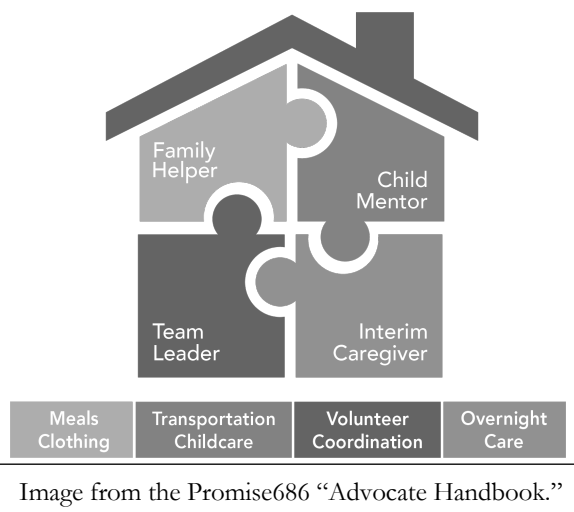
In addition, the Lead Advocate will providing ongoing recruitment and training to develop more care community teams and equip members to answer God’s call to serve in orphan care ministry.

Care Communities

Our care communities will consist of 5-8 members who will be connected to a foster family or adoptive family. The Care Community Coordinator Advocate will work with our local CPS and CPA entities to identify a family to serve. The coordinator will connect with the family and set up an informal gathering (meet-n-greet). The care community team will gather the needs of the family and identify ways to serve. This ministry consists of a one-year commitment to serve and support the family. Our ministry leaders and volunteers will work with our local CPS and CPA entities to secure proper clearances and background checks that are required in the different roles.

Care Community Roles

- ❑ **Team Leader:** The leader of an assigned care community, providing oversight and communication between the advocate and care team as they serve their family.
- ❑ **Family Helper:** A diverse role that has one reoccurring service such as providing a weekly meal, yard work, or laundry, among other tangible acts of service.
- ❑ **Child Mentor:** A role that commits to providing childcare at least twice a month to allow the family to make their appointments, or go shopping, among other reasons.
- ❑ **Interim Caregiver:** A role that provides overnight care that lasts one night up to two weeks.



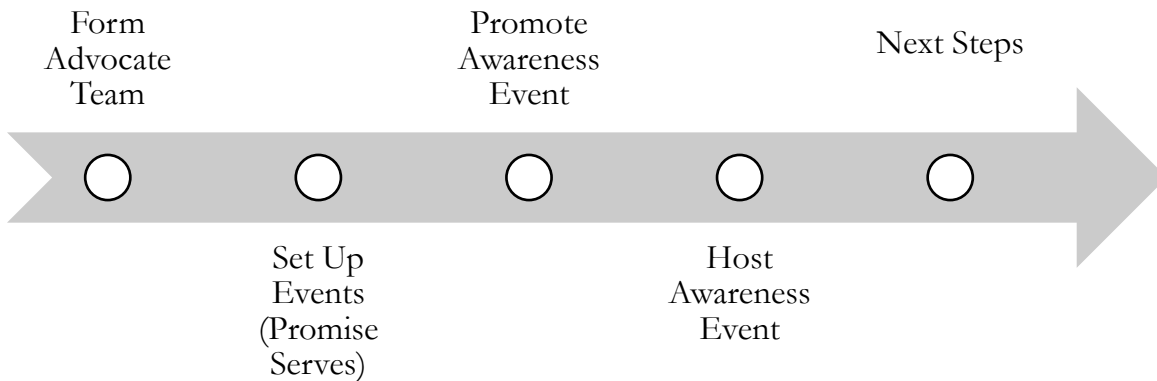
Event Hosting & Communications

Family Strong will also provide a variety of events that serve families as well as promote the ministry to the church. The Event Hosting Coordinator and Communications Coordinator will work together in scheduling the various events by using diverse forms of communication to promote the events. The following are some examples:

<p>TIPPS Training Site</p>	<p>Family Fun Events</p>	<p>Awareness</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with Dale County DHR and/or ABCHEM to serve as a host site for their TIPPS training and certification. • Serve a meal at each session. • Provide childcare while adults meet. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quarterly or semi-annual events for foster and adoptive families in our areas. • Examples: movie night, game night, parent night out, etc. • Give aways. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • STAND Sunday (Awareness event for foster care and adoption. • Monthly tie-ins in regular worship service (volunteer or family stories, videos, etc). • Recruitment and training events. • Information (church website, FB page, bulletin, etc.).

RECRUITMENT & EQUIPPING

FAM Recruitment Gameplan



Family Strong/CC Training and Launch¹³

Phase 1: Biblical Foundations. *Biblical Foundations* is a four-hour training that focuses on the biblical and theological realities related to engaging in a ministry that serves vulnerable children. (See sessions 1-4 of this ministry plan guide.)

¹³ Specific details can be found in the “Advocate Handbook” as well as the Promise Serves website. The specific details will be communicated in the appropriate phases and awareness events.

Phase 2: Family Strong Volunteer Orientation and Equipping. After completing the *Biblical Foundations* preparation, volunteers will participate in the Care Community Launch gathering and Care Community Volunteer Orientation (CCVO) to learn about the various roles in the Care Community and identify your place of service.

Phase 3: Family Strong Care Community Meet-n-Greet. Once the Care Community is formed and equipped, the next step is connecting with a family to serve. This will involve the meet-n-greet with the family and the formal start of the one-year commitment and service to them.



A Word on Confidentiality

Family Strong leaders and volunteers will need to uphold strict confidentiality when serving families, specifically in the context of foster care. Pictures and the release of **any** personal information (i.e., names, locations, circumstances, etc.) are not to be shared outside of the FAM without permission from the state entity (DHR). A good approach is to remember *“It is their story to share.”*

Church leaders such as pastors and ministerial staff members are mandated reporters. In cases where abuse or neglect are disclosed, this information must immediately be shared with the Lead Advocate and pastor (if different) that way it is documented and communicated to DHR. In foster care, the state has legal custody of the child, and the foster family provides care under the jurisdiction of DHR.

CONCLUSION

Jason Johnson, Director of the National Church Ministry Initiatives with the Christian Alliance for Orphans (CAFO) states **“Everyone can do something. . . so find your something!”**

SESSION 6

Expert Panel

Lesson Title: Interactive Q&A with Expert Panel

Lesson Objective: To gain wisdom and insights from diverse perspectives of those who are engaged in orphan care.

Key Questions: Participants are welcome to ask panelists questions related to foster care, adoption, supportive ministry, and other related topics that will provide greater depth of knowledge in order to be equipped to answer God's call to orphan care.

Main Idea: Experts who have personal, practical, and professional wisdom and experience can equip participants to serve.

Foundational Verses:

Proverbs 27:17, As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.

EXPERT PANEL PARTICIPANTS

Tameaca McErvin. Tameaca is currently one of the supervisors with the CPS department at Dale County DHR. Tameaca has over a decade of professional experience dealing with child welfare cases, foster care, adoption, and other related matters.

Darby Thompson. Darby is currently serving as a social worker with the Alabama Baptist Children's Home and Family Ministries. She is based in the Dothan office and serves in our region/area. In addition to the many years of service through ABCHFM, she is currently the children's ministry director at Daleville Baptist Church.

Foster/Adoptive Family. The names of the foster/adoptive family is not listed to maintain confidentiality for the children in care.

SESSION 7

Next Steps

Lesson Title: What Now? Taking the Next Steps.

Lesson Objective: To connect members to engage in orphan care by providing clear pathways to answer God's call.

Key Questions:

- (1) What are the next steps to becoming a licensed foster resource, adoptive resource, or respite provider?
- (2) What are the next steps to becoming part of *Family Strong* at Pinckard Baptist Church?
- (3) What is your something?

Main Idea: Everyone has a role in orphan care.

Foundational Verses:

INTRODUCTION

In this final session, (1) we will take time to debrief the biblical and theological instruction moving us to engage in orphan care; (2) review the FAM and reflect on the insights from the expert panel; and (3) identify the NEXT STEPS to start engaging. Choose a track or indicate an extended time of prayer to seek God's guidance in your involvement.

Track 1: Pursue *Family Strong*

Track 2: Pursue Certification/License to Foster/Adopt

Track 3: Commit to Pray and/or Give to Support *Family Strong* and those who Foster/Adopt/Provide Respite

Appendix I

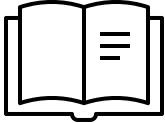
Homework Assignments

The following attachments contain the homework assignments for each session. Each participant is to complete the homework assignments to further contemplate God's purposes in His people to honor Him through orphan care. Please write out your responses on the homework page or create a journal that you can write extensively during the training period and beyond. Please complete and be prepared to discuss briefly at the start of the following session.

SESSION 1

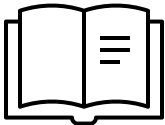
Homework

Please incorporate the following assignments into your daily devotional time. These assignments are derived from this session and are aimed to help cultivate a deeper understanding and application of the *imago Dei* in your life, particularly in shaping your engagement in orphan care ministry.



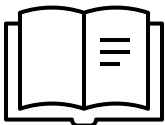
Assignment #1 – The *imago Dei*

Read Genesis 1:26-27. In your own words, define and describe your understanding of the doctrine of the *imago Dei*. Detail how this doctrine shapes your view of others, especially orphans. Pray and ask God to use this passage and doctrine to develop a greater sense of the value of life and the need to engage in orphan care.



Assignment #2 – The Pro-Life Ethic

Read and review the two biblical convictions in session 1 (pg. 6). In your own words, write 2-3 biblical convictions that are derived from Genesis 1:26-27 and your understanding of Scripture’s depiction of a pro-life ethic. Pray and ask God to shape your heart to promote, protect, and preserve the dignity of life, specifically in the care of orphans.



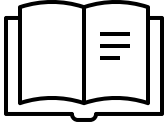
Assignment #3 – The Example of Jesus

Read and reflect on the parable of the Good Samaritan found in Luke 10:25-37. In your own words, describe how Jesus uses this parable to reshape our understanding of who our “neighbors” are and list ways this moves you to care for others, particularly orphans.

SESSION 2

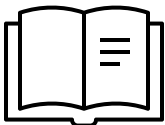
Homework

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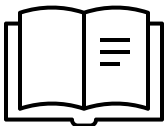
Assignment #1 – Our Compassionate Father

Read Exodus 34:6-7. In your own words, describe the character of God as revealed in this text. Identify ways the character of God shapes and motivates us to serve others. Pray for God to cultivate His character in your heart and life.



Assignment #2 – Paul’s Adoption Trifecta

Read and review “Paul’s Adoption Trifecta” in session 2 (pg. 12). In your own words, what is the theme of these three passages? What do they say about our salvation and relationship to God? How do they shape our understanding of God’s care of orphans through the ministry of the church? Ask God to apply these truths and celebrate His grace.



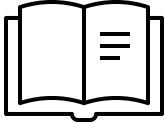
Assignment #3 – Russell Moore Quote

Read and reflect on the quote from Russell Moore in session 2 (pg. 10). Do you agree with this quote? Why or why not? How does your understanding of the biblical and theological underpinnings motivate you to work through this quote? Pray for your heart and our church to be motivated to engage in orphan care.

SESSION 3

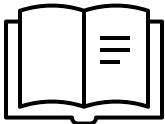
Homework

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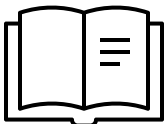
Assignment #1 – The Church: Community of Care

Read Galatians 5:22-26 and Galatians 6:10. In your own words, describe how God's grace work internally and externally in the life of the believer. How can this be expressed in our response to care for orphans. List and pray through barriers or obstacles that may impede this work.



Assignment #2 – Core Belief

Read and reflect on the **Core Belief** in session 3 (pg. 16). Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? Based on Galatians 6:1-10, how can we show care to those involved in orphan care? Pray for God to lead us to be caring Christians and a caring church.



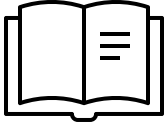
Assignment #3 – The Whole Care Diagram

Refer to and reflect on the **Whole Care** diagram in session 3 (pg. 18) and identify 2-3 ways the church can provide care to the four categories.

SESSION 4

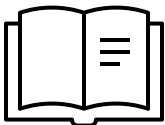
Homework

Please incorporate the following assignments into your daily devotional time. These assignments are derived from this session and are aimed to help cultivate a deeper understanding and application of the *imago Dei* in your life, particularly in shaping your engagement in orphan care ministry.



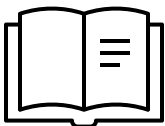
Assignment #1 – Authentic, Active Faith

Read James 1:22 and 2:14-26 and in your own words describe the verses. Relate these by listing 4-5 tangible expressions of authentic and active faith. Pray for God to mature our faith family to be “hearers and doers of the Word.”



Assignment #2 – The Definitive Statement on Orphan Care

Read James 1:27, in your own words describe the following: (1) undefiled and pure religion and (2) visit orphans. How is our care for orphans an expression of authentic religion or service before God?



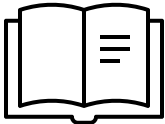
Assignment #3 – Motivations and Barriers

List 4 motivators to engaging in orphan care and describe them in biblical categories (positive or negative). List 4 barriers that impede Christians from engaging in the care of orphans. After you list these, begin assessing your heart and ask God to stir up biblical motivations while removing barriers to your involvement in this ministry.

SESSION 5

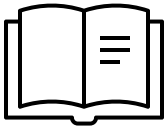
Homework

Please incorporate the following assignments into your daily devotional time. These assignments are derived from this session and are aimed to help cultivate a deeper understanding and application of the *imago Dei* in your life, particularly in shaping your engagement in orphan care ministry. *Assignment #1 and #2 will be discussed in session 7. Assignment #3 will be used for session 6.*



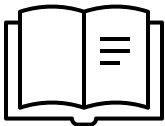
Assignment #1 – The Importance of Confidentiality

In your own words, describe the importance and priority in our care of orphans. Apply your understanding of confidentiality to the potential roles within the FAM. Identify limits or exceptions to confidentiality.



Assignment #2 – FAM Roles

Review the different roles identified in our FAM. List them and in your own words describe that is involved with each one. Begin praying and asking God to give clarity to how you can participate in the FAM.



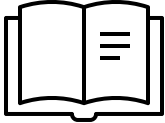
Assignment #3 – Panel Questions

In preparation of session 6, Expert Panel, please draft several questions that you have for the panelists. Our panel will consist of a social worker with Dale County DHR, a social worker with the Alabama Baptist Children's Home and Family Ministry, as well as a foster/adoptive family.

SESSION 6

Homework

Please incorporate the following assignments into your daily devotional time. These assignments are derived from this session and are aimed to help cultivate a deeper understanding and application of the *imago Dei* in your life, particularly in shaping your engagement in orphan care ministry.



Assignment #1 – The Expert Panel

List 5 key takeaways from the expert panel and how these are shaping your understanding about orphan care:

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

Appendix II

2009 Southern Baptist Convention Resolution on Adoption and Orphan Care

Date: June 1, 2009

Event(s): 2009 Annual Meeting

Topic(s): adoption, orphan care

RESOLUTION NO. 2 ON ADOPTION AND ORPHAN CARE

WHEREAS, In the gospel we have received the “Spirit of adoption” whereby we are no longer spiritual orphans but are now beloved children of God and joint heirs with Christ (John 14:18; Romans 8:12-25; Galatians 3:27-4:9; Ephesians 1:5); and

WHEREAS, The God we now know as our Father reveals himself as a “father of the fatherless” (Psalm 68:5) who grants mercy to orphans (Deuteronomy 10:18; Hosea 14:3); and

WHEREAS, Our Lord Jesus welcomes the little ones (Luke 18:15-17), pleads for the lives of the innocent (Psalm 72:12-14), and shows us that we will be held accountable for our response to “the least of these brothers of mine” (Matthew 25:40); and

WHEREAS, The Scripture defines “pure and undefiled religion” as “to look after orphans and widows in their distress” (James 1:27); and

WHEREAS, The satanic powers and the ravages of sin have warred against infants and children from Pharaoh to Molech to Herod and, now, through the horrors of a divorce culture, an abortion industry, and the global plagues of disease, starvation, and warfare; and

WHEREAS, Southern Baptists have articulated an unequivocal commitment to the sanctity of all human life, born and unborn; and

WHEREAS, Churches defined by the Great Commission must be concerned for the evangelism of children—including those who have no parents; and

WHEREAS, Upward of 150 million orphans now languish without families in orphanages, group homes, and placement systems in North America and around the world; and

WHEREAS, Our Father loves all of these children, and a great multitude of them will never otherwise hear the gospel of Jesus Christ; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Louisville, Kentucky, June 23-24, 2009, express our commitment to join our Father in seeking mercy for orphans; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we call on each Southern Baptist family to pray for guidance as to whether God is calling them to adopt or foster a child or children; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we encourage our pastors and church leaders to preach and teach on God's concern for orphans; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we commend churches and ministries that are equipping families to provide financial and other resources to those called to adopt, through grants, matching funds, or loans; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we encourage local churches to champion the evangelism of and ministry to orphans around the world, and to seek out ways to energize Southern Baptists behind this mission; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we encourage Southern Baptist churches to join with other evangelical Christians in setting aside a special Sunday each year to focus upon our adoption in Christ and our common burden for the orphans of the world; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we pray what God is doing in creating an adoption culture in so many churches and families can point us to a gospel oneness that is determined not by "the flesh," or race, or economics, or cultural sameness, but by the Spirit, unity, and peace in Christ Jesus; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That we pray for an outpouring of God's Spirit on Southern Baptist congregations so that our churches will proclaim and picture, in word and in deed, that "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world."

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APPENDIX 7

PREPARATORY SERMONS

Two preparatory sermons were delivered to prime the congregation for the “Becoming a Church that Cares for Orphans” training material. The first sermon was from Psalm 68:5-6 preached on Sunday, July 23, 2023. The second sermon was from James 1:26-27 preached on Sunday, July 30, 2023.

Pinckard Baptist Church
Rev. Chris Woodall
July 23, 2023
Sermon

Psalm 68:5-6
“The Goodness of our Father”

INTRODUCTION

Psalm 68:5-6, A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation. God sets the solitary in families; He brings out those who are bound into prosperity; but the rebellious dwell in a dry land.

Main Point: God the Father cares for vulnerable peoples including the orphan, widow, and lonely. We find refuge, strength, and hope by trusting in Him resulting in our joy and praise.

Psalm 68 is a psalm of David and reveals the goodness of God in His relationship to Israel. David exalts in the LORD by reflecting on His power, might, justice, compassion, sovereignty, among other aspects of our majestic King. As he reflects on the attributes of God, David focuses on the relational nature of God.

The eternal cosmic boundless God, who is Creator, is not distant or unconcerned, rather is relational and engaged with His creation, particularly humanity. In the Genesis creation account, we are informed that God made humanity, male and female He created them (Genesis 1:26-27). This unique creation is distinct from all other aspects of God’s creation. Man: male and female, is created in the *imago Dei* that promotes inherent value, dignity, and worth as well as identifying the relational capacities that man has with God. While sin has marred the image of God in man, God has revealed His plan to redeem and restore. This is slowly revealed in the election of His people, Israel, as His son and ultimately expressed in Jesus Christ, His perfect and better Son.

Nonetheless, in the OT record, we see God revealing both His character and commitment that is revealed in Jesus and reflected in His people promoting His goodness and glory to our neighbors and the nations.

BODY OF SERMON

THE CHARACTER OF GOD

As we turn our attention to Psalm 68:5-6, we will first consider the character of God. David frames these two verses with the language and imagery of God as the King who is mighty and fights for His people – specifically those who are defenseless and vulnerable. Notice the language of the LORD of Armies.

- When God acts, His enemies are scattered (v. 1).

- When God acts, He drives them away (v. 2).
- As God acts on behalf of His people, He judges the wicked and the righteous rejoice (v. 3-4).
- God continuously goes before His people (v. 7).

David harkens back to the revelation of God regarding formative Israel in Exodus. God reveals Himself and nature itself responds (v. 8). Now, consider who we are addressing. God is the Mighty-Warrior King who fights on behalf of His people for the glory of His great name. He is not passive or neglectful but acts for the good of His people.

Exodus 34:6-7, And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means cleaning the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and fourth generation.”

Deuteronomy 7:6-9, “For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Therefore, know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments.”

See the character of God – faithful, watches over His people, redeems, secures, extends compassion and mercy, and loves. This benevolent King is ultimately expressed in the Lord Jesus Christ. God in Christ perfectly loves, is the King who is faithful to His bride and demonstrates mercy and grace through His death granting life to those who turn to Him by faith. As His people, we are to embody this great grace and reflect His character in the care of others.

THE COMMITMENT OF GOD

Having considered the character of God, let us now devote our time to weigh the commitment of God. In our selected passages, notice God’s commitment to Himself and His covenant through His commitment to the vulnerable peoples.

- God is “a father to the fatherless.”
- God is “a defender of the widow.”
- God “sets the solitary (lonely) in families.”
- God sets free “those who are bound into prosperity.”

These four commitments are due to His character. God’s character moves Him to honor these commitments. Because God is committed to and concerned for vulnerable peoples, He sets apart His people to reflect His care through the same commitment.

Deuteronomy 10:17-19, “For the LORD your God is God of gods, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore, love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

Notice God’s commitment and that this commitment is to be shared and exercised through His people.

- The compassionate care and commitment to the vulnerable is due to God’s redeeming love (Deuteronomy 10:19).
- The compassionate care and commitment to the vulnerable is the tangible expression that summarizes the essence of the Law – love God and love others (Deuteronomy 10:12-13, Matthew 22:34-40).

Furthermore, notice the parallels that are found in our salvation through Jesus and evident in the life of the church.

- God covenantal love is seen in spiritual adoption that motivates our engagement in the care of vulnerable people, specifically those in foster care and eligible for adoption (Ephesians 1:4-5).
- God’s covenantal love is impartial; therefore, we are to be impartial in our treatment of others, specifically vulnerable peoples (James 2:1ff).
- God welcomes the alien and stranger; therefore, we are to remember that we were strangers apart from Christ (Ephesians 2:19).
- God provides for the vulnerable through compassion ministry; therefore, we are to care for the vulnerable (Matthew 25:31ff).

APPLICATION

The redeemed in Christ reflect the Father’s care in defending the vulnerable.

Rick Morton (adaptive): We are never more like our Father than when we care for vulnerable peoples, specifically those who are in foster care and eligible for adoption.

Truth: Our care to the fatherless, to the widow, to the lonely yields praise to God.

MEDITATION

Father, train my heart to express your love toward vulnerable peoples. Grant me a greater appreciation for your compassionate care and covenantal love revealed and experienced through our Lord Jesus Christ. Move me to respond to the needs of the vulnerable child, family, neighbor that I may honor you. Reveal how I am to respond and reflect your great love.

Pinckard Baptist Church
Rev. Chris Woodall
July 30, 2023
Sermon

James 1:26-27
“An Authentic and Active Faith”

INTRODUCTION

James 1:26-27, If anyone among you thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue, but deceives his own heart, this one’s religious is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

Main Point: An active faith results in authentic worship expressed in the care for the vulnerable and personal holiness.

Writing to a scattered church, James pens this great epistle that teaches what true faith and authentic Christian discipleship, and piety consists of in a sinful world. Thus, genuineness and authenticity become the central theme in the exercise of one’s faith in Jesus. Authentic and genuine faith is birthed from James 1:22 as the apostle charges the church to “be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” The aim is to shift Christians from empty platitudes and vain religious piety toward a life that honors God through sincere obedience to the “implanted word” of God. James poses, does the Christian’s faith rests in a profession of faith alone or is it marked by a distinct life of holiness and obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer challenges twentieth-century Christians to consider the cost of discipleship. In his autobiography entitled *Bonhoeffer*, Eric Metaxas states that Bonhoeffer “had theologically redefined the Christian life as something active, not reactive. It had everything to do with living’s whole life in obedience to God’s call through action.”¹ This theme in Bonhoeffer’s understanding of discipleship is expressed in the epistle of James and is central to the working of the gospel through the redeemed as one engages in orphan care. James presents a living faith that is active and engaging, moving Christians to demonstrate their devotion to God through the compassionate care of others, namely orphans and widows (1:27).

James asserts, “Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (2:17). The work of grace in the Christian’s life produces “good works” for the glory of God and the good of others (Eph 2:8-10). The expressions of grace and good works authenticate the profession of faith in Christ. These works do not save the individual; rather, they substantiate the testimony that the individual is indeed in Christ. James focuses on one aspect of this work of grace in James 1:27, noting that the Christian will care well for orphans.

¹ Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 446.

BODY OF SERMON

THE DECEPTION OF RELIGIOUS TALK (v. 26)

James is refuting those who possess an empty faith. In verses 21-27, he tackles the reality of self-deception.

James 1:22, But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, **deceiving yourselves**.

James 1:26, If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but **deceives his own heart**, this one's religious is useless.

Deceive

- In **verse 22**, the term “deceiving” is the Greek *paralogizomai* which means “to reason falsely.” Many consider themselves to be right with God and authentic in their faith by the knowledge they may possess (hearers). Yet, James argues that knowledge is not an adequate gauge to legitimize one's faith. True faith is always accompanied with actions.
- In **verse 26**, the term “deceives” is the Greek *apatao* which means “to cheat and lead into error.” James confronts the hypocrisy of false professions by illustrating the use of the tongue. James indicates that you are essentially cheating yourself and delegitimizing your faith if you have a habit of sinful use of the tongue (see James 3 for further development).

This is the problem observed in the gospels related to the religious leaders. Jesus issued His harshest rebukes to the self-righteous, self-deceived religious leaders. Ranging from “hypocrite” to “whitewashed tombs”, Jesus assessed the heart condition of all humanity, specifically the religious elite noting that their external religious piety and practices could not cover the sinfulness of their heart.

James builds on this theme of empty religious rhetoric by condemning the practice of partiality. James notes that “if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors” (James 2:9). He illustrates the duplicity of religious language and empty platitudes noting it is sinful to give preference to rich over the poor (2:1-9) and the needy (2:14-17). In other words, failure to show impartiality and meet tangible needs while communicating the gospel is hypocritical. It does not authenticate one's faith.

THE PRIORITY OF THE REDEEMED (v. 27)

Having warned his audience of deceitfulness, James moves them to flesh out an authentic and living faith. You may recall in the previous sermon; we examined Psalm 68:5-6. In that message, according to the text, we considered the character and commitment of God. His commitment to care for the vulnerable flowed from His character. Here, James argues that our priorities to honor God flows from our experience with grace. The redeemed of God are set apart for good works for His glory. In James 1:27, this priority is expressed in two specific ways: (1) the care of the vulnerable, and (2) the pursuit of personal holiness.

The Holy Spirit inspires James to define authentic faith and worship before God. This is seen in caring for the vulnerable and pursuing personal holiness. The ministry to the vulnerable and the life of holiness is perfectly embodied in the PERFECT MAN, the Lord Jesus Christ. In His incarnation, Jesus was sinless and perfectly righteous – “unspotted” as well as ministering the gospel to the vulnerable. This priority and practice are replicated through God’s people. **Authentic faith and worship are not marked by ritual or religious rhetoric, rather it is seen in the gospel that values righteousness and the vulnerable.**

Notice the lens that shapes our lifestyle to honor God. The lens reflects the character and commitment of God, observed in Jesus, and produced through the body of the church. **The final portion of this sermon is devoted to the care of orphans.**

Visit = The term *episkeptomai* which means to “to inspect, to attend.” Here, James identifies that the product of an authentic faith and genuine worship before God involves His people actively aware and engaged in the care of the orphan.

Trouble = The term *thlipsis* refers to one who is experiencing “affliction, distress, tribulation.”

This trouble reflects the disruption of the family’s life, in this context the child. If we were to view this language in the lens of our culture, we can easily see that a child in foster care or those eligible for adoption is experiencing trouble as their life is disrupted by various factors, thus prompting the Christian to respond. Is this not the visible expression of the work of grace and gospel through Jesus? The Father, aware of our condition of separation due to sin, sent His Son Jesus to “visit” us in our time of “trouble.” Sin, in a sense, disrupts us and separates us from God. But through Jesus we find grace, forgiveness, redemption, and adoption.

John 1:14, And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:12-13, But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

APPLICATION

As recipients of grace and sonship through our adoption in Christ, we reflect the gospel in our engagement and care of the vulnerable, particularly those who are in foster care and eligible for adoption.

Russell Moore: “The gospel of Jesus Christ means that our families and churches ought to be at the forefront of the adoption of orphans close to home and around the world.”

Russell Moore: “Not every Christian is called to adopt or foster a child. But every Christian is called to care for orphans.”

MEDITATION

Father, grant me a heart that remains in awe of your goodness and mercy. Reflect your grace and truth in me that I may live authentically before you and others. Move me to visit and care for those who are in foster care or eligible for adoption. Move me to care for the families who serve them. Fill me with compassion that does not simply cause me to have pity but propels me to engagement.

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ABSTRACT

TRAINING THE MEMBERS OF PINCKARD BAPTIST CHURCH IN PINCKARD, ALABAMA, FOR WHOLISTIC CARE TO THOSE WHO ARE IN FOSTER CARE AND ELIGIBLE FOR ADOPTION

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This project seeks to train the members of Pinckard Baptist Church in Pinckard, Alabama, for wholistic care to those who are in foster care and eligible for adoption. Chapter 1 presents the history and ministry context of Pinckard Baptist Church as well as the goals of this project. Chapter 2 provides exegesis and thematic considerations of three biblical passages (Gen 1:26-28; Jas 1:27; Eph 1:3-6) to demonstrate God's position and posture concerning the care of orphans. Chapter 3 presents evidence and arguments that churches are to affirm the totality of the pro-life spectrum through inclusion and engagement of orphan care. Chapter 4 describes the project itself, recounting the content and teaching methodology of the specific course curriculum. Chapter 5 evaluates the efficacy of the project based on the completion of the four specified goals. This project seeks to train Christians with the biblical worldview and motivation to minister to orphans and aims to prepare participants from a position of knowledge to future next steps to minister and care for children who are orphaned, for their good and to the glory of God.

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