More than 150 million children worldwide meet the definition of orphan, with at least one parent dead. It’s a staggering figure, one that’s difficult to fathom. But imagine it like this: that is enough children to fill 180 professional football stadiums. And beyond the numbers are very real situations.

**There is no doubt the Bible carries a clear mandate to care for orphans.** But caring for orphans is not mandate alone. It is foremost a mirror of God’s heart. The prophet Hosea told Israel to say to God, “In you the fatherless find compassion” (Hosea 14:3). The Psalms express, “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families” (Psalm 68:5–6). But most breathtaking of all, this is not only the orphan’s story. It is ours as well. For the heart of the Christian story—the gospel—is how God sought us when we were destitute and alone.

**LEARN to Encounter Jesus**

Imagine that you are in that upper room. Jesus takes a basin of water and a towel and humbly washes your feet. He looks up at you and gently proclaims, “Remember, you’re the one I love. I chose you. I couldn’t bear the thought of not having a relationship with you, so I elected you as My beloved. I’ve seen how alone you were and how you were separated from me.
Adoption, foster care, and other ways of aiding vulnerable children represent vital engagement with a critical social justice need. But they also offer a rich theological expression of our relationship with God. Whenever and wherever we become home for the orphan, we point ultimately to an even greater reality. We are reminded that at the center of all things is the Father who pursued us at immeasurable cost to himself—who now welcomes us home as his daughters and sons.

Caring Transforms Children

Love and belonging change the trajectory of a child’s life, from foster care to support of widow-and-orphan families. Despite the special challenges that can come with adoption, research consistently shows that adopted children thrive in loving homes. Even when children adopted from difficult backgrounds struggle, studies show they fare far better than orphaned peers who were never adopted.

Caring Transforms Individuals and Families

Children transform through adoption and foster care, but families are changed even more. As we encounter Jesus in the destitute child, Christians are pulled beyond a flaccid, self-focused religion
to a costly-but-muscular faith. Coming to grasp God’s heart for the fatherless begins to change us. When we hear from Scripture that God is especially tender and near to the destitute child, we start to hope that He might be willing to come near to us too. And when we see God’s love for orphans reflected by His people in real, tangible ways, we begin to be able to believe it all might be true.

**Caring Transforms Churches**

Love for orphans transforms churches as well. It helps us to see God’s true character more than any sermon. Caring for orphans is an undertaking for the entire church community to engage together. Not every Christian is called to foster or adopt. But every Christian community is called to embody the pure religion that includes caring for orphans and widows in their distress. No other institution in the world is capable of embracing orphans and supporting their families like the local church. As we support each other amid the joys and struggles of loving children from difficult places, we are knit ever closer as community. Imagine the church defined by this—not primarily by what we oppose, but by a rare and profligate hospitality for children the world often discards.

Foster care, adoption, and other ways of loving orphans call the entire church community to embrace children together. It’s about the family of God becoming home to those who ache for one. This can be acted out in ways large and small. Young adults can offer babysitting to give adoptive and foster parents a break. Empty nesters can run errands and help with yard care. A mechanic could teach foster youth simple car maintenance. Hair-stylists might offer free haircuts every other month. Others can
just invite over for a BBQ “the extra-large family” or “the family with special needs.” All these acts can make a world of difference practically. They also convey something even more valuable to both parent and child: You are most welcome here.

**PRAY and Experience Scripture**

“We love each other because he loved us first.” (1 John 4:19)

Pray now for the needs of orphaned children both near and far. Pray that Christians would rise as the answer for each child’s need. With humility and attentiveness to the Lord’s voice, ask God what role He may have for you in that.

Jesus, You have loved me when I was alone and destitute in my sin. I am so grateful because…

Please speak to me about the role that you might want me to have in the care for orphans. I want to love because You loved me first. Speak Lord, I am listening…

Prompt Your followers to rise up and meet the needs of children.

**Caring Transforms a Watching World**

Love for orphans transforms our world, as it sees—perhaps for the first time—the gospel embodied. Another pastor, Daniel Bennett, helped his church in Illinois start a foster and adoption ministry. He saw it not only as a “justice ministry” but also as a venture of both discipleship and evangelism. Daniel describes what is happening now: “As our church grows excited about orphan ministry, I see people coming to grasp the love of God more deeply. I also see it growing our understanding of biblical love—that it involves real sacrifice; it gives like God does to those who have no way to pay you back.” This countercultural hospitality for hurting
children reverberates beyond the church. Daniel goes on: “People outside our church who you never would have expected are intrigued, asking questions, because they’re seeing the adoptions and care for the foster kids. It really gives the church a more powerful testimony to the community.”

The apologist Tertullian wrote, “It is our care for the helpless, our practice of loving kindness, that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents.”

SHARE with Others in Community

Talk to a friend, family member, or ministry leader about your relationship with Jesus and how He has become a “home” for you. Tell the story of your adoption into God’s family and what that’s meant to you.

I am so grateful to have a relationship with Jesus. He has been my “family” even when…

LOVE Others in Community

Look for a way to practically support the adoption and foster care ministry in your church/community. Plan to contribute in one or more of these ways: financial support, helping adoptive families with travel needs, assisting an adoptive family with household tasks, starting or serving an adoption support group, or becoming an adoptive or foster parent yourself!

I sense that the Lord wants me to care for orphans by…