

**Orphan Sunday** | Sunday, November 13, 2022  
Faith Evangelical Free Church  
Outreach Pastor Sam Creagar

Today, all over the world, in many different countries, cultures, and churches, Christians will gather to recognize and respond to a growing and powerful movement known as “Orphan Sunday”.

This movement began in 2002 at a small church in Southern Africa. A local pastor called upon his people to remember God’s love for vulnerable children, and to care for the kids in their community. This call to action was no small thing. Poverty was an ever-present struggle for nearly everyone in the church. The AIDS epidemic had ravaged the area, taking the lives of many mothers and fathers. Members of the church faced deep needs themselves. But as the service ended, and the people considered what must be done and what God would ask of them, one after another came forward to give their money, food, and their material possessions – some even taking off their shoes and placing them in the offering for orphans and vulnerable children in their community.

Over the last 20 years this church’s commitment and vision to care for kids in need has reached far beyond that little congregation. The observance and call to action of Orphan Sunday has spread through more than 80 countries, including being recognized by many Christians in places like China, India, Indonesia, South America, and of course right here at home in the USA.

And today, I would like us to consider what it means for our church, for you and for me, to care for and love kids in need in our own community and beyond. This morning we will consider what it would mean to join with Christians worldwide in obedience to one of the clearest and most fundamental characteristics of our faith: genuinely loving others because God has so genuinely loved us.

Now, some of you out there might be reeling a bit. You came to church this morning thinking, *“okay, I’m going to grab a little coffee, catch up with a few of my friends, worship God, hear a sermon, fill up my spiritual tank for the week, then maybe grab some lunch or get home in time to settle in and watch the Chiefs beat up on the Jaguars. But this Orphan Sunday thing seems like a detour from those expectations. It sounds good and all (caring for kids is never a bad thing), but why is Faith getting involved, and what is going to be asked of me?”*

Those are good questions. I and hope to answer them, and invite you to consider not just the answers but some actions as well, in three ways:

First, we’ll take a VERY QUICK look at the undeniable and overwhelming truth from Scripture that God wants us, and indeed expects us, to care for orphans and vulnerable children.

Second, I want to be sure we are all clear on the “why” – why is it good for you and me to care about kids in need? Why is it so important for us to move toward the marginalized, the weary, and those who are alone?

Third, I want to share with you all a bit about some really exciting things God has been up to at Faith over the past few years, and how all His work is beginning to yield opportunities for you and me to get involved in the lives of vulnerable children in powerful ways.

We'll begin with arguably the most well-known command to care for vulnerable kids in the whole Bible:

*27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

James 1:27 (NIV)

I like it when the Bible is blunt. I like it when God's expectation is obvious and clear. And so, even though this command is no small thing and potentially demands quite a lot from us, I like how inescapably direct it is.

*Do you want the way you live your life and practice your faith to be acceptable before God?* Then look after orphans and widows in their hardest moments. Care for their deepest needs. Reject the world's selfishness and callousness towards the broken and weary. This is a call to action, in obedience to God, for the sake of helping children in need.

Before we go on I want to pause real quick and be sure we're on the same page in regards to what we mean (and what the Bible means) when we say "orphan". Many of us are probably familiar with the idea of an orphan being a child that has lost both their parents. And while that definition is accurate, the term "orphan" can have a bit broader of a meaning. In Scripture you often find "orphan" grouped with the terms: "fatherless" and "widow". The overall category seems to indicate that God's concern extends to kids who have lost either both or just one parent, and also includes the situations where a child's parents cannot adequately care for their kids.

In the modern world many organizations also recognize something called "social orphans". This refers to a child who may have living parents, but for whatever reason (be it poverty, drugs, wars, abandonment, etc ) the parents aren't able to meet their child's needs.

So when we think of caring for orphans and vulnerable children, and when we look at what God asks of us in Scripture, I'd encourage you to broaden your concept of who might be counted among those in need of help. I'd suggest you consider "orphans" to be ***children who have lost one or both parents, or who have caretakers that are not able to provide what their child needs most. These are the sort of vulnerable children God tells us we must look after.***

We see God's heart for these children throughout the Old Testament. Over and over again God tells his people to...

- "Take up the cause of the fatherless" (Deut 10:18, Isaiah 1:17)
- Secure justice for children who have lost one or both parents (Deut 24:17, 27:19, Ps 10:17-18)
- Make sure provisions are made ready for orphaned and vulnerable children (Deut 24:17)

One story that sticks with me and, I think, reveals God's heart for orphaned kids, is from Genesis 21. Hagar, the slave woman who had given birth to one of Abraham's sons, was forced by Sarah (Abraham's wife) to leave the family and was abandoned in the wilderness of Beersheba. Her circumstances overwhelm her and she breaks down, fearing the almost certain death of her child and having no idea how to save herself or her baby boy. Genesis 21:17 says something amazing:

*17 God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. 18 Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation.”*

Genesis 21:17-18 (NIV)

***God heard the boy crying, and it moved His heart into action.*** God heard the boy crying, and He moved toward the pain, hardship, and fear. He rescued the boy, and his mother, in their moment of greatest need and desperation.

God cares for the orphan, the widow, and the fatherless. His heart breaks for children in need, and His actions bend toward meeting those needs in incredible ways. If this is the heart of God, then my hope and prayer is that it would be our heart as well. Let every one of us be the kind of person, and all of us together be the kind of people, who love and care for the vulnerable children and families that God brings into our awareness and into our lives.

We are commanded by our gracious God to care for these kids. To look out for and provide for children and families in their suffering circumstances. And while I think it is good to be inspired by a desire to obey this command, I want to go even deeper into the question of “why”. Why should we seek to do this? What is the true, motivating catalyst behind seeking to help the orphan and fatherless?

I can think of no greater reason than this: it’s an outworking of true love. It’s God’s love for us, transforming our lives, reshaping what we do, how we act, and how we long to serve those in need. It’s not just obedience to a clear command... it is a response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ:

*16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. 17 If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? 18 Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.*

1 John 3:16-18 (NIV)

The Gospel is our “why”. The Gospel is our reason for caring for anyone and everyone. The Gospel declares that we were so dearly loved by God that he moved toward our pain, toward our brokenness, toward our desperate need and laid down his life so that we might be saved.

***As followers of Jesus, we are called to lovingly care for others because we have been so lovingly cared for by Jesus.***

That’s the broad principle that comes from the Gospel. That’s our motivation for loving others – God first loved us, and Christ laid down his life for us. Therefore, we will do the same for others. And today, as we join the world in the reflection and action of Orphan Sunday, my challenge to you is to consider whether or not there is a way for you to love like this in the context of caring for orphaned and vulnerable children.

***Because as followers of Jesus, we are called to lovingly care for vulnerable children in our community and around the world, because we have been so lovingly cared for by Jesus.***

And I think we can do this, care for kids in this way, by recognizing what God is already up to, right now, in our church.

Over the past few years God has been calling many individuals and families at Faith to care for vulnerable children in extraordinary ways. I want to share a bit with you about what has been going on, and invite you to consider joining in on the work to come.

You may not know it, but our church has a large number of families – at last count I think I was aware of at least 2 dozen households – that are actively providing foster care, inviting children to become permanent members of their family through adoption, or in the midst of training to ready their lives and homes to welcome a child in need of a safe place stay. The most humbling part about all of that is it has been entirely a grassroots phenomenon spreading throughout the hearts of so many at Faith. It's all been thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit, the example of Christ's sacrificial love, and God's command to care for kids.

In 2019, as Outreach Pastor, I realized that we are in desperate need to start playing catchup to what certainly seems like the work of God creating such a passion for foster and adoptive care in our church. So, a few projects got started. We offered a few Respite nights, created the Foster Care supplies closet, blessed families with new foster placements with gift cards to Target, and tried to create opportunities for folks to learn more about the need for additional foster and adoptive families in our community.

Along the way, as we listened to what these families said they needed from their church, one clear message got repeated over and over: a need for **support and community**. They asked for help. They asked for fellowship. They wondered aloud and expressed their desire to see Faith E Free rally around the foster and adoptive families in our community and provide practical, meaningful, direct aid through committed relationships.

Could meals be made and delivered? Could childcare be provided? Could someone come by and mow the lawn, fix the leaky sink, or help paint the kid's new room?

Could there be folks committed to praying for the foster and adoptive families in our midst? Might there be people willing to sit and listen and grieve with these parents and caretakers as they weep over the trauma of the kids in their care and the difficulty of loving little ones who have somehow already experienced so much evil?

Today, we're going to take a small step in meeting this need and supporting our foster and adoptive families. Over the next few months we hope to formalize a ministry that focuses on meeting the needs – material, physical and spiritual – of fostering and adopting families at Faith (and in the Manhattan community). We hope to see this vision made a reality:

*At Faith, we envision the day when the Church is the primary advocate for vulnerable children and families. To that end, our Foster and Adoption ministry exists to support biological, foster, and adoptive families in times of flourishing and crisis. By providing support and creating opportunities for the Church to serve in meaningful ways, we desire to provide the kind of care Christ commands us to have for children and families in need.*

The most immediate fruit we hope is produced by this ministry is the establishment of **Care Teams** around each and every foster and adoptive family who desire that kind of support. Members of these teams will commit to praying for these families regularly, providing material and logistical support, and becoming the go-to network of people willing to respond to a fostering or adopting family's cry of "*I need some help!*"

These teams are not ready yet – we have an absolutely phenomenal intern from MCC laying the groundwork to make sure they get started well and have the structure, training, and resources necessary to succeed. We hope to see teams begin to form in January or February of 2023.

For now, what I'd invite you all to consider is this: If you think serving on a Care Team sounds like something you'd like to do, take the Connection Card from the seat back near you, fill out the contact information, and simply write "Care Team" on the blank line next to the check-box just below where you fill out your information. Drop that Connection Card in the offering box as you leave, or find me and put it in my hands if you like – either way, we will add you to the list of people we plan to contact as we begin to assemble these teams in 2023.

This may sound like a small thing, but I truly believe it has the potential to have a major impact on the lives of our fostering and adopting community. It's a chance to sacrificially love. It's an opportunity to care for vulnerable kids, right here in Manhattan. We know that not everyone can foster or adopt. But some of you may be able to join in supporting those who do answer that call, and that support will be powerful. So please, consider whether or not joining a Care Team would be a right fit for you.

Increasing our commitment to foster and adoptive care is not the only new ministry opportunity I want to invite you to consider today. Because alongside this growing movement, God has also called Faith's attention to a really exciting opportunity to combine three things we absolutely love: caring for kids, sharing the Gospel, and planting churches.

This morning will mark the first day of a new partnership with a ministry called GlobalFingerprints.

GlobalFingerprints is a child sponsorship initiative of the Evangelical Free Church. It currently operates in 12 different countries, and seeks to address the medical, nutritional, educational, and spiritual needs of the children in their care. With a commitment of donating \$35/month, a sponsor makes it possible for a trained local specialist to meet with the child and their family, assess their needs, and create a plan that may significantly transform that child's life.

But the truly wonderful and remarkable thing about Global Fingerprints is that ***all of this happens in connection to a local church***. Every child sponsored with Global Fingerprints, along with their family and caretakers, are personally invited into the life of a Christian community. They get a chance to take part in things like church-led kids programs, bible studies, and worship services. The care and compassion of these local church leaders for the vulnerable children in their community has created incredible opportunities for the Gospel to be shared, especially in places where the name of Jesus and truth about God is not well known.

- Global Fingerprints specializes in working among unreached people groups so that sponsorship programs can always be implemented alongside new church planting and church growth efforts.

- The local church – including local leaders, local pastors, and local people – are empowered and equipped to care for the children and communities.
- The children who are sponsored are visited every month in their homes so that the assessment of their physical, emotional, educational, and spiritual well being is always up to date.

Our church has been specifically invited to take part in a child sponsorship and church planting program in India. To get a better idea of the impact sponsoring a child today will have, I'd like you all to watch this video that highlights the kids and community our church's sponsorships will serve:

[https://vimeo.com/453349285?embedded=true&source=vimeo\\_logo&owner=10479881](https://vimeo.com/453349285?embedded=true&source=vimeo_logo&owner=10479881)

As followers of Jesus, we are called to lovingly care for vulnerable children in our community and around the world, because we have been so lovingly cared for by Jesus. So my invitation to you is simply this: *might sponsoring a child with Global Fingerprints be a way God is calling you to love someone today?* Is providing a donation \$35/month a way you can genuinely care for the orphaned, fatherless, and vulnerable?

I know Global Fingerprints won't be the right fit for everyone here this morning. I fully understand that a financial commitment like this isn't to be taken lightly. I also know that many of you, so very many of you, already have many ways that you minister to people in need. Really and truly, some of you may search your hearts and be at peace with this opportunity *not* being the right one for you. I bless that discernment and praise God for whatever other work He's called you to be a part of.

But for those who ARE interested in sponsoring a child, who DO feel God tugging their hearts to get involved and to explore or take on this chance to sponsor a child, here's what you need to do:

- After the service has ended, stop at the table outside with the Global Fingerprints information. I'll be there, and can guide you through the whole process of getting a sponsorship started.
  - We've got cards with the kid's names, pictures, locations, and a little bit of information about them.
- You can choose to sponsor a kid right away and sign up while here at the church, or you can go home and sign up online. The signup process is super easy and once you are registered you'll get an email with further details about the child you've picked and the ongoing ministry to them and their community.
  - There is also an "offline" (hardcopy, snail mail, old school!) signup option. I can help you get started if that works better for you.
- At the table I will also have a sheet you can sign up on if you want some time to think and pray about this opportunity, and would like me to follow up with you later this week.

Global Fingerprints sent us 34 kids to sponsor. I hope you'll consider joining us, the EFCA, and the church planters and missionaries in India in supporting these kids and giving the local church a chance to make new connections and create new pathways for the Gospel to be shared among unreached people and in unreached places.

I know I threw a LOT at you this morning. So please, if it's all been just too much, simplify it for yourself dwell on this one, beautiful, amazing truth:

*This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.*

As followers of Jesus, we are called to lovingly care for others because we have been lovingly cared for by Jesus.

***As followers of Jesus, we are called to lovingly care for vulnerable children in our community and around the world, because we have been so lovingly cared for by Jesus.***

I hope you'll commit to exploring what that might mean for you. What action it might lead you to take. Who it might lead you to care for and love.

If you decide the answer is a child in foster care, supporting a fostering or adopting family, or giving a little each month so a kid who needs to hear the Gospel and receive basic care from a little local church in India can receive those precious gifts, I hope and pray you'll move toward the weary and hurting, and love not just *with words or speech but with actions and in truth.*