LEADING FAMILIES OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH IN FORT

PAYNE, ALABAMA, TO PARTICIPATE IN ORPHAN CARE

THROUGH FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION

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by

Marshall Smith Henderson

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APPROVAL SHEET

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Marshall Smith Henderson

Read and Approved by:

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Anthony W. Foster (Faculty Supervisor)

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Danny R. Bowen

Date_____

I dedicate this project to my wife, Jill-Curry, whom I describe as the "heart" of our family. Her love for Jesus and for children has helped open my eyes to God's heart for the fatherless. In many ways, this project has been ten years in the making as our marriage has been a tool by which God has been shaping my heart and my leadership in the church. In our time together, we have welcomed four wonderful sons into the world by birth, one precious son through adoption, and five other incredible, resilient children through foster care. Still, God reminds us that our home has room to welcome more.

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PREFACE

This is project is rooted in the prologue to the Gospel of John: "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:11-13) Many years ago, Jesus brought me in and made me a part of God's family. I have had the privilege of preaching the Word of God over the years and inviting others into the family.

First Baptist Church of Cleveland, Mississippi, has been a constant source of love for my family and their prayerful support all my ministry endeavors. I am grateful to First Baptist Church of Fort Payne, Alabama, where I currently serve. Continually, the church family shows its love for me and my family. The church has also responded to the needs of orphans in our community, and its compassionate ministry overwhelms me.

I am grateful for my friend and former pastor, Nathan Vanhorn. He has been committed to sharpening me as a brother for many years and was the person who first suggested that I pursue a DMin.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Anthony Foster, for commiting to supervise this project, for guiding me through the process and for being just as passionate about the project as I have been. His encouragement and insight have been invaluable.

I am grateful for my late grandparents, Nathan and Audis Lee Goss, who adopted my mother. They were the "real-life" picture of gospel adoption—of immeasurable love for and welcome of a child into their family.

I am most thankful of all for my wife, Jill-Curry, and our five sons. Our sons are still puzzled somewhat by what we mean when "Daddy has school work," but they are supportive all the same. My wife is my best friend and the "heart" of our family. Her

sacrificial love keeps our family going and has made all the difference in the gospel ministry we do.

<div align="right">Marshall Henderson</div>

Fort Payne, Alabama

May 2020

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The vision and mission statement of First Baptist Church of Fort Payne, Alabama (FBCFP) identifies knowing Christ, growing in Christ, going for Christ, and showing Christ as four commitments by which First Baptist Church will participate in the mission of Jesus. The church is to show Christ by ministering to the needs of people in the church as well as those in the community. Jesus identified His followers as those who see and respond to needs. The responsive ministry of His followers unto the "least of these" is like ministry done for Jesus, Himself (Matt 25:31-46). Furthermore, the Bible gives specific mandates to the church for ministering to "the least" when James instructs Christians to care for orphans and widows (Jas 1:27). The church cares for the least—the widow and the orphan—not as a separate ministry, but as an extension of the church's call to proclaim to the gospel and to make disciples. The Christian ethicist and President of the SBC's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, Russel Moore, identifies orphan care as ministry that is the natural outworking of believers becoming more attuned to the gospel, as actions that comprise a "sign of the gospel" in the world, and as part of the church's Great Commission mandate.[1]

The Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR) reports that over six thousand children are in foster care in Alabama, hundreds of which are eligible for adoption.[2] FBCFP is a multi-generational church in Dekalb County, Alabama. The

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[1] Russell Moore, *Adopted for Life: The Priority of Adoption for Christian Families and Churches*, updated and exp. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 18–19.

[2] "Alabama Department of Human Resources—Intro Foster Care," accessed October 9, 2017, http://dhr.alabama.gov/services/Foster_Care/Intro_Foster_Care.aspx.

church is comprised of many families and individuals of child-rearing ages who can provide temporary or permanent homes for children. The leadership of FBCFP believes that the church can and should respond to children in need of homes in Dekalb County and throughout the state of Alabama as a way of fulfilling its mission. For these reasons, the leadership of FBCFP seeks to lead families to participate in orphan care through local foster care and adoption.

Context

This ministry project took place in the context of the FBCFP. Several contributing factors related to the ministry context at FBCFP are relevant for this project. The first is FBCFP's vision and mission statement for how it will participate in the mission of Jesus Christ. The leadership has established commitments by which the church will share in the mission of Christ: Know Christ, Grow in Christ, Show Christ, and Go for Christ together. The church's mission is to *know Christ* as a body united in worship of God and fellowship with one another. The church seeks to *grow in Christ* by fostering maturity and becoming complete disciples of Jesus. FBCFP *shows the love of Christ* in action. The church is committed to comforting those who are hurting and to meet material needs. The church participates in the mission of Christ by *going for Christ* and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus in the community and through engagement of world-missions.[3] Of particular relevance for the project are the third and fourth commitments of FBCFP's vision and mission. The ministry project is aimed at showing the love of Christ and fulfilling the Great Commission by addressing the need for local foster and adoptive families.

The second relevant factor of FBCFP's ministry context is the need to cultivate a greater social consciousness. Church leadership desires to engage church members in a

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[3] "Mission & Vision—First Baptist Church Fort Payne," accessed November 17, 2017, http://www.fbcfp.org/about-us/mission-vision/.

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greater degree of social ministry. Christian theologian, Millard Erickson, identifies social concern as one of the four essential ministries of the church.[4] While FBCFP does not lack social ministry, the church sees and responds to the needs and hurts of those in the church more reliably than those who are outside of the body. One contributing element to the insufficiency of its social concern is that FBCFP is a highly programmed church with insufficient attention given to social ministries. Most of the programs are ministries that are aimed inward, meaning the programs primarily focus on worship and discipleship rather than social concern. Leadership has assessed the need to broaden the church's ministry focus and provide greater leadership to see and respond to needs outside of the church body. With a majority of church members who rely upon programs or leadership initiatives for pathways in which they can participate in mission of the church, leadership feels the responsibility to lead them to see the need for orphan care and to respond. Leadership is vital to teach, lead, and provide a pathway for FBCFP to participate in orphan care.

Third, FBCFP has families and individuals of optimal child-rearing ages who could participate in the mission of showing Christ's love by providing homes for children in need of a foster home or adoptive family. According to church records, FBCFP has 513 members that are in the twenty-one to sixty-year age range. The number of individuals indicates a great potential for providing foster and adoptive homes if believers were to be led to participate in orphan care. Gospel preaching and teaching can make the compelling case for foster care and adoption as a gospel ministry. The Bible uses adoption imagery as one way of explaining the gospel. Christians have been adopted as children and heirs of God (Rom 8: 12-17). In like manner, Christians can display the gospel through foster care and adoption. When Jesus announced the Kingdom of God, He proclaimed that it is good news for those in distress (Luke 4:18-19). Later Jesus gave his

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[4] Millard J Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 1060–61.

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followers the mandate to act justly toward the vulnerable, needy, and least important (Matt 25:31-46). More directly, James gave Christians a similar mandate to care for the vulnerable by mandating care for orphans (Jas 1:27). Given the emphases in Scripture, churches should address how they are to be involved in orphan care ministries. While foster care and adoption are not the only avenues for faithfully responding to scriptural mandates, FBCFP's leadership feels the appropriate response is to lead families toward foster care and adoption.

The last contributing factor to the ministry context is the need for foster homes in Dekalb County and adoptive homes in Alabama. Foster children are those who cannot live with their birth families because of situations that have put them at risk of neglect or abuse. Children may only need a home for a couple of days before being reunited with birth families. Others need a home for a longer time as they await a plan for them to be adopted. Of the six thousand who are in foster care, hundreds are awaiting adoption into permanent homes.[5] Suzanne Thomas, a Dekalb County DHR staff member, stated that at the end of 2017, Dekalb County had 107 children in the foster care system while only having thirty-seven licensed foster care homes. She also identified over four hundred children who are free to be adopted statewide.[6] FBCFP is able to have an immediate impact on the needs of the community by providing temporary and permanent families for children. Resources—Intro

Rationale

Based on the contextual factors described above, several related reasons reveal the need for leading families of FBCFP to participate in local foster care and adoption. First, because many in the church may not understand that orphan care is part of the

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[5] "Alabama Department of Human Resources—Intro Foster Care."

[6] Suzanne Thomas, Dekalb County Foster Parent Licensing Worker. telephone interview with author, January 4, 2018.

mission of the church, leadership must teach the biblical mandates for orphan care. Orphan care must be articulated as one part of how the church obeys the Great Commission—to make disciples of all nations—and the Great Commandment—to love our neighbors as ourselves. In FBCFP's context, participating in orphan care by the placement of children into fostering or adopting homes will be taught not only as how the church shows the love of Christ but also as how the church proclaims the gospel of Christ.

Second, leadership is essential to bridge the gap between teaching and participation in orphan care. In *Orphanology*, Tony Merida and Rick Morton identify the need for church leaders to not only teach the Word, but to lead by example and to establish a simple plan for orphan care.[7] Beyond faithfully teaching God's Word, this project seeks to provide both leadership examples and a concise plan for how church members can participate in orphan care. In 2018 two families of FBCFP began certification classes for child placement through becoming licensed foster and adoptive homes by the Dekalb County DHR. One family was mine. Alongside this project, the church had the examples of these families to follow. Furthermore, this project is designed to provide families with training and a pathway for partnering with the Dekalb DHR. Thus, the project was designed to fulfill the proposed three-fold model for implementing orphan care ministry by teaching, leading, and developing a simple plan.

Third, equipping families to participate in foster care and adoption provides a clear opportunity for Christians to engage in the mission of the church and in orphan care. The desired outcome is that church members would fulfill the desire of God to care for orphans through becoming a fostering or adoptive home. In a narrow sense, the project is designed for leading families to commit to become foster and adoptive families as part

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[7] Tony Merida and Rick Morton, *Orphanology: Awakening to Gospel-Centered Adoption and Orphan Care* (Birmingham, AL: New Hope Publishers, 2011), 96.

the fulfillment of the church's mission. The added benefit of teaching, leading, and equipping families specifically for child placement is that, as a result, many members of FBCFP would have the desire to engage in orphan care in other ways. Church members can participate by prayer, financial assistance, meeting physical needs, raising awareness, or being part of a support ministry for families. Not every family should or will participate as a fostering or adopting family; however, many more can and should participate in the mission of the church and public witness of Christ's love through orphan care.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to lead families in First Baptist Church, Fort Payne, Alabama, to participate in orphan care through local foster care and adoption.

Goals

The following four goals were established to determine the effectiveness of the project. The first goal sought to assess biblical understanding, practical considerations, and personal accountability regarding the gospel ministry of orphan care. The second and third goals sought to connect the gospel mandates for orphan care to practical obedience. Broadly, the fourth goal was meant to connect the gospel ministry of orphan care to the social concern and ministry of the local church. Narrowly, the fourth goal was meant to ensure a plan is in place to aid individuals and families of FBCFP to participate in foster care and adoption.

1. The first goal was to assess understanding of the church's role in orphan care as well as the current attitudes toward local foster care and adoption among members of FBCFP.

2. The second goal was to develop a five-session teaching series on the church's role in orphan care which addressed directly and encouraged church members to become fostering or adopting families.

3. The third goal was to equip the church for its role in orphan care, foster care, and

adoption.

4. The fourth goal was to develop a ministry plan for helping families who desire to foster or adopt in taking steps to partner successfully with local agencies.

The completion of each goal was dependent on a defined means of measurement. The research methodology and instruments used to measure the success of each goal are detailed in the following section.

Research Methodology

The first goal of assessing the understanding of the church's role in orphan care as well as the current attitudes toward local foster care and adoption among members of FBCFP was evaluated using an Orphan Care Assessment (OCA) prior to the teaching series developed for this project.[8] This OCA was administered to members of FBCFP during Sunday school. The preliminary assessment measured theological understanding of the church's role in orphan care, theoretical understanding of personal accountability in orphan care, and personal attitudes toward local foster care and adoption. Regarding personal attitudes, the OCA measured willingness verses unwillingness, practical concerns and hindrances, and awareness of the need for fostering or adopting families. The goal was successfully met when no less than fifty members completed the OCA and when the results were compiled electronically for further analysis.

The second goal was to develop a five-session teaching series on the church's role in orphan care which addressed directly and encouraged church members to become fostering or adopting families.[9] Two teaching sessions took place in the context of Sunday morning worship services with thirty-five minutes of teaching. The other three sessions took place in a break-out session format, which included fifty minutes of

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[8] See appendix 1.

[9] See: Jason Johnson, *ALL IN Orphan Care: Equipping the Church to Serve Vulnerable Children and Families* (Houston: ALL IN Publishing, 2016). This resource provides a multiple-session discussion guide for initiating orphan care ministry in the church. The scope of the study is broad yet comprehensive, and it will serve as a meaningful resource to shape this project's teaching series.

teaching and guided discussion. The break-out sessions occurred during scheduled Sunday school times and were comprised of members of adult Sunday school classes. Since the original population for the pre-teaching survey was drawn from Sunday School roles, the times selected for teaching ensured maximum participation. The broad scope of the teaching series was to expose FBCFP to God's concern for the orphan, gospel implications for adoption, and gospel mandates in regard to the church's role in orphan care. Sunday morning sermons primarily provided the big-picture framework, connecting orphan care to the gospel and the church's mission. Since the series intended to connect the biblical framework with steps of practical obedience, Sunday break-out sessions introduced avenues to be involved in orphan care, addressed hindrances to getting involved in orphan care, and introduced a pathway for adoption and foster care. The goal was measured by a panel consisting of the former senior pastor of FBCFP, two deacons of FBCFP, one staff member of the Dekalb County DHR, and a staff member from a partner church engaged in orphan care. The panel utilized a rubric to evaluate the content of the teaching series based on biblical faithfulness, methodology, and applicability for the church.[10] This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded the sufficient level. Had the initial feedback yielded less than ninety percent, the curriculum would be revised until it met or exceeded the sufficient level.

The third goal was to equip the church for its role in orphan care, foster care, and adoption. Pastors from FBCFP taught the five-session orphan care series to equip the church. This goal was measured by administering a pre-teaching and post-teaching survey that measured church members' level of theological understanding and accountability for orphan care as well as personal attitudes toward foster care and adoption. Furthermore, interviews were conducted for families or individuals who either

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[10] See appendix 2.

demonstrated the greatest increase between pre- and post-teaching surveys or who self-identified as interested in participating in orphan care through foster care or adoption. This goal was considered successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive and statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-teaching survey scores and when interviews were conducted, evaluated, and summarized.[11]

The fourth goal was to develop a ministry plan to help families who desire to foster or adopt in taking steps to partner successfully with local agencies. The teaching series encouraged church members to participate in orphan care by becoming fostering or adoptive families. At that point, those who were interested were directed to an initial, special interest meeting. The initial meeting's purpose was to provide information and counsel for the next steps, to define the aid that FBCFP would provide during the process, and to direct participants toward a partnership with the Dekalb County DHR. The Dekalb County DHR has an established process and set of requirements for families desiring to foster or adopt. The plan is meant to aid families at three stages of partnership with Dekalb County DHR: Commitment, Family Preparation/Certification, and Family Support. This goal was measured by two FBCFP staff members, two FBCFP deacons, and a Dekalb County DHR staff member who utilized a rubric to evaluate the plan's content, scope, resources, and application. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficient level and the plan had been adopted by FBCFP. Should the rubric evaluation indicators had fallen short of the ninety percent sufficient level, the strategic plan would be revised until such time that it met or exceeded the sufficient level and was adopted by FBCFP.[12]

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[11] See appendix 3.

[12] See appendix 4.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms will be used in the ministry project and are supplied below to aid the reader.

Adoption. The terms *adoption* can be used in two regards. First, *adoption* refers to the "legal act that changes the personal status of a child in relation to his natural parent(s) and constitutes the relationship of a parent and child between him and some other person or persons."[13] Adoption means a child is received in a home as permanent member of the family.[14] Second, *adoption* refers to gospel adoption or spiritual adoption. In this sense adoption refers to the biblical concept that God has adopted believers as His children (Rom 8:15-17).[15]

Foster care. "Foster care is 24-hour substitute care for children placed away from their parents or guardians and for whom the [state agency] has placement and care responsibility."[16] Foster care is a temporary living arrangement for children who need a secure living arrangement when they cannot live with their parents or have been removed from their natural homes.[17] While foster care is a broad term, it is primarily used in this paper to refer to the in-home placement of a child with a family. Thus, a foster child is any child who is in the care of the state agency, whether in-home or in a treatment center.

Orphan. An orphan is a child who has lost one of both of his or her parents to death (familial orphan), who cannot live with his natural parents because his parents are functionally incapable of providing care (functional orphan), or whose parent(s) have had

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[13] Francis Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons: Legal Metaphors in the Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1984), 67.

[14] Johnson, *ALL IN Orphan Care,* 90.

[15] Context will make clear what sense of *adoption* is meant. If needed, the phrases "gospel adoption" or "spiritual adoption" will clarify that legal adoption is not meant.

[16] "45 CFR 1355.20—Definitions," LII Legal Information Institute, accessed January 8, 2018, https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/45/1355.20.

[17] Johnson, *ALL IN Orphan Care*, 90.

their parental rights terminated (social orphan).[18] Those in the orphan care movement use the term broadly to refer to those worldwide who are "fatherless," meaning children who have no families to care for them.[19]

Orphan care. Orphan care extends beyond simply caring for the "orphan" in the strict sense of the word. The term refers to a variety of acts of justice and mercy on behalf orphans and vulnerable children.[20] Furthermore, efforts have been made to guide Christians away from an unbalanced focus on adoption as the only means of caring for orphans to the array of merciful acts to aid vulnerable children and families.[21]

Several delimitations were placed on the project. First, the project surveyed adult populations within the church for pre- and post-tests, drawn from adult Sunday school class rolls. The reason for the limitation was two-fold. Since one of the primary aims of the study was to have families participate in foster care and adoption, instruments were be designed specifically for adults who would be eligible to do so. Also, the Alabama DHR specifies age minimums for eligibility for certification as well as minimum marriage requirements for couples.[22] Second, the project was confined originally to a twenty-week timeframe. This would have given adequate time to prepare and teach the five-session series and conduct the post-series survey after sessions were completed. Third, this project concentrated on a partnership with the Dekalb County

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[18] Johnson, *ALL IN Orphan Care*, 24–25.

[19] Merida and Morton, *Orphanology*, 50–51.

[20] The Christian Alliance for Orphans identifies a continuum of care for orphans and vulnerable children. Prevention, family unification, and temporary and/or permanent residential care are included in the scope of orphan care. ("Faith2Action_ContinuumOfCare.Pdf," accessed January 8, 2018, http://faithtoaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Faith2Action_ContinuumOfCare.pdf.) Similarly, Merida and Morton in identify adoption, foster care, participating in institutional care, combating human trafficking and slavery, and engaging in transracial ministry as orphan care ministries (*Orphanology*, 52-56).

[21] David M. Smolin, "Moving from Fad to Fundamentals: The Future of the Evangelical Christian Adoption and Orphan Movement," in Robert L. Ballard et al., *The Intercountry Adoption Debate: Dialogues across Disciplines* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 464–68.

[22] The minimum age is 19 years, and the minimum marriage requirement is one year to be certified to be a foster home and three years to be certified to be an adoptive home.

DHR. While other agencies are suitable for those who seek to aid orphans, the partnership with Dekalb DHR was selected based on proximity, need, and willingness of the agency to partner with FBCFP. Finally, the fourth goal of this project was restricted in scope to primarily provide "next steps" for those who desire to participate in adoption or foster care. The broader scope of orphan care ministry was not ignored in the ministry context but fell outside of the scope of the last goal.

Conclusion

The church is called to obey the Great Commandment and to fulfill the Great Commission. Certainly, the church does so as it cares for the vulnerable and the "least" in the world. More pointedly, Christians are mandated to fulfill their calling by caring for orphans. Therefore, church leaders do well to teach, lead, and engage their members in orphan care ministries. Chapter two will provide the theological undergirding for orphan care in the church, and chapter three will provide the practical framework for leading orphan care ministries in the local church.

CHAPTER 2

THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR
ORPHAN CARE AND CHILD PLACEMENT
MINISTRIES

Russell Moore claims that "not every Christian is called to adopt or foster a

child. But every Christian is called to care for orphans."[1] The purpose of this chapter is to

establish a biblical and theological foundation to support Moore's claim for *every*

Christian by exploring four relevant texts. The adoption imagery of the gospel in Romans

8:12-17 will illuminate the theological truth that all Christians are adopted children of

God and how that truth influences Christians' motivation for orphan care. James 1:27 will

make the explicit claim that true religion requires care for orphans. By means of an

exegesis of Matthew 25:31-46, orphan care will be located within Jesus' mandate to care

for the "least of these" in a society. Finally, care for orphans will be shown to be a natural

outworking of Jesus' Great Commission for the church in Matthew 28:16-20.

Romans 8:12-17

Romans 8 provides essential insight into the identity of every follower of

Christ, an identity found in Christ and His redeeming work. The gospel of adoption alerts

Christians to their own self-identity. There are no natural born children of God. Before

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

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Christ and apart from Christ all people are spiritual orphans, and all Christians'

inheritance and identity are rooted in their adoption into the family of God through Jesus

Christ. From this self-understanding Christians have sufficient motivation to reflect the

love of God and the deeds of Christ through orphan care. Russell Moore states, "The

gospel of adoption challenges us, first of all, to recognize ourselves as spiritual orphans.

The gospel compels us to see our fallen universe—and our own egocentric kingdoms

therein—as not the way it's supposed to be."[2] The following exegesis of Romans 8:12-17

will focus primarily on the robust self-understanding of Christians as adopted children of

God. Secondarily, the exegesis will give attention to the implications for living according

to their new identity as adopted children of God and what implications it has for

Christians' involvement in orphan care.

The God Who Adopts

Repeatedly in Romans, Paul uses familial terms to highlight the position of

Christians who have received salvation in Jesus Christ, describing Christians as "sons of

God" (8:14), adopted sons (8:15), "children of God" (8:16), and "heirs of God" (8:17).

Especially relevant in the context is Paul's use of the adoption metaphor, that Christians

are adopted sons of God. In Paul's writing, *adoption* is a key term for Christians' new

status as God's people. The term is a familial, graphic, and intimate description of God's

people. To be a Christian is to be an adopted son.[3]

In proclaiming a believer's adoption through Christ, Paul in Romans 8:14

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[2] Moore, "Abba Changes Everything," 20.

[3] Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God's Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 22–23.

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states, "For all who are led by the Spirit are sons of God." The conjunction *for* is meant to connect verses 14-17 to verses 1-13. Paul's argumentation has been building up to the proclamation that believers in Jesus, free from condemnation and controlled by the Spirit, are in fact children of God. To be children of God is a relationship, according to Paul, which is undoubtedly brought about by divine design, "by the will of the Father, through the work of the Son, and the ministry of the Spirit."[4]

The Greek word used for adoption, "*huiothesia*," is unique to Paul in the New Testament (Rom 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5), and has no uses in the LXX.[5] However, the notion that the people of God are adopted children of God is not a novel idea in the scope of the Old Testament. Paul's understanding of adoption as rooted in the OT can be seen in Romans 9:4 when he writes of Israelites that "to them belong the adoption," literally *huiothesia.* To be adopted as sons, according to Paul, was one of the privileges enjoyed by Israel. God has taken this insignificant people group of the Ancient Near East and bestowed upon them the status and blessing of belonging to Him. The nation was His adopted son.[6]

If *huiothesia* does not occur in the LXX, then what Old Testament material is Paul drawing from to assert that Israel was the adopted son of God? Exodus 4:22-23 says, "Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me. If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son." Many scholars conclude that this can be understood to signify

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[4] Moore, "Abba Changes Everything," 20.

[5] Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*, 22.

[6] Burke, *Adopted into God's Family,* 49.

God's adoption of Israel.[7] God has called this particular people out of Egypt for no other reason than His love for them. There is no notion of divine descent as if Israel was birthed from the gods. Israel's special status as son came by the will of love of God. Israel's sonship came by adoption. A similar argument is made from Hosea 11:1: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." Therefore, when Paul uses the adoption metaphor in the NT, applying it to all the people of God, he is not introducing a novel concept but extending and adapting a Jewish understanding of what it means to be the people of God.[8]

Another view is that Paul's adoption metaphor is not grounded strictly in an adoptive view of Israel in the OT, but more generally in terms of Israel's "sonship."[9] If Israel cannot be shown unambiguously to be God's adopted son, it is clear that God established a familial Father-son relationship with Israel. Exodus 4:22 and other texts (Jer 31:9; Deut 32:6; Isa 63:15-16, 64:8) point to Israel's special status as God's son. The relationship is one of special favor that is rooted in God's initiative to enter into a covenant relationship with Israel. God's love is what initiates and sustains this status.[10]

Sonship carried with it the expectation of familial loyalty and covenant obedience. With its privileged position came the responsibility to live as the son of God,

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[7] See Byrne,*'Sons of God'—"Seed of Abraham": A Study of the Idea of the Sonship of God of All Christians in Paul against the Jewish Background*; Knight, *A Christian Theology of the Old Testament*, BTCL, vol. 21; Cook, "The Concept of Adoption in the Theology of Paul," in *Saved by Hope: Essays in Honor of Richard C. Ouderslusy;* Cranfield, *Romans*, International Critical Commentary, vol. 1; Bruce, *Commentary on Galatians*, NIGTC.

[8] Burke, *Adopted into God's Family,* 49.

[9] See Wright *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land and Property in the Old Testament*, Biblical and Theological Classics Library, vol. 14.

[10] Burke, *Adopted into God's Family,* 50.

to reflect the image of the Father, and to live according to His ways. However, the story of Israel is the story of a wayward son, repeatedly betraying the covenant and special status and eventually going into exile. Although Israel had broken the covenant, the Father-son relationship remained intact. Israel's sonship is appealed to (Hos 11:1) in order to point to God's unbroken love and promise of restoration.[11] The broader concept of sonship in the OT seems to focus less strictly on adoption but more on election and redemption.[12] Whereas Paul clearly believes that "adoption" is an appropriate term to categorize Israel's special status as God's son, he is likely drawing not strictly from a few texts describing Israel as "adopted" but drawing from the breadth of Israel's sonship relationship with God. Now, Israel's blessed and chosen position as God's son is replicated for all those who are in Christ. They are in Christ, the true Israel, and have become God's children.[13]

While Paul's rootedness in the Old Testament in how he understands *huiothesia*, Paul is also presenting a "contextualized proclamation of the Gospel to pagan Gentiles in a Greco-Roman world."[14] Paul's adoption metaphor, which is vital for understanding the full import of Paul's proclamation, also draws from his own and his original audience's understanding of the practice of Roman adoption and sonship. Considering the shared knowledge, Paul presents the gospel of Christ in such a way to

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[11] Burke, *Adopted into God's Family,* 52.

[12] Burke, *Adopted into God's Family,* 70.

[13] Grant R. Osborne, *Romans*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 205.

[14] Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2016), 707.

capture the richness of what it is to be made sons of God.

Adoption in ancient Roman society, unlike modern adoption in the West, was not for childless parents desiring to adopt a child. The subjects of adoption were adults, and were adopted in order to prevent the extinction of a family. Given the importance of the family to Roman society, the preservation of the family through adoption not only meant that adoption was a key practice of Roman society, it meant that adoption had a treasured status in society. A childless family or a family whose child did not live to adulthood would adopt a son from another family, preserve their family, and secure an heir. [15]

Longenecker outlines the four prominent features of Roman adoption that no doubt were part of the shared understanding for Paul's use of *huiothesia.*

> An adopted son was taken out of his previous situation and placed in an entirely new relationship to his new adopting father, who became his new *paterfamilias*. An adopted son started a new life as part of his new family, with all his old debts canceled. An adopted son was considered no less important than any other biologically born son in his adopting father's family. An adopted son experienced a changed status, with his old name set aside and a new name given him by his adopting father. [16]

The implications for what it is to be part of God's spiritual family are clear. Children of God have been taken out of a previous situation—death and slavery to sin—and brought into the family of God through the work of Jesus. As sons of God, old debts are cancelled; they are no longer under condemnation or debtors to the flesh. Whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free, adopted sons are full members of God's family and coheirs with Christ. And believers have the assurance of a new status and new

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[15] Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*, 65–66.

[16] Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 705.

name—no longer slaves but sons of God.

The Spirit of Adoption

The ministry of the Spirit of God features prominently in Romans 8, but particularly in the first seventeen verses, with special emphasis on the work of the Spirit on behalf of and in the lives of believers.[17] The "Spirit of life" confers liberation in Christ and "no condemnation" for believers (8:1-2). Liberation comes to full fruit in the future as the "mortal body" is raised by the power of the Spirit (8:11), but presently liberation means freedom from the power of sin and participation in work of the Spirit to put sin to death.[18] The Spirit remains prominent for understanding the adoption of the sons of God and life as sons of God. Sons of God are those who have received the Spirit at conversion. They have the testimony of the Spirit that they have not only been set free from slavery but have moved from freedmen to adopted sons.[19] What Romans 8:1-13 pictures as the work of the "Spirit of life" now is seen in terms of the "Spirit of adoption" in 8:15. For what can be said of the meaning of "adoption as sons," the Spirit remains the determinative reference point for defining divine sonship.[20]

In a sense, the ministry of the Spirit has a restrictive force, clarifying who the children of God are.[21] That "all those who are led by the Spirit" are the children of God

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[17] Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament; New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1996), 468.

[18] Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans,* 468.

[19] Osborne, *Romans*, 205.

[20] James D. G. Dunn, *Romans. 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, 38A (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1988), 451.

[21] Dunn, *Romans. 1-8,* 447.

draws attention to the uniqueness of those who are children of God, specifically those who have received the Spirit at conversion. At the same time, Paul's wording in 8:14 has an inclusive force. Those led by the Spirit are not limited to those within the boundaries of Israel nor those who are defined as sons of God by faithfulness to the law.[22] In terms of the Spirit of God, the circle which constitutes the chosen and beloved sons of God has been widened to include all those, Gentiles or Jews, who believe in Christ.[23]

This becomes especially important in the meaning of "the Spirit of adoption as sons" in 8:15. In Romans 8, to be led by the Spirit is to have a "Spirit-inspired perspective" on life with God.[24] The Spirit speaks to believers, revealing that which is theirs in Christ. That which is true of the new status of believers in Christ is therefore made known and experiential for each believer. By the Spirit of adoption, the status as adopted sons of God becomes experienced and assured in the lives of believers. Some debate exists over the phrase, whether it is more appropriate to be the "Spirit of adoption" or the "spirit of adoption." The former draws more attention to the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's work is thus contrasted with the "spirit of slavery" (8:15) and is parallel in a sense to the "Spirit of life" in 8:2. In much the same way the Spirit confers life and liberation to believers, so too the Spirit confers the full assurance of divine adoption for believers.[25]

Argument for the latter, "spirit of adoption" relies upon the parallel structure

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[22] Dunn, *Romans. 1-8,* 451.

[23] Osborne, *Romans*, 205.

[24] Craig S. Keener, *Romans: A New Covenant Commentary*, New Covenant Commentary Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009), 102.

[25] Keener, *Romans,* 102.

of Paul's two uses of *spirit* in 8:15. The spirit is the "essential principle influencing a person." The spirit of adoption against the spirit of slavery means that slavery to sin is no longer the principle that governs believers' lives, but the spirit of adoption as sons. Believers live entirely new lives as sons of God.[26]

While advocating for the former, the fullness of meaning tends to include that which is argued for in the latter. The result of the Spirit of adoption is that believers are no longer those who are dominated by slavery to sin or those who shrink back in fear before God, but who live fully and experientially as sons of God.[27] Sons of God cry out their new relationship "*Abba*, Father." Membership in God's family is experienced with the fullness of emotion and joy.[28] The emphasis is not only upon assurance of status as children of God but of the reality of the intimate relationship with the Father to be experienced by the sons of God.[29]

Sons and Daughters of God

Paul states that sons and daughters are led by the Spirit of God, which is of great importance in Roman 8. In fact, Paul has put immense emphasis in the reality that children of God are not "in the flesh" (8:9) and "debtors" to the flesh (8:12) but "in the Spirit" (8:9) and "led by the Spirit" (8:12-14). With the Spirit comes the possibility of true holy living—putting to death the deeds of the body and living in the righteousness of God. The adoption metaphor used by Paul harmonizes with the work of the Spirit to

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[26] Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 704.

[27] Osborne, *Romans*, 205.

[28] Osborne, 206.

[29] Osborne, 207.

produce those who reflect the righteous life of the Father. For Paul, to be adopted by God produces in the children of God authentic sonship living. Much like an adopted son in the Roman world experienced a complete status change that produces a new life in the adoptive family with new motives and new allegiances, Christians assume the marks of a new life as children of God.[30] "A 'son of God' must behave in a manner worthy of his august descent, and only those who behave so are truly 'sons' … only as men behave like God can they really prove themselves to be the sons of God."[31]

Romans 8:17 concludes that children of God, led by the Spirit, are also heirs of God with Christ who will one day participate in Christ's glorification but who, for now, participate in His suffering. Here, Paul assures adopted sons of God of their inheritance and future glory that they will share in with Christ. The future inheritance informs how Christians live now. To be adopted by God in Christ secures future glorification. Therefore, to be a child of God means one has willingly entered into God's plan to conform believers into the image of His Son (8:29). Moving toward glorification as heirs with Christ, believers' lives now become progressively identifiable with the Son of God. That believers will suffer with Christ indicates that believers will bear the distinguishable marks of Christ in their lives.[32]

The lives of believers will testify to their adoption as sons. The testimony involves embracing the ethical imperative of sonship—righteous living. Led by the Spirit, believers conform to the likeness of Christ and live according to the concerns of the

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[30] Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*, 145.

[31] L. H. Marshall, *The Ethics of the New Testament* (London: Macmillan, 1960), 259.

[32] Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*, 145.

Father. Sons of God are charged to reflect and represent the Father. Clearly the Father cares about adoption because He has adopted children into His family. Christians' involvement in orphan care is a reasonable response to their adoption as sons. What God has done for them in Christ can be done for others in earthly relationships. Orphan care is a visible sign of the gospel of adoption in believers' lives. It is a testimony of their adoption into God's family.

James 1:27

James writes, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (1:27). James' statement in 1:27 is terse and concrete. His language is meant to move the audience beyond attempts to evade responsibility by means of religion which is self-deceptive and dead.[33] At this same time, the mandate provides a positive test for true religion, that is, to test genuine faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Jas 2:1). While true religion certainly extends beyond caring for orphans, true religion certainly encompasses no less. Under such clear biblical instruction, the people of God are challenged to respond.[34]

True Religion and Orphans

In 1:27, James is offering a contrast to the self-deceptive, worthless religion of 1:26 by giving a picture of religion that is instead pure and undefiled. In defining true

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[33] Ralph P. Martin, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 48 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988), lxxxvii.

[34] Tony Merida and Rick Morton, *Orphanology: Awakening to Gospel-Centered Adoption and Orphan Care* (Birmingham, AL: New Hope Publishers, 2011), 68.

religion, James puts forth two composite elements. One element involves purity and piety, concern for holiness, and set-apartness from the pollution of a sinful world. The second element is a call to social concern. James blends the call to be spiritual separatists with the call to be spiritual activists, so to speak.[35] The religious life is one that is fully lived before God and set apart for God. True religion involves "the inward life of self" and "the life lived with others."[36] The two elements of true religion characterize the whole corpus of Christian teaching on the will of God for His people.[37]

Life with God produces true religion. By the word of truth, God has brought forth a new people by new birth in Jesus (1:18). James' concern for the children of God through the new birth is that the Word of God and the reception of the wisdom of God might produce the righteousness of God in their lives (1:19-25).[38] Born of God, the expectation is to reflect the righteous character of God and live out the righteous life required by God.[39] James also emphasizes the ongoing place of the "implanted word" (1:21). The Word of God through which believers have experienced new birth is also the Word that must be accepted in the lives of believers by being doers of the Word.[40] The *implanted* Word is also the *accepted* Word. The Word of God has found a home—

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[35] Craig L. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions* (Downers Grove, IL: Apollos/InterVarsity Press, 1999), 151.

[36] Kurt A. Richardson, *James*, The New American Commentary, vol. 36 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 103.

[37] Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell, *James*, In vol. 16 of Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series: New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 83.

[38] Richardson, *James*, 101.

[39] Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 86.

[40] Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 88.

implanted and internalized—and works in the lives of the believers to produce piety and to reflect the righteous life from God

James reasonably claims that the testing ground for true religion is actions that care for and protect those in need (specifically orphans and widows in their distress). Such actions are the logical outworking and display of the heart of God. The mandate to "visit" orphans and widows in their distress fits within a larger theme in James' epistle: wisdom in regard to poverty and riches and the righteous use of wealth.[41] Secondly, the mandate captures what doers of the law actually do. Christ's followers help the most helpless in society. Meeting the needs of the helpless and vulnerable of society is rooted in the life and teaching of Jesus and in the OT Scriptures. The Greek verb *episkeptesthai*, used by James which is translated here as "to visit," is used elsewhere in the NT in Matthew 25:36, 43 where Jesus is instructing His disciples that true discipleship manifests itself in help for the vulnerable.[42] "To visit" orphans and widows in their distress is a compressed way of instructing believers to move toward those who are helpless with the appropriate help and needed care. God cares for the helpless and holds His people accountable for doing likewise.[43] While 1:27 is not the exhaustive definition of Christianity, it offers an indispensable test for faith that is genuine and of worth.

Father to the Fatherless

James is explicit in his description of true religion: care for orphans and

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[41] Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 64.

[42] Martin, *James, 52*.

[43] Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 96.

widows in their affliction. But why is the test of genuine faith in Jesus Christ related to the treatment of orphans and widows? Broadly, the mandate mirrors the character of God. God describes Himself as a "Father of the fatherless and protector of widows" (Ps 65:8) and One who "upholds the widow and the fatherless" (Ps 146:9). Extension of aid to the orphan and widow is a reflection and imitation of the character of God.

The orphan and the widow, along with the alien and the economically deprived, are special objects of God's mercy in the OT. The list is not meant to be exhaustive, but representative of the "entire range of disadvantaged, unprotected, and easily mistreated individuals and groups in ancient times, including those among the Israelites…"[44] God comes to the aid of those in need. God shows favor to the poor and disenfranchised against the human tendency to favor the wealthy and powerful. As God cares for those in need, God's people care for the most vulnerable members of society.[45] God's concern for these vulnerable groups overflows into warning against those who abuse them (Deut 27:9; Exod 22:21-22; Zech 7:10), to blessing for those who bless them (Deut 14:28-29), and to mandating protection and provision for them (Deut 10:18; 14:28-29).[46] Isaiah 1:10-17 in many ways is similar to James 1:27. When God calls for the reformation of the worship of Israel through repentance He says, "Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean… bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause" (Isa 1:16-17).

In requiring care for orphans and widows, James picks up what is frequently

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[44] Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 2 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 515.

[45] Richardson, *James*, 102.

[46] Merida and Morton, *Orphanology*, 64–65.

commanded of God's people in the OT. The vertical reception of the blessings of God

calls for a response, specifically a response of practical obedience and sharing

horizontally and socioeconomically the blessing of God.[47] Orphans and widows, as the

most vulnerable and helpless in a society, are the objects of the obedient action of

followers of Jesus. Whereas orphans and widows are the outcasts in the world, they find

their place of aid and belonging within the people of God.[48]

The Test of Wealth

Beyond the clear, scriptural roots of the mandate to care for orphans and

widows in God's care for the helpless, James also develops in his epistle a theology of

poverty and prosperity that figures into James 1:27. Throughout the epistle, James

strongly denounces the rich, their paradigm for life, and their actions. He calls for the

poor in the Christian community to endure patiently with single-minded faith in God

while pursuing the righteous life of God. (1:9-11; 2:1-14; 4:13-17; 5:1-6). Particularly

important to James is that believers not adopt the practices and patterns of the rich,

practices which oppress and discriminate and pursue the temporary rewards of wealth.

Such practices and patterns, if present in Christians, point to a kind of apostasy evident in

a divided heart that loves money over God.[49] Wealth, poverty, and economic pressures

comprised one of the major tests facing the Christian community.[50] Davids asks, "Will

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[47] Christopher J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 185.

[48] Richardson, *James*, 103.

[49] Peter H. Davids, *James*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1989), 46–47.

[50] Davids, *James*, 45.

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the Christian really stand the test and share with the rest of the community? Or will the person show himself to be of a divided heart and really a lover of the world?"[51]

In regard to orphan care, James 1:27 places before Christians a testing ground for the genuineness of their faith. Faith in Jesus Christ must lead to action. Inward piety or outward religiosity is not enough. The actions of faith must be in accord with the character of the faith they profess. James' mandate for compassionate care for the orphan and widow is grounded in the consistent instruction for the people of God to reflect their God, Father to the fatherless and defender of widows. To fail in the area of charity is especially revealing of a double-minded person, motivated by the desires of the world instead of the righteous life of God. The question remains for modern Christians if they succeed in the test and share what they have with orphans.

Matthew 25:31-46

Matthew 25:21-46 locates the responsibility for Jesus' disciples to care for "the lowly, the insignificant, and the unimportant in the world's eyes" as of the greatest significance, indicating their true discipleship and that they belong in the kingdom of Jesus Christ.[52] The ethical instruction of this passage is not unlike that which has been discussed above. The actions of the disciples of Christ are rooted in belonging to God through Jesus Christ and inhabiting the concerns and deeds consistent with the character of God, as seen in the life of Jesus and as led by the Spirit. The call to action is concrete. Righteous action must extend to all, especially those in particular need. The judgment

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[51] Davids, *James*, 46.

[52] Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 641.

scene adds the emphasis on what the appropriate ethical response is in light of the weight of one's eternal future. Here in Matthew 25:31-46, the appropriate response is compassionate deeds.[53]

Matthew 25:31-46 fits within a string of Jesus' parabolic teaching on judgment from 24:43. Though not a parable in the strictest sense, Jesus' metaphorical use of the separation of sheep and goats to describe the separate, eternal destiny of the righteous and unrighteous illustratively describes a scene like that which will happen on judgment day.[54] The scene features Jesus—the Son of Man (25:31) and the King (25:40)—coming to judge "all the nations." The scope of judgment is universal, much like Matthew 28:19, where Jesus' followers are given the universal commission for making disciples. All people will appear before Jesus Christ. As a shepherd separates sheep from goats in the flock, the King in His coming will separate the righteous for eternal life (25:34, 46) from the unrighteous for eternal punishment (25:41,46).

The explanation of the separation is quite straight-forward. King Jesus explains that He was hungry and the righteous gave Him food; He was thirsty and they gave Him drink; He was a stranger and they welcomed Him; He was naked and they clothed Him; He was sick and they visited Him; and He was in prison and they came to Him (25:35-36). But the unrighteous, when Jesus was hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, and in prison, did not attend to Him (25:42-43). Judgment is warranted for what was done for the King or refused for the King. Meeting the needs of the King would be an

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[53] David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 610.

[54] Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 634.

urgent priority for those who belong to the King.[55]

Yet, both the sheep and goats are perplexed by the words of King Jesus. Blomberg notes that the righteous are not surprised by inheriting eternal life. The issue of Jesus' teaching is not on works which merit eternal life. The issue that perplexes the righteous and unrighteous is the question, "When did we see Jesus hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, and in prison?"[56] Jesus' answer to both is that what compassion or service was given or denied to "one of the least of these" was given or denied to the King (25:40, 45). As Jesus identified with the poor and outcast in His earthly ministry, so too His followers are to treat the poor, outcast, and seemingly insignificant as of great importance to the King. Their actions have eternal significance.[57]

The Least of These

When King Jesus comes as judge, what compassion and service that is given to "one of the least of these" in their time of great need is unveiled as critical for the eternity of the righteous and unrighteous. The identification of "these least of these" is an interpretative crux on which the use of the text in regard to orphan care relies. Two major interpretations are put forth for the identity of the "least of these." The first, which has been the majority perspective throughout church history, is that Jesus is teaching the need to help those who are "the least of these my brothers" (25:40). In this case Jesus is fully identifying with His followers, and the issue at hand is how those who have not followed

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[55] John. Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005), 1033.

[56] Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches*, 127.

[57] Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 639.

Jesus treat those whom Jesus calls family and who carry the message of the gospel. The rejection of Jesus' brothers is a rejection of Jesus and the salvation He offers.[58] Within Matthew's gospel this interpretation is merited. The "least" is the superlative of the designation of Jesus' disciples as "little ones" (10:42; 18:6,10,14). Likewise, the use of "brothers" is typically used of spiritual brothers rather than biological siblings.[59] The interpretation does not exclude other parts of Jesus' teaching that mandate that His disciples care for anyone in need, but does restrict the direct meaning of Matthew 25:31-46 to be directed toward Jesus' disciples.

Those who hold to the second major interpretation understand "the least of these" to refer to all people, particularly those in need.[60] Textually, it is not a given that "the least my brothers" is necessarily disciples of Jesus. First, the use of the superlative ἐλάχιστος as "the least" appears in 25:40, but μικρός is used in 10:42; 18:6, 10, and 14.[61] While Matthew 18:6 pertains to the "little ones *who believe* [Jesus]," Jesus' teaching seems to emphasize the significance of the little children in spite of their societal insignificance.[62] This nuance appears to be mirrored in Matthew 25:31-46.[63] Also, the omission of "my brothers" in 25:45 is important. Does Jesus expect all unbelievers will have the opportunity to care for needy Christians or is it likely that non-Christians would

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[58] Donald Alfred. Hagner, *Matthew. 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33B (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 745.

[59] Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 377.

[60] Hagner, *Matthew. 14-28*, 745.

[61] William David Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (London: Clark International, 2008), 430.

[62] Matt 18:6, italics added.

[63] Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1032.

visit Christians in prison?[64] To the contrary, Jesus values service to the needy regardless

of whether they are Christians or not. Jesus counts their service as service to Him.

This broader interpretation is in keeping with the Scripture's emphasis on

action in accordance with the profession of faith made by those who belong to God

through Christ. It is connected to Jesus' unqualified proclamation, "Blessed are the

merciful, for they shall receive mercy" (Matt 5:7). The interpretation allows for the whole

scene to mirror Proverbs 19:17, "Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and

he will repay him for his deed." With either interpretation, the judgment is leveed in

accordance with how individuals treat the needy in front of them, whether it be Christians

in need or others. Motivations of the "all nations" are not addressed specifically but this

second interpretation, like the first, allows for the important question to be how the life

and message of Jesus have been received. Hearts that are given over to King Jesus will

give to their neighbor with the same openheartedness.[65]

Deeds of the Righteous

The text emphasizes the deeds done by the righteous or denied by the

unrighteous by the fourfold repetition of the deeds. The actions are in line with Jesus' call

upon His disciples to give of their material possessions and service to those in need.[66]

The repetition of the list should draw attention to the deeds done. While not an exhaustive

list for the righteous, the list at minimum is a practical guide for how the disciples of

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[64] Davies, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 430.

[65] David P. Gushee and Glen Harold Stassen, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*, Second ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 367.

[66] Gushee and Stassen, *Kingdom Ethics*, 367.

Christ ought to live.[67]

Six situations of need are presented by the King: hunger, thirst, being a stranger, nakedness, sickness, and imprisonment. The deeds mirror the deeds that, throughout Scripture, are described as the work of the righteous. The people of God provide food and clothing. The righteous are the hub of hospitality and care for the stranger, giving a place to stay for those displaced or in need of shelter on a journey. Similarly, deeds of mercy are appropriate for the righteous in regard to the sick and those imprisoned. Action is emphasized. When the righteous confront a need, they meet it. The list encompasses the vast array of human needs, giving structure to how disciples of Jesus care and serve in line with their profession of Jesus. Such disciples have participated in the kingdom's work in their lives and belong to the eternal kingdom.[68]

Matthew 28:16-20

At Jesus' post-resurrection appearance to His disciples, Jesus gave them a worldwide missional mandate. The disciple of Jesus will now, with the resurrection and ascension of their Lord, be given the task to continue and expand the ministry and mission of Jesus. The text is a foundational text for the mission of Jesus' church. The mission of the church is primarily to bring the good news of Jesus to bear upon the world to bring people to faith and obedience in Jesus Christ.[69] The Great Commission is foundational to the life and mission of the church. Therefore, Moore's claim that

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[67] Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 637.

[68] Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 745.

[69] Tom Wright, *Matthew for Everyone,* Part 2, *Chapters 16-28*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 208.

adoption is "part of our Great Commission mandate" is an immense claim.[70] The

following exploration of Matthew 28:16-20 will seek to substantiate the claim by

showing that orphan care is a natural outworking of Jesus' commission for His church.

The Great Commission

Following His resurrection, Jesus came to His disciples on a mountain. The

setting appears to purposefully echo the OT giving of the Law on Mount Sinai as were

other experiences with Jesus meeting with disciples on a mountain (Matt 5:1; 17:1). The

resurrected Jesus now commissions His disciples under His universal rule (28:18, 20) to a

universal mission.[71] Their task is primarily to "make disciples." The idea is to duplicate

themselves which means duplicating the pattern of Jesus, expanding the borders of faith

in Jesus Christ by the proclamation of the good news, and nurturing converts in a lifetime

of true discipleship. Making disciples will require that followers of Jesus "go" in some

respect and will be accompanied by "baptizing them" and "teaching them to observe all I

have commanded you" (28:19-20). The mandate is clearly meant to include proclamation

of the gospel in order to see converts. The full picture includes nurturing disciples into a

lifetime of following Jesus by righteously living out His teaching.[72] Given the immensity

of the task, the disciples go forth to make disciples in faith that Jesus is already ruling the

world.

The concept is straightforward. The disciples of Jesus are to advance the

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[70] Russell Moore, *Adopted for Life: The Priority of Adoption for Christian Families and Churches*, updated and exp. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 19.

[71] Turner, *Matthew*, 688–89.

[72] Hagner, *Matthew. 14-28*, 887.

mission and ministry of Jesus to all people in light of His all-powerful rule. Their resources are the Presence of the God with them, the gospel message, the community of faith, and the full scope of the teaching of Jesus. Their aim is to take Jesus' project of bringing the "rule of [God's] life-giving love" to bear continually upon all things and all people.[73] The fruit of the mission will be seen in the replication those who embody the righteous life and teaching of Jesus Christ who in turn bring that to bear upon all people and all things.

Orphan Care and the Great Commission

On the surface, adoption of a child by a Christian individual or family provides the opportunity for the introduction of the gospel of Jesus to a child and the structure for life-long disciple-making in the home. If one concedes that the home is an appropriate place to which the Great Commission extends, logically Christians have an equal charge in their home as they do to unreached people groups in Asia. For instance, by caring for orphans, Christians can meet a host of people to whom the good news of Jesus is meant to reach, people they otherwise would not have met. Christians will find themselves constantly in the presence of those who Jesus intends as objects of the church's mission.

A more robust connection can be made by understanding what Jesus is assigning to His followers. Broadly, Jesus is passing down the task of the expansion of His "good news." Announcing of the good news of the kingdom of God has been Jesus' mission (Matt 4:17). The fullness of the gospel is seen in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—the means by which God brings His redeems and restores the lost to Himself.

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[73] Wright, *Matthew for Everyone,* Part 2, 207.

The announcement of the good news remains central to how Jesus will accomplish His world-wide rule.[74] Announcement is certainly verbal; it involves preaching, proclaiming, and teaching. Announcing also involves the embodied declaration that the gospel has come to bear on the world. If this were not the case, Jesus conceivably would have opted that the mission is to make converts and not disciples. When a disciple lives out the teaching of Jesus, he or she is announcing the profound truths of the gospel. Whether it is living out the imagery of the gospel of adoption (Rom 8:14-17) or extending care to the "least of these" (Matt 25:40) who are orphans, Christians are announcing the good news and thus expanding the gospel.

The phrase "teaching them to observe all I have commanded you" is especially important. Making a disciple involves teaching "all" of Jesus' commands. While the church's foremost command is to *make* disciples, its command is also to *be* disciples. [75]What Jesus passed to His disciples is to be duplicated in every disciple that is made.[76] Logically, this would mean instilling in every disciple the mandate to be merciful (Matt 5:7), to love one's neighbor as oneself (Matt 22:39), and to serve "the least" (Matt 25:40). Given the vulnerable state of orphans, it is hard to ignore care for orphans as an outworking of true disciple-making. The Great Commission forms a cycle that disciples inhabit. Every disciple is called to be one who "teaches" which also means that every disciple is one who is "taught." Followers of Jesus, based on validity of the Great Commission, are to be receptive to learning and following Jesus' teaching for their

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[74] Wright, *Matthew for Everyone,* Part 2, 208.

[75] Nick Roark and Robert Cline, *Biblical Theology: How the Church Faithfully Teaches the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 112–13.

[76] Blomberg, *Matthew*, 431.

lifetime. Reasonably, the Great Commission would open more doors for orphan care as disciples continually open themselves up to Jesus' teachings.

Conclusion

The exploration of the four biblical texts above was meant to follow three significant threads as they relate to orphan care. First, God is an adopting God. He takes spiritual orphans and makes them sons. Second, Christians are called to the type of righteous life that mirrors the righteousness of God. Specifically, how Christians care for the most vulnerable in society is reflective of their fidelity to their Father. Third, Christians in every time and in every place are meant to find ways to live out the Great Commission, acting as Jesus' disciples and bring His life-giving rule into all things and making disciples wherever they are. Once these three biblical threads are pulled together, one is able to see how caring for orphans both reflects the righteous deeds of God and His gospel and is also context for making know the gospel. The following chapter will serve to further connect the biblical framework to the practices of Christians caring for orphans through foster care and adoption.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES
RELATED TO ORPHAN CARE

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the role of the church in regard to

orphan care. First, the church's responsibility regarding orphan care will be established,

with attention given to its theological convictions and identity. Second, this chapter will

establish the role that the church plays in orphan care by describing the need for foster

and adoptive families alongside the need for a variety of ministries of justice and mercy

for vulnerable children and families. Last, this chapter will establish the function of

church leaders in the implementation of orphan care ministry and its integration into the

ministry of the church.

Christians are Responsible for Orphan Care

According to 2013 research by the Barna Research Group, seventy-seven

percent of Christians believed that Christians have a special responsibility to adopt. At

the same time, sixty-two percent of non-Christians believed that Christians have a special

responsibility. The research also showed that Christians are more than twice as likely to

adopt than the general population and notably more likely to consider fostering or

adopting.[1] Indeed, the church has a unique role in the care for orphans. Christians'

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[1] Jedd Medefind, *Becoming Home: Adoption, Foster Care, and Mentoring—Living out God's Heart for Orphans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), "Infographics," graphics 1 and 3, Kindle.

responsibility is rooted deeply in the church's theology, identity, and mission; and it is precisely the church's unique character that makes it not only responsible but the ideal community for embracing the ministry of mercy to orphans.

From Orphans to Children

In stating three realities concerning the orphans of the world, Lawrence Bergeron, the Executive Director of A Child's Hope International, Inc., asserts as of primary significance that "God created a plan to redeem the orphan."[2] Throughout Scripture God has special concern for the most vulnerable in a society, and the "fatherless" is among those for whom God's compassionate care extends. In Psalm 68:5 God is called "Father to the fatherless and the protector of widows." God's plan for the orphan is equally God's purpose for His people. God desires His people to share in His concern—for them to "give justice to the weak and fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute" (Ps 82:3). If God has a plan to compassionately care for the orphan, then God's people are to be the instruments through which God will accomplish His desires.

God's plan for the redeeming the orphan resonates even more deeply with the people of God. The church's role is not simply duty-based, as if the Father's plan is a task list to be delegated to His children. Bergeron goes on to explain that the church has first-hand experience of God's plan to redeem the orphan. The church does not know of adoption or orphan care by a text-book definition only. The people of God were spiritual

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[2] Lawrence Bergeron, *Journey to the Fatherless: Preparing for the Journey of Adoption, Orphan Care, Foster Care and Humanitarian Relief for Vulnerable Children* (Bloomington, IN: Westbow Press, 2012), 179.

orphans on whom God lavished His love and invited into His family through the redeeming work of Jesus. God's plan for care and justice for the orphans of the world is a reality that the church is living in, spiritually speaking, every day. God has already included every believer in His plan to redeem the orphan. As the church has experienced their adoption in Christ, and as they have learned first-hand of the heart and plan of God, in like manner they join in the plan of the Father to redeem the orphan.[3] Committed to orphan care, the church displays something true about the Father. Russell Moore writes: "We, like Jesus, see what our Father is doing and do likewise (1 John 5:19). And what our Father is doing, it turns out, is fighting for orphans, making them sons and daughters."[4]

Care for orphans in not unique to the church. Secular agencies and individuals are engaged in meeting the physical and emotional needs of the world's orphans.[5] By His common grace, God has included many in His plan to care for orphans. However, the church's calling is inescapably unique. Rooted in the theology of their adoption as children of God, the church, therefore, is in a unique position and peculiarly motivated to the task of caring for orphans. John Piper writes, "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."[6] Piper goes on to write that God could have explained His children's

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[3] Bergeron, *Journey to the Fatherless,* 187–88.

[4] Russell Moore, *Adopted for Life: The Priority of Adoption for Christian Families and Churches*, updated and exp. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 73.

[5] Daniel J. Bennett, *A Passion for the Fatherless: Developing a God-Centered Ministry to Orphans* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 31.

[6] John Piper, "Adoption: The Heart of the Gospel," in *Reclaiming Adoption: Missional Living*

identity as being brought into the family by supernatural, new birth, which the Scriptures

do elsewhere (John 1:12-13), yet God chose the conception of adoption to explain

believers' place in the family of God (Gal 4:4-5).[7] Moore states that "adoption" is not

simply another literary device utilized by Paul for describing salvation. To be united with

Christ by the "Spirit of adoption" and to be adopted as "sons of God" (Rom 8:14-15)

speaks volumes about believers' identity and inheritance.[8] In other words, God's people

are uniquely linked to adoption and orphan care because their identity is rooted in being

spiritual orphans whom God adopted as children through the redeeming work of Jesus

Christ. Jason Johnson, the National Director of Church Ministry Initiatives for the

Christian Alliance for Orphans (CAFO), succinctly states the beauty of the gospel of

adoption:

> The imagery of adoption is used throughout Scripture to paint a vivid picture of the
> Gospel — God's rescuing and redeeming love for us in Jesus. Our salvation, or
> adoption into the family of God through Jesus, is presented as a multi-generational
> story of hope – breaking past cycles of brokenness, securing a new present reality and
> altering our future trajectory for all eternity. Because of the work of Christ on our
> behalf, we who were once isolated and orphaned in our sin have been adopted into
> the family of God as sons and daughters – and this changes everything forever![9]

Johnson goes on to write that when the gospel of adoption grows deeply into

the hearts of the church is when the gospel will be "demonstrated widely" in how the

church cares for the "oppressed, abused, marginalized, and orphaned."[10] Caring for the

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through the Rediscovery of Abba Father, ed. Dan Cruver (Adelphi, MD: Cruciform Press, 2011), 95.

[7] Piper, "Adoption," 95–96.

[8] Moore, *Adopted for Life*, 24.

[9] Jason Johnson, *ALL IN Orphan Care: Equipping The Church to Serve Vulnerable Children and Families* (Houston: ALL IN Publishing, 2016), 31.

[10] Johnson, *ALL IN Orphan Care*, 32.

fatherless begins with a recognition of God's grace—He adopted the fatherless and made them His children. The church responds to His grace by sharing and proclaiming the grace of God through caring for the fatherless.[11] The gospel is the starting point, and the gospel is meant to be displayed and demonstrated through the church in the way it cares for the fatherless.

The Church's Response to the Orphan

In *Orphanology,* Merida and Morton develop the following four biblical convictions that drive the church to compassionate care for the fatherless: "God is concerned for all people made in His image; He has special concern for the fatherless; God commands His people to share His concern for the fatherless; and He is pro-adoption."[12] Every person is created in the image of God. The church values the orphan as an image-bearer of God. Although orphans can often feel worthless or unloved, each one is loved by God and to be loved by His people.

Even more, Scripture identifies certain groups of vulnerable people—the orphan, the widow, and the sojourner—that stand out objects of God's great mercy.[13] "[God] executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing" (Deut 10:18). Repeatedly, God promises to protect and provide for the fatherless (Pss 10:14, 10:16-18, 68:5-6, 146:9), warns against abusing the fatherless (Deut 27:19; Exod 22:21-22; Zech 7:10), and promises to bless those who care

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[11] Bennett, *A Passion for the Fatherless*, 63–64.

[12] Tony Merida and Rick Morton, *Orphanology: Awakening to Gospel-Centered Adoption and Orphan Care* (Birmingham, AL: New Hope Publishers, 2011), 60.

[13] Merida and Morton, *Orphanology*, 64.

for them (Deut 14:28-29). God's people must share His concern and reflect the great mercy of God by providing for and acting justly toward the orphan (Deut 24:17-22; Ps 82:3-4).[14] Against such a backdrop, in the NT James mandates all Christians "to visit orphans and widows in their affliction" (James 1:27). No doubt the full import of obedience to the command "to visit" draws from God's compassionate care for the orphan and widow, to bless, to protect, and to provide. Jedd Medefind, president of the Christian Alliance for Orphans, writes, "Far more than a requirement, caring for orphans is first a response to God's love. It is not just a mandate, but a mirror of God's character."[15]

The mandate to care for the orphan is a calling upon every Christian. "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."[16] One type of response to James 1:27 is for families in the church to open their homes to children for foster care and adoption. Not all can, however; and not all are called specifically to respond in that manner. But an obedient response requires Jesus' church to do *something.* All Christians are to be engaged, personally and actively, in ministry of mercy for those in need. The Scriptures do not call for a theoretical response, but one in which God's people act.[17]

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[14] Merida and Morton, *Orphanology,* 64–67.

[15] Jedd Medefind, "How Should the Church Engage?," in *The Gospel & Adoption*, Gospel for Life Series, eds. Russell D. Moore and Andrew T. Walker (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2017), 65.

[16] Jedd Medefind, *Becoming Home,* sec. 4, para. 1.

[17] Bennett, *A Passion for the Fatherless*, 64–65.

Given the calling upon the church, Lawrence Bergeron states that in many ways the response of the church has been inadequate. He isolates the vast need for a response from the church to children in the U.S. foster care, and relays in stark terms the "problem" and "solution":

> Here is the essence of the problem: Too many at risk children need help. Too few case workers are available to help them and far too few homes are available to provide a safe and nurturing environment. The result is tragic.
> Here is the solution: The local church has the homes—of those who attend that church. They have the biblical mandate to care for the fatherless and they have the Lord God Almighty to equip them with what they need. Sounds like a solution to me.[18]

Stated in such definite terms, the church's duty to respond appears evident. The church sees the plight of the orphan, and they commit themselves in the light of the gospel and God's clear mandate to merciful ministry, to be part of God's solution.

The Church's Unique Character

The church engages in a unique world mission. As the church lives according to the Greatest Commandments, it lives its life on mission according to Jesus' Great Commission. For God's people, orphan care is not a disconnected cause for social justice nor is it for childless parents, but it is part of the church's missional mandate. In orphan care, the church joins God is His redeeming plan for orphans, and adoption itself is a sign of the gospel.[19] The church has a greater concern at stake in orphan care, so to speak. God's people have a consuming desire for God's glory and for their resources to be used for His salvation of and praise among all people (Ps 67). As much as orphan care is about

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[18] Bergeron, *Journey to the Fatherless,* 65.

[19] Moore, *Adopted for Life*, 18–19.

giving a child a home, it is about providing a gospel-filled home in which the child can receive the gospel. More than a social cause, it is about vividly displaying God's love, hope, welcome, and redemption in Jesus.[20]

Christians are rightly concerned about how they live as people on mission. Dan Cruver, founder and president of Together for Adoption, explains missional living as living "each waking moment in light of the gospel so that it increasingly affects every part of our lives for the glory of God's grace in our fallen world."[21] Certainly living each moment in light of the gospel also means commitment to the proclamation of the gospel. Parents who adopt or foster children have the wonderful opportunity to proclaim the gospel with the aim to make disciples in the home. Furthermore, for Christians to be known as those who not only advocate for the birth of unwanted children but also as those who receive unwanted children and make them sons and daughters helps the church gain the kind of positive, counter-cultural exposure consistent with its gospel proclamation. Churches committed to orphan care have the type of credible public witness that lends itself to the proclamation of the gospel.[22]

The church is committed to the mission, even at great cost. Christians recognize that the cross is at center of their adoption in Christ and their mission. When Paul wrote of believers' adoption as sons, he called believers co-inheritors with Christ in His glory and co-sufferers with Christ (Rom 8:17). Those thinking of adoption or foster care have a strong possibility to suffer in the process. They willingly take on the costs,

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[20] Dan Cruver, "Adoption of the Prodigals," in *Reclaiming Adoption*, 15.

[21] Cruver, "Adoption of the Prodigals," 16.

[22] Moore, *Adopted for Life*, 79.

knowing they suffer in union with Christ.[23] A healthy theology of suffering that allows

the church to persevere in orphan care, for families to persevere. They can struggle

honestly as they also celebrate God's redeeming work through their work.[24] Christians

open themselves to heartache that comes alongside the joy when they open themselves to

orphan care, but it is the type of exposure that the church is uniquely poised to embrace.

The church is also uniquely equipped for orphan care because of its unique

commitment to the family. In Psalm 68:5, God is called a Father to the fatherless, and in

the following verse God is described as the one who give a home to the solitary. God

does not intend that any child grow up without a family. Orphan care is a family-giving

endeavor. Ultimately, it is about giving a child a family.[25] Medefind asserts that

increasing social science is bearing out what God has designed from the beginning: the

family is the best place for a child to flourish. Since family is God's idea, it is ideal for

children.[26]

Even more than being committed to the family as God's ideal, the church is

committed to being family, as in brothers and sisters in Christ committed to one another.

In a study that attempted to approach social support for foster families in terms of

ecological theory, researchers found that foster family resilience coincided with support

from a number of "systems." Especially important is the informal support provided by

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[23] Timothy Paul Jones, "A Picture of Adoption: Adoption and Orphan Care in Scripture and in Christian Thought," in *A Guide to Adoption & Orphan Care*, ed. Russell D. Moore (Louisville, KY: Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 22.

[24] Medefind, "How Should the Church Engage?," 78.

[25] Jason Johnson, *The Beauty and Brokenness of Foster Care: A Foster Parent Support Resource* (Houston, TX: ALL IN Publishing, 2015), 23.

[26] Medefind, "How Should the Church Engage?," 68.

those outside the family unit but still within the "microsystem," or the closest personal relationships.[27] Bergeron pictures the role of the church to be that of a "wrap around" support system as the family of God selflessly and sacrificially aids the families who are providing homes for orphans.[28] The church has been uniquely equipped and called for this purpose. The vision of foster care and adoption is not "one child embraced by a loving family...[but] one child embraced by a family embraced by an entire church."[29]

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Orphan Care: Spectrum of Care

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This section will explore orphan care as a continuum. The term *orphan* can be understood along a broad spectrum. Therefore, caring for the orphan as Scripture mandates must likewise take place along a spectrum that considers the diverse needs of orphans worldwide and diverse opportunities to minister with mercy. This section will clarify terms and provide a spectrum of care for churches who seek to follow the mandate to care for orphans from James 1:27.

Who Is an Orphan?

Agreement on the definition of the term *orphan* is difficult. The lack of consensus on the definition is also tied to the challenge to find clear statistics regarding the state of orphans worldwide. If one were to ask the basic question of how many orphans are currently in the world, the answer is difficult to definitively quantify. An online paper by the Christian Alliance for Orphans, documents well the complications with the orphan

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[27] Megan Hayes Piel et al., "An Ecological Systems Approach to Understanding Social Support in Foster Family Resilience," *Child & Family Social Work* 22, no. 2 (May 2017): 1037.

[28] Bergeron, *Journey to the Fatherless*, 200.

[29] Medefind, "How Should the Church Engage?," 73

statistics and worldwide estimates. UNICEF and the United States Government estimate that there are 153 million children worldwide who have lost one or both parents. From that number, 17.8 million have lost both parents.[30] The numbers however do not accurately represent the state of the fatherless worldwide. The estimates only include nations that report orphan statistics.[31] UNICEF's numbers are based on household surveys and represent only those orphans who are living in homes. The numbers exclude the estimated eight million orphans who live in institutions worldwide, the countless children who live on the streets, and children who are trafficked, who are exploited for labor, or who have joined armed groups. Furthermore, the statistics do not account for children who are "social orphans," children that may have one or both living parents but whose every day experience of life is as if they had no parents.[32]

Drawing attention to the challenges with the statistics is not simply commentary on data collection, but it raises the questions about the term *orphan* itself. What children does the term include? Restated, if churches are to take seriously the mandate to care for orphans in their distress (Jas 1:27), then who are the "orphans?"

In an expansive sense, caring for the "orphan" means mercifully meeting the needs of "vulnerable children." Children need not be "orphaned" or "fatherless" in a strict sense to be an object of the orphan care. Children by nature of being small, weak, and

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[30] Christian Alliance for Orphans, "On Understanding Orphan Statistics," Christian Alliance for Orphans White Paper, accessed January 3, 2019. https://cafo.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Orphan-Statistics-Web-9-2015.pdf. Children who have lost both parents are known as "double orphans," and children who have lost one parent are known as "single orphans."

[31] Merida and Morton, *Orphanology*, 50.

[32] Christian Alliance for Orphans, " On Understanding Orphan Statistics," 3–4.

trusting are likely objects of neglect or abuse.[33] Vulnerable children are those who are

currently being exploited or those who are in a position to be easily exploited because of

their precarious family circumstances.[34]

Jason Johnson has identified three types of orphans: familial orphans,

functional orphans, and social orphans.[35] Each type represents a different mode of being

fatherless. Johnson concludes his discussion of the *orphan* by stating that an orphan is "a

child with no parental structure of safety, support, provision or care necessary in order to

adequately manage the risk to which they are daily exposed. In this vulnerable position,

they are in need of others to provide for them relationally what they have not been

provided and are incapable of supplying on their own."[36]

Orphan in the sense expressed here is broad, not restricted to describing a child

who needs to be adopted. Orphans include those whom Scripture or society refer to as the

"orphan," the "fatherless," the "vulnerable" or the "lonely."[37] Within the orphan care

movement, the term is used comprehensively to include the spectrum of children who

"face the world without the provision, protection and nurture that parents uniquely

provide."[38] Accordingly, understanding *orphan* in this manner ought to broaden what is

seen as appropriate and responsive ministry for the needs of orphans. Because the nature

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[33] Wess Stafford and Dean Merrill, *Too Small to Ignore: Why the Least of These Matters Most*, (repr., Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2007), 2.

[34] 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), 11.

[35] See previous definition of each, pages 10-11.

[36] Johnson, *ALL IN Orphan Care*, 24–25.

[37] Christian Alliance for Orphans, "On Understanding Orphan Statistics," 7.

[38] Christian Alliance for Orphans, "On Understanding Orphan Statistics," 7.

of being "fatherless" is a spectrum, so too, orphan care ministry must be a continuum of care.

Is a Spectrum Necessary?

In a forceful critique of the evangelical adoption and orphan care movement, David M. Smolin, the Harwell G. Davis Professor of Constitutional Law and Director for the Center for Children, Law and Ethics at Cumberland School of Law, states that the theological and biblical reasons that support the movement are seriously erroneous, and the errors of the movement have produced practices that are "sinful" and "exploitative" of orphans and poor families."[39] Of particular interest for Smolin is the emphasis on adoption by the evangelical orphan care movement and modern American adoption practices. Treating the horizontal adoptions of orphans as the "absolute, redemptive good" leaves those within the movement uncritical of the legitimacy of their practices. An overemphasis on adoption has the potential for the practices of Christians, at worst, to be actually sinful and exploitative and at best ignore the actual, most desirable outcome for orphans and vulnerable families.[40]

Convincing responses have been offered in defense of the Christian orphan care movement, so they will not be explored at length here.[41] Instead, insight from Smolin's critique will be used here to underscore the need for a continuum of

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[39] David M. Smolin, "Of Orphans and Adoption, Parents and the Poor, Exploitation and Rescue: A Scriptural Critique of the Evangelical Christian Adoption and Orphan Care Movement," *Regent Journal of International Law* 8 (Spring 2012): 268.

[40] Smolin, "Of Orphans and Adoption," 311–12.

[41] See: Dan Cruver, "The First Steps in the Way Forward: A Response to David M. Smolin's 'Of Orphans and Adoption,' *Journal of Christian Legal Thought 2*, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 11-14; Jedd Medefind, "In Defense of the Christian Orphan Care Movement," *Journal of Christian Legal Thought* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 9-10.

compassionate and merciful acts for orphans. In the following section, the task will be to

locate all orphan care practices—only one of which is horizontal adoption—fittingly

along the spectrum.

Smolin notes the common connection in Scripture of the plight of the orphan

and widow and God's mandate to care for both in the OT and NT. In regard to Smolin's

critique, he states that to ignore the connection and to treat orphans and widows as two

separate categories can lead to erroneous and harmful practices which care for the orphan

but exploit poor widows instead of caring for the orphan *and* the widow.[42] Smolin states

that in OT, orphans and widows were considered a "natural unit," and that often the same

circumstances that created a widow were the circumstances that led to children becoming

"fatherless." While one can exist apart from the other, the two often were a single unit for

which God commanded His people to care.[43]

When God commands His people to support, provide for, and protect the

orphan and the widow, the concern was to care for them as a unit. The people of God

were to work for family preservation, to keep the family-in-crisis intact.[44] From this

perspective, when James in the NT mandates the care for orphans and widows in their

distress, he would have seen them as a unit that needed aid and preservation. To care for

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[42] Smolin, "Of Orphans and Adoption," 314.

[43] Smolin, "Of Orphans and Adoption," 297. Smolin notes that the two terms appear together frequently in the law (Exod 22:22, 22:24; Deut 10:18, 14:29, 16:11, 16:14, 24:17, 24:19, 24:20, 26:12, 26:13, 27:19), in the Psalms (Pss 68:5, 94:6, 109:9, 146:9), in prophetical books (Isa 1:23, 9:17, Jer 7:6, 22:3, 49:11; Mal 3:5), and in Job 24:3 and Lam 5:3.

[44] Smolin, "Of Orphans and Adoption," 296–301.

the orphan would naturally mean to care for the widowed mother, and preserve and protect the family.[45]

Smolin's critique should meaningfully point Christians to what Jedd Medefind calls a "full spectrum response." A full spectrum vision for orphan care considers the greatly diverse situations that orphans face worldwide. To concede that the Christian adoption movement of the past under-emphasized many elements of orphan care does not negate its positive impact. Over time it has raised awareness of the plight of the orphan worldwide and engaged Christians who have passionately gotten involved. Accordingly, the movement has shifted to now clearly emphasizing a broader response along a full spectrum.[46]

The Christian Alliance for Orphans has therefore articulated two full-spectrum convictions in response to orphans worldwide. First, while the CAFO affirms the priority of the family, there will also be times and situations in which the best option for care will be outside a permanent family. This option *as a necessity* does not diminish the ideal of the family or the prioritizing pursuing the ideal.[47] Second, in every other case the CAFO articulates pursuing the ideal—permanent family—through preserving families (providing aid to keep at-risk families safely intact), reuniting families (reuniting children who have been displaced due to crisis and providing resources to help the families thrive), or expanding families (placing children in permanent, safely, and loving families

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[45] Smolin, "Of Orphans and Adoption," 303–4.

[46] Jedd Medefind, "In Defense of the Christian Orphan Care Movement," *Journal of Christian Legal Thought* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 9.

[47] Christian Alliance for Orphans, "On Understanding Orphan Statistics," 4.

or family-like homes).[48] Such convictions are representative of the full spectrum of care

that is needed in response to the vast needs of and problems facing orphans worldwide.

What Is Orphan Care?

The three CAFO pursuits listed above—preserving families, reuniting

families, and expanding families—direct attention to the goal of caring for orphans:

permanence. Jason Johnson states, "The goal in caring for orphans is always permanence

– providing children the opportunity to grow up in a loving, supportive and nurturing

family environment."[49] The CAFO core principles likewise affirm permanence in a

family as the foremost goal of orphan care.

> Both Scripture and social science affirm that the very best environment for children
> is a safe, loving, permanent family. When this is not possible, the goal for each child
> should be – as a general rule – to move as far as possible along the "spectrum of
> care" options toward permanent family. Care for children should always be as safe,
> nurturing and close to family as is feasible for the given situation. The goal does not
> assume one path alone by which it can be accomplished.[50]

The CAFO's statements are significant because they both highlight care along a spectrum

and they give a tangible, ideal goal to orphan care efforts without restricting care

unnecessarily to a few actions.

The orphan care movement encourages a host of merciful acts which can be

done on behalf of the fatherless. The Faith to Action Initiative identifies a continuum of

care for orphans and vulnerable children. Prevention, family unification, and temporary

and permanent residential care are included in the scope of orphan care.[51] Similarly,

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[48] Christian Alliance for Orphans, "On Understanding Orphan Statistics," 5.

[49] Johnson, *ALL IN Orphan Care*, 65.

[50] Christian Alliance for Orphans, "On Understanding Orphan Statistics," 10.

[51] Faith to Action Initiative, "A Continuum of Care for Orphans and Vulnerable Children,"

Merida and Morton in *Orphanology* identify adoption, foster care, participating in institutional care, combating human trafficking and slavery, and engaging in transracial ministry as orphan care ministries.[52] Furthermore, Johnny Carr links orphan care with efforts to combat poverty, human trafficking, and the AIDs epidemic and to provide care for and options for mothers considering abortion.[53]

Jason Johnson envisions orphan care ministry as taking place with a three-stage approach that engages children and families along a child welfare continuum. Vividly, Johnson describes the continuum using story of three friends who encounter a river with children being swept down the rapids. One friend responds by immediately jumping in the river and pulling children from the rushing water. Another friend runs upstream to seek the reason that caused children to be in the water and to prevent others from joining them. The third runs downstream seeking to rescue children from fatally going over the waterfall.[54] The river scenario illustrates three stages of involvement in caring for children-in-crisis: intervention, prevention, and restoration.

Intervention. The midstream point of rescue is intervention.[55] Jedd Medefind notes that every orphan's story begins with a crisis of some sort and often gets worse as

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Faith to Action Initiative, last modified August 2015, http://faithtoaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Faith2Action_ ContinuumOfCare.pdf.

[52] Merida and Morton, *Orphanology*, 52–56.

[53] Johnny Carr and Laura Captari, *Orphan Justice: How to Care for Orphans beyond Adopting* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publish Group, 2013), xi.

[54] Jason Johnson, *Everyone Can Do Something: A Field Guide for Strategically Rallying Your Church around the Orphaned and Vulnerable* (Grand Rapids: Credo House Publishers, 2018), 63.

[55] Johnson, *Everyone Can Do Something*, 64.

the story unfolds.[56] Intervention focuses on relief for children who are already in crisis, who are currently without families who can provide the safety and provision which they daily need.

Adoption is one way and perhaps the most prominent way of intervention for orphans. Adoption provides the permanence of a family to give the love, provision, and protection that a child needs.[57] Foster care is another intervening act on behalf of orphans. When children are removed from their homes for reasons such as abuse or neglect and cannot live with a family member, they enter foster care. In such circumstances they can be placed with foster families who have been trained and licensed to care for them temporarily. While a variety of outcomes are possible, in many cases, foster care continues until either the child is able to return home after the parents have met the rehabilitation requirements set by social work professionals or the child becomes eligible and is adopted.[58]

Christians have developed alternative programs to foster care which help keep children-in-crises from entering foster care, avoiding its legal entanglements and high tax costs, and helping children more readily reunite with their biological parents. The program, "Safe Families," mobilizes a volunteer base that works with the state to provide temporary families for children and to give assistance to parents while they resolve the acute family issues that led to their crisis.[59] Similarly, Lifeline Children

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[56] Medefind, *Becoming Home*, "The Frame," sec. 6, para. 6.

[57] Medefind, *Becoming Home*, "The Frame," sec. 7, "Adoption," para. 1 and 3.

[58] Johnson, *ALL IN Orphan Care*, 90.

[59] Medefind, *Becoming Home*, "The Frame," sec. 7, "Foster Care," para. 7.

Services has established "Harbor Families" who provide short-term care for children and connect parents with a local church to help them resolve issues and to achieve more family stability.[60]

Each avenue of intervention above is a "family-giving mechanism," a means of giving a family to a child-in-crisis as primary importance.[61] Adoption provides the life-long family a child needs, and foster care can lead to adoption as well. However, foster care, Safe Families, and Harbor families are primarily concerned with the healing of the entire family. Permanence is sought for the orphan through the healing and reunification of the family of origin.[62]

Intervention can also take the form of different types of formal residential care. Short term care can be provided through respite care (short term, critical care) or more focused short-term rehabilitative or emergency services for children. Small group homes and institutional care for groups of children are formally funded and run by staff and volunteers. While not preferred compared to the in-home care of a family, they are also options domestically and worldwide. Small group homes are family-style homes that provide children with some stability within a community while permanent solutions are sought. Large institutional care is not ideal to provide for the needs of children in care, yet this kind of care remains a point of intervention worldwide.[63]

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[60] "Harbor Families," *Lifeline Children's Services Blog*, accessed March 21, 2019, http://lifelinechild.org/family-restoration/harbor-families/.

[61] Johnson, *ALL IN Orphan Care*, 52.

[62] Medefind, *Becoming Home*, "The Frame," sec. 7, "Foster Care," para. 6.

[63] Faith to Action Initiative, "A Continuum of Care for Orphans and Vulnerable Children."

Prevention. The upstream point of care is prevention. Before children come into care, prevention is about helping at-risk families to stay together. Prevention can range from being a part of family development programs, counseling parents, sponsoring children, or aiding through pregnancy assistance centers.[64] Medefind notes that many efforts worldwide, although not billed as "orphan prevention," go toward the preservation of the family— "health, micro-finance, disaster relief, community development" efforts.[65]

Restoration. The downstream point of orphan care is restoration. Orphan restoration focuses on what can be done for the orphan once the child has passed the point of intervention. Involvement in prison ministries, homeless ministries, sex-trafficking recovery, and education services can be ways of mercifully meeting needs of those who were once orphaned.[66] Orphans in many ways are easy targets for traffickers, and orphans who age out of care are significantly more likely to be trafficked for sex. They are also less likely to complete their high school education, more likely to be unemployed, more likely to receive food stamps (women), and more likely to be incarcerated (men).[67] At this stage, orphans are past the point of seeking permanent placement in a family as a goal. Restoration is a ministry of mercy aimed at healing. It recognizes the long-term effects of being an orphan and not having relational and protective care they needed earlier in life.

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[64] Johnson, *Everyone Can Do Something*, 64.

[65] Medefind, *Becoming Home*, "The Frame," sec. 7, "Family Preservation," para. 1.

[66] Johnson, *Everyone Can Do Something, 64*.

[67] Medefind, *Becoming Home*, "The Frame," sec. 7, "Thinking Too Big," graphic.

Other ways to care for orphans. Churches who have pursued ways to mobilize the entire church to care for orphans have adopted ministry programs that come alongside foster or adoptive families to provide them the support they need. The acronym "W.R.A.P." is used illustratively to describe ministry that "wraps around" and embraces families who have become foster or adoptive families. The letters also represent the four components of the care that volunteers within churches provide—Wrestle in prayer, Relief care, Acts of service, and Promises of God.[68] Support such as this in the church "forms the backbone of a healthy orphan care ministry."[69]

The Role of Church Leaders

In Orphanology, Merida and Morton identify the essential role that church leaders must take to influence local churches to use their God-given resources to participate in orphan care. The conviction that all local churches have a role to play in orphan care leads to a passion to mobilize as many within churches and to leverage the considerable resources of churches for the cause of the fatherless. Merida and Morton identify a three-fold strategy for how leaders can build and grow a culture of orphan care in churches: teach God's Word, demonstrate by example, and implement an organized plan.[70]

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[68] The Church at Brook Hills, "WRAP," The Church at Brook Hills, accessed March 21, 2019, http://www. brookhills.org/wrap/.

[69] Johhny Grimes, Eric Frye, and Jodie Frye, *Altar Care: A Strategy for Gospel-Centered Orphan Care Ministry in the Church* (Birmingham, AL: Alter84, 2015), 65.

[70] Merida and Morton, *Orphanology*, 79–81.

Teach God's Word

The book *Portraits of a Pastor: The 9 Essential Roles of a Church Leader*

highlights the unique calling of the pastoral role. In a chapter titled "Pastor as Shepherd"

Jared C. Wilson describes a shepherd as one who is commissioned to tend the flock with

the Word of God. Sheep need to be fed, and pastors tend the sheep with the gospel of

Jesus.[71] Pastors have an opportunity for great impact because they have the opportunity to

teach the full counsel of Scripture and call Christians to submit their lives to the authority

of the Word of God. If any Christian is to be persuaded to give themselves for the cause

of the fatherless, they ought to be persuaded foremost by the Scriptures.[72]

Jeremy Haskins, pastor of Ashland Avenue Baptist Church in Lexington,

Kentucky, states that the consistent and clear teaching of the gospel will not simply be

useful for creating a ministry for orphans but for creating an entire orphan care culture

within the local church—one in which passion to care for orphans permeates throughout

the entire church.[73] Jedd Medefind identifies an orphan care culture in the church as one

that is less about rallying people for a cause and more about nurturing believers for

growth in discipleship. The redemptive story of the gospel is the most fundamental

motivator for caring for orphans. As church leaders keep their people rooted deeply in the

gospel story, the gospel has the potential to produce a culture in which the church is

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[71] Jared C. Wilson "Pastor as Shepherd," in *Portraits of a Pastor: The 9 Essential Roles of a Church Leader,* ed. Jason K. Allen (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2017), 18–20.

[72] Merida and Morton, *Orphanology*, 81.

[73] Jeremy Haskins, "From Church Pews to Church Plants," in Moore, *A Guide to Adoption & Orphan Care*, 59.

active on behalf of the orphan because it has "come to know, rejoice in, and reflect the hearts of the Father."[74]

The message. Jason Johnson identifies two aspects of the gospel message that are particularly compelling for church leaders who want to cast meaningful vision for orphan care: the doctrine of adoption and the doctrine of the incarnation. When the doctrine of adoption is emphasized, the church understands that at the core of their calling to care for the orphaned and vulnerable is the reality that through Jesus, God's people have been loved, pursued, and brought into God's family. When leaders emphasize the doctrine of the incarnation, they are able to call the church to move toward broken situations and people for the sake of redeeming them, like Jesus did for His church.[75] To these two doctrines, leaders can also articulate a theology of missions that emphasizes how God brings all peoples, from "every tribe and language and people and nation" into His family. The church through orphan care can become a living picture of God's desire to unite many, diverse people as family.[76]

Johnson also emphasizes how teaching the gospel addresses the fears, doubts, and costs associated with caring for orphans. When the gospel is applied, it addresses the financial costs of adoption and orphan care, the fear of trusting the child welfare system in foster care, the fear of loving a child and losing her, and the struggle with how adoption and foster care can affect marriages and biological children.[77] Teaching the

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[74] Medefind, "How Should the Church Engage?," 65.

[75] Johnson, *Everyone Can Do Something*, 28–31.

[76] Haskins, "From Church Pews to Church Plants," 61-62.

[77] Jason Johnson, "Foster Care, Adoption and Confronting the Fear of Not Having What It Takes," *Jason Johnson Blog*, accessed March 30, 2019, http://jasonjohnsonblog.com/blog/not-having-what-

gospel instills confidence in followers of Christ that they have everything they need to do the work to which Jesus has called. The church advances in supreme confidence, knowing it can confidently embrace whatever calling it has from God. God has given the church the Spirit of God, His promise that nothing can separate His people from His love, and His promise that nothing can frustrate His plan in and through His people, (Rom 8:17-39).

Opportunities for teaching. Russell Moore insists that the primary step for a church to be pro-adoption and engaged in orphan care is through the pulpit. He advocates preaching of the "cosmic and missional aspects of adoption" in such a way that confronts the people of God with spiritual realities and calls them to join in God's redeeming work for the orphan.[78] An emphasis on adoption or orphan care can readily be incorporated in expository preaching through books of the Bible. Certain books of the Bible have passages that explicitly address the gospel of adoption (i.e., Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians). Sermon series on other biblical doctrines will also naturally touch on the nature of becoming children of God. A call to care for orphans can also be a call to biblical application as the pastor teaches on missions, family, justice, caring for the poor, or loving one's neighbor.[79]

Orphan Sunday, a special day to raise awareness and cast vision for how the church ought to care for orphans, has become a recognized day in many churches. The

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it-takes.

[78] Moore, *Adopted for Life*, 169–70.

[79] Merida and Morton, *Orphanology*, 82.

Christian Alliance for Orphans provides numerous resources for churches for the promotion and strong execution of an Orphan Sunday.[80] A special Sunday is a good place to start, but an Orphan Sunday alone will be insufficient for the vision of an orphan care culture to spread thoroughly in the church. Instead it ought to be incorporated as a part of a pastor's clear, consistent preaching from God's Word—preaching that confronts hearers and calls them to respond by caring for orphans.[81]

Demonstrate by Example

Merida and Morton note that Jesus' teaching was marked by "servant leadership." In His teaching, Jesus explained what a life in God's kingdom would entail—loving one's enemies, sacrificing oneself in service for others, washing one another's feet, and even taking up one's cross—and as He taught, Jesus clearly demonstrated by His life what life in the kingdom looked like.[82] Disciples of Jesus are not just those that follow a set of teachings or that move according to burdens placed on them to do good deeds in the world, but they are followers of the *way* of Jesus. Pastor and author, Eugene Peterson, describes disciples as those who "spend [their] lives apprenticed to [their] master, Jesus Christ. [They] are in a growing-learning relationship, always. A disciple is a learner, but not in the academic setting of a schoolroom, rather at the work site of a craftsman."[83] Jesus demonstrated the way in which all His disciples would follow.

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[80] Christian Alliance for Orphans, "Orphan Sunday Resources," Christian Alliance for Orphans, accessed April 9, 2019, https://cafo.org/orphansunday/resources/.

[81] Merida and Morton, *Orphanology*, 83.

[82] Merida and Morton, *Orphanology*, 83.

[83] Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant*

From a leadership standpoint, articulating a strong vision requires that leaders not only go ahead of their people to articulate the vision but that they go ahead of their people to make the sacrifices and take the risks personally that are necessary for the vision to succeed.[84] The underlying principle is that the church will "buy into" a leader before they buy in to his vision. Once they see the leader buy living out his own vision, they are much more likely to buy in to the vision as well.[85]

Church leaders who engage the church with the vision of orphan care will be calling them to a significantly sacrificial way forward. Leaders can certainly demonstrate by example by adopting or by becoming foster homes although this will not be the route for everyone. Church leaders can also set an example by participating in any of the deeds in the spectrum of care or through sacrificial giving, advocacy, and personal involvement in developing and growing ministries to orphans.[86] Leaders will model the legitimacy of the vision by their own investment in God's call to care for the fatherless. At the same time they will demonstrate a path for the church to follow. Kimber Graves notes that pastors, staff, deacons, and other leaders "set the tone." The church will follow "as leaders communicate this message verbally and through personal life examples."[87]

Society (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 17.

[84] Andy Stanley, *Visioneering: God's Blueprint for Developing and Maintaining Vision* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1999), 132.

[85] Stanley, *Visioneering*, 125.

[86] Merida and Morton, *Orphanology*, 84.

[87] Kimber Graves, "Orphan Care Ministry: Becoming an Adoption-friendly Church," in Russell D. Moore, *A Guide to Adoption & Orphan Care*, 65.

Implement an Organized Plan

Merida and Morton advocate that church leaders ought to "lead with a simple plan."[88] Like any ministry of the church, successful ministry begins with a clear vision. Leadership must provide clarity in the vision and clarity in how the vision will be concretely implemented and sustained. The ministry can grow as leaders evaluate and build. When writing about clarifying the vision for an orphan care ministry, Jason Johnson said that what is needed is to take big, multifaceted issue and to package it in a manner that is less overwhelming and more manageable mentally. This is known as the "art of scaling." A scaled vision provides clarity on what ministry actually can be done, gives meaningful goals, and provides a clear sense of what is needed to fulfill the vision. For Johnson, the vision to "eradicate the foster care crisis" is not helpful. A quality vision can still be bold, but must be "manageable, actionable, and achievable."[89]

Johnson, in *Everyone Can Do Something,* advocates for clarity in the process of building an orphan care ministry. He walks the reader through issues such as leadership, vision, communication, implementation, and growth.[90] In a chapter which gets at the core message of his book, "Engaging the Whole of Your Church," Johnson gives an aerial view of the process implementing a plan that involves the entire church. He proposes the following three ingredients: shrink the problem, grow your people, and chart a path. To "shrink the problem" is to not only scale the vision but scale goals so that the church can see actual, attainable solutions in which the people want to be involved.

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[88] Merida and Morton, *Orphanology*, 96.

[89] Johnson, *Everyone Can Do Something*, 23.

[90] Johnson, E*veryone Can Do Something*, TOC.

To "grow your people" is to develop and incorporate the church in a discipleship process that allows them to obey God's command to care for orphans using their God-given resources and gifts. To "chart a path" is to establish a pathway of "next steps" for people who respond and want to be involved.[91] The pathway will include taking people from engagement to general information gatherings to specifically orienting them for serving to connecting them to the appropriate leaders or agencies through which they can serve.[92]

Merida and Morton provide a ground-level, multi-step plan. They suggest the following six steps in implementing an organized plan. First, the orphan care ministry must align with the overall mission and vision of the church. Caring for orphans is not a separate issue but fits within the way the church fulfills the Great Commission and the Greatest Commandments. Second, leaders ought to develop tangible ministries that work toward accomplishing the vision. Churches can work to changes orphans' lives in any number of ways and can be involved in any number of ways along the spectrum. Leaders will have to decide a direction and develop what ministries can most meaningfully be done by their churches. For some, the ministry will be an international adoption ministry. For others, it will be developing a partnership with an overseas orphanage, and still for others, the orphan care ministry will be recruiting and supporting foster parents and fighting human trafficking locally. Third, implementing an organized plan will require equipping people through training. The type of training will depend on the type of orphan care ministry the church implements. Fourth, the church ought to reflect its commitment by budgeting resources toward orphan care. Fifth, leaders must evaluate regularly in

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[91] Johnson, *Everyone Can Do Something*, 47.

[92] Johnson, *Everyone Can Do Something*, 56.

order to adapt the ministry for more effectiveness as well as celebrate the work done

through the ministry. Last, leaders must continue to grow the vision by "influencing the

influencers." Specifically, the more people and specifically more influential people who

are in on the vision, the more the work of the ministry will be able to grow.[93]

Jason Weber's and Paul Pennington's book, *Launching an Orphans Ministry

in Your Church,* details eight steps toward launching an orphan care ministry along with

eight accompanying "on-board" tools that will help in the process. Steps 4 through 7

present the main corpus of organizational material needed. The steps articulate well what

implementing an organized plan will be in a local church. Step 4 is "determine your

channels of orphans ministry." The authors suggest three possible channels or categories

into which most orphan ministries fall: "Orphan Care," "International and Private,

Domestic Adoption," or "Foster Care and Foster-Care Adoption."[94]

Step 5 is "plan the strategies of your ministry." Once a ministry channel has

been determined, the authors recommend mapping out objectives for the first three years

along with the strategies that will be achieve the objectives.[95] Step 6 is to "establish a

leadership structure" that can function to help with decision-making, administrative

duties, and on-going strategy and implementation.[96] Step 7 is to "develop a formal

proposal for church leadership." While this step assumes a bottom-up approach (lay

leadership proposing an orphan ministry to church elders/pastors), the formal proposal is

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[93] Merida and Morton, *Orphanology,* 87–92.

[94] Jason Weber and Paul Pennington, *Launching an Orphans Ministry in Your Church* (Little Rock, AR: Family Life Publishing, 2006), 14.

[95] Weber and Pennington, *Launching an Orphans Ministry,* 17, 36–38.

[96] Weber and Pennington, *Launching an Orphans Ministry*, 23.

useful in any situation for clarifying the plan of action. Specifically, the proposal

formalizes the plan in all its phases by proposing the strategies, resources, and timing

needed. The proposal is also forward-looking and provides the next steps needed before

launching the orphan care ministry.[97] In essence, if one is able to complete steps four

through seven of Weber and Pennington's guide, he or she will have a simple, actionable

plan for launching an orphan care ministry.

Conclusion

The only fitting response to the needs of orphans domestically and worldwide

is a whole-church, full-spectrum response. The church's theology of adoption and the

incarnational ministry of Jesus gives the church compelling reason why they would reach

down and become involved in compassionately caring for orphans. The church has a

unique identity as a community of faith created by the gospel of Jesus with a distinctive

commitment and calling to display the heart and do the will of God. God's church has a

focused mission—to bring the fullness of the good news of Jesus to bear on the world

(Matt 28:18-20). Caring for orphans opens up doors for the verbal declaration of the

gospel and caring for orphans is the embodied declaration of the gospel. Also, the

church's leaders have the role of shepherds. They are those who bring the word of God to

bear on all aspects of how they lead. Given God's heart for the orphan and God's explicit

instructions to care for the orphan, the reasonable conclusion is that the church ought to

embrace orphan care ministry.

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[97] Weber and Pennington, *Launching an Orphans Ministry*, 25–26, 41–45.

Church leaders play a crucial role in the church's obedient response. First, pastors are shepherds and disciple-makers. They bear the responsibility of leading their people in the will of God to do His work, and growing them toward being who God desires His people to be. Leaders must give a compelling vision for how orphan care is fulfilling God's mission for His people, and find ways to build them up to be people who invest themselves God's desire for them. Second, pastors are also leaders who mobilize, build, and manage. If God has called His churches to respond, pastors are called upon to lead their people with a clear vision and plan for them.

CHAPTER 4

THE ORPHAN CARE MINISTRY PROJECT

Having laid the foundation for orphan care ministries in the first three

chapters, this chapter will describe the development and implementation of the orphan

care ministry project. From the outset, the project has had four goals. The first goal was

to assess understanding of the church's role in orphan care as well as the current attitudes

toward local foster care and adoption among church members. The second goal was to

develop a five-session teaching series on the church's role in orphan care that will

address directly and encourage church members to become fostering or adopting families.

The third goal was to equip the church for its role in orphan care through foster care, and

adoption. The fourth goal was to develop a ministry plan for helping families who desire

to foster or adopt in taking steps to partner successfully with local agencies. In total, the

project accomplished its purpose over the course of thirty weeks.

Development and Evaluation of the Teaching Sessions
(Weeks 1-9)

Five lessons were developed over a nine-week time period. OCA pre-surveys

were given at weeks four and five.[1] The information collected through the surveys were

contributory in the development of the material for the latter three teaching sessions that

were in a small group type setting. The period of development and evaluation also

overlapped with the beginning of the teaching series starting at week 6. (The teaching

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[1] See appendix 1.

series occurred at weeks 6 through 10 of the project.) Time constraints of the FBCFP's church calendar necessitated a condensed and overlapping timeline.

Preparation, evaluation, and revision also took place in stages throughout the nine weeks. Drafts for teaching sessions 1 and 2, which were sermons prepared for the entire congregation during morning worship, were given to the expert panel during week 5 for evaluation. Evaluations were returned promptly, and revisions were made during weeks 5 and 6. The draft for the sessions 3 through 5 (small group sessions) were given, returned, and revised (as necessary) successively during weeks 7, 8, and 9. The teaching series was delivered on weeks 6 through 10.

Five people comprised the panel used to evaluate the lessons. The senior pastor of FBCFP at the time participated as is fitting for one who oversees the overall teaching and ministry of the church. Two deacons were asked to participate based on their strong insight into and ability to teach and apply the gospel. The Dekalb County Foster Parent Licensing Worker was also asked to participate. As the licensing social worker that recruits and trains all foster families and as a professed believer in Jesus, she was asked to participate based on her unique insight as both. Finally, a staff member from the Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Alabama, was asked to participate. As a staff member that has led in the adoptive and foster parent ministry at the Church at Brook Hills for over a decade, she was a great resource for evaluation, and her insight was integral in the development of the teaching curriculum.

Pre-Testing (Weeks 4-5)

Pretests of the OCA were administered in adult Sunday school classrooms two successive Sundays. Participants were allowed to take surveys home on the first Sunday to complete if they required more time. All pre-surveys were collected prior to the first teaching session. Couples were asked to take the OCA individually, and everyone was

asked to complete all three sections completely. Seventy-nine participants completed the OCA pretest.

The OCA contained three sections. Section 1 was to collect basic demographic data. Section 2 utilized a six-point Likert scale to assess three categories of beliefs and attitudes. The first category is the participants' current level of biblical understanding in regard to caring for orphans. The second is the participants' attitudes about adoption and foster care, and the third is the participants' feelings of personal responsibility for orphan care. Section 3 of the OCA was to collect qualitative data regarding biblical understanding, attitudes, and personal motivation to care for orphans. The data taken from section three contributed to the makeup of the material for the teaching sessions and the ministry plan that would be developed later.

Teaching Sessions (Weeks 6-10)

Session 1

Sessions 1 and 2 were taught as the message during Sunday morning worship. Sessions 1 and 2 had the broad function of casting vision for orphan care ministry for the entire church, reaching beyond those who formally participated in the research at hand. Session one was entitled "The Spirit of Adoption," and the primary biblical text was Romans 8:12-17. The message was an introduction to orphan care as an issue that the gospel speaks to directly and how the gospel calls Christians to respond. The message had two points: "The Gospel of Adoption Compels Us to Orphan Care" and "The Gospel of Adoption Demands a Response." First, the gospel of adoption was explained through Romans 8:12-17. There are no natural-born children of God. Christians' identity, standing, confidence, freedom, inheritance, and joy in God are all rooted in their adoption as God's children through the work of Jesus Christ. Children of God have the Spirit of God in them which guides them to living with a Spirit-inspired perspective for all of life. Therefore, God's children look for ways to reflect and display the gospel into the world.

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One such way reflecting God's care for spiritual orphans through their care for orphans. The call to respond invited unbelievers to experience adoption as sons of God through faith in Christ. Furthermore, the call to respond charged believers in the service to begin praying, discussing and exploring how God might be calling them to orphan care.

Session 2

Session 2 was a sermon entitled "True Religion," and the key texts were James 1:27 and Matthew 25:31-46. The session's goal was to call believers to action. Using the phrase taken from James 1:27, the church was encouraged to become spiritual activists, those that cannot separate their spiritual piety from obedient action. Matthew 24:31-46, alongside the James 1:27 command to care for orphans and widows, locates the responsibility to care for the most vulnerable and insignificant in the world's eyes to Jesus' followers. The command to care for the orphan is a calling upon every Christian. While not every Christian is called to foster or adopt, every church has the call to embody the type of true religion that cares for the most vulnerable in society. One type of response to James 1:27 is for families in the church to open their homes to children for foster care and adoption. Not all can, however; and not all are called specifically to respond in that manner, but an obedient response requires Jesus' church to do *something*. The testing ground for true religion is faith with action, especially action on behalf of the helpless. All Christians are to be engaged, personally and actively, in ministry of mercy for those in need. The Scriptures do not call for a theoretical response, but one in which God's people act. Two types of responses were presented: "Reaching Down" or "Wrapping Around." First families or individuals were invited to "reach down" by exploring becoming a foster or adoptive family. Second, the congregation was invited to "wrap around" exploring how to become communities of care for foster and adoptive families.

Session 3

Session 3 was the first of three sessions that were taught in a Sunday school and small group setting. Although all were invited to attend, sessions 3 through 5 were specifically for the audience of those who took the OCA previously. Session 3 was entitled "Orphan Care Ministry: Spectrum of Care." The session began with a theological overview of the doctrine of spiritual adoption and the incarnation as they relate to orphan care.[2] The church's role in orphan care and the Christian family's role in orphan care were also discussed briefly in the introductory matter.[3] The primary goal of session 3 was to give a clear understanding of orphan care along a spectrum and to encourage hearers to explore how the gifts and passions God has given them can engage in caring at different points on the spectrum. The session gave a clear definition or *orphans* as children who do not have parents or families to supply the safety, support, and provision which they need daily and which cannot supply on their own; these children can be familial, functional, or social orphans. Orphan care was defined as a spectrum of care that includes prevention, intervention, and restoration. The session closed with three potential action steps. First, pray for FBCFP and families—for hearts to awaken to orphan care as gospel-driven work as families explore their part in caring for orphans. Second, perceive ways that the "spectrum of care" connects to our church's unique identity and where ministry might take root in our context in northeast Alabama. Third, in light of the spectrum of care, explore how God has gifted and called your family to get involved.

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[2] For the doctrine of the Incarnation: The incarnation reveals who God is through what God does. God the Son came to us for the purpose of redeeming us. Jesus was incarnated in order that we might be adopted (Gal 4:4-5). We immerse ourselves in hard and broken situations because that is what Christ has done for us. The gospel teaches us to move toward broken things for the purpose of redeeming broken things.

[3] For the role of Christian families: God established family in the garden as a building block for civilization (Gen 1:27-28) and a means through which His glory will fill the earth (Ps 8). The gospel reorients the purpose of family—all things under Christ and for the purposes of Christ (Eph 1:3-14, 5:21-6:4).

Session 4

Session 4 was entitled "Intervention: Reaching Down and Wrapping Around." The session focused on intervention and established a clear path through which FBCFP in its local context could participate in caring for orphans in their distress (James 1:27). The goal of the lesson was narrow in the sense that it was to establish a clear pathway for FBCFP to care for orphans. The terms previously used for this pathway were "reaching down" and "wrapping around." In regard to reaching down, the lesson advocated for a critical, direct response by members of FBCFP to "reach down" and care directly for orphans by bringing them into their homes as family. In regard to wrapping around, the material advocated for communities of care to embrace families in the church that become foster or adoptive parents. Theologically, wrapping around beckons the church to live as family-in-community with one another (Acts 2:42-47). Practically, wrapping around is vital for the perseverance of those families who become foster families. The session walked through the four ways the church can come alongside foster or adoptive families and be part of a W.R.A.P. support team.[4] Three action steps were given in closing. First, pray for the families who will becoming new foster parents from FBCFP this year and that FBCFP can provide an adequate support structure for the families. Second, commit to reaching down or wrapping around. Third, when given the opportunity, share the vision for reaching down and wrapping around inside and outside the church.

Session 5

Session 5 was entitled "Foster Care and Adoption: Saying Yes." The goal of the session was to address questions, doubts, and hindrances to become a foster and adoptive home then discuss a framework from the gospel that put such hindrances in perspective.

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[4] See appendix 6.

First, the session addressed and gave appropriate weight to fears and insecurities. The five fears that were addressed were the fear of financial costs, the fear of getting attached and losing children, the fear of how foster care can negatively affect the existing family, the fear that life will never feel or be "normal" again, and the fear of having to trust the child welfare system. Each fear was discussed with a corresponding insecurity in the ability to sacrifice financially, to grieve appropriately, to guide one's family well, to leave comforts of the "normal" life for a new type of family, and to not be or feel in control of a child's future. Having addressed the legitimate hurdles, Romans 8:17-39 was explored briefly to address the fears, doubts, and hindrances and to reframe them with a gospel-perspective. The exploration of Romans 8:17-39 led to two affirmations. First, the costs are worth it. Christians are confident in the Spirit's work in their most difficult times and that God is working for the good of those who love Him in all things. The costs of foster care and adoption are not alien costs to Christian's lives. They may be new and different in substance, but not foreign in their essence to all who follow Jesus. Every act done in obedience to Christ is worthy it in the scope of what God is doing. Second, believers have what it takes to engage in the most difficult avenues of following Jesus. Believers have everything they need in Jesus to be like Jesus in this world. Romans 8 ends in a place of supreme confidence in God through Christ Jesus. With the Spirit of God, the promise that nothing can separate believers from His love, and the promise that nothing can thwart God's plan in and through His people, Christians can confidently embrace whatever calling is in front of them. The session concluded by encouraging families to say "yes" to becoming foster families and for everyone else to pray for those who do.

Teaching sessions were made available in video format weekly for participants to watch weekly and were released online during the week following the Sunday the session they were taught.[5]

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[5] Video content is found at https://vimeo.com/fbcfp.

Post-Testing (Weeks 11-12)

The OCA post-test was administered on weeks eleven and twelve. Participants were allowed to take the post-tests home for completion. For maximized participation, OCA post-tests were mailed via the USPS and emailed to participants who completed a pre-test but who were not present during post-testing; the mailer contained detailed instructions for the completion and prompt return of the post-tests. Fifty-one individuals who competed the pre-test also completed the post-test.

Following the administration and collection of the OCA post-test, I utilized a t-test for dependent samples to compare the pre and post-series surveys of those who completed both. The t-test yielded a positive statistically significant difference between the pre and post-survey scores. More details can be found in chapter five.

Interviews (Weeks 13-15)

Three families who identified as interested in foster care where interviewed following the testing. Interviews were conducted ascertain qualitatively how the teaching series equipped their families and the church for their role in caring for orphans. Their answers were evaluated and summarized.[6]

Ministry Plan (Weeks 13-30)

Development and Evaluation
of the Ministry Plan

The next steps described below coincided with developing a formalized and repeatable "Ministry Plan" for families who have shown interest in becoming foster or adoptive families with the needed information and support to move forward in the

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[6] See appendix 3.

process to foster a child or to foster-to-adopt a child. The three stages are commitment, preparation, and support.[7]

Five individuals evaluated the Ministry Plan. Two FBCFP staff members, two FBCFP deacons, and the Dekalb County Foster Parent Licensing Worker. The individuals utilized a rubric to evaluate the plan's content, scope, resources, and application. More details can be found in chapter 5.

Next Steps

Throughout the course of the teaching the project's material, several families identified their willingness to become licensed to be foster parents or licensed to be respite care. The families were invited to two meetings in order to provide information for their next steps, to partner with the families both in the process of completing licensure through the Dekalb County DHR, to support the families once they have become foster parents. Both meetings with families were in an informal setting; one was at a coffee shop and the other was over dinner in a family's home.

Meeting 1. The first meeting took place during week 13. The meeting was co-led by my wife, Jill-Curry Henderson. We met with three families. Each family had already signed up for the foster care certification course through Dekalb County DHR. The goal of the first meeting was to encourage the families in the commitment they had already made, answer questions they had about the process, and to give the promise of aid if needed to complete the licensure process. The meeting began with informal conversation. We asked each couple to share their story and how they have come to the point of committing to become foster parents. We did so in order to affirm their sense of "calling" and to celebrate their obedience. We then opened the floor for questions and

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[7] See appendix 5.

discussion. The discussion was largely pertaining to two categories: addressing fear and uncertainty and licensure details.

In regard to addressing fear and uncertainty, we took the time to address the questions as legitimate. The three couples were in various stages of parenting. One couple had only been married briefly with no kids, another couple had been married longer with one elementary-aged child living at home, and the third couple had been married for many years with college-aged children who live away from home. Given the broad scope of life-stages, the questions asked were broad as well. Answering their questions however involved one of the three components: affirming their obedience to care for orphans even if it felt risky, affirming the sufficiency of God to minister to them in their weakness, and reminding them to lean on the community of faith.

In regard to questions on licensure details, we answered questions according to Alabama DHR's website and their documents "Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes" and the "Foster Parents Bill of Rights."[8] Other questions pertained to the timeline of completing the licensure course, completing the state requirements, and becoming licensed. Questions and answers were used to develop the Ministry Plan to help families who desire to foster or adopt in taking steps to partner successfully with local agencies.

Meeting 2. The second took place during week 17. Five families participated. Four of the families were enrolled and had attended several weeks of training through Dekalb County DHR's foster care certification training, and the fifth family was already a licensed foster family with a child placed in their care. The goal of the meeting was to discuss the W.R.A.P. support ministry through FBCFP, and give foster parents the questionnaires that would be used to pair their needs with the support given through the

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[8] Information found at http://dhr.alabama.gov/services/Foster_Care/Intro_Foster_Care.aspx.

W.R.A.P. team. The questionnaires focused on four categories: prayer, relief care, acts of service, and encouragement.[9]

W.R.A.P. Equip Night. The W.R.A.P. Equip Night took place in week 27. Aide promised by FBCFP to foster families entailed providing family support to help foster parents persevere. The W.R.A.P. support ministry is a recognition that foster or adoptive families encounter unique challenges that are aided by a community of care beyond the general support provided by family and the community of faith. The resilience of foster families has been shown to coincide with a system of support. Researchers indicates that foster family resilience coincided with an ecosystem of support. Especially important is support provided from outside the family unit yet within the closest personal relationships.[10]

The W.R.A.P. Equip Night was a meeting that had three goals. One was to have those in the meeting identify with the way they would serve by choosing a letter representative of their role on the team.[11] The second goal was to prompt a volunteer to be a "Family Coordinator" for each W.R.AP. team. Family Coordinators are primarily tasked with communication—to communicate weekly with the foster family and to update their team on needs or events in the foster family's life. The third goal was to assign the participants to a foster family who they would serve and support. Participants had the option of choosing a foster family or being assigned one without expressing a preference.

In the meeting a brief introduction was given of the current and soon-to-be foster families in FBCFP. A summary of each team member position was given, with

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[9] See appendix 8.

[10] Megan Hayes Piel et al., "An Ecological Systems Approach to Understanding Social Support in Foster Family Resilience," *Child & Family Social Work* 22, no. 2 (May 2017): 1037.

[11] See appendix 7.

examples of how to serve in that capacity. Information about the W.R.A.P. support ministry was introduced in the original teaching five teaching sessions, had been discussed in morning worship multiple times, and the outline was published in the FBCFP Sunday bulletin for the five weeks prior to the meeting.[12] Through the publication, participants in the meeting were largely familiar with the various ways they could serve. After the brief explanation, the floor was opened to questions. Once any clarifications were made, participants were instructed to fill out the "W.R.A.P. Support Ministry Card" provided.[13]

In the following weeks, W.R.A.P. ministry participants were placed into teams and team leaders were assigned. Team leaders were given the questionnaires previously filled out by the foster parent in order to effectively minister to the families at the time the foster families receive their first placement. If no team leaders were available after the W.R.A.P. Equip Night, my wife or I took care of the necessary coordination. Foster families were also made aware of the FBCFP foster care closet and the resources available to them.

Conclusion

The efficacy of the project rested primary on two component parts: the five-session orphan care teaching series and implementing a ministry plan for potential foster and/or adoptive families. As a result of the teaching series the participants increased their knowledge on orphan care, and five families began and completed the foster care certification course through Dekalb County DHR. Several other families responded with a desire to serve in other ways. The development of a ministry plan during the project was vital because it provides a repeatable model to offer potential foster and adoptive

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[12] See appendix 6.

[13] See appendix 7.

families a clear pathway to move forward. The current chapter has narrated how the goals of the project were met. The following chapter will provide an extensive evaluation of this project.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This project began with a personal passion and a desire to share that passion by leading FBCFP toward orphan care ministry. Over the course of the project, the passion gained a footing in FBCFP. We have adopted and adapted a mantra suggested by Jason Johnson in *Everyone Can Do Something*. We say, "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."[1] The work done for the project, while successfully satisfying its goals, has exceeded the project in terms of importance. FBCFP has begun to embrace the fatherless. Orphan care is an increasing topic of conversation at FBCFP. Several church families have welcomed foster children into their homes, and our new "normal" in Sunday morning worship is to have the children's ministry peppered with foster children during the children's sermon. One child was adopted from foster care in 2019, and potentially six more will be adopted by FBCFP members in 2020. By God's grace, the work done for the project will be simply an initial step in FBCFP's ministry to orphans. The purpose of this chapter is to evaluate the stated purpose and goals of the project.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to lead families in FBCFP to participate in orphan care through local foster care and adoption. The purpose was accomplished not

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[1] Jason Johnson, *Everyone Can Do Something: A Field Guide for Strategically Rallying Your Church around the Orphaned and Vulnerable* (Grand Rapids: Credo House Publishers, 2018), 39.

only as the four goal of the project were successfully met (see below), but as the church as a whole was introduced to orphan care as a ministry of the local church, as it grew in understanding, and as many in the church began to find their role in caring the fatherless and supporting foster and adoptive families. FBCFP now knows what orphan care is, and we have a clear picture of how our church will be involved with orphans in our county. As a result of the work done through the project, the church has a W.R.A.P. support ministry for foster families, several church members regularly donate toward the needs of foster families, and the church now holds a drive to collect duffle bags with essential items and comfort objects for children when they are taken into DHR's care. FBCFP has even seen the wonderful story of a foster child who was able to return home, and whose birth mother has become a member of the church, in large part due to the witness and work of the foster family from FBCFP.

More specifically, the project's purpose was meant for more than just establishing an orphan care ministry, the project was aimed at leading families to foster care and adoption. During the course of the project, five families began and completed their foster care certification. Three of those families have already provided homes to multiple children. The project accomplished the purpose which it was designed to accomplish.

Evaluation the Project's Goals

Four goals were determined at the beginning of the project: to assess understanding of the church's role in orphan care, to develop a five-session teaching series on the church's role in orphan care, to equip the church for its role in orphan care, foster care, and adoption, and to develop a ministry plan for helping families to partner successfully with local agencies to foster and adopt. Each goal will be evaluated below.

Assess Understanding

The first goal was to assess the understanding of the church's role in orphan

care as well as the current attitudes toward local foster care and adoption among members of FBCFP. The assessment utilized the OCA which gauged theological understanding and personal attitudes toward orphan care, foster care, and adoption. The goal was successfully met when seventy-nine participants completed the OCA and when the results were compiled electronically for further analysis. Table 1 depicts the average scores on a six-point Likert scale for each question from the seventy-nine participants. Higher scores correlate with desired answers.[2]

Table 1. Pre-OCA average scores per question

Question	Average
1	5.6
2	5.9
3	5.7
4	5.6
5	5.3
6	5.8
7	5.4
8	4.7
9	4.5
10	4.2
11	4.4
12	4.9
13	3.9
14	5.0
15	5.1
16	5.4
17	4.3
18	5.5
19	4.4
20	5.0
21	4.1
22	3.3

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[2] See appendix 9 for more details concerning the t-test results. Results shown reflect participants who completed both pre- and post-tests.

Three observations follow from the pre-OCA scoring. First, questions 1-7 represent a subset of questions about theological understanding as it pertains to orphan care. The participants' scores on average were higher in this subset compared to other subsets. Second, questions 8-11 represented a different subset of questions that assessed how FBCFP had previously contributed to biblical understanding and leadership in regard to orphan care. The average of the scores in the second subset were 4.45 as compared to 5.61 in the first, greater than a one-point difference. Combined, these first two observations point to a solid biblical and theological foundation and an opportunity for the church to grow that knowledge and mobilize it for action. Third, questions 13 and 22 had the lowest average scores, 3.9 and 3.3 respectively. Question 13, "Orphan care is primarily about the adoption of 'orphans,'" was designed to assess how broadly participants understood "orphan care." Question 22, "I am willing to explore next steps in becoming a foster or adoptive home," was designed to assess if participants were willing to personally explore foster care and adoption. These questions indicate the potential opportunity for growing knowledge and affecting attitudes through the teaching series which was provided in this project.

Develop Teaching Series

The second goal was to develop a five-session teaching series on the church's role in orphan care which also encouraged church members to become foster or adoptive homes. The goal was considered successfully met when it was evaluated by a panel and when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded the sufficient level. Table 2 below shows the summative scores for each member of the panel.

Table 2. Summative scores for each evaluator

Evaluator	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5	Total
Pastor	32	32	32	32	32	160
Deacon 1	32	32	32	32	32	160
Deacon 2	32	32	32	32	32	160
DHR Staff	32	32	32	32	32	160
Partner Church	32	32	32	32	32	160
Average	32	32	32	32	32	160

To meet the sufficiency level, the numbered criterion had to score a numerical value of 3 (sufficient), out of a maximum of 4 (exemplary). For the sum of each lesson, the sufficient level was 24 out of a maximum score of 32. The sufficient level for the entire curriculum was 120 out of a maximum of 160. All criteria met or exceeded the sufficient level with one hundred percent of the marks being exemplary.

Equip the Church

The third goal was to equip the church for its role in orphan care, foster care, and adoption. Once the content of the teaching sessions was successfully developed, two teaching sessions were delivered as a sermon in the context of Sunday morning worship services, and the other three sessions were taught in a break-out session format, which included teaching and guided discussion. The break-out sessions occurred during scheduled Sunday School times and were comprised of members of adult Sunday school classes. For participants who could not attend all five sessions, the teaching sessions were recorded in video format and made available digitally.[3]

This goal was measured by a post-teaching survey (OCA) that measured church members' level of theological understanding and personal attitudes toward foster care and adoption. Fifty-one of the 79 original participants completed post-surveys. The

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[3] Videos found at https://vimeo.com/311095797; https://vimeo.com/312397255; https://vimeo.com/319570580; https://vimeo.com/320519594; https://vimeo.com/321615603.

goal was met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between pre-teaching and post-teaching OCA scores ($t_{(50)} = -7.704$, $p < .0001$).

Potential results for each of the 51 participants who completed both pre- and post-OCAs ranged between a minimum score of 22 and a maximum of 132. The average pre-project OCA score was 109.6 and the average post-project OCA score was 117.1, indicating an average improvement of 7.5, a 6.84 percent increase. Table 3 depicts the t-test results with percent differences for each participant.[4]

Table 3. Pre- and post-OCA results

Participants	Pre-OCA	Post-OCA	Difference
A	118	119	0.8%
B	107	109	1.9%
C	108	118	9.3%
D	112	107	-4.5%
E	96	121	26.0%
F	108	118	9.3%
G	115	122	6.1%
H	106	112	5.7%
I	119	119	0.0%
J	111	119	7.2%
K	108	105	-2.8%
L	110	120	9.1%
M	106	122	5.1%
N	106	122	5.1%
O	115	108	-6.1%
P	116	122	5.2%
Q	119	121	1.7%
R	108	113	4.6%
S	106	115	8.5%
T	108	124	14.8%
U	113	122	8.0%
V	112	123	9.8%
W	107	112	4.7%
X	104	118	13.5%

[4] See appendix 9 for details concerning the t-test results.

Table 3—*continued*

Y	103	117	13.6%
Z	124	120	-3.2%
AA	119	126	5.9%
BB	116	113	-2.6%
CC	116	113	-2.6%
DD	107	112	4.7%
EE	119	127	6.7%
FF	106	111	4.7%
GG	98	104	6.1%
HH	102	112	9.8%
II	111	115	3.6%
JJ	112	121	8.0%
KK	108	117	8.3%
LL	114	122	7.0%
MM	116	128	10.3%
NN	109	131	20.2%
OO	116	129	11.2%
PP	92	114	23.9%
QQ	116	122	5.2%
RR	122	129	5.7%
SS	92	113	22.8%
TT	113	114	0.9%
UU	115	122	6.1%
VV	88	100	13.6%
WW	100	108	8.0%
XX	102	106	3.9%
YY	115	117	1.7%

Further statistical analyses were conducted on the test scores since the OCA was designed to measure both church members' level of theological understanding and personal attitudes toward foster care and adoption. Questions 1-17 were grouped for analysis as those questions which measured theological understanding, and questions 18-22 were analyzed as those which measured personal attitudes. A *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between pre-teaching and post-teaching OCA scores for theological understanding ($t_{(50)} = -8.342$, $p < .0001$). However a *t*-test for dependent samples did not demonstrate a positive, statistically

significant difference between pre-teaching and post-teaching OCA scores for personal attitudes ($t_{(50)}$ = -1.348, p =.0919).[5] The results indicate that the teaching series made a differences in increasing theological understanding in regard to orphan care, but that no statistical evidence can be found that personal attitudes were changed by the teaching series. These finding are further evaluated below.

For an illustrative look at selected participants, the scores of the participant who scored lowest on the pre-test were compared to the average test scores, and the scores of the participant who scored highest on the post-test were to the average test scores. The reason was to examine the participant who had the most to improve from the study and the participant who had seemingly gained the most from the study, respectively. The lowest pre-OCA score was 88, with the participant showing a 12-point difference (13.64 percent increase) between pre and post-tests. The highest post-OCA score was 131. The participant's increase was 22 points (20.18 percent increase) between pre- and post-tests, which was well above the average difference. A possible inference from the data is that participants across a spectrum of scores were equipped by the study.

Scores also showed a great variance across participants. The participant whose scores increased the most from the study showed a 26.04 percent increase, while the participant who scores showed the greatest negative difference yielded a -6.19 percent difference. A closer look at the scores offered possible explanations. The participant with the most increase began with a score well below average and ended with a score above average. In regard to the participant with the greatest negative difference, the majority of the decrease in score was due to a five-point decrease for an individual question.[6] The individual scored a 6 out of 6 on the pre-test and only a 1 out of 6 on the post-test. Without a certain explanation for such a decrease, an explanation is the potential

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[5] See appendix 9.

[6] See appendix 1, question 17.

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ambiguity of the question. Table 4 depicts the comparison of these results.

Table 4. OCA results comparison

Category	Pre-OCA	Post-OCA	Difference
Average Score	109.6	117.1	6.84%
Lowest Pre-OCA	88	100	13.64%
Highest Post-OCA	109	131	20.18%
Maximum Improvement	96	121	26.04%
Minimum Improvement	115	108	-6.19%

Furthermore, interviews were conducted for families or individuals who self-identified as interested in participating in orphan care through foster care. Interviews were conducted with three families. Interview answers were evaluated and summarized.[7]

Develop Ministry Plan

The fourth goal was to develop a ministry plan to help families who desire to foster or adopt in taking steps to partner successfully with local agencies. The teaching series encouraged church members to participate in orphan care by becoming foster or adoptive families. The purpose of the ministry plan was to provide a pathway and to aid families at three stages: Commitment, Preparation, and Support. The goal was considered successfully met when it was evaluated by a panel and when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded the sufficient level. To meet the sufficiency level, the numbered criterion had to score a numerical value of 3 (sufficient), out of a maximum of 4 (exemplary). One mark received did not meet the sufficient level. It was scored as a 2 (requires attention) out of 4. The panel member commented that in regard to the criterion, the ministry ought to provide counseling resources for families not only in the early stages but in the latter stages of caring for a foster child. The issue was given

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[7] See appendix 3.

attention, and a new resource was added to the ministry plan. All other marks received

were exemplary, and 97.5 percent of the criteria met or exceeded the sufficiency level.

Table 5 below shows the scores for each member of the panel. The adoption and

implementation of the ministry plan was detailed in chapter 4.

Table 5. Scores for each evaluator

Evaluator	Staff 1	Staff 2	Deacon 1	Deacon 2	DHR Staff
The overall plan provides clear "next steps" for families interested in foster care and/or adoption.	4	4	4	4	4
The initial special-interest meeting is organized and clearly communicates an action plan for participants.	4	4	4	4	4
The plan indicates clear and thoughtful coordination with local agencies.	4	4	4	4	4
The plan contains structures to aid families in process of preparation and/or certification.	4	4	4	4	4
The plan develops a support system within the church for families.	4	4	4	4	4
The plan provides adequate resources for counseling.	4	2	4	4	4
The plan is adaptable and repeatable and has a long-term perspective.	4	4	4	4	4
The plan provides alternative pathways for orphan care ministry in the church.	4	4	4	4	4

With the completion of the four goals above, this project was considered successful. First, participants from FBCFP completed the pre-test OCA to assess their understanding and attitudes about orphan care. Second, a five-week series on orphan care was developed and evaluated. When evaluated, all criteria met or exceeded the sufficient level with one hundred percent of the marks being exemplary. Third, once the orphan care series was taught, 51 participants completed the OCA post-test. Results from a t-test demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between pre-teaching and post-teaching OCA scores. Finally, a ministry plan was developed and evaluated. Evaluations yielded a 97.5 percent of the criteria met or exceeded the sufficiency level. Collectively, the success of each of the four goals demonstrates the great success obtained by the project. The following describes particular strengths and weaknesses of the project that can be further strengthened or that can be improved, respectively.

Strengths of the Project

Several strengths of the project stood out as it was being developed and implemented. First, the five-session teaching series that I led was highly appropriate in FBCFP's context. The material scored all perfect scores with the panel who evaluated it, and I believe that the material is highly valuable and well done. Beyond the objective quality of the teaching content, the teaching series deeply affected many people, many who committed to becoming foster parents. More so, the teaching series provided a vision for mission and ministry that FBCFP has adopted. One long-time church member recently told me that our church's work with orphans is "the most important ministry our church has ever done."

Second, through the project I have led the church to start a viable orphan care ministry. Five families responded and have completed the training to become foster families. Three of the five families have already taken children into their homes. This ministry, though still in its early stages, is now built into the life of FBCFP. I continue to

provide the leadership and the vision. We have a community of foster parents in our church who provide a living witness to what is possible for other families, and we have a support ministry for foster families—W.R.A.P., foster care closet, and other resources that have been provided.

Third, the project has formed a new community within the church body made up of foster families and the families who have come alongside them. New bonds have been formed and existing relationships have been fortified as families have undertaken the task of caring for foster children.

Fourth, the project lends itself well to future research. I suggest replication of this study conducted by a doctoral student who will do a correlation study for pre- and post-survey scores. Furthermore, I noted earlier that the results of secondary t-tests indicated that the teaching series made a difference in increasing theological understanding in regard to orphan care, but that no statistically significant evidence could be found that personal attitudes were changed by the teaching series. A possible explanation for these results is that knowledge is more easily changed than attitudes, especially if the attitudes in question involved significant changes in life. A longitudinal study on attitudes toward orphan care in a church setting would also be an appropriate advancement of this project.

Lastly, the work done for the project can be used as a resource for similar local churches in our county. One delimitation put on the project was to focus on foster care through the Dekalb County DHR. Certainly, the scope of orphan care extends well beyond local foster care, and the great need world-wide can be overwhelming. This project, however, deals with a specific need with a specific ministry in a particular context. The kind of orphan care ministry I have led in FBCFP can be reproduced in any number of local churches so that churches might get involved in the great need in the county.

Weaknesses and Improvements of the Project

Several weaknesses limited the effectiveness of the project and could be improved if given the chance to do them differently in the future. First, as narrated in chapter four, the development, evaluation, and execution of the teaching series occurred on a condensed and overlapping timeline. I began surveying participants and then teaching the first session during weeks in which I was still developing later sessions. Having this condensed timeline was not planned in the original proposal. At the time, I served as the student minister of FBCFP and was restricted by the church's calendar and senior leadership. Given my options, implementing when I did was the most optimal. As stated above, I am amply pleased with the quality of the teaching material that I produced. Still, the condensed timeline hurried my development of the material and restricted my opportunity to provide any context for the church before the weeks in which I surveyed participants. The improvement would to allow for a more generous timeline in which all the material can be developed and evaluated before being implemented. If I were to do this project differently, I would have planned the timeline better well ahead of time with my senior pastor.

Second, I allowed for participants in the study who were absent for a teaching session to continue in the study by watching a video of the session's material. This was a necessary concession for individuals who missed a session due to nursery duty or other church service, and it was necessary also because church attendance is not mandatory. The videos themselves were not the issue; the material was taught clearly in the video format. However, the original sessions 3 through 5 were taught in a more discussion-based format. The nuances of the discussions were not available in the digital format. Additionally, although participants were asked to be present for all five sessions or watch all sessions, I cannot be sure of the quality of attention given as participants watched the

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video sessions on their own.[8]

 A clear improvement would be to require all participants to be present for all sessions so that I could be more certain that nothing was missed. The other option would be to condense the five session and reduce the number to three. The content of the first two would remain unaltered. The last three sessions could be combined to form a special session for participants to attend. The session would require two and a half hours and would have to be scheduled as a special event.

 If the project remained in its current format, another improvement would be to distinguish in the data analysis those who were present for all sessions and those who completed the session in video format. I did not make that distinction as I collected the data. I cannot be sure if it would yield any reasonable difference, but I would have been useful to explore in the research.

 Third, as detailed above, a *t*-test for dependent samples yielded no statistically significant difference between pre-teaching and post-teaching OCA scores for personal attitudes ($t_{(50)}$ = -1.348, p =.0919). For this subset of survey questions, the teaching series cannot be shown to have made a difference in the attitudes of the participants. I would have liked to have seen this subset of question yield different results. Part of the success of the project was to affect understanding and attitudes such that families explore and commit to foster care or adoption. This evidence points to the limitations of a five-session teaching series. Knowledge is easier to affect than attitudes and personal responsibility. Further leadership and discipleship are necessary. The results are not discouraging in regard to overall effectiveness of the project, however. This may be a case in which the statistical evidence does not line up with the experiential evidence of the project. As a result of the project, FBCFP has started a viable orphan care ministry (detailed above).

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[8] Videos found at https://vimeo.com/311095797; https://vimeo.com/312397255; https://vimeo.com/319570580; https://vimeo.com/320519594; https://vimeo.com/321615603.

Last, I had 79 participants take the pre-test and only 51 complete the post-test. Several reasons explain this large difference. On the weeks I administered the post-tests, many of the original participants were not present. I mailed and emailed the post-tests to those individuals, but the return was not 100 percent. Second, I allowed the participants to take the surveys home for completion. This was necessary on one hand since some needed to watch the video version of the sessions for which they were not present, but also created an issue with getting the surveys returned. Last, some participants declined finishing the material and completing the second survey. Had the teaching sessions and surveys all been required to be completed in person, then the large discrepancy possibly could have been avoided.

If I were to do this project differently, I would have been more proactive to secure participants who could be present for all sessions and to whom I could immediately administer and collect post-tests. This scenario would be ideal for the best conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the teaching-sessions. However, this would likely cut down on my sample size. Given that some concessions had to be made to compensate for the unpredictable nature of when participants would miss a session, a second alternative for improvement would be to find a more efficient way to administer and collect post-tests. Enlisting the help of a volunteer who would contact participants in order to collect completed post-surveys could possibly offer an improved return rate.

Theological Reflections

I was reminded through this project how sufficient the gospel message of Jesus is for the entirety of the believers' lives. In regard to leading families to orphan care, the gospel is what moves and sustains believers. The gospel tells us that all mankind was lost, spiritual orphans, but because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, Christians by faith have been adopted as sons into the family of God (Rom 8:13-17). The gospel also provides the motive for living for God. We love because God first loved us; we invite

orphaned children into our families because God invited us into his family. Our lives are shaped by the gospel, and we seek to reflect and demonstrate the gospel in how we live. The gospel is also the message that sustains Christians as they seek to do God's will. Believers have everything in their union with Christ to live for Jesus in this world. Romans 8:26-39 provides believers with utmost confidence in God through Christ Jesus. With the promise of Spirit of God, the promise that nothing can separate believers from His love, and the promise that nothing can thwart God's plan for His people, Christians can confidently embrace whatever calling is in front of them.

Second, I had my confidence in God's church strengthened through this project. I expected the project to be a success. Beyond the success of the project, I have been overwhelmed by how FBCFP has responded to the new vision for how our church can care for orphans. I was warned by a staff member at sister church who has a foster and adoptive ministry that introducing orphan care into the church would be one of the most difficult things I would ask the church to do. The reason is caring for orphaned children is not a project or a program but a whole-life commitment. FBCFP responded in an incredible way, and it strengthen my confidence in the local church that when it is led by the gospel, it will respond to embrace the calling.

Personal Reflections

When my family took a call to FBCFP in September 2015, we were confident that God had led us to the church. We just did not know *why* he had led us here. Certainly, my work with the student ministry has been rewarding personally and fruitful. Also, we have forged wonderful friendships within the congregation. We have enjoyed our time ministering in the church, and have been confident of our calling. It was not until we became involved in foster care with Dekalb County that my wife and I began to realize why we are where we are. In July of 2019, we adopted a son from foster care.

Likewise, it was not until I began presenting the vision of orphan care to the

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church, that my wife and I began to realize why God had called us to this church. I do not know how to quantify it, but our church is different since orphan care has been introduced. I had a church member comment that my vision for orphan care would "completely change our church." This project has been extremely encouraging to me as I have seen the Holy Spirit take a personal passion of mine which became a DMin. project and move a church to respond and join in God's care for the fatherless. For this reason, I have been called to FBCFP.

Conclusion

In *Generous Justice*, Tim Keller urges the reader to realize "how significant it is that the Biblical writers introduce God as a 'Father to the fatherless; a defender of widows' (Ps 68:4-5)." He goes on to state, "This is one of the main things He does in the world. He identifies with the powerless; He takes up their cause."[9] I have sought through this project to align the passion and ministry of FBCFP with the passions and causes of our Father. The project has been successful, which has been gratifying as a student pursuing a degree but more so a minister of the gospel. Our church has responded, and our course has been altered. Already, vulnerable children have been given a home—some for a season, and some for a lifetime. My next great desire is to take what I have developed for this project and share it with other local churches in order to see orphan care ministries begin and grow in Dekalb County. A further step for the project is to convert the research, the teaching sessions, and the ministry plan into a published curriculum. The final hope for this project is that it would help lead multiple churches to equip families to meet the great need in our county and to provide the loving, supportive, nurturing family environments that so many children need.

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[9] Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* (New York: Penguin Group, 2010), 6.

APPENDIX 1

ORPHAN CARE ASSESSMENT (OCA)

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. Marshall Henderson is conducting this research for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project, and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project.

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 be 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 purposes of matching and analyzing your pre-test and post-test.

By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

[ ] I agree to participate. Name_____ or 4-digit ID#_____

[ ] I do not agree to participate

Section I

The first section of the OCA will obtain some demographic information about the individuals taking this survey.

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? _____

3. Are you a member of FBCFP? _____ A. Yes _____ B. No

4. What is your marital status? _____

5. Do you have children? ___ A. Yes ___ B. No

6. Do you have any children age 18 or younger living in the home? ___ A. Yes ___ B. No

7. Have you or any member or any of your family members ever been orphaned, placed in foster care, or adopted? ___ A. Yes ___ B. No

- If yes, please elaborate _____
  _____
  _____

Section II

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

Directions: The questions in this section ask you to give your opinion using the following scale: SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, DS = disagree somewhat, AS = agree somewhat, A=agree, SA = strongly agree.

Please circle the figure that best corresponds to your feelings in response to the following statements:

1. The Bible teaches significantly on God's care for the fatherless/orphan.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

2. The Bible clearly instructs Christians to care for the poor, hurting, or vulnerable in the world.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

3. The Bible clearly commands Christians to care for orphans.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

4. Orphan care is part of how the church fulfills its mission.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

5. I understand how caring for orphans fits within the mission of the church.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

6. The Bible teaches that Christians have been adopted into God's family.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

7. Christians have ample theological motivation to engage in social causes in the community.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

8. I believe our church has instructed its members how to care for the poor, marginalized, needy, and hurting.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

9. I believe our church has instructed its members to have a biblical perspective on orphan care.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

10. I believe our church has provided leadership for its members on how to be involved in orphan care.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

11. I have been taught by our church that foster care and adoption are gospel-motivated issues for Christians.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

12. I understand what "orphan care" is.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

13. Orphan care is primarily about the adoption of "orphans."

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

14. Every Christian has a responsibility to care for orphans.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

15. Adoption is primarily for families who cannot have biological children.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

16. Becoming a foster home is primarily for families who seek additional family income.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

17. Some people adopt solely because they are motivated as Christians to do so.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

18. I believe there is an acute need for foster and adoptive homes for children in Dekalb County.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

19. I believe the costs (financial or emotional) of foster care or adoption are the most significant hindrances to more Christians becoming involved in foster care or adoption.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

20. I believe Christians can successfully partner with government agencies to become foster or adoptive homes.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

21. I am willing to explore next steps in becoming personally involved in orphan care.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

22. I am willing to explore next steps in becoming a foster or adoptive home.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

Section III

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

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

_____
_____
_____
_____

2. 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?

_____
_____
_____
_____

3. To your knowledge, is FBCFP involved in any type of orphan care ministry?
___A. Yes ___ B. No

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

_____

_____

_____

4. Is your immediate family involved in any type of orphan care, foster care, or adoption

process?   ___A. Yes ___ B. No

For your answer, please elaborate with any relevant knowledge, reasons, hindrances, or

motivations.

_____

_____

5. What is your awareness of the need for foster and adoptive homes for children in

Dekalb county and world-wide?

_____

_____

_____

6. What do you perceive to be the most significant hindrances that prevent families from

becoming foster or adoptive families?

_____

_____

APPENDIX 2

TEACHING SERIES EVALUATION RUBRIC

Teaching Series Evaluation Tool					
Lesson One Evaluation					
1= insufficient 2= requires attention 3=sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson is scripturally and theologically sound.					
The lesson thoughtfully engages orphan care as a theological issue.					
The lesson thoughtfully engages orphan care as a significant issue for any Christian.					
The lesson has a clearly stated thesis, which is supported throughout the lesson.					
The lesson is appropriate for its intended audience.					
The lesson appropriately addresses the mind and the heart.					
The lesson provides clear steps for practical application.					
Overall, the lesson is clear in content and presentation.					

APPENDIX 3

POST-SURVEY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What has been your most significant biblical insights during the course of the orphan care series?

2. Before the orphan care series, what were your previous thoughts regarding the topic?

3. What were your biggest misconceptions regarding orphan care and what the Bible has to say on the topic?

4. In what ways do you think the orphan care series was healthy for our church?

5. What meaningful orphan care ministries do you see FBCFP able to begin immediately?

6. What ways do you plan on being involved in orphan care ministry?

7. How do you see orphan ministry growing in FBCFP and across Dekalb county?

7. If applicable, how can the church help you moving forward with foster care or adoption?

Table A1. Summary of post-survey interview questions

Question	Answers
1.	Family 1: It is incumbent not optional for us to care for children in need. Family 2: Jesus commands us to take care of widows and orphans. Family 3: We have often heard it stated that we should take care or orphans and widows, but we never took that literally or seriously. It helped open our eyes to our calling into orphan care as the role of foster/adoptive parents.
2.	Family 1: We felt that things were being handled by someone else. We had never given a lot of thought to the plight of foster children. Family 2: We were drawn to foster care before the series but we didn't know of anyone involved or the first steps to getting there. Family 3: We knew we should care for orphans but I didn't know what that meant or how to do that. We also knew very little about the need in our community for foster children.
3.	Family 1: We are not sure we had a misconception, just a "mis-assignment" of responsibility. Family 2: Biblically, it is not optional. Everyone cannot foster or adopt but everyone can help/support. Family 3: The biggest misconception is that we can't do anything about it. Everyone should be a part of the calling in some way.
4.	Family 1: In all the ways that being obedient to God's call is good for us individually, it's been good for our church collectively. And we have grown closer to families who are walking through the same decisions and experience. Family 2: It has given us a level of "public awareness," it helped some family become foster parents, and it opened an avenue for people who want to help to support foster families. Family 3: We now have several new families who are wanting to become foster parents.
5.	Family 1: We as a family feel so inadequate in filling the needs of the children that come into our care. A clothes closet housed in our church would be a good thing. Family 2: Our church can largely support foster families through childcare and a foster care closet drive. Family 3: The W.R.A.P. ministry is something our church can immediately do well.
6.	Family 1: We see our niche as doing emergent and respite care. Family 2: We want to foster and/or do respite care. Family 3: We will be foster parents.

7.	Family 1: We have seen our church respond. We think other churches will follow our lead. Family 2: There will be more foster family's as we progress, just based on the awareness. Family 3: As a church, I think we are just at the surface of what we can accomplish. We have several new foster families, and I would like to see that number increase. Across Dekalb County, we need to be attending events for foster children and other meetings to let people know that we at FBCFP are here to provide support and help for these children.
8.	Family 1: The physical needs are what concern us most. We really think the financial burdens are what can cause burnout, even as much as the shear exhaustion of the enterprise both physically and mentally. Family 2: We need people to pray for us. Family 3: We know the process can be draining and feel lonely. We need continued support.

APPENDIX 4

MINISTRY PLAN EVALUATION RUBRIC

Ministry Plan Evaluation Tool					
Lesson One Evaluation					
1= insufficient 2= requires attention 3=sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The overall plan provides clear "next steps" for families interested in foster care and/or adoption.					
The initial special-interest meeting is organized and clearly communicates an action plan for participants.					
The plan indicates clear and thoughtful coordination with local agencies.					
The plan contains structures to aid families in process of preparation and/or certification.					
The plan develops a support system within the church for families.					
The plan provides adequate resources for counseling.					
The plan is adaptable and repeatable and has a long-term perspective.					
The plan provides alternative pathways for orphan care ministry in the church.					

APPENDIX 5

MINISTRY PLAN

The ministry plan developed for this project is a three-stage plan that equips families who have shown interest in becoming foster or adoptive families with the needed information and support to move forward in the process to foster a child or to foster-to-adopt a child. The three stages are commitment, preparation, and support.

Stage 1: Commitment

The first stage of the ministry plan is focused on commitment. The material below is meant to be used in the context of and initial meeting with families who express interest in foster care and/or adoption. The meetings can be conducted in a one-on-one format with families or in meeting with a small group of families. In the commitment stage, the goal is to help families who have shown interest in foster care or adoption to make a firm commitment to proceed in the process to apply for licensure.

1.1 Why Foster Care?

Assuming a biblical and theological foundation is in place for orphan care and adoption ministries, the following points make an appeal for becoming a foster home.

The need is great. According to the Alabama DHR, there are over 6000 children in the foster care system in Alabama. These are "children of all ages who cannot currently live with their birth families due to the risk of neglect, physical or sexual abuse."[1]

- Christians have a special responsibility in caring for orphans.

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[1] "Alabama Department of Human Resources—Intro Foster Care," accessed July 19, 2019, http://dhr.alabama.gov/services/Foster_Care/Intro_Foster_Care.aspx.

- The "orphan" or the "fatherless" are children who do not have parents/families to supply the safety, support, and provision which they need daily and which cannot supply on their own.

- From scripture, one can see that Christians have a special role in caring for the fatherless because when they care for orphans they reflect and demonstrate the gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:12-17; Gal 4:4-7), they mirror God's character and champion His causes (Ps 68:5-6; 146:9; Jas 1:27; Deut 10:17-22), and they obedient disciples who aid the most vulnerable and helpless in society (Matt 25:31-46; James 1:27).

- Christians believe the permanent solution for the orphan should be growing up in a loving, supportive, and nurturing family environment. Permanency in a home is a singular, worthwhile purpose for all the church's efforts to be aimed. Children are growing up without families. God has a special concern for these children, and the church does too.

- With foster care, the certification process for families is relatively brief, and after the certification process, families can immediately begin to intervene in vulnerable children's and their families' lives. Compared to global and domestic adoptions, with foster care the timeline is vastly speedier for having a child come into one's home, and the financial responsibilities are immensely less. If one is looking to adopt, foster care can also lead to adoption. Also, foster care provides an opportunity to not only give care for children but to work with families for their restoration.

1.2 Assessing Your Situation

The following questions are helpful for families to ask when assessing their readiness for becoming a foster or adoptive home.[2]

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[2] Ideas adapted from: Jason Johnson, "Ten Questions Couples Should Ask Before Becoming Foster Parents," *Jason Johnson Blog*, accessed December 2, 2019, http://jasonjohnsonblog.com/blog/ten-questions-

- Why do we believe foster care and/or adoption is for us?

- How do both spouses feel (if married)?

- Have we spoken to your biological children (if any)?

- What are our fears? Have we counted the costs? Do we have realistic expectations?

- Do we have a support system?

- Do we believe work in partnership with a state agency?

1.3 Answering Questions

This section of the ministry plan is unscripted, but it is helpful to allow families to express their questions. For questions about state licensure, see information provided in stage 2 (below).

1.4 Addressing Fears

Families will have room to express fears and doubts openly and have their feelings treated as legitimate. While there are very few simplistic answers when addressing fears, the following are helpful, biblical affirmations to make in light of fears and doubts:

- Affirm obedience even if it involves suffering. to care for orphans even if it felt risky,

- Affirm the sufficiency of God to minister to them in their weakness.

- Affirm how the Spirit of God is equipping them for where God is leading.

- Affirm the role of the community of faith and remind the family to lean on their community.

1.5 Prayer

Finally, encourage families at this point to pray: "We will care for orphans. Is foster care and/or adoption how we will care for orphans?"

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couples-should-ask.

Stage 2: Family Preparation and Certification

The second stage of the ministry plan is focused on preparation. The information below is meant to offer a helpful, condensed version of the requirements that families must meet to progress forward with foster care certification.

2.1 Foster Care Certification in Alabama

Commitment to foster care through Alabama DHR requires more than the expressed desire to do so. Becoming a foster parent involves an application process and certification course. Also, Alabama has minimum standards for foster family homes that must be met.

2.1a Basic Steps

- Step 1: Determine if you meet Foster Parent Minimum Standards (see below)
- Step 2: Complete and send application to your county DHR.[3]
- Step 3: Complete the following and turn in to your licensing worker:
  - Financial Statement
  - Physical Exam
- Step 5: Complete the following background checks: (see your licensing worker for information)
  - Clearance of State Central Registry on Child Abuse and Neglect (fingerprinting).
  - State of Alabama Criminal History Background Information Check
- Step 6: Begin TIPS-MAPP training with your county DHR. You will need to complete 30 hours of training at a specified location (typically, 3 hours a week for 10 weeks).[4]
- Step 7 Complete home study with your licensing worker.[5]

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[3] Application can be found at http://dhr.alabama.gov/documents/ApplicationDHR-FCS%20704.pdf.

[4] TIPPS-MAPP is the abbreviation for "Trauma Informed Partnering for Safety and Permanence – Model Approach to Partnership Parenting" All prospective foster and adoptive parents are required to participate in this training program in order to become licensed as foster parents. The program designed specifically to educate potential adoptive and foster parent families on a variety of relevant topics on their upcoming foster or adoption experience.

[5] Steps adapted from John King, "Getting Started Fostering," *AFAPA Blog*, May 10, 2016,

Once you have completed all the steps, you await the approval of the State of Alabama. Upon licensure, you can begin receiving placements within 24 hours.

2.1b Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes

Below is a summary of Alabama's Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes.[6]

- Age: 19 or older

- Marital Status: Foster parents may be single or married. If married, foster parents must have been in this relationship for at least one year, and both married spouses must be approved as foster parents.

- Foster parents need to be able to:

    o Read and write

    o Demonstrate an understanding of the needs of children

    o Give time and attention to the needs of children

    o Provide opportunities for the physical, mental, emotional, and social development of children in care.

    o Respond to the changing needs of children

    o Participate in any planning and delivery of services required for children in care.

- Religious beliefs: Foster parents shall respect the religious beliefs and cultural heritage of foster children, and shall not interfere with the reasonable practice of a foster child's religious beliefs. Foster parents shall not coerce a foster child into participating in religious or ethnic events against the child's will.

- Income: Maintain income or resources to meet the needs of the foster family, basic household needs, and the additional needs of the foster children

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https://afapa.org/2016/05/10/getting-started-fostering/.

[6] For the full-length Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes: http://dhr.alabama.gov/services/ Family_Services/Documents/MinimumStandardsforFosterFamilyHomes.pdf

- Transportation: Maintain a valid driver's license and motor vehicle insurance, as required by law, on vehicles transporting children and provide proof of insurance and a valid driver's license to the DHR.

- Complete and maintain current CPR certification. If approved for infants and young children, the training must include Pediatric and Infant First Aid/CPR

- Housing: The home and grounds needs to be maintained in a clean and safe condition.
  - A play space for indoor and outdoor activities will be provided. This area shall be free from hazardous conditions that may cause injury.
  - The residence shall have a working telephone, electrical service, water, gas (if used for cooking/heating), waste disposal system (city sewage or septic tank), ventilation, comfortably regulated cooling and heating, and lighting that provides for necessary activities and safety.

- Bedrooms and Bathrooms:
  - Beds and mattresses shall be of size and quality to allow good sleeping posture. In addition, if infants will be placed in the home, additional guidelines exist related to baby cribs.
  - Separate sleeping rooms shall be provided for children over age 6 who are of the opposite sex.
  - An adequate number of bedrooms shall be provided for all persons residing in the home.
  - Bedrooms for foster children shall be used only for the child's sleeping, personal time, and study.
  - Bedrooms for foster children shall have adequate space for the child's personal belongings.
  - Sanitary bathroom facilities that provide privacy shall be available for use by family members and foster children.

- Cleanliness: The home dwelling house needs to be clean overall and maintained so as to prevent and/or eliminate rodent and insect infestation. Outside garbage and trash is to be stored in containers with lids, and garbage and trash shall be removed at intervals to avoid creating a nuisance or menace to health.

- Animals in the Home:

  - An animal shall not be kept if the animal has shown aggressive behavior.

  - Animals shall have an annual certificate of rabies vaccination on file in the home if required by law to be vaccinated.

  - Animals, such as, but not limited to lizards, snakes and turtles, shall be routinely confined (e.g. a cage or an aquarium) in an appropriate container.

- Swimming Pools and Hot Tubs:

  - Pools shall be maintained in clean and safe condition.

  - Foster parents shall develop rules governing pool, hot tub and/or spa use. Rules shall be posted and reviewed with each child.

  - Pools exceeding two (2) feet in depth (above or in ground shall be enclosed by a fence or a solid wall. The fence shall be at least four (4) feet in height, with a locking gate. The gate and all areas of access shall remain locked at all times the pool is not in use.

- Firearms: Firearms and ammunition must be kept in a locked approved container.[7]

2.2 Resources

- The Alabama Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (AFAPA) provides helpful information on the process for certification and minimum standards. (https://afapa.org/).

- John DeGamo, *The Foster Parenting Manual: A Practical Guide to Creating a Loving, Safe, and Stable Home*, 2013.

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[7] John King, "Minimum Standards for Foster Parenting," *AFAPA Blog*, May 11, 2016, https://afapa.org/2016/05/11/minimum-standards-of-foster-parenting/. (Paraphrased).

- Jason Johnson, *Reframing Foster Care: Filtering Your Foster Parenting Journey Through the Lens of the Gospel,* 2018.
- Helpful insights on a variety of foster care topics: http://jasonjohnsonblog.com/posts.
- Pathways Professional Counseling provides Christ-centered counseling in Alabama: https://www.pathwaysprofessional.org/.

Stage 3: Support

Support for foster families comes in two forms through FBCFP.

3.1 W.R.A.P. Support Ministry

Foster families need support, and the community of faith will provide the support system needed. Since the church has a responsibility in orphan care, many who do not foster and adopt will be looking for ways to care for orphans. One way is to serve and support the families who do foster or adopt. The W.R.A.P. support ministry is a recognition that foster or adoptive families encounter unique challenges that are aided by a community of care beyond the general support provided by family and the community of faith.

- Step 1: Foster families will fill out W.R.A.P. questionnaires during their certification process. The questionnaires are used to pair families' needs with the support given through the W.R.A.P. team. The questionnaires focused on four categories: prayer, relief care, acts of service, and encouragement.
- Step 2: Foster families will be paired with a W.R.A.P. support team and will be contacted by a team coordinator when they receive a child placement.

3.2 FBCFP Foster Care "Closet"

The foster care closet is a resource to meet the most basic needs of foster children who come into care by providing resources to foster families. The "closet" consists of two types of resources. The first is monetary donations, designated by givers to be used to help foster families. The

designated money is disbursed according to need as families receive new foster children into their homes.

The second type of resource are items that are kept in a closet in the building of FBCFP. Families from FBCFP who receive new foster children is contacted by a church volunteer to offer access to whatever resources are on hand. The foster care closet is operated from the donations of FBCFP members, and it routinely stocks the following items:

School supplies:

- Back packs
- Composition notebook
- Spiral bound notebook
- #2 pencil (Ticonderoga)
- Color pencils
- Crayons
- College rule notebook paper

- Glue sticks
- Child Scissors
- Highlighter
- Pens
- Dry erase markers
- Folders

Hygiene items:

- Shampoo
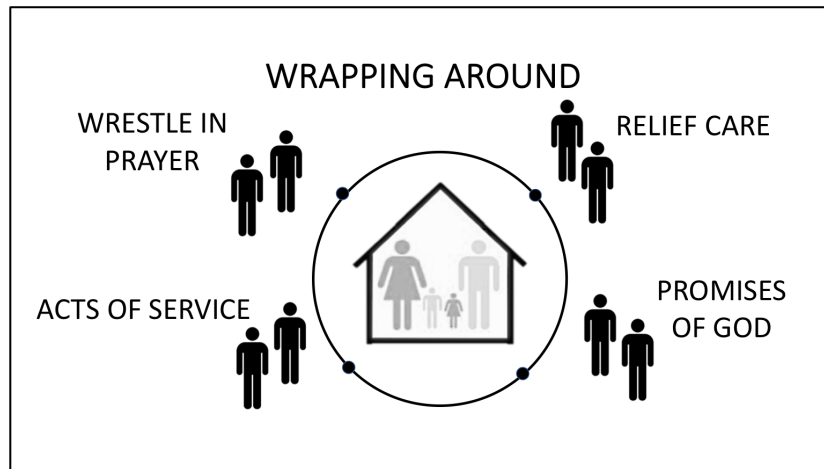- Conditioner
- Body wash
- Deodorant
- Toothbrush

- Toothpaste
- Face wash
- Hairbrush/combs

Baby supplies:

- Baby Shampoo
- Baby lotion
- Diaper cream
- Baby wipes
- Diapers
- Sippy cups
- Bottles
- Pacifiers

APPENDIX 6

W.R.A.P. SUPPORT MINISTRY

W.R.A.P. is a tool that helps our church care for foster children and the families that care for

them. It consists of four primary ways church members can come alongside foster families.[1]

- **WRESTLE in PRAYER**: This team commits to intentionally and continually pray for the foster family
- **RELIEF CARE**: Relief care providers care for either the foster children or other children in the foster home in order for the family to have time away or to give special 1 on 1 attention to a specific child's needs. They can also help with transportation for foster children to visits, school, and other activities.
- **ACTS of SERVICE**: This team provides meals, runs errands, tutors, helps with yardwork, birthday parties, etc.
- **PROMISES of GOD**: This team shares scriptural encouragement with the foster family through calls, notes, emails, & texts

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[1] Thanks to The Church at Brook Hills who shared the W.R.A.P. ministry model with me.

APPENDIX 7

W.R.A.P. SUPPORT MINISTRY CARD
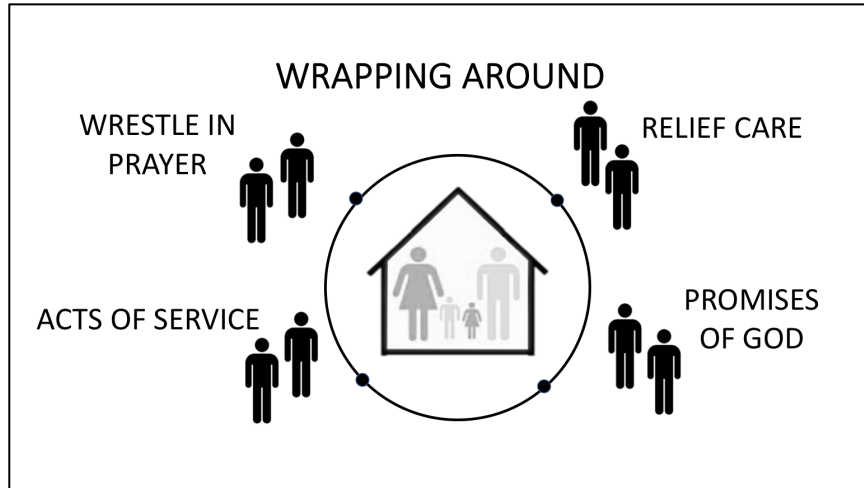
GET A LETTER & A FAMILY:

Name(s)_____

Phone_____

Email_____

Preferred method for contact:

___Call   ___Text   ___Email

How will you serve?

_____ WRESTLE IN PRAYER

_____ RELIEF CARE

_____ ACTS OF SERVICE

_____ PROMISES OF GOD

Do you have a family or families you would like to serve/already support?

_____

_____

Would you like to be a family coordinator? _____

Do you have other ways you would like to serve or support foster children and their foster

families?

_____

_____

APPENDIX 8

W.R.A.P. QUESTIONNAIRES FOR FOSTER FAMILIES

Wrestle in Prayer: To Contend with the Enemy for Victory

1. Name and Licensing Agency

2. Are you in a small group or Sunday school class? Y/N

3. Do you prefer your "W" team to check with you to receive prayer requests:
   o Once a week
   o Twice a week
   o Less
   o More

4. Are you comfortable with members of your W.R.A.P. team gathering in your home to pray

with you and your family? Y/N

5. Would you like your "W" team to come over and pray with you:
   o On a regular basis
   o Over the phone
   o Pray on their own
   o All the above

6. What is your preferred method of communication?
   o Email
   o Text
   o Phone calls

7. Do you have other friends or family that you would like to be on your "W" team? Y/N

If yes, please list names and contact info.

Relief Care: An Interval of Rest

1. Do you have family in town? Y/N

   If yes, will they be your primary relief care? Y/N

2. Do you have friends in your small group or in the community that want to be part of your "R" team? Y/N

       If yes, please list names and contact info.

3. Do you have a regular babysitter? Y/N

4. Do you personally know any licensed respite care providers? Y/N

       If yes, please list the name(s).

5. How often do you prefer relief care?
- o Once a month
- o Twice a month
- o Periodic as need arises

6. Do you have any regular scheduled activities for which you might desire or need relief care?

7. Do you have specific relief care needs for your children (transportation to/from school, doctor, counseling appointments, or birth family visitations)?

8. What is your favorite date night restaurant or place to go?

9. What is your favorite way to relax/recharge?

10. Is there anything else your "R" team needs to know about your family?

Acts of Service: To Give Sacrificially of Your Time, Talent, and Treasure

1. What do you foresee being your greatest challenge(s) once you are home with your foster placement?

2. How frequently do you prefer that your "A" team contact you?
- o Once a week
- o Every other week
- o Twice a week
- o Other

3. Contact Preference?
- o Email
- o Text
- o Phone call

4. Mark the things you would like help with:
- o Laundry
- o Errands

- Yardwork
- Grocery Shopping
- Housework
- Homework/Tutoring
- Other:

5. Would you like to have 6-8 meals brought to your family over the first 3-4 weeks after a placement? Y/N

If yes, list any favorite foods, any dislikes, or allergies. List 2-3 of your family's favorite restaurants.

6. Would you be interested in your "A" team helping with a birthday party for your foster children should they still be living with you at the time? Y/N

7. Are there any other ways your "A" team can minister to you?

Promises of God: Unfailing Declarations that God is Who He Says He Is

and that God Can Do What He Says He Can Do.

1. What is your favorite promise of God in your journey so far?

2. What is your greatest fear or struggle as a foster parent?

3. If you have other children in the home, what are their concerns as they anticipate or welcome a new child into the family?

4. What are your foster children's greatest struggles or needs?

5. Which version of the Bible do you prefer to read?

6. What is your preferred method of communication with your "P" team?
- Email
- Text
- Phone Call[1]

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[1] Thanks to The Church at Brook Hills who shared the W.R.A.P. questionnaires with FBCFP.

APPENDIX 9

T-TEST RESULTS

Table A2. Pre- and post-OCA results

Participants	Pre-OCA	Post-OCA	Difference
A	118	119	1
B	107	109	2
C	108	118	10
D	112	107	-5
E	96	121	25
F	108	118	10
G	115	122	7
H	106	112	6
I	119	119	0
J	111	119	8
K	108	105	-3
L	110	120	10
M	106	122	16
N	106	122	16
O	115	108	-3
P	116	122	6
Q	119	121	3
R	108	113	5
S	106	115	9
T	108	124	16
U	113	122	9
V	112	123	11
W	107	112	5
X	104	118	14
Y	103	117	14
Z	124	120	-4
AA	119	126	7
BB	116	113	-3
CC	116	113	-3
DD	107	112	5
EE	119	127	8
FF	106	111	5

Table A2—*continued*

Participants	Pre-OCA	Post-OCA	Difference
GG	98	104	6
HH	102	112	10
II	111	115	4
JJ	112	121	9
KK	108	117	9
LL	114	122	8
MM	116	128	12
NN	109	131	22
OO	116	129	13
PP	92	114	22
QQ	116	122	5
RR	122	129	7
SS	92	113	21
TT	113	114	1
UU	115	122	7
VV	88	100	12
WW	100	108	8
XX	102	106	4
YY	115	117	2

	Pre-test Total	Post-test Total
Mean	109.5882353	117.1372549
Variance	60.00705882	48.52078431
Observations	51	51
Pearson Correlation	0.551855406	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	50	
t Stat	-7.703698663	
P(T<=t) one-tail	2.39473E-10	
t Critical one-tail	1.675905025	
P(T<=t) two-tail	4.78946E-10	

Figure A1. T-test paired two sample for means

APPENDIX 10

OUTLINE OF TEACHING SESSIONS

Session 1: "The Spirit of Adoption;" Romans 8:12-17

I. Introduction:

A. Personal Story: How I Discovered Adoption is a "Gospel Issue"

B. Statistics for Orphans: Global Number; U.S. 440,00 in Foster Care; Alabama:

6000 in Foster Care; Dekalb County: approximately 100 in Foster Care

C. The Gospel is Our "Why"

II. The Word of God

A. The Gospel of Adoption Compels Us to Orphan Care.

1. The Gospel of Adoption (Romans 8:12-17)

a. There are no natural-born children of God.

b. Our identity is rooted in our adoption as God's children through

the work of Jesus.

c. The Spirit's work is such that you experience your adoption as

sons as personal, intimate, real, and transformative.

2. The Gospel Compels Us Toward Orphan Care.

a. The "Spirit of adoption" is a Holy Spirit-inspired

perspective on our lives and our identity.

b. We look for ways to reflect the gospel in our world.

c. We look at all things in our world through the gospel.

B. The Gospel of Adoption Calls for a Response

1. Are You a Child of God?

2. Not Every Christian Will Adopt or Foster, but Every Church and Every

Christian Has a Role in Orphan Care.

Session 2: "True Religion;" James 1:27; Matthew 25:31-46

I. Introduction:

A. Keller Quote: Realize "how significant it is that the Biblical writers introduce

God as a 'Father to the fatherless; a defender of widows'...This is

one of the main things He does in the world. He identifies with the

powerless; He takes up their cause."[1]

B. Identifying with the "Father to the fatherless" (Ps 68:4-5)

II. The Word of God

A. James 1:27

1. Indispensable Test for Genuine Faith

a. Contrast: Worthless Religion

b. Compassionate Action for the Orphan and Widow

2. The Mandate Mirrors the Heart of God

a. Orphans and Widows: Special Objects of God's Mercy

b. From the OT: Vertical Reception of Blessing Calls for

Horizontal Sharing

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[1] Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* (New York: Penguin Group, 2010), 6.

B. Matthew 25: 31-46

    1. Disciples Who Belong to the Kingdom Care for the Lowly and

        Insignificant

    2. Actions Done for the "Least of These" Have Eternal Significance

III. Application

A. An Obedient Response Requires Jesus' Church to Do Something

B. Reaching Down: Will You Respond by Committing to Seek More

    Information about Becoming a Foster Home or an Adoptive Family?

C. Wrapping Around: Will You Respond by Committing to Learn How to Be Part

    of an Orphan Care Ecosystem in Our Church?

Session 3: "Orphan Care Ministry: Spectrum of Care"

I. Biblical Foundation for Orphan Care

A. The Gospel Gives Us Our "Why?"

    1.Adoption (Rom 8:15; Eph 1:5, Gal 4:4-7)

    2. Incarnation (Gal 4:4-5)

B. The Gospel Gives Us Our "What?"

    1. Mission (Matt 28:18-20)

    2. Worship (Ps 68:5-6; Ps 146:9; Deut 10:17-22)

C. The Gospel Gives Us Our "Who?"

    1. Church (Ps 67; Acts 2:42-47)

    2. Family (Gen 1:27-28; Eph 1:3-14, 5:21-6:4)

II. Orphans and Orphan Care

A. Orphan: Familial Orphan, Functional Orphan, Social Orphan

B. Orphan Care is a Spectrum

    1. The Goal of Orphan Care: Permanent Family (Permanence)

    2. The River Illustration[2]

        a. Intervention: Helping Children-In-Crisis

        b. Prevention: Helping At-Risk Families

        c. Restoration: Ministry to the Once-Orphaned Adult

Session 4: "Intervention: Foster Care and Wrap Around Support Ministry"

    I. Intervention: A Clear Pathway for a Church to Care for Orphans

        A. Reaching Down: Give an Orphan a Family

        1. Equation: [Gospel of Adoption] + [James 1:27] + [Goal: Permanent

        Family] + [Our Families under Jesus Christ] = Giving Our

        Families for Orphaned Children.

        2. Could Adoption or Foster Care Be the Direction that God is Calling

        Your Family?

        B. Wrapping Around: The Church Embracing the Families Who Embrace

        Orphans

        1. Acts 2:42-47: The Church as Family

        2. W.R.A.P. Support Ministry

Session 5: "Foster Care and Adoption: Saying 'Yes'"

    I. Saying "Yes"

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[2] Jason Johnson, *Everyone Can Do Something: A Field Guide for Strategically Rallying Your Church Around the Orphaned and Vulnerable* (Grand Rapids: Credo House Publishers, 2018), 63–65.

A. Exploring Costs, Questions, and Hurdles

    1. I Fear the Financial Costs We Will Incur.

    2. I Fear Loving Them, Getting Attached, and Losing Them.

    3. I Fear the Effects It Will Have on Our Family (Biological Children,

        Marriage, etc.…).

    4. I Fear That Our Lives Will Never Fit the New "Normal" of Foster Care

        or Adoption.

    5. I Fear the Idea of Trusting the Child Welfare System (DHR and

        The Courts).[3]

B. Are the Costs Worth It? (Rom 8:17-30)

    1. "I consider that the sufferings of this present time [and foster care] are

        not worth comparing with the glory to be revealed in us." (Rom

        8:18, brackets added)

    2. Yes, the Costs are Worth It.

C. Do I Have What It Takes? (Rom 8:28-39

    1. No, but We Are Servants, Not Saviors

    2. Yes: We Have Everything We Need in Jesus

D. Explore Where "Yes" Can Take Us

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[3] Jason Johnson, "Foster Care, Adoption and Confronting the Fear of Not Having What It Takes,"*Jason Johnson Blog*, accessed March 30, 2019, http://jasonjohnsonblog.com/blog/not-having-what-it-takes.

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ABSTRACT

LEADING FAMILIES OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH IN FORT
PAYNE, ALABAMA, TO PARTICIPATE IN ORPHAN CARE
THROUGH FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION

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This project was designed to lead families in First Baptist Church of For Payne, Alabama (FBCFP), to participate in orphan care through local foster care and adoption. The leadership process began by assessing how members of FBCFP understood their theological role and responsibility in caring for orphans. Next, church members were equipped for caring for orphans through a five-week teaching series. At the end of the series, church members were given "next steps" for either becoming foster or adoptive parents or for ministering to the families who become foster or adoptive families.

Chapter 1 introduces the ministry context of FBCFP, along with the rationale, purpose, goals, research methodologies, definitions, and delimitations of the project. Chapter 2 provides a biblical and theological foundation for orphan care ministry. Chapter 3 provides a practical and theoretical basis for church-based orphan care ministries. Chapter 4 describes the development and implementation of the project. Chapter 5 provides evaluation of the project and its goals, suggestions for improvements, and further reflection.

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