

“LOVING THE FORSAKEN”

James 1:27

INTRODUCTION

1. All over the world today, thousands and thousands of children are forced to live as slaves in the sex trade..

Eg. In India, a buffalo costs \$350 and a child costs \$12. Two children a minute are trafficked for sexual exploitation.

In Thailand, where we have an orphan home, 80% of the prostitutes are under the age of 16.

In Burma 700,000 children are used as sex slaves, human shields, and mine sweepers – more than any other country in the world. With statistics like this, is it any wonder why God has so much to say in His Word about those who are fatherless?

2. The statistics about orphans in our world are staggering...143 million children in the world have lost one or both of their parents. Folks, that’s almost half the population of the United States.

Every 14 seconds, an AIDS death leaves another child orphaned. Every year, 12 million children become orphans.

3. This morning, we want to turn our attention to the plight of orphans in our world as we continue the series we began last week called, “A Passion for Compassion.” Now, to lay the foundation for our study, I invite you to turn to the last verse in the first chapter in the Epistle of James.

This morning, we want to examine six steps that help us learn how to love those who are often forgotten in our world. These are six ideas I need to adopt if I’m going to love the forsaken in our world. Now look at what James says in James 1:27:

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (James 1:27).

With that verse in mind, I want you to follow with me these six steps that I need to follow if I’m going to help “*the least of these*” in our world. Today, I want to take the word, “orphan” and help you understand what you and I can do to care for those who are often forsaken and abused in our world. First of all, I must...

1. OPEN MY HEART TO ORPHANS

Eg. I have a confession to make. I grew up in a God-honoring home. I was been taught the Scriptures since I was a little boy. I went to a Christian college and a Christian graduate school where I heard hundreds of chapel speakers. I cannot ever remember hearing one chapel sermon about the need of orphans in the world.

Eg. There is one old saying: “*There is none so blind as those who will not see.*” Frankly, I think that might have been my life for many years. I knew there were orphans in the world but my heart really had not been opened to their plight.

Yet, James says, in this verse that I memorized 35 years ago, that one of the characteristics of a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ is to look after orphans and widows in their distress.

In many places of the world, widows lose all of their property rights when their husbands die. That's not so true in the United States, but in other countries of the world. That's why we have a widow's home in Thailand on a farm where we planted over 1600 silk trees so the widows would be able to make purses and other items to provide some income.

The plight of orphans in this world is beyond description. My friend, the first step I have to take to help the least of these in the world is open my heart to orphans.

David said it like this about the Lord in the Psalms:

"...You are the helper of the fatherless. You hear, O LORD, the desire of the afflicted; You encourage them, and You listen to their cry, defending the fatherless and the oppressed..." (Psalm 10:14,17-18a).

The "R" in orphan is to...

2. **RECOGNIZE MY RESPONSIBILITY**

One of the great principles of Scripture is this:

- To not care about orphans is sin!

In fact, God told His people years ago that He would allow them to live in their land if they properly cared for *"the least of these."*

Look at these words of Jeremiah:

"If you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm,

then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers for ever and ever" (Jeremiah 7:6-7).

God has done a special work in my own heart in recent years. I used to think only of missions as planting churches around the world. I believe in that value just as much today as ever. A significant portion of your giving here at Grace goes to church planting. We cannot ignore the responsibility to start Christ-honoring, Bible-teaching churches around the world. We have a responsibility to help train pastors who will lead those churches. This provides long-term answers for any society. We'll talk about that opportunity in the weeks ahead.

But, I believe we also have a role like E.M.T.'s. We can do something to help right now and we fail in our responsibility before God if we do not care for the *"least of these"* in a personal way. When I traveled to Southeast Asia in the spring, I gained a whole new understanding of how critical it is for Christ-followers to accept their responsibility to help orphans.

When I was in Phenom Penh, I visited the garbage dump for the city. I saw children at the garbage dump who were looking for anything of value to sell on the open market. It's a scene and a smell that I cannot adequately describe for you today, and one I'll never forget.

Several years ago, a wealthy French family with the help of the French government established a school for children of the dump. I visited that school where hundreds of children are being educated.

As I walked around the school that has been well funded, it occurred to me that these children are being educated without any spiritual direction that points them to the God who sets the lonely in spiritual families.

I'm glad for humanitarian efforts all over the world to raise people out of poverty and helpless situations, but those who are Christ-followers have a unique responsibility in this world to represent Him among those who are *"the least of these."*

After all, God is described as...

"a father to the fatherless, a defender of the widows..."
(Psalm 68:5).

Those who know Him have a special responsibility in this area.

There is a third step I have to take if I'm to help address the needs of those who are *"the least of these"* in our world. I must...

3. PREVENT CHILDREN FROM BEING ORPHANED WHENEVER POSSIBLE

Look at these words in Isaiah 1:17:

"Learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow" (Isaiah 1:17).

You see, the cry of the Scripture is to advocate for children. One of the ways to prevent children from becoming orphans is to offer care and treatment to family members who are suffering from preventable diseases and from HIV. We'll talk more about that in a couple of weeks.

Another way to prevent children from being orphaned is to consider the possibility of foster care or adoption.

Eg. Can you guess what the following people have in common? Aristotle, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar,

Johann Sebastian Bach, Charles Dickens, Rudyard Kipling, Leo Tolstoy, Nelson Mandela, John Hancock, Gerald Ford, Bill Clinton, Faith Hill, and Tim McGraw?

If you guessed that all these famous people were adopted as children, you're correct. At one time, each of these celebrities was a child who needed a family that cared enough to adopt them.

Adoption or foster care is one of the best ways to make a difference in a child's life. In fact, I'm grateful for three families at Grace who have recently signed up to be foster parents. But, the need in Wayne County for foster care is significant.

Right now there is a lack of available homes for foster care in Wooster. There is a special need for foster homes that are willing to take teenagers. Thirty foster homes are needed.

Four of the children in foster care in Wayne County are eligible for adoption right now.

God may be moving in somebody's heart here today to become involved in this important effort. You'll find a table in the lobby today that will assist you if you're interested. There is a fourth step to helping *"the least of these"* in our world. I can...

4. HELP IN PRACTICAL WAYS

Look at these words of Deuteronomy 24:17, 18:

"Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge... Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there"
(Deuteronomy 24:17,18).

God gave some very specific instructions to His people in the Old Testament concerning the way they treated orphans and widows. He even told them not to harvest the corners of their fields so that the orphans and widows would be able to harvest what was left and provide for their needs.

God has enabled our church to respond in practical ways to the needs of orphans in places like Southeast Asia and in Africa. Today, over 200 people are participating in sponsorship programs which represents over \$50,000 a year in assistance to our own orphans.

Some of you know the story of Team Hope. These are people who have been willing to run or walk in Cleveland or Columbus road races to help sponsor orphans in Southeast Asia. To date, Team Hope has raised over \$40,000 for startup expenses at our Grace Place orphan homes in Cambodia and Thailand.

In June 2009, Vacation Bible School raised over \$15,000 to pay for landscaping and playground equipment at our orphan home in Battambang, Cambodia.

The A in orphan is to...

5. **ACKNOWLEDGE THE CONCERN OF GOD HIMSELF**

"He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing" (Deuteronomy 10:18).

"The LORD watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow" (Psalm 146:9).

You see, the God of heaven has a love relationship with every human being on this earth. He loves us so

much He was willing to send Jesus Christ to this world to live a life that was rejected and despised so that you and I could experience life with Him.

He wants every human being in this world, rich and poor, young and old, from every tribe and nation on the face of the earth to learn about His forgiveness offered through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross for us.

If I'm really going to care about *"the least of these"* I have to understand, there is a spiritual issue at stake at the heart of this matter. God cares for every human being. No one is less worthy of our love and attention because of their situation in life.

There is one final step that we must take if we're to care *"for the least of these"*. I must be willing to open my heart to orphans, to recognize my responsibility, to prevent children from being orphaned, to help in practical ways, to acknowledge the concern of God Himself, and I must...

6. **NEVER FORGET THE CHURCH**

"So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family" (Ephesians 2:19, NLT).

"Both the One who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers" (Hebrews 2:11).

"For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will - to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves" (Ephesians 1:4-6).

The Church of Jesus Christ really is the hope of the world when it works right. It's the family that some orphans will never know! God has given you and me an incredible opportunity to help those who are in desperate need. We're already sponsoring two orphan homes with over 60 children.

Eg. A few days ago, we discovered that the sponsorships of our orphan homes don't cover all of the potential medical and emergency needs for our children. If you're not able to be one of our sponsors, you might want to help assist with some of these emergency medical needs by signing up to be a partner with our "Rainy Day Fund." I like those initials... "RDF," - rainy day fund. You see, the Church, when it works right, is able to accomplish what no government agency, no non-government organization, or no social agency can accomplish, because we represent the love of God Himself.

CONCLUSION

I want to invite you to ask yourself this question as we're closing.

- How does God want me to respond?