



“The pain of losing a loving parent is not as immense as the pain of living without one.”

» Stephen Ucembe, founder, Kenya Society of Care Leavers

Caring for Orphans and Vulnerable Children

A Study Guide for
Journeys of Faith

SESSION 1

Who Are Orphans and Vulnerable Children?



Taking the child in his arms,
he said to them, 'Anyone who
welcomes a little child like this
on my behalf welcomes me,
and anyone who welcomes me
welcomes not only me but also my
Father who sent me.'

Jesus (Mark 9:36b–37 NLT)

Caring for Orphans and Vulnerable Children
A Study Guide for *Journeys of Faith* (Sessions 1 – 6)
The Faith to Action Initiative, 2015.
Photo credits: Firelight Foundation and World Vision

This series is designed to support small group study accompanying *Journeys of Faith: A Resource Guide for Orphan Care Ministries Helping Children in Africa & Beyond*. The series includes six downloadable sessions and a facilitator guide, which together equip small groups with the tools, resources, and information needed to engage participants through discussion, readings, videos, group activities, and prayer.

The Faith to Action Initiative serves as a resource for Christian groups, churches, and individuals seeking to respond to the needs of orphans and vulnerable children. Through our publications, website, and workshops, we offer practical tools and resources and up-to-date information on key strategies and research to help guide action.

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WELCOME AND OPENING PRAYER



5 minutes

Welcome to Session 1 of *Caring for Orphans and Vulnerable Children*. In this session, you will:

- Explore some of the foundational terms and information essential for understanding the needs of orphans and vulnerable children around the world.
- Begin your time together with prayer, inviting God to open your hearts and minds as you seek to learn more about caring for orphans and vulnerable children.

GROUP DISCUSSION



15 minutes

The Image of Orphans

1. The mental image we have of orphans might be shaped by many things, including news reports and personal relationships as well as books and movies. Listed below are several fictional orphans depicted in classic books as well as popular culture. On your own, briefly read through the list and check three to five of the names whose stories you're most familiar with. When everyone is finished, use the questions that follow to discuss your choices.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Little Orphan Annie | <input type="checkbox"/> Jane Eyre |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bambi | <input type="checkbox"/> Tohru Honda, <i>Fruits Basket</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mowgli, <i>The Jungle Book</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Leela, <i>Futurama</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke Skywalker, <i>Star Wars</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Oliver Twist |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Snow White | <input type="checkbox"/> Harry Potter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Superman | <input type="checkbox"/> Lord Voldemort, <i>Harry Potter</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tarzan | <input type="checkbox"/> Frodo Baggins, <i>The Lord of the Rings</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Batman | <input type="checkbox"/> Cinderella |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wolverine | <input type="checkbox"/> James, <i>James and the Giant Peach</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Violet, Klaus, and Sunny | <input type="checkbox"/> Cosette, <i>Les Misérables</i> |
| Baudelaire, <i>A Series of Unfortunate Events (Lemony Snicket)</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Matilda |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dorothy, <i>The Wonderful Wizard of Oz</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Pollyanna |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Anne Shirley, <i>Anne of Green Gables</i> |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |

- Based on the names you checked, what three to five words or phrases would you use to summarize the experience of living as an orphan?
- How would you describe the way literature and popular culture have tended to portray orphans? For example, what would you say are the best or most positive characteristics of these fictional orphans? What are the worst or most negative characteristics?
- What similarities and differences do you recognize between these characters and what you know about the experience of real orphans in the world today? For example, how might the fictional characters accurately reflect the experience of real orphans? How might they be inaccurate or misleading?

The Reality of Orphans



2. An orphan is defined as a child who has lost one or both parents. The loss of one parent classifies a child as a “single orphan,” and the loss of both parents as a “double orphan.” In many cases, an orphan may still live with primary or extended family.

How does this definition of an orphan fit with your image or understanding of what it means to be an orphan?

3. Go around the group and have a different person read aloud each of the statements in “Quick Facts about Orphans and Vulnerable Children” (page 5). As the statements are read, underline any words or phrases that stand out to you.
 - Which fact is most surprising to you? Why?
 - How do these facts impact your understanding of what it means to effectively care for children and the needs of orphans and vulnerable children?
 - “Orphans are not numbers [statistics],” says Steven Ucembe, once an orphan himself and now an advocate for the rights of young people leaving orphanage care in Kenya. “They are normal children deserving love and belonging like any other member in society.” In what ways are facts and statistics helpful in advocating and caring for orphans? In what ways might they make it more difficult to really understand and care for orphans—to love them?



Quick Facts about Orphans and Vulnerable Children*

- Globally, it is estimated that approximately 153 million children have lost a mother or a father; 17.8 million of these have lost both parents.
- UNICEF estimates that at least 2.2 million children in the world live in orphanages (many estimates are higher). Orphanages include all types of residential care, from small (fewer than 15 children) to large-scale institutions.
- The vast majority of children in residential care globally are not double orphans. In fact, it is estimated that more than 8 out of 10 children in orphanages have at least one living parent. In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 95–98 percent of children below age three in formal care were not orphans. They had parents who felt they could not care for them.
- Poverty, not lack of caregivers, is frequently cited as the reason for placing children in orphanages. Other causes of separation of children from parental care include disabilities, abuse and neglect, and emergencies such as natural disasters.
- Studies conducted around the globe consistently demonstrate that family-based care is the best option for the healthy development of children. One study notes that for every three months a child resides in an orphanage, he or she loses one month of development.
- The detrimental effects of orphanages are increased when children are placed there at an early age or for long periods of time, and especially within orphanages with large numbers of children and few caregivers.
- Children raised in large-scale orphanages often have passive growth problems, including stunting (severe growth delay), and impairments in fine and gross motor skills and coordination.
- Children raised in biological, foster care, and adoptive families demonstrate better physical, intellectual, and developmental outcomes as compared to children living in institutional care.
- The quality of material components of care (such as food and housing) is not nearly as important as consistent and responsive interaction with a child's caregiver, especially in the early years.

* For more information and documentation of sources behind the facts, see "Children, Orphanages, and Families: A Summary of Research to Help Guide Faith-Based Action," published by Faith to Action and available for digital download at <http://faithtoaction.org/resources>.

What Does Scripture Say about Caring for Orphans?

 30 minutes

4. God's concern for the poor and vulnerable, and especially widows and orphans, is among the most prominent themes of Scripture. In the Old Testament, orphans are often listed along with widows and aliens (foreigners) as those who are the most vulnerable in society and so require the care and advocacy of God himself:

He ensures that orphans and widows receive justice. He shows love to the foreigners living among you and gives them food and clothing.

DEUTERONOMY 10:18 NLT

When Old Testament prophets condemned the sin and corruption of the ancient Israelites, it was often their shameful treatment of the most vulnerable the prophets cited as evidence against them:

Your leaders are rebels...they refuse to defend the cause of orphans or fight for the rights of widows.

ISAIAH 1:23 NLT

Foreigners are forced to pay for protection. Orphans and widows are wronged and oppressed among you.

EZEKIEL 22:7 NLT

In the New Testament, the apostle James affirms this Old Testament teaching about the vital connection between authentic faith and caring for the most vulnerable:

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

JAMES 1:27 NIV

- In describing God's heart for the vulnerable, the verse from Deuteronomy makes a connection between three things: justice, love, and the basic necessities of life (food and clothing). When it comes to caring for orphans and vulnerable children, how would you describe the connection between these three things? For example, what might be lost or gained if efforts to care for orphans were focused on love and basic necessities but not justice, or justice and love but not basic necessities?
- The Old Testament prophets describe two kinds of sin and corruption: passive and active. The ancient Israelites sinned passively when they refused to defend and fight for the

vulnerable; they sinned actively when they wronged and oppressed them. Both kinds of failure reveal something about the hearts of God's people.

In ancient times, what contributing factors do you imagine might have caused someone with resources or authority to ignore or refuse to advocate for the vulnerable?

In what ways, if any, do you recognize these or similar dynamics among God's people today?

The larger context for the apostle James's statement is about acting on spiritual truths in practical ways. It is what the apostle Paul described as "faith expressing itself through love" (Galatians 5:6 NIV). Or, as author Bob Goff might say, "Love does."

The purpose of *Journeys of Faith* is to help people of faith as they seek to respond to the call of James 1:27—to express their faith in loving action on behalf of the orphans and vulnerable children of the world. You and your group are likely just beginning to pray and discern how God may be calling you to respond. But if you allowed yourself to dream a little, how would you describe your hopes and vision? What would you really like to accomplish—as an individual or as part of the group—on behalf of orphans and vulnerable children? How would you hope your efforts might change their circumstances and living conditions?

Making a Personal Connection

 20 minutes

5. Most of us don't donate to a charity or volunteer our time based on things like an organizational mission statement or a list of persuasive statistics. Before we commit our time, energy, or money, we have some kind of personal connection that motivates our involvement. For example, people who commit to learning more about orphan care might have:
- Grown up with a friend whose family life was abusive
 - Belonged to a church that was active in reaching out to vulnerable neighborhood kids
 - Coached kids in sports and discovered that many came from broken homes
 - Encountered vulnerable children on a mission trip
 - Felt moved when they heard someone share a heartbreaking personal story at an event or in the news
 - Experienced childhood neglect or abuse personally

How would you describe the personal connection you have to learning more about responding to the needs of orphans and vulnerable children?

6. In addition to learning more about the needs of orphans and vulnerable children, it's important to also be aware of how God is at work among you—especially in how you relate to each other and share your lives throughout the study. God can lead us not only through things like study and prayer, but also through our relationships. And it may be no accident that this particular group of people has gathered together at this time!

As you anticipate the next several weeks of learning together in community, what hopes or concerns would you like the group to be aware of? Use one or more of the sentence starters below, or your own statement, to help the group understand the best way to challenge, encourage, and support you throughout this study. As each person responds, use the chart that follows to briefly note what is important to that person and how you can support him or her.

The thing I'm most looking forward to in this study is...

One thing I expect to be challenged by in this study is...

One concern I have about myself in this study is...

Throughout this study, you can encourage and support me by...

I'd like you to consistently challenge me about...

In our discussions, the best thing you could do for me is...

| Name | The best way I can challenge, encourage, and support this person... |
|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
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CLOSING PRAYER

Close your time together with prayer.

As an option, you might use the following prayer to close your meeting. To quiet your hearts and center your focus on God, consider allowing a few minutes of silence before reading the prayer.

We thank you, Heavenly Father,
for your great and unending love
for each and every child.
In your perfect wisdom,
you have created us for family—
that every child may grow surrounded in love
and with a sense of belonging.
May your heart be our heart,
and your plan be our guide:
 For every child's heart, joy.
 For every child's soul, meaning.
 For every child's body, protection.
 For every child's mind, peace.
 For every child, family.

Amen.

MAKE PRAYER YOUR FIRST ACTION

The goal of this study is to help you put your faith into action on behalf of orphans and vulnerable children. As you begin this journey, we invite you to anchor yourself and your efforts in reliance on God by making a commitment to daily prayer your first action step. As you pray . . .

- Acknowledge your weakness and lack of resources as the starting point for relying on Christ and receiving his power (2 Corinthians 12:9–10).
- Ask for an open heart, a humble spirit, and a willingness to be changed by what you learn and experience throughout the study.
- Invite God to use you to love and serve others—your family and friends, members of your study group, as well as orphans and vulnerable children.



On Your Own

Between now and the next group meeting, set aside 60–90 minutes to read, watch, and then reflect on the following:

- *Journeys of Faith*, pages 1–3, 39 (accessible and downloadable at <http://faithtoaction.org/resources/journeys-of-faith/>).
- “Striving for the Best Interests of Children” (pages 12–13).
- “Key Terms and Acronyms” (pages 14–15).
- “Guiding Principles” (accessible online at <http://faithtoaction.org/about-us/guiding-principles/>).
- “Importance of Family” (accessible online at <http://faithtoaction.org/start-here/>).
- “Webinar 1: The Importance of Family,” 36 minutes, (accessible and downloadable at <http://faithtoaction.org/videos/webinars/>).
- “Stephen Ucembe: Christian Alliance for Orphans Summit 9,” 16 minutes, (access video online at <http://faithtoaction.org/videos/>).

Note any insights or questions in the space provided on pages 16–18. You’ll discuss what you’ve read and watched in your next meeting.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Online

- *Families, Not Orphanages*, John Williamson, Aaron Greenberg (<http://faithtoaction.org/resources/more-resources>).
- *Lumos Factsheet: How Institutions Are Harmful for Children* (<http://faithtoaction.org/resources/more-resources>).

Books

- *Understanding God’s Heart for Children: Toward a Biblical Framework*, Douglas McConnell, Jennifer Orona, Paul Stockley, eds., (Authentic/World Vision, 2007).
- *Children in Crisis: A New Commitment*, Phyllis Kilbourn, ed., (Wcl 3rd Party Books, 2013).
- *Dancing Standing Still: Healing the World from a Place of Prayer*, Richard Rohr (Paulist Press, 2014).

STRIVING FOR THE BEST INTERESTS OF CHILDREN

An effective response to the individual needs and circumstances of orphans and vulnerable children requires a range of alternative care options, primarily family-based. This continuum of care, including both prevention and response services, is at the core of any effective child welfare system. The process of decreasing reliance on orphanages, ensuring quality of care, and providing a range of care options with an emphasis on family care requires significant investment of human and financial resources as well as public support. It is a process that requires time and conviction. Churches, faith-based organizations, and people of faith play an important role in supporting the needs of the orphaned and the vulnerable across the continuum of care.

To engage the issues and concerns of these children effectively, it is essential to understand eight key facts:*

- **The term “orphan” is often a misnomer.** Most children who have lost a mother or father still have a living parent or other family members who are willing to care for them. However, many children have been separated or are at risk of being separated from family care for a range of reasons. Globally, it is estimated that well over 2 million children are living in orphanages.
- **Poverty is a primary reason children are placed in orphanages.** Too often, parents and relatives place children in orphanages to provide them with food, shelter, and an education. Other causes include lack of access to health care and social services; abandonment, abuse, and neglect; the loss of parents; and disability status. Each of these factors, when coupled with poverty, increases the risk of a child being placed in an orphanage.
- **Strengthening families and addressing children’s basic needs while enabling them to remain within family care is critical.** Studies show that when parents and relatives are presented with the option of support or social services to avoid placing their children in an orphanage, most would unequivocally choose to keep their children at home. Supporting family-based options is also shown to be more cost-effective than orphanages.
- **Families provide the best environment for a child’s development.** Children’s cognitive, social, and emotional development are supported when they are loved and protected, have a sense of belonging, and learn the life skills that are integral to growing up within a family.

* For a fuller presentation and documentation of the sources behind the facts, see “Children, Orphanages, and Families: A Summary of Research to Help Guide Faith-Based Action,” published by Faith to Action and available for digital download at faithtoaction.org/resources.

- ***Children living in orphanages are at greater risk for long-term negative impacts on their social, emotional, and cognitive development.*** This is especially true for children under age three and for children living in large institutions for long periods of time. While higher quality residential care (small numbers of children living “family-style” with consistent, well-trained caregivers) can help minimize these impacts, research shows that children growing up within families fare better in the long term than children raised in orphanages.
- ***Good practice dictates having a full range of care options available for children in need, with emphasis on care within families.*** This facilitates the possibility of identifying the best care option to meet each child’s unique needs. The continuum of care includes family strengthening, family reunification, kinship care, adoption, and foster care, as well as smaller, “family-style” high quality residential care.
- ***Whether in family care or in orphanages, all vulnerable children need to be protected from abuse, neglect, and deprivation of basic needs.*** While the evidence demonstrates that children are more likely to be abused or neglected in orphanage care, it is important to support the wellbeing and protection of children in all settings.
- ***Ensuring that all children are well cared for, ideally within a family, takes the active involvement of and collaboration among government, non-governmental organizations, local communities, faith-based communities, families, and caregivers, as well as children and youth.*** There is a role for each of these groups and a need for collaboration and a shared understanding of what is best for children.

KEY TERMS

As you begin to read and study more about orphans and vulnerable children, you'll likely encounter a host of terms—some familiar, some new—describing different aspects of both orphan life and orphan care. Here is a brief overview to help you better understand several foundational terms you may come across as you continue to read and learn.

Alternative care. Includes formal and informal care of children outside of parental care. Alternative care includes kinship care, foster care, supervised independent living, and residential care.

Caregiver. A person with whom the child lives who provides daily care, and who acts as the child's "parent" whether or not he or she is a biological parent. A caregiver can be the mother or father, or another family member such as a grandparent or older sibling. Caregiver situations include informal arrangements in which the caregiver does not necessarily have legal responsibility.

Church-to-church partnership. An arrangement between two churches, generally one in the global South and one in the global North, who enter into a long-term relationship to further the goals and needs of the local church and its community members.

Community-based care. Refers to both the direct caring role assumed by the leadership or members of a community and the supportive role community-based organizations play in assisting direct caregivers.

Extreme poverty. The lack of basic human needs, such as clean and fresh water, nutrition, health care, education, clothing, and shelter, because of the inability to afford them. It depends not only on income, but also on access to services. Generally, extreme poverty refers to an individual living on less than \$1.25 per day. According to the World Bank and UN Development Program, in 2014 close to 2 billion people were living on less than \$2 per day, and of those at least half were children.

Family-based care. Keeping or placing children within families rather than in orphanages or in institutional residential care. This can include strengthening the child's natural family so that he or she is not separated from loved ones, as well as the placement of a child in a nurturing family environment, with at least one consistent parental caregiver, where children are part of supportive kin and community. Examples of family-based care include kinship care, foster care (both formal and informal), and adoption.

Gatekeeping. The process of assessing what form of alternative care is best for an individual child's particular situation.

Home-based care. Regular home-based visits provided by a volunteer or community worker to support and monitor the wellbeing of those who are ill, elderly, or particularly vulnerable (including those living with HIV and AIDS). This community service can include medical, psychosocial, emotional, and spiritual support to those in need.

Institutional care. Care settings in which children are looked after in any public or private facility staffed by paid caregivers or volunteers working predetermined hours or shifts, and based on collective living arrangements with a large capacity. It typically refers to large, warehouse-like settings and is considered more harmful than other types of residential care.

Residential care. Care provided in any non-family-based group setting, such as places of safety for emergency care, transit centers in emergency situations, and all other short- and long-term residential care facilities including group homes. Residential care is the umbrella that encompasses institutional care such as orphanages, and its basic characteristic is that it is a living arrangement or facility where salaried staff or volunteers ensure care for children living there.

Short-term mission. Short-term mission trips are undertaken by church groups composed of members of the congregation who travel to a community outside their own to serve in that community, often alongside a local church. Groups frequently organize and raise funds to be able to embark on these missions, which are centered around the concept of Christian service and solidarity.

Social stigma. Severe social disapproval of personal characteristics or beliefs that are perceived to be against cultural norms. Stigma is a process by which the reaction of others leads to marginalization and social isolation or persecution due to such characteristics as mental illness, physical disabilities, nationality, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or HIV status.

Vulnerable children. Children whose basic needs and rights to care and protection are being violated or who are at risk of those needs and rights being violated. This includes children who are poor, abused, neglected, lacking access to basic services, ill, or living with disabilities. It also includes children whose parents are homeless, living in poverty, physically or mentally ill, or suffering from addiction and without access to supportive services, or who are affected by war or living in conflict zones. Social stigma, due to these or any other factor, is also a source of vulnerability.

