



FAITH TO ACTION PRAYER GUIDE



**“LEARN TO DO GOOD;
SEEK JUSTICE, RESCUE
THE OPPRESSED, DEFEND
THE ORPHAN, PLEAD
FOR THE WIDOW.”**

—Isaiah 1:17 (NRV)

WELCOME!

Throughout the Bible—in both the Old Testament and the New—we can see that God has a special place in His heart for orphans and vulnerable children. Time and again He calls us to care for them and defend them, instructs us not to take advantage of them, and reminds us that He upholds their cause.

ALIGNING OUR HEARTS WITH GOD'S

What does this mean for Christians today? It means that our hearts must align with God's in demonstrating compassion and support for these children who deserve the loving care of a family. We cannot turn our backs on the issue or assume others will address their needs. It's up to you and me as followers of Jesus to seek justice for them in His name. But the good news is that God is already at work in our lives and theirs. We don't have to do anything in our own power—we simply have to join Him in what's He's already accomplishing. And that begins with prayer.

LEARN, REFLECT, AND PRAY

This prayer guide is designed to equip and inspire you as an advocate for the care of orphans and vulnerable children. Each day focuses on a different topic, giving you insights from Scripture and research, along with suggestions for prayer. Our hope is that this prayer guide will serve as a helpful resource for you as you support the movement of seeing children in the care of safe, loving families.

To get started, invite God to open your heart and mind. Ask Him to direct your steps—and trust Him, because *“we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose”* —Romans 8:28 (NIV).

Thank you for joining us in this important mission. We're excited about what God has waiting for you.



SESSION 1

ALL CHILDREN DESERVE LOVE

Every child was created in God's image. Each has a unique story, a unique situation, and a unique future.

“Orphans are not numbers [statistics],” says Steven Ucembe, who himself grew up in an orphanage and now advocates 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.”

Yet worldwide, an estimated 5 million orphans and vulnerable children have been placed in orphanages or children's homes, separated from the love, sense of belonging and connections they desperately need. God tells us these children deserve better. And it's our job to intervene. Proverbs 31:9 (The Message) instructs us to “Speak out for justice! Stand up for the poor and destitute!”

Thank you for helping bring attention to the needs of orphans and other vulnerable children around the world. Serving as an advocate to the family-care movement is a big role, but one that God will guide you through, every step of the way.

REFLECT

Read the following verse: ***“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”*** –Mark 9:37 (NRV)

What does this verse mean to you and how can it apply to your role, as we work to help redefine the way we think about *orphan care*?



**“I KNOW THAT (YOU) THE
LORD SECURES JUSTICE FOR
THE POOR AND UPHOLDS THE
CAUSE OF THE NEEDY.”**

— Psalm 140:12 (NIV)

PRAY

Dear God, *“I know that (You) the Lord secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy.”* — Psalm 140:12 (NIV). Your heart hurts for your children in need. Mold me to have a heart like yours and teach me how to pray for your children.

I pray for the 140 million children who have lost a mother or a father, and for the more than 15 million who have lost both parents. I lift up those who are living in orphanages who need so much more than just food and shelter. Please bring them compassionate care and love. I pray for their physical, intellectual, and emotional development. I pray that they won't feel isolated and forgotten, but instead that they'll feel a sense of belonging.

I pray, too, for vulnerable children like those who are living on the streets, hungry or afraid, and those who are in homes where they experience abuse and violence. Protect these children from harm, Lord. Place a shield around them and free them from fear. Bring caring people into their lives who will show them your perfect love. And remind them that you are with them, always.

Amen.

SESSION 2

FAMILY MEANS THE WORLD.

The Bible tells us, *“God sets the lonely in families...”* —Psalm 68:6 (NIV). Research backs this up, too. Findings shows that when children are loved, protected, and feel like they belong, they develop cognitively, socially, and emotionally the way they should.

Even a small orphanage with high quality care isn’t enough. Children depend on the consistent, loving care of a parent or primary caregiver. They need the protection and safety only a caring family can offer. They deserve the chance to participate in family and cultural traditions, to develop a sense of shared history, and to learn important relational and life skills that can make all the difference later in life.

Children belong in families. It’s where they were designed to be. Just like God designed each of us to be a part of His family, calling us His own sons and daughters, and Jesus calling us brothers and sisters.

Thank you for following God’s call to *“look after orphans and widows in their distress,”* James 1:27 (NIV), as an advocate in the family-care movement. You’re speaking up for children who deserve to be in a loving family and experience all that God created for them. You’re raising awareness by telling others about the significance of family in the lives of orphans and vulnerable children. And you’re helping change perspectives about the kind of care children need. We encourage you to pray that God will equip you the way only He can as you inspire others to join you in this mission.



Photo Credit: Whitney Runyon of the Achibald Project

REFLECT

What are some of the blessings you received from being a part of a family? How can your story help shape the work you can do as an advocate?

PRAY

Dear God, You are a loving, compassionate Father. Thank you for creating families, and for creating us to be in relationship with each other.

I lift up children living in orphanages who may feel abandoned and forgotten. Surround them with your love, your joy, and your peace, Lord. Please create more opportunities for them to be reunited with their families. Or bring them new, caring families where they can grow, be nurtured, and belong. Strengthen entire communities so they can create a stronger safety net for parents, families, and their children.

I pray you will use me and my voice, to make a difference as a Faith to Action Advocate. Please give me the ability to stir the hearts of others in Your name—help me inspire them to respond to the needs of orphans and vulnerable children by supporting ministries that strengthen families.

“May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice,” –Psalm 141:2 (NIV).

Thank you for hearing my prayers, Lord, and for going before me and preparing hearts.

Amen.



SESSION 3

POVERTY'S IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Poverty puts families in situations they would never choose. 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, but poverty makes it difficult. Often, family members place children in orphanages so they'll have food, shelter, education, or health care—things they can't provide themselves. Other children end up in residential care simply because they're disabled, or because they've been abandoned, abused, or neglected.

Yet most parents would choose to keep their children at home if they had the option of support or social services.

So how can we help? Strengthening families is the best way to support vulnerable children—not placing them in orphanages. We need to help parents and caregivers be able to meet their children's basic needs, so they can remain where they belong—together.

Jane needed support to provide the things her children needed.

Without access to clean water, Jane's life in Central Kenya was a constant struggle. Instead of attending class, her children had to walk a full day on a dangerous path to reach the nearest water source and walk another full day to get home.

**“NOT ONLY IS MY FAMILY SAFER,
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Everything changed when World Vision child sponsorship came to their community. Today, Jane's family has a clean water source, implemented and managed by local community members, just minutes from home. While her children are now able to go to school, Jane, too, has a new role, serving as the school's superintendent and generating much-needed income for her family. Jane says that clean water has made the world of a difference: "Not only is my family safer, not having to travel as far from home daily, but they are stronger, spending more time together as a family.

Investing in families like Jane's can help give vulnerable children the chance to grow up healthy and loved.

REFLECT

Why is supporting the movement to *redefine orphan care* important to you? Why is your heart drawn to helping orphans and vulnerable children?

PRAY

Dear God, It's overwhelming to imagine the kind of extreme poverty that more than 700 million people experience every day. I want to have a heart like yours that breaks at the injustice of the world.

Have I not wept for him who was in trouble? Has not my soul grieved for the poor? —Job 30:25 (New King James Version)

Please help me to have compassion for the most vulnerable people in the world experiencing all of the struggles that go along with extreme poverty. Let me not forget their plight.

I lift up families that feel they have no other option than to put their children in orphanages. Help them see the value of keeping their children home, where they belong. Provide parents like Jane and other caregivers with the means to support their children, so they can give them nutritious food, keep them healthy, and send them to school. Bring clean water to those in need. Bless impoverished communities with resources, opportunities, and real hope for the future.

Father, I ask you to teach me more about how I can help strengthen families. I desire to be a vessel of Your love, and to make a difference. Give me the will to do Your work. Thank you Lord.

Amen.



SESSION 4

THE GLOBAL CHURCH

Christians have long responded to God's call to care for orphans and widows. Each year, more than two million Christians from North America travel on international short-term mission (STM) trips. For decades, many of these trips have involved visiting residential care centers such as orphanages and children's homes in other parts of the world. Global volunteering is important—it gives us the opportunity to take part in God's work around the world, hands-on.

Yet even with the best of intentions, donating to orphanages and sending volunteers on short-term mission trips to visit them can cause harm to children, creating attachment issues among vulnerable children, and weakening their protection. And when visitors support these centers, it perpetuates a model that sustains the practice of separating children from their families. We need to redirect our efforts and support families and communities instead, so children can remain in families.

It's time for the global church to rise up and support families in need. We need to come together to make a difference all across the world—and that means working in partnership with other churches and organizations committed to God's work in helping vulnerable children.

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You can play an important role by reaching out to churches and faith-based organizations to share with them what you've learned about the benefits of family-based care over orphanages. You can help them change their perspective and make a shift in the way they serve orphans and vulnerable children. And you can point them toward partnering with trusted international organizations already doing this work long-term, or with local churches or faith-based organizations in the communities they want to help. From sponsorship programs through organizations that support children in communities rather than orphanages, to STM trips that focus on strengthening communities, there are many options available for Christians who want to support vulnerable children in a way that best provides for their health and well-being.

REFLECT

Among the Greek words New Testament writers use for “partnership” is the word *koinonia* (koy-nohn-ee-ah). Here is how the apostle Paul uses it in one of his letters:

“In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership (*koinonia*) in the gospel from the first day until now. —Philippians 1:4–5 (NIV)

Another meaning of *koinonia* is the kind of close relationship shared among those in the Body of Christ:

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship [*koinonia*], to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” —Acts 2:42 (NIV)

Still other translations of this rich biblical word include the following:

“And do not forget to do good and to share [*koinonia*] with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.” —Hebrews 13:16 (NIV)

How do all of these uses of the word *koinonia* enrich your understanding of what it means to engage in partnership on behalf of vulnerable children and families?

In what ways do the three stories you discussed demonstrate this kind of rich expression of *koinonia* in partnership?



Photo Credit: Operation Uganda

PRAY

Dear God, Creator and Counselor, help us to be your church—to listen and learn as we walk with you. We pray for the courage to change our approach to short-term missions so that we can best support the well-being of orphans and vulnerable children.

Show us how to connect with our global neighbors, to understand their needs. In our desire to get things right, help us to recognize the need to be sensitive. Help us to see clearly your purpose. Through the leading of your Spirit, may we enter into relationships of love—relationships that offer joy and encouragement and refresh the hearts of your people.

We ask that partnerships between churches deepen our understanding of every good thing you desire. Instill within us an appreciation for the diversity and divinity of community. We intercede for the local congregations all over the world who seek to transform and strengthen their communities. May they reflect your goodness as they love their neighbors, offer opportunity and possibility to individuals, provide hope and home to children, and support those seeking to thrive as family. We pray for organizations making a difference, long-term, in developing communities. Help their work be successful as they partner with community members to create lasting change.

We pray the followers of Christ will work together in harmony to reveal your kingdom here on earth. For the sake of the children, may your will be done.

Amen.

SESSION 5

ALTERNATIVE FAMILY CARE

While children's well-being and development are best supported in families, it's important to remember that every situation is different.

Vulnerable children need a full range of care options, with emphasis on care within families. These options range from family strengthening, family reunification, kinship care which includes care by a relative or close family friend, adoption, and foster care, as well as smaller, short-term, high quality residential care.

When it's not safe or possible for children to live with their parents, alternative family care is an important option. Alternative family care refers to care situations when children are living within a substitute family, outside of their parents. Alternative family care can look different in different places.

In most countries, relative care or "kinship" care is the most long-standing and culturally acceptable form of alternative family care, which includes care by aunts, uncles, grandparents, older siblings, and other extended family members. Kinship care offers the benefits of a family environment and prevents a child from losing his or her culture. Most importantly, however, it gives children a sense of belonging and family ties. For these reasons, kinship care is often preferred by children over all other types of alternative care.





In situations where family members cannot be identified or are not able to care for children, full-time foster care with a nonrelative is another form of alternative family care. In some places this option is a growing, positive alternative to placement in an orphanage. In other places, foster care is rare or the concept is not yet well understood.

For children who have no possibility of remaining with or returning to their parents or relatives, adoption can provide a pathway to a permanent family. Research has demonstrated that an adoptive family environment can support improved developmental outcomes for children, especially for young children transitioning from care within orphanages.

Ensuring that all children are well cared for—ideally within a family—takes collaboration. It requires partnerships and active interactions among government, non-governmental organizations, local communities, faith-based communities, families, and caregivers—as well as children and youth. Each of these groups has a specific role, but all need to have a shared understanding of—and commitment to—what is best for the well-being of every individual child.

As an advocate, you can encourage other Christians to pray for vulnerable children, and for the right family for every child in need. Being aware of the issues and the different kinds of support needed helps you pray specific prayers. And be encouraged! Remember, everything you do for the least of these, God says you do also for Him: *“... for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.”* —Matthew 25:35-36 (NRV)

REFLECT

Now that you’ve learned a great deal, what fears or concerns do you have about your role in helping to redefine orphan care and sharing about the importance of children in safe, loving families? How can you pray for God’s provision in these areas?

PRAY

Dear God, Holy Father, thank you for the privilege of partnering with you to care for vulnerable children and families. I ask that you not only fill my heart with love and compassion, but that you also help me share this vision and lead me into wise and practical action.

Lord, please bless every vulnerable child's family. I pray for those involved in foster care. Help expand foster care across the world and open up avenues in new places for this special kind of care. Give foster families patience, understanding, strength, and wisdom. Help the child in those homes to feel loved, accepted, safe, and protected. I pray for those who adopt. Soften the hearts of everyone in the family, from brothers to sisters to moms and dads. Please help adopted children to connect and develop close, trusting relationships within their new families.

I lift up children who are being reintegrated into their original, biological families. Will you strengthen those families, Lord, and protect their children? Give them your guidance, your provision, your protection, and your unconditional love. Help those caregivers and parents maintain incomes to meet their children's needs so they can stay together as a family.

Bless those considering fostering or adopting children—that those who feel called will respond and the new relationship will bring hope to everyone in the family and will bring joy to you. And lastly, I pray for acceptance of adoption in new cultural contexts—that these relationships will be honored and upheld and supported.

Thank you Lord, for the blessing of allowing me to bring these prayers before you. Help us as Christians to live out a true faith and partnership—in our families and friendships, in our churches, and in our efforts to love and support vulnerable children, families, and communities.

Amen.



COMMISSIONING

Consider how God is moving you, now that you've come to the end of this prayer guide. Pray for your response—for God to pave the way for you to make an impact within the movement. Ask Him to prepare relationships and opportunities for you in advance that will result in better care and support for orphans and vulnerable children around the world. Pray for your local church and community and how they can respond to the needs of vulnerable children. How might God use you to help guide their efforts?

Please know that we are continuing to pray for you in your role as an advocate for family-based care, and that you are bringing joy to the Father by caring for the children who are so close to His heart. We pray that you will be tremendously blessed by knowing you are making a real, lasting difference in the lives of vulnerable children and families.

“...and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.” –Isaiah 58:10 (NIV)

THANK YOU FOR BEING A LIGHT FOR CHILDREN IN NEED.

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