

A Passion for the Fatherless

*Developing a God-Centered
Ministry to Orphans*

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A Passion for the Fatherless is written with both individuals and small groups in mind. If you decide to go through the book with a group, the chapters in parts 1 and 2 contain study questions that are designed to help stimulate discussion on the subjects presented in the chapter.

Since the publication of *A Passion for the Fatherless*, some have asked for more assistance in leading the study. This packet supplements the small group discussion guide in the book.

I recommend making sure that each Bible study contain several features. First, there should be a strong teacher serving as the group facilitator. He should work to have a firm grasp on the concepts in the chapter and have an outline for the session in mind.

Second, the group should contain individuals or couples in the group who are already involved in orphan care ministry in some way. They can serve as a resource for those who have not been involved in orphan care ministry and may have many questions.

Finally, as important as I believe communicating biblical principles are, I am also convinced that you must make sure that there is time to build relationships within the group. Each session should begin with a time of prayer for one another. The couples and individuals in your church are embarking on one of the most challenging times of their lives. They need to be able to have a network of saints to whom they can turn when they encounter various hardships. The people from the orphan care study can be a great source of spiritual and emotional support.

Contrary to what your mother taught you, be sure to “scratch what itches.” I provide a suggested overview for small group discussion at the end of each chapter, but you may find that the concerns of the group go beyond the topics raised here. It can be helpful to allow some moderated “rabbit trails,” especially towards the end of the time together.

Session 1: The Uniqueness of Christian Orphan Care

Pre-Study

Read *A Passion for the Fatherless*, pages 19-38.

Introductions and Starter Questions

1. Begin by introducing yourself, then ask individuals in the group to introduce themselves, answering some of the following questions.
2. What are some of your goals in going through this study? What are some of the questions you have about orphan care ministry that you would like to make sure are covered?
3. Are there ways God has used you in the past to care for the orphan? How have you been encouraged by how he has used others?
4. What are some ways that you believe God *might* call you to care for the orphan in the future?
5. Review the purpose of the study: The purpose of this study is to *expose* believers to the Scriptural mandate to care for orphans, help them *understand* why God has issued that call, and give them the ability to *discern* how God would have them joyfully respond to that call. It tries to put the church's care for orphans within the context of God's purpose for His church, which is to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and prepare people to worship Him forever.

There are over 140 million children designated as “orphans” in the world. Christ's church has an incredible opportunity to engage in ministry to the fatherless. This study combines a theological understanding of the church with a practical understanding of orphan ministry. Its primary purpose is to lay out a biblical and theological understanding of the nature of orphan ministry in the church.

Why is a Bible study necessary?

1. **It is necessary because we must do the right things for the right reasons.** We must not simply motivate people to do ministry...we must motivate people to do ministry for God-glorifying reasons (1 Cor. 15:10).
2. **It is necessary because children are in need.** Compassion means literally to be moved in the inward parts. It is that uncomfortable feeling within you when you see a need. It is what you feel when you visit an orphanage and have an ache to help. Consider some passages that teach us about compassion and God's goal for compassion.

Matt 9:35-38: Harvest plentiful, but laborers few. Compassion compels prayer for spiritual needs. Compassion fuels the prayer for missions as we consider their need to know God.

Mark 6:30-44: Feeding of the Five Thousand –Jesus cares not just for physical needs but for spiritual—compassion compels Him to meet physical needs for spiritual reasons.

Luke 7:11-17—compassion has as its end the glory of God, people respond by praising God when Jesus shows compassion.

3. It is necessary because Christians are not thinking biblically about caring for orphans.

The church needs to know how to respond to this crisis. Most believers are either missing an incredible opportunity for ministry or are not motivated to care for orphans for biblical reasons.

Discussion Question: Why are some Christians not embracing the ministry of orphan care? *Don't feel as though it is an important ministry; physical hurdles; lack of understanding*

Discussion Question: What are some reasons people might be motivated to care for orphans that are not biblical?

4. It is necessary because the church lacks resources to help its people learn how to care for orphans. There are not an abundance of materials that apply a theological understanding of the purpose of life and the role of the church to the issue of caring for orphans.

What is not unique about the Christian's Care for the Orphan?

Most people who have been in orphan care ministry realize that, on one level, there is nothing unique about Christians caring for orphans. You find a variety of backgrounds as you work with people in orphanages, foster care system, in home study groups, etc. Christians are not unique in wanting to take care of a child.

Discussion question: what are some examples of aspects of orphan care that are not unique to Christians? *Provision of food, Home, Love, Activism, Giving money*

So what makes Christian orphan care ministry unique? Let's first consider what makes the Christian life unique.

What is unique about the Christian Life?

Before we consider what is unique about Christian orphan care, let's consider for a moment what is unique about the Christian's understanding of life. We believe that we exist for God's glory. Read some of these verses as a group.

Isaiah 43:7: We were created for God's glory.

Psalms 106:7-8: The deliverance of the people from Egypt was for God's glory.

Isaiah 48:9-11: God forgives for His glory.

Matthew 5:16: We perform good works for His glory.

Habakkuk 2:14: God has a plan to fill the entire earth with the knowledge of His glory!

Discussion question: What is the purpose of our life? What were we designed to do?

What is Unique about the Christian's Care for the Orphan?

The Christian adoption is unique for the same reason that the Christian life is unique: its goal is the worship and glory of God!

Closing Discussion Questions:

1. How does being a Christian change the manner in which we meet the physical needs of orphans? Or, to put it another way, how does the understanding that the purpose of our lives is to glorify God impact our ministry to orphans?
2. How does shifting our ultimate focus from children to God help us serve children more effectively?
3. Do you have a desire to meet the needs of orphans? Why? What motivates you to care for them?

For Next Time:

Read *A Passion for the Fatherless*, pages 39-55.

Session 2: Compassion, the Disenfranchised, and the Orphan

Pre-Study

Read *A Passion for the Fatherless*, pages 39-55.

Fellowship and Prayer

Starter Questions

1. Can you think of a particular instance in which you were moved by compassion to take action?
2. Can you think of a time when someone showed compassion to you? How did it impact your life?

Passionless Compassion

1. Read through Deut 4:1-8. Discuss how knowing God and His word comes before *doing* His word. Now look at 4:15 and following. If idolatry is calling something “God” that isn’t God, how is it possible that we can practice idolatry if we don’t carefully consider the attributes of God before doing ministry?
2. What are some ways that the church has divorced theology from its concern for the disenfranchised?
3. Consider the call to social action that many have given to the church (pp. 40-41). What is often missing? What is meant by the phrase “passionless compassion”? For whom are we to have passion?
4. Why is passionless compassion so dangerous?

God has Compassion for the Disenfranchised

1. What does the word “disenfranchised” mean?
2. Read the following verses and note what they teach us about God’s passion for the disenfranchised.
 - a. Proverbs 23:10-11
 - b. Malachi 3:5
 - c. James 5:4

3. Read the following verses from the Gospels and note what they teach us about Jesus' compassion.
 - a. Matthew 9:35-38
 - b. Mark 6:30-44
 - c. Luke 7:11-17
4. What are the four groups that receive God's special attention and compassion?
 - a. Exodus 22:21-27
 - b. Other potential passages to consider if time allows.
 - i. Poor in Leviticus 25. What are some observations about God's concern for the poor here?
 - ii. Widows: 1 Timothy 4:3-16. What are some observations about God's concern for the widow?
 - iii. Also note Luke's theology of the poor (note Luke's attention to the disenfranchised and Jesus' ministry).
 - c. How have the needs of each of those groups changed? How have they remained the same? How is your church caring for each of these groups? What is unique about the needs of orphans compared to the other groups as you consider ministry in your cultural context?

The Essence of God's Compassion

1. James 1:26-27
2. Isaiah 61:1-3. Why is God compassionate? Why does he show special compassion for some?
3. In the chapter, it was claimed that "true compassion for the needy is always fueled by a passion for God to be worshipped among them—and a passion for God always manifests itself in compassion for others." Do you agree with this statement? How does your care for orphans currently reflect the passion you have for God? How can you discern if your passion for God is idolatrous?

God's People Have Compassion

1. God is a compassionate God and His people must emulate His compassion.

2. Review Luke 10:25-37. Consider again the three truths from the parable: (1) love of God and love of neighbor are essential characteristics of one who has eternal life; (2) we must have an unlimited concept of who our neighbor is; (3) compassion compels us to action.
3. Why is compassion an essential characteristic of the believer?
4. What is our ultimate desire for the orphan?

Application Questions

1. Who are the disenfranchised people in your life?
2. How has your passion for God impacted your compassion for the needy?
3. Read through the statistics from UNICEF regarding the needs of orphans (pp. 54-55). As you read through them, consider what the biblical response is to these “statistics”.
5. What is your plan to respond to the needs of your neighbor the orphan?
6. Are we required to meet every need that we see? How do we determine what needs to meet?
7. Why is an “adoption” ministry alone not sufficient to meet the biblical injunction to care for the fatherless?

Session Three: A Theology of Adoption
Six Truths Regarding our Adoption by God from Romans

Pre-Study

Read pp. 57-81 of *A Passion for the Fatherless*

Fellowship and Prayer

Starter Questions

1. Do you have a greater sense of the ministry God may be calling you to as you think about caring for the orphan?
2. What questions or topics do you want to make sure are covered in the coming weeks of the study?
3. What is “theology”? Do you consider yourself a theologian? In what way might it be true that every person practices theology?

Evangelical Christianity and the Loss of Theology

One of the biggest challenges facing orphan care ministries is that the church has ignored the importance of theology. In this sense, as we’ve seen, they run the risk of practicing idolatry.

Like playing Jenga...advancing while removing our foundation! Eph 2:20: Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets!

Why, biblically, is this dangerous? First, Scripture never separates the doing and knowing. In fact, the doing has to be based on the knowing, otherwise we can be doing the wrong thing or the right thing for the wrong reasons (reminder: Deut 4).

J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*. “Our aim in studying the Godhead must be to know God himself better. Our concern must be to enlarge our acquaintance, not simply with the doctrine of God’s attributes, but with the living God whose attributes they are. As he is the subject of our study, and our helper in it, so he must himself be the end of it. We must seek, in studying God, to be led to God. It was for this purpose that revelation was given, and it is to this use that we must put it” (23).

David Wells, *No Place for Truth* writes of the disappearance of theology in the church: “The disappearance [of theology] of which I am speaking is not the same as the abduction of a child who is happily playing at home one minute and then is no longer to be found the next. No one has abducted theology in this sense. The disappearance is closer to what happens in homes where the children are ignored and, to all intents and purposes, abandoned. They remain in the home, but they have no place in the family. So it is with theology in the Church. It remains on the edges of evangelical life, but it has been dislodged from its center” (106).

Adoption and the Importance of Theology

So, the caution is to not try to do an adoption ministry apart from the foundation of a biblical-theological understanding of *why God wants you to do it!!!*

Goal for this session: A biblical understanding of spiritual adoption and an awareness of how this shapes our theology of earthly adoption.

Salvation in God's Word is more than just obtaining heaven. The good news of the message of salvation is the restoration of our relationship with our Heavenly Father. Romans describes the process of that relationship being restored.

It is appropriate to understand our relationship with God and glean from it principles to apply in our relationship with others. Examples: (First, we are called to imitate God period. Also: Forgive as God forgives; love as God loves; Husbands and wives; imitating God's parenting in Hebrews).

Looking at the character of God gives us some valuable insights into our earthly adoptions as well. The adoptions that we participate in are shadows of our adoption by a loving heavenly father.

Six Truths Regarding Our Adoption from the Book of Romans:

First, our adoption was accomplished despite our condition (Romans 3:10-23; cf. Romans 5:6-11)

Before our adoption by God, we were His enemies and dead in our sins. There was nothing intrinsic in us that was of value.

What are the implications for our earth adoptions? The implication for earthly adoptions is that there are no unlovable children.

Second, our adoption was an act of God (Romans 3:24-26).

Text: Gift of grace; grace received through faith alone; through redemption in Jesus; **deals with sin as only God could.**

What are the implications for our earth adoptions? Implication: God's love is initiatory. Children do not work in order to be brought into our home. We call them to become a part of our home.

Third, our adoption was accomplished through the suffering of our Savior (Romans 5:6-11; 6:1-11).

Text: Suffering was part of a sovereign plan to bring us to God.

What are the implications for our earth adoptions? **We are tempted to reject suffering**, but our loving God often sovereignly decrees suffering for His saints. We must prepare ourselves for suffering as we care for orphans. Cf. 1 Peter and James.

Fourth, our adoption makes us a part of a new family (Romans 8:14-17).

Text: The security of the believer is directly tied to this truth.

What are the implications for our earth adoptions? We too may struggle with whose family we are part of. Salvation doesn't mean that we don't still struggle with whose family we're *really* in. However, though we struggle with it subjectively, that struggle doesn't affect our objective status before God.

Fifth, our adoption can never be revoked (Romans 8:14-39).

Text: Security based upon God.

What are the implications for our earth adoptions? The children whom we adopt become part of a new family. They may struggle, as we struggle, with understanding the love of a family, but that does not cause their adoption to be revoked.

Sixth, our adoption is for the glory of God (Romans 9:22-29).

Text: Cf. w/ Ephesians 1

What are the implications for our earth adoptions? We are motivated to adopt for God's glory, not our own. We are careful to search our motives as we pursue caring for children. We must not be motivated by pride, loneliness, the "debtor's ethic" or anything else other than the glory of God.

Application Questions

Preparing for Next Time

Read *A Passion for the Fatherless*, pp. 85-96.

Session Four: Blessings, Missions and Orphans
Six Truths Regarding our Adoption by God from Romans

Pre-Study

Read pp. 85-96 of *A Passion for the Fatherless*

Fellowship and Prayer

Starter Questions

1. How has God blessed your church/community/country materially?
2. Why do we sometimes not feel very wealthy?

Three Ways Missions and Orphan Ministry are Similar

#1: Missions and Orphan Ministry Both Rely Upon God's Blessings

1. Materialism is fundamentally at odds with missions.
2. Read through Psalm 67.

Ex: Prosperity Gospel

Why God Has Blessed You Materially

Psalm 67: God blesses you *so that* his gospel will be proclaimed to all peoples *so that* they will joyfully worship him. God blesses you *so that* he will be glorified through missions. The gospel is proclaimed by God's people as they use his physical blessings to increase the joy of all people through worship.

The Structure of Psalm 67. Hebrew poetry; parallelism; Chiasm is like what happens when you throw a boomerang—you end right back where you started, covering the same ground in reverse order on the way back. In a chiasmic structure, the main idea is at the very center of the poem—the point where the boomerang starts coming back—instead of the beginning or end.

This is what happens in Psalm 67. Observe the following layout:

A. God, bless us so that you may be known on the whole earth (vv. 1-2)

B. Let the peoples praise you (v. 3)

C. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy (v. 4).

B¹. Let the peoples praise you (v. 5)

A¹. God blesses us so that he is known on the whole earth (vv. 6-7)

Observe the “boomerang.” The psalm begins and ends by talking about God’s blessing. At the center we find the main theme: the joyous worship of God by the nations.

The Bookends Teach us About God’s Grace

The Middle Sections Teach Us About the Purpose of Missions

The Center Teaches Us About the End Result of Missions

In missions and orphan care ministry, we use our worthless, temporary material possessions to help proclaim the immeasurable value of Christ, so that others can engage in joyful worship of him.

You are Wealthy

If that is your thought pattern, I have some good news for you: You *are* the wealthy! According to Global Rich List, if you make \$20,000 a year, you are in the top 12% of wealthiest people in the world. If you earn \$30,000, you are in the top 7.5%. \$60,000 puts you in the top 1%. Anything above \$125,000 a year puts you in the top 0.5% wealthiest people in the world. You get the idea. Let me be the first to congratulate you on your new found wealth!

Sadly, the more people earn, the less of their income they give. Studies show they become more immersed in the things of the world. It is imperative that you ask yourself this question: Why has God made me so wealthy? What do his blessings mean? Did God make me wealthy so that I could accumulate more material possessions than others? Or, perhaps, did God grant me with material possessions so that I could demonstrate his worth to those around me by gladly parting with those treasures in order to pursue him?

For your own benefit and joy, give generously. It is rare that even the poor in our North American culture cannot afford to give at least 10% of their income. As your income increases, what sacrificial giving looks like changes in terms of what percentage of your income you are able to give. If a person making \$70,000 a year gives 10% of their income, they are still wealthier than 99% of the people on the planet. Someone making \$200,000 who gives 10% of their income still has access to more resources than 99.85% of the people on the globe.

My encouragement to you is to find a standard of living to which God has called you. Then, as the amount of money you make increases, do not increase your standard of living. Instead, increase your standard of giving. Randy Alcorn exhorts believers to have a “strategic” lifestyle. This means that they can still enjoy the resources that God has provided them, but they do so with an understanding of why God has provided those resources. As my income increases, “I won’t look at my income as God’s call to spend more, but rather as his provision to invest more in the cause. I might determine to live on a certain amount of money each year, an amount that allows some room for discretionary or recreational spending. All income beyond that I will give to God’s kingdom purpose.”

3. What might it say if it were written to our culture? What are some ways we might ask God to bless us materially?

4. Why has God blessed us financially? How does our poor stewardship of our physical resources undermine the gospel?
5. Do you believe you are using God's resources the way he desires you to? What are some areas in which you believe you are doing well? In what areas are you perhaps being a poor steward? Do you have a budget that you are following that reflects God's priorities?

#2: Missions and Orphan Ministry Both Proclaim the Gospel

1. Read through 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 and discuss the central tenants of the gospel.
2. What essential truths should be communicated when sharing the gospel?
3. Do you understand how to clearly communicate the gospel message to a non-Christian? What would you say?
4. How can we ensure that the gospel message remains at the core of our orphan care ministry? What are some ways we might be tempted to compromise the gospel message?

#3: Missions and Orphan Ministry Both Result in Ethnically Diverse Worship

1. Read through Ps. 87.
 - a. In Psalm 87, God demonstrates a desire for diversity in worship. His goal of ethnically diverse worship fuels our passion for missions. We want to see a diverse group of people worship God. As we engage in caring for orphans, we begin to see God's vision for ethnic unity realized. Let us look at three principles regarding diversity we see in Psalm 87 that impact our understanding of missions and orphan care.
 - b. ***God Delights in Ethnically Diverse Worship***
 - c. ***God's People are United through Rebirth***
 - d. ***God Saves His People through Exclusive Means***
2. Why does God delight in ethnically diverse worship?
3. Do you share God's delight for this type of worship?
4. Why do you believe the church so often fails to experience this aspect of worship if God delights in it?
5. What are some things you can do to increase the ethnic diversity of the worship in your church?
6. Is it possible that racism is limiting the types of orphan care ministry of which you are willing to be a part?

Session 5: When *Not* to Care for Orphans

Pre-Study

Read *A Passion for the Fatherless*, pp. 97-113

Fellowship and Prayer

Starter Questions

1. Begin by reading through Malachi 1. What are some of the ways that the people are indicating that they are not truly worshipping God? What questions do they ask that reveal their hard hearts? What is God's response (1:10)? How does that relate to your ministry plans?
2. Have you ever considered that your plans for ministry might not be God's plans?

Do Not Care for Orphans if You are Practicing Idolatry

1. What is idolatry? (Deut 4 and James 4): calling something God that isn't God; or setting affections upon something that isn't God.

What are some examples of good desires that can become idols?

If you can, think through some of the conflicts in your life over the past week or month or year (situations where you have been angry, yelled, simmered with resentment, etc.). Consider other sinful fruit in your life (anxiety, worry, fear). What prompted those responses? What were you worshipping? How should you have responded? How can you seek God's help?

2. How idolatry relates to orphan care

Is it possible that an aspect of orphan care ministry has become an idol in your life? How can God help you overcome idolatry?

3. How idolatry can be cured (James 4:5-10).

Do not care for orphans if you have not properly counted the cost

1. Examples of failing to count the cost in orphan care ministry
2. Luke 14:22-33: The desire to be a disciple (vv. 25-26a) and the cost of being a disciple (26b-33).
3. How would you encourage a person to "count the cost" in caring for orphans?

Do not care for orphans if you are doing so on your own strength

1. Ways we rely upon our own strength and the importance of Philippians 2:13.
2. Understanding spiritual gifts: 1 Peter 4:10-11
3. In what ways does God equip a person for orphan care ministry? What are the dangers of caring for the fatherless on your own strength?

Do not care for orphans if you are discontent

1. Read Philippians 4:11-13
2. Do you struggle with discontentment as you wait for something in your life to happen? How can your study group encourage one another to be content?

Application Questions

1. Besides those mentioned in the chapter, can you think of additional circumstances in which believers should wait before caring for orphans?
2. How could you lovingly approach a fellow believer and caution them in their ministry plans? How would you respond if someone advised you to wait to pursue a ministry you were excited about?
3. What will you do if you are unable to serve the Lord in an area of orphan care ministry that you want to? What will you do if he closes doors of opportunity?

Preparing for Next Time

Read *A Passion for the Fatherless*, pp. 113-127

Session 6: The Greatness of Godly Affliction

Pre-Study

Read *A Passion for the Fatherless*, pp. 113-127

Fellowship and Prayer

Starter Questions

1. What are some times of suffering the Lord has brought you through? How did he use them in your life?
2. How are you sometimes tempted to value ease instead of God?

Intro thoughts

I believe that one of the ways you encourage people who are in tough circumstances is by helping them see the greater context of their suffering. Not all sacrifices are good sacrifices. Useless sacrifices: Gen 4; Isa 1:13; Mal 1.

Important for a person who is going to do difficult things to understand the context and greater meaning their actions have. Singapore: a teen saved the lives of some 30 individuals during the floods in Sept 2009. Would he have ventured back out into the flood without the need? Imagine: you are alone in this room and a hand grenade is thrown in. If there are other people who are in the room, impacts decision. Giving sacrifice meaning.

We try to do this pre-ministry, but it is hard to get people to wrap their minds around this and impossible to anticipate all of the scenarios.

I don't like difficulty in life. Love ease and comfort. My ideal vacation (minimal discomfort). Don't like difficulty in life—worship the idol of ease—make decisions for ourselves and our children *based on what will be easiest for us/them*. Don't want to inconvenience.

But God has appointed suffering for us! Concern: many orphan ministries focus on how to ease suffering. I'd prefer we give context to understand suffering. Medicated culture.

Let the Nations Be Glad, margins; **most impactful chapter ever, perhaps:**

Why does God allow this [suffering]? No, that is not quite the right question. We have to ask, Why does God *appoint* this? These things are part of God's plan for his people just as the suffering and death of Jesus were part of God's plan for salvation (Isa. 53:10; Acts 4:27-28). It is true that Satan can be the more immediate agent of suffering, but even he may do nothing without God's permission.

Paul describes suffering as a gift of God: “It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also *suffer for his sake*” (Phil. 1:29).

Twice Peter spoke of suffering as being God’s will: “It is better to suffer for doing good, *if that should be God’s will*, than for doing evil....Let those who suffer *according to God’s will* entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good” (1 Pet. 3:17; 4:19).

So, let’s put that suffering in context, help you understand how caring for the orphan is painful yes, but gloriously painful.

THE IDOLATRY OF EASE

Lives look different if embraced? How does lack of belief affect decisions: ministry, giving, orphan care. If see difficulty not as something to be avoided but gift, wouldn’t balk at cost.

QUESTION: What are some of the easy things about life you love? How do you respond when confronted with difficulty?

Ease is an idol that diverts our attention away from the glory of God and focuses our hearts on the exaltation of self. As we exalt ease, our question changes from “What would God have me do to meet this need?” to “How will pursuing this ministry inconvenience me or my family?” or “How will this ministry affect my retirement planning?” or “Will this impact my ability to take the European vacation I have been longing for?”

WHY SUFFER

QUESTION: What are the costs of orphan care...how does it make life less easy?

Paul’s culture also averse to suffering: affliction = disfavor. Corinth = large port city; 2 harbors, wealthy; 2nd missionary journey c. 50; attacked by false teachers after leaving; 3rd journey c. 55 attacked during visit; rebukes. Gets good news. Writes 2 Cor to defend suffering.

Corinthians favor. Affliction and grief are not instruments of torture but rather a hammer and chisel in the hands of a loving God. He uses these tools in order to cause us to be made into the image he desires. Our theology of suffering must be sound and consistently applied to the ministry of orphan care.

Suffering Produces Empathy for Others: 2 Cor 1:3-6. (1) Suffering under His direction; (2) grants comfort during it; (3) now can comfort others (not “I feel your pain”...instead God-centered wisdom); who really teaches Bible study—who they call; not orphan Annie, but you will be able to point others to Christ. Q: examples? Ill: guy suffering v. Brenda Bundy.

Suffering Strengthens our Reliance on God 2 Cor 1:8-10. There is a suffering that some go through that is unimaginable to those who are not going through it. And hard to comprehend for those who are. Navy SEAL training designed to push these guys *beyond* their limit.

Brett & Hillary: reviewing the files; thought about saying no; “But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength.” 2 Timothy 4:17. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge him and he shall direct your paths.” Proverbs 3:5-6. “But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” 2 Corinthians 12:9. Begin to know horror. Would they have learned that apart from suffering?

Ill: My dad. Important truth: Afflictions in orphan care doesn't *create* need, it reveals need that is already there. Dad's statement. Reluctance to suffer means they don't get to know that.

ENCOURAGEMENT: Don't waste this time that God has prepared for you. QUESTION: how is God strengthening you at this time?

Suffering Proclaims the Power of God 2 Cor 4:7-12. You're not that great!!! But God uses you and suffering reveals God's greatness. Not just internal but external. What can display the power of God to others more than suffering? God appoints suffering so they can proclaim gospel: Tatlock: “every era of church history, it was the church who championed the cause of the widows and orphans. The world rightly accuses the church of hypocrisy when we proclaim a message of peace and reconciliation and there is no visible expression of it. Compassion ministries validate the gospel.” Lehman: “Orphan care ministry proclaims to the world that the church is willing to meet tangible needs. The ultimate goal of the church is not to be seen as relevant by the world. However, an outgrowth of the orphan ministry can be relevancy as it is seen that the church meets some practical needs.” Styffe: Muslim orphan and James 1:27.

Suffering Yields Great Rewards 2 Cor 4:16-18. Ellie and her change...momentary pain, momentary reward, greater reward.

Suffering Results in Greater Humility (2 Cor 12:7-9). Shame of being bad parent, conferences well attended. Pastor's kid comments. Try to be transparent, can't help it. Pride dangers place to be and suffering helps us avoid that.

Churches avoid suffering: Churches also don't want to suffer, want prestige, direct resources to ministries that glorify their own kingdoms instead of Christ's. Ill: Bethany Baptist Church as a positive example.

Orphans don't tithe well, not prominent. Foster kids may drive off others.

Application Questions

1. Does the thought of suffering make you nervous? In what tangible ways can we prepare ourselves for suffering?
2. Can you think of ways God might call you to suffer as you care for the orphan?
3. How can you help those who are currently going through trying circumstances?

Preparing for Next Time

Read *A Passion for the Fatherless*, pp. 129-146

Session 7: Decision Making & Moving Forward

Pre-Study

Read *A Passion for the Fatherless*, pp. 113-127

Fellowship and Prayer

1. What is a decision you are struggling with as you think about caring for the fatherless?
2. What are some ways you have heard people express their understanding of God's will?

Scripture to Consider

1. Read Isaiah 46:1-11. What does this tell you about God's will?
2. Look through the following passage and identify whether they are referring to God's will of decree or his will of desire:
 - a. Mark 3:35
 - b. John 1:13
 - c. Romans 15:32
 - d. Ephesians 1:1
 - e. Ephesians 6:5-7
 - f. Colossians 4:12
 - g. Hebrews 10:36
 - h. 1 John 2:17
 - i. Revelation 4:11

Reviewing Principles from the Chapter

1. What is meant by God's decreed will? How does understanding that aspect of God's will impact our life? How should we view the plans we make for our life?

2. What is meant by God's declared will? What are some clear instructions that God has given that you struggle to obey? Can you think of ways your obedience might help you with decisions you need to make?
3. What are some of the mistakes people make as they search for God to direct specific decisions they must make? What are some unbiblical ways that people search for guidance?
4. What are some of the things we can be confident of as we speak of God's will?

Application Questions

1. What are some of the big decisions you need to make in your life regarding orphan care ministry? List the top 5-10 decisions that need to be made.
2. Look at the suggestions given in the section "God's Will and the Orphan" (see pp. 165ff.) How can they be applied to the decisions you listed?

Starter Questions