

# What God Calls Pure and Undefined Religion

The kids were dirty; the food was terrible; the showers (when we had running water) were freezing; there was not one restroom with toilet paper in it; I got really sick one summer; I got a staph infection another summer—but somehow, it was a little bit of heaven on earth to me.

I loved holding their grimy hands. I loved sitting at their orphanage tables with them, even if we were eating mystery meat (and a mysterious porridge that seriously resembled Elmer's glue). I loved running around and playing games with them.

But most of all, I loved getting eye-to-eye with them, giving them my full attention, and hearing their stories.

I can't ever forget those stories.

These orphans across the ocean weren't merely social issues and statistics. They became my friends.

I saw the scarred arms of a teen who'd tried to take her own life. I held the skinny, malnourished frame of a 10-year-old who was otherwise rarely, or maybe never, embraced. I felt the clinging grip of a 12-year-old girl who'd wrapped herself around me, sobbing, asking me to please not leave.

These children changed me. And I knew I wanted to spend my life serving them. I wanted to move to Africa. Or Eastern Europe. Or really, any far off land.

Wherever I ended up living, there was just one condition I required that place to meet: There had to be orphans there. And in my thinking at that time, I thought working with orphans required a move across the ocean.

So imagine my confusion and wrestle when I felt God clearly telling me to put down roots in Kansas City, Missouri. I actually rebutted with, *"But Lord, what about the orphans?"*

But God knew what He was doing, of course.

*He wanted to broaden my vision.*

My mind's picture of "orphan" was that of a child in a dusty village, in a crowded orphanage, or on the street in an economically developing nation.

**But I was missing something.**

Those overseas trips were unquestionably valuable—to the children, to the Lord and to my own heart. ***But I'd been solely far-sighted.*** And thus, I missed what was right in front of me. Right down the road.

One day—a day I know will always mark me—I met a 4-year-old boy who was living with some friends of mine. And he asked me to hold him.

I was a stranger. He was desperate for a safe place to lay his head.

He was fatherless, floating around in foster care, longing for security, longing for love, longing to belong somewhere and to someone.

So I held him because he asked. And as I held him, my heart was pierced through. *My eyes were opened.* The truth that would initially surprise me, *just before it seared me*, is that the orphan's reality runs through America too.

**More than 400,000 displaced children are right here in America.**

And in these recent years, I've started coming up close to them, and getting into their lives.

“Foster kids,” we call them. Our affluent nation has set aside third-world terminology like “orphans.”

Instead of having *orphans* who live in *orphanages*, we have *foster children* who live in *residential treatment facilities*.

### **Different terms. Same reality.**

Now, I know some of their names. I know some of their stories. I’ve sat at their lunch tables. I’ve run around and played games with them. I’ve listened to their hearts.

They don’t know a family’s embrace or the permanence of a place they can truly call “home.” These children are shuffled through the foster system, finding residence either in foster families, or in group facilities (our present-day orphanages) **which currently house over 50,000 of our nation’s displaced children.**

Today, more than 100,000 of America’s kids have been given the name “waiting children” because they are in need of adoptive families. Their biological families’ rights have been legally severed, and they are in need of new families who will embrace them.

*And so, they wait.*

If James 1:27 tells us that **pure and undefiled religion in the eyes of our Father is to care for orphans and widows**, then none of us as believers in Jesus Christ are exempt from this call.

For too many of us, when we think of “caring for orphans,” our minds jump straight to adoption. And it feels kind of scary—unmapped, even overwhelming, territory. So what ends up happening? Many count themselves out of the call to “serve orphans” because they don’t feel ready to make that leap.

God is indeed looking for open hearts and homes where He can

set the lonely. And there is no question that many more courageous families need to arise and embrace the orphaned. But the truth is, there is an easy inroad to serving these children for *every single one of us*—for those who have adopted; for those who are thinking about it; for those who want to do something, but don't know what or how; for those who, like me, had never even realized that the orphaned even existed in America.

Want to know what it is?

*Prayer.*

***We must pray for them.***

My husband and I have not adopted. It is in our hearts for the future of our family. But we're not *waiting* until then to serve the orphan. In these recent years, God has highlighted to us that a primary way of loving these children, of fighting for their lives, is to stand in the place of intercession for them.

**Our strongest place of action in coming against injustice is not in reaching out our hands only, but in bowing our hearts, standing before the God of heaven, asking Him to accomplish what only He can ... *and then being willing to let Him use us as the answer to our own prayers.***

And so we pray:

*"God, raise up families to embrace the orphan ... and find my heart willing before You to be one of those families should you call me to it."*

*"God, give revelation of Your Father's heart to a fatherless generation ... and shine through me, make me a witness, that this is who You are."*

*"God, bring healing to these broken ones ... and use even me as an instrument of Your healing."*

**Jon and I want to ask you to join us in 40 weeks of prayer for America's orphaned and fatherless.**

We are not a big ministry organizing a large prayer event. We are just a couple of people who love the Father's heart, who love to pray and who believe that prayer can shift things.

We want to engage with God's heart, and let Him—*the God who has joined His name to these children, the God who has called Himself a Father to the fatherless*—draw us into His burden and tell us how He feels over an orphaned generation of children.

So how are we, scattered across the Internet, going to do this in unity? It's simple:

- **Each week I will be sending out a point of focus for our prayers.** Come find me on Instagram or the new Facebook public page to see our prayer focuses *every Tuesday, beginning March 29*. Pray in your secret place with the Lord, pray as a family, pray with friends—however you want to pray, let's just pray. Let's truly engage with God's heart over these children.
- **Also, join in with Jon and me each Friday at 10 a.m. (CST) during our weekly prayer meeting for the fatherless.** Understandably, you might not be able to join us for each one, but take part as often as you can (via live stream or archives).

We are going to link arms and pray for a generation suffering under fatherlessness, to stand as their intercessors, to be a voice for these who have no voice.

We're going to ask God to set lonely into families, to break cycles of brokenness, to turn hearts of fathers back to children, to bring salvation in the foster system, to pour out abundant strength to families who are bringing children into their homes.

We're going to ask for the amazing and impossible and

miraculous.

And who knows what will happen in these 40 weeks—in the lives of children, and in our own hearts as their intercessors.

**Join us.**

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