

The God of Orphans

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Preacher: Jeremy Tam

- [0 : 0 0] The scripture reading comes from James, chapter 1, starting at verse 19. Please follow along on the screen or in your Bible. My dear brothers and sisters, understand this.
- Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger. For human anger does not accomplish God's righteousness. Therefore, ridding yourselves of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, humbly receive the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.
- But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. Because if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like someone looking at his own face in the mirror.
- For he looks at himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of person he was. But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer, but a doer who works.
- This person will be blessed in what he does. If anyone thinks he is religious without controlling his tongue, his religion is useless, and he deceives himself.
- [1 : 2 1] Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this, to look after orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.
- Amen. Amen. Thank you, Ellen. Church, my name is Jeremy, and it is a real pleasure to welcome you again.
- And this morning I am extremely excited about what the word of God is going to speak to us through the book of James that Ellen just read.
- And I'm excited for us, but I'm also terrified for me and for us as a church. I'm excited because this passage points us to what I see as a lavish and beautiful love and grace from God, and also this glorious calling for his people.
- But I'm also terrified because James is confronting us. God is confronting us with a stark truth about true religion and false religion.
- [2 : 3 4] James asks us, are you just a hearer of the word, or are you a doer of God's word? Let's look right back at the text with me at verse 22.
- It says, Now what an illustration to start off with.
- Just imagine that your best friend told you that their favorite thing was to go hiking, and they really want to go on a hike with you. And you're like, Yeah, you're my best friend.
- And you think about that hike every day, and you memorize all the map points and all the transportation to get to the hike. You might even start a discussion group, a small group to talk about the hike.
- You might even write some songs and sing about hiking. But for whatever reason, you keep putting off this hike. For whatever reason, you don't actually follow through and go on this hike.
- [3 : 5 3] And if that was the case, what kind of best friend are you? And, you know, this is kind of a silly illustration, but I think the reality is that all of us, we so often forget what is important.

We have the best thoughts. We have the best intentions. But when it comes to actually following through and executing, we fall short. I kind of think like when you're running into a friend in the MTR.

This happens all the time. An old friend that you haven't seen in a long time. And you are genuinely happy to see them. Right? This is one of those friends. And you want to reconnect with them, and you want to rekindle that friendship.

And you're like, Hey, man, let's meet up soon. And you really mean that. This isn't one just friends that you, you just say so you can get out of the conversation and you really want to. But as soon as you part ways, all of those good intentions fall by the wayside because other things get in the way.

Has that ever happened to you? It happens to me quite a bit. And isn't that so often what we do with the word of God? But the challenging thing is God, God, what God loves and what he cares about is a lot more serious than a hike with friends or even rekindling a friendship with an old friends.

[5 : 15] And James says that we today need to think about whether our religion, the way we worship God, that's all it means. The way we worship God, that's our religion.

We want to think, he wants us to think about whether that is actually what God wants. Verse 27, pure and undefiled religion before God, the father is this to look after orphans and widows in their distress.

And what's that all about? And I thought God just wanted me to sit through this live stream and read the Bible and pray sometimes and tell some people about Jesus.

But what on earth is all this stuff about widows and orphans? And church, the thing is that all throughout scripture, when you read through from old Testament to new, you see a God that yes, he loves all of his creation.

He loves all of his people. And yet he has a particular preferential love for those who are vulnerable and marginalized in society.

[6 : 27] They are the lowly, the rejected, despised by society, the forgotten. And yet God says to them, I have not forgotten you.

I remember you. And there are so many places in scripture we can look to, but I think there's two specific passages that can really help us to see this.

Let's start with Psalm 68. And this is just a beautiful description of who God is. It's like God introducing himself as the Israelites recall his faithfulness.

He says this God in his holy dwelling is a father to the fatherless and a champion of widows. God provides homes for those who are deserted.

You see, in the patriarchal ancient times, losing your father or husband would have been devastating and would have put you in immediate risk of sustenance and protection.

[7 : 28] And what James seems to be doing is he's picking up on this language in verse 27, that he's saying, God, the father, God is our father. And yet pure religion that is pure and faultless is to take after orphans because the father to the fatherless.

And here's the thing. It's not just that God provides food or money or shelter to the orphan. The Psalmist says God provides homes for those who are deserted. And we can also translate that as he puts the abandoned or the lonely into families.

God understands a family. He knows that family is important, not just physical sustenance. James would also have been familiar with God's command in Isaiah one.

Look at that with me. Verse 16, wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight. Stop doing wrong.

Learn to do right. Seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless and plead the case of the widow. These strong words.

[8 : 42] And what was the evil that the Israelites were committing? When you look at the chapter, it's that they were doing all these outward ritualistic things.

They were doing religious feasts that God had told them about. They were even giving offerings and sacrifices, and they were doing all those things, but not justice, not true religion that is pure and faultless.

And so the most shocking thing to me when you read this is that God actually says, literally, he says, I hate all these things that you're doing. I hate them because you're not doing what truly matters from my heart.

And church, it's really sobering for me to think about my life and to think about our community, to think maybe because we're not really doing good, and maybe we're not really doing justice, that God might hate this worship service right now, that he might hate this sermon I'm preaching right now, that our singing and even our tithes and offerings, that all of that is just plain hypocrisy, just like the Israelites, because we say we love you, God, we sing to you, we worship you, we pray to you, but when push comes to shove, we ignore the things that are close to his heart, that our religion, as James says, is useless.

These are strong words from Isaiah that are echoed by James, and they should make us pause. They should make us reflect deeply, because I know that we as a whole church, myself included, we are not caring for orphans in any active or intentional way right now.

[10 : 40] And this makes me pause. This makes me solemn. But I'm hopeful. I'm hopeful because this challenging call from God is not given in some kind of vacuum without context.

Let's take a look back at James 1 again. Verse 25. He says, the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer, but a doer who works, this person will be blessed in what he does.

We're used to hearing the word law and thinking about burdens and commands. I know that's what I often do instinctively. Maybe even this command, this weighty command to care for orphans, and it feels burdensome.

But this is a perfect law of freedom. That sounds pretty good, right? Sounds encouraging. So what could it mean to look into this perfect law of freedom?

Let's take a look at Romans chapter 8. I think this illuminates a bit of what James is saying. Read this with me. It says, therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.

[12 : 16] You see that parallel with the perfect law of freedom in James? It's the same root words there. The law of the spirit of life will set us free from death.

Then in verse 14, for all those led by God's spirit are God's sons. You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear.

Instead, you received the spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, Abba, Father. The spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God's children.

And if children also heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Church, you see, this perfect law of freedom is all about Jesus. the one who came, the one who came, who was God and yet in human flesh to identify with us.

[13 : 18] And he fulfilled all of the law, all of the demands of morality, all the things that we could not do so that we could be set free from sin and death and that we can receive the spirit of adoption.

The spirit of adoption. The spirit of adoption. So what excites me, not just terrifies, but excites me today about today's sermon is that this command to care for orphans is set within the context of our own adoption by our Lord, by our God.

Now we should know exactly what it feels like to be an orphan, maybe not a literal orphan in this world, but I believe every one of us has experienced orphanhood in the depths of our souls.

Our ancestors going back to Adam and Eve, the first people, they rejected their father and they ran away from paradise. They ran away from home.

And since then we have been born generation after generation into this metaphorical giant orphanage called the fallen world.

[14 : 35] Without our heavenly father to guide us, to shower us with unconditional love. All we could do was rely on ourselves in this dog eat dog world.

So we turn to whatever we could to give us that happiness and that validation and that affirmation, whether, you know, you name it education.

Is that what you're pining after a better grade career? Better money, sex, and power. And yet over and over again, if we're honest with ourselves, those things do not satisfy.

And it makes sense, right? Because would you expect a child? If you imagined a child, would you expect them to flourish? To actually flourish, not just to survive or to not die, but to actually flourish.

Would you expect that to happen if you just gave them some food, shelter, and clothing, and some toys, and maybe some fellow orphans to hang out with? No, right?

[15 : 38] The research and probably your common sense will tell you that every child needs a family and a home. They were made for that.

They were made for the persistent security of committed and loving parents. They were made and need the identity of a son or daughter, not just an orphan with a roof over their head.

And so for us as spiritual orphans, our greatest need is a heavenly father and a heavenly home. C.S.

Lewis, his famous quote from his book, Mere Christianity is, is helpful. Again, it's a gem. He said in this book, he said, if I find in myself a desire, which no experience in this world can satisfy, then the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.

The writer of Ecclesiastes puts it in a slightly different way. He says, God has put eternity into the human heart. He has put something that longs for something that is transcendent, that is beyond what we can touch and feel, because we know as this pandemic has shown us that life, physical life is fleeting.

[17 : 04] Spiritual orphans are on their own. They can only look to this present world for meaning, for happiness and purpose. But as we see, this world is a crumbling orphanage.

Just look what's happening around us. Just watch the news. Just look through history. But sons and daughters, sons and daughters can look to their heavenly father to provide the true needs.

That unconditional love and acceptance, not just for this short lifetime, but one that carries on beyond death to eternity. Remember Romans eight.

Let's look at that again. It says the spirit himself testifies together with our spirit, that we are God's children. And if children also heirs, heirs of God, friends and orphan, unfortunately is heir to nothing.

By definition, but a child of God is heir to the everlasting riches of the king of the universe. And so when we know that our dad, our heavenly dad is preparing an eternal home for us, where there's no pain, death or suffering, but only joy in his presence.

[18 : 26] What do we have to lose in this life? What do we have to fear? And that is the gospel that God came to us when we were far off, when we had run away, when we had rejected him, when we had fallen short, and he adopted us at great price because he sacrificed his son so that we could be sons and daughters to him.

And that is the gospel. And so the challenge that James brings to us this morning is to not forget. Because somehow, I think this happens for all of us.

We still, we wake up, we look in the mirror, and we see a son. We see a daughter of God, the king of kings. But then as we leave the bathroom, we leave the house, we go about the busyness of our world and our lives.

We're orphans again. We're fending for ourselves. We're thinking we need to claw and grasp our way to the top of the food chain because this life is all we have.

And we're orphans. And we get upset that we got passed over that promotion. Or we get devastated when that romance doesn't work out. Or whatever it is that riles you and frustrates you.

[19 : 45] And this morning, I believe God just wants us to hear again. That if you have put your faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit, as Romans 8 said, the Holy Spirit who resides in you, he is testifying.

He is reminding you that you have been adopted. And not only that, but I believe that one of the keys to remembering that we're children of God is to not just think it, but to actually start acting and doing and functioning as if we're children of God.

Be a doer of the world, of the word. You see, the beauty of this adoption is not just that your identity is now a son or daughter.

That's amazing. And it's not just that you have eternal security in your heavenly father, but that it's just, and it's, and that you have that. And then you just sit back and you just chill for 30, 40, 50 years.

No, the amazing thing about adoption is that you've now joined a new heavenly family with a new family culture and a purpose.

[20 : 56] And here's the thing. When God looks at this world, this mess of a world that we're in, he's not interested in, in renovating this orphanage to make it nicer or a little more palatable or a little more comfortable.

God is in the business of rebuilding everything from the ground up to build a loving home for a giant family.

We're even the most marginalized, the most despised and forgotten. They are welcome with open arms. And that is why God has such a special heart for orphans.

That's why pure and undefiled religion, the family business, this must involve orphan care. So how do we go from hearing about orphan care to actually doing it?

Last year, a few of us went to a conference called world without orphans. And a big takeaway was that orphans do indeed belong in families as sons and daughters.

[22 : 04] And that orphan care cannot just be outsourced to orphanages and institutions that provide food and shelter, but not the identity of son and daughter.

So I want to share with you a testimony of a young man who went through this experience in Ukraine. And I think it gives us a perspective, obviously, from an adopted child, but it also really gives us a picture of what's at stake, I think, when we think about family-based orphan care rather than institutionalized care.

So that there is a sense of life. I remember that I was in the childhood home, but when I was 6 years old, I was in the hospital.

[23 : 27] You are still in the hospital, because there is no one to come, no one to send a letter. It was very painful. We were very upset. And the director could just throw you between children, 300 people, and he could just hit you on the leg, and pull you up and pull you up.

I wanted to love. I wanted to love. I wanted to come and hug me. They came and said, you are good, you are good, you are good, you need to develop this.

I was like, I just lay on the bed and cry, I'm crying, I still didn't know my mother, I didn't know my mother. I said, God, if you are a child, I believe you give me a family.

I was like, among 300 children, they play basketball, they play volleyball, football, they play, they play, I was like, I was standing on the stadium, I was just standing, and she came to me, and she just started to be and started to be a little bit.

It was just, and I started crying, and at that moment, my mother said to me, that I want you to be in my family. And, well, of course, joy was just not a point, because I understood, why this person is here, because I remember, that a year passed, when I prayed and said, God, I want you to give me a family.

[25 : 56] I can teach other children, because I understand, if I go to the friends, and I come to the internat, and I look at these children, and I feel like it's pain. I want to hug them all, because I understand, that I don't have to do it.

There were tears from other side. I came to the heart of my life, and I said, I don't want to go to this school, help me. And my mom helped me, ████████████████████ me, ████████████████████.

I can be sure to say, that my wounds, and wounds, they are filled with this precious love, just attention.

[27 : 10] That you have not in the internet, but you now have it. And there is no way to be able to be proud. I am extremely grateful, in the first of all, because it was planned for me for God.

Amen.

It's just amazing to hear one little story like this, amongst hundreds and thousands, I believe, out there, that just remind us again and again, that we were created to have a father and a mother, that we were meant to have the identity of son and daughter.

And we've heard this fantastic testimony, from this young man, from the perspective of an adopted son. Now we want to hear a little bit from the perspective, of adoptive and foster parents.

And so I'm so honored and pleased to have, Nick and Chloe here with us this morning. Nick and Chloe are not part of Watermark, but they've graciously decided, and willed their time to share with us their experience.

[28 : 21] Chloe also works for Mother's Choice. So she has plenty of experience and expertise in this area. But for this morning, we really want to just hear from their personal story. Because most, more importantly, they are adoptive parents and they've been foster parents.

And, and so we just want to hear your story because obviously you two have been great friends to Julie and I, and we, we love you and you guys are amazing in our sight, but I know you're the first, you'd be the first to say we're just normal, regular Christians.

And honestly, I believe that too. Um, so how did it, how did that come to a place where you guys decided to be, uh, foster and adoptive parents? Just tell us, tell us your story.

Well, thank you so much, Jeremy, for having us. And it was amazing to travel with you to the world without orphans conference last year with a team from Hong Kong. Um, and yeah, we're just so thankful to share our story.

I think for me, it starts, um, you know, as a child, I didn't really know any foster adopted families, particularly growing up. It wasn't something that was, you know, in my family or friend group. I, I hadn't really thought about it until, um, I started working with children without families, um, as a teenager.

[29 : 31] And I just knew, you know, this is, this is how I want to build my family one day. Um, and that sort of desire, that thought never really went away. And then, uh, when I met Nick, I, I told him, you know, if we build a family one day, I, I think this is how I want to do it.

Um, and he said, um, yeah, I mean, I'd never really thought about adoption much before. I hadn't really thought about having kids at all anyway. Really? Um, but, uh, uh, a number of, uh, uh, in, uh, in, uh, in, uh, you know, quite well.

Um, uh, yeah. So when, when Chloe sort of started talking about this, it, um, it wasn't kind of, you know, uh, you know, it wasn't, um, this weird thing.

Uh, so I said, yeah, yeah, sure. I'm, I'm open to that. Yeah. Um, there were just several children that we actually really would have loved to have adopted, but at the time we, we weren't eligible and, um, and we started doing some foster care.

Um, and foster care is something we're also going to talk a bit about, um, uh, with you guys. Um, and, um, and, um, and, and we knew after doing foster care a little bit, actually, we really want to make this permanent.

[31 : 01] We really feel like, like we, we want to adopt a child permanently, um, into our family. Yeah. I mean, you know, we never really heard a, um, a big, you know, telling us to adopt.

We don't want to kind of over spiritualize the, the, the kind of decision making of it. You know, um, we knew that this is a part of the character of God, you know, as, as you've just been talking about today. Um, you know, for us in our own situation, we just, yeah, we knew deeply, this was, um, this is, um, consistent with who we are as believers and, uh, who we are as a couple.

Yeah. Yeah. That's awesome. And it's just cool to hear that. There was just an openness. It seems like even from a younger age about, about this and openness to hear God's word on this. So in this journey, uh, I'm sure it hasn't been easy, but, uh, how have you experienced God in this journey?

How has your faith kind of manifested itself in this? Yeah. I mean, um, we've really experienced God kind of, uh, step by step, you know, it's, the, the, the process of adoption, um, you know, is, you know, there's, um, training is, and, uh, interviews, all, all this stuff that's very, you know, sort of step by step.

So we really felt God kind of meet us wherever we happen to be in that, in that process and just leading us through step by step. And, um, through step by step, giving us enough light on the path to take one step ahead. Right. So it's very, very kind of continuous rather than, um, you know, like, there's not, um, I think maybe sometimes we, we think, oh, we need, you know, to step out and adopt a kid, but, you know, we really, you know, we just needed whatever the next step was very kind of continuous way.

[32 : 53] Yeah. Yeah. And I think just, just meeting other families and being involved with, with other families, there's no normal family actually. And just meeting families who have adopted before us or families who, you know, their children have unexpected medical needs or unexpected special needs.

And just seeing how they just embrace that unknown parenting journey. And I think just speaking with people just like, like those types of families gives us so much courage and reminds us there's no one way to build a family.

And I, having that discussion, um, before we had kids on, you know, how are we going to build our family was really valuable for, for our family, um, and how we built it. And then, you know, when the, when the time came and then, you know, we're finally ready and we're waiting and then we get this phone call to say, you know, there's this child.

And, um, you know, we're sitting there in this, um, in this social workers office and there's like, you know, stacks of paperwork and a bunch of it's scary and words we don't understand. And, and, you know, I think we felt like this is the moment to have that huge amount of faith.

And it wasn't, it, I think it was just all of those steps of faith and courage. We'd, we'd been able to take, uh, throughout, you know, this like 10 or 15 year journey.

[34 : 09] Um, just when we were looking at that paperwork, we're like, this is just a child, right? It's really easy to look at paper and, and it's very scary, but it's like, it just felt like, no, this is, this is our child.

This is actually the easiest part of it is to say yes. Um, and we knew that, that he was our son and, um, yeah, he's four years old right now and just the best. Amazing. Yeah.

And I really want to acknowledge, you know, there, there's lots of, um, uh, adoptive families within our community, um, that we know who are not motivated by faith. Right.

And, and their journeys to adoption, uh, just as valid and meaningful. And, um, I think we all have, um, so much to learn from, um, each other's journeys and, um, you know, the, you know, the, the steps that each of us has taken to get to this point.

Yeah. Um, it sounds like, um, faith and obviously a huge part, but also I know Christian faith was, we were designed to experience it as a community, you know, with people.

[35 : 14] And I can only imagine all the more something as significant as adoption or fostering. Hopefully that's been your experience. And if so, how have you felt or not felt the community around you, the Christian, the people of God walking with you in this journey?

Yeah, um, definitely, you know, our, um, you know, school, uh, workplace, you know, all of these things, they're absolutely vital really for, for any family, I think.

um, you know, for adoptive families, I think, you know, there, um, there's always loss, right? Like no matter how, um, great or wonderful, um, you know, a person, uh, person's adoptive kind of experiences, there's always, there's always loss in there.

Right. And, um, I think there's this, um, whether it's church or, or other communities, there's, you know, adoption is, is many things, you know, it's just, just, like you, you get this kind of thing of, you know, people might, you know, might be like, Oh, isn't that, you know, aren't you, aren't you so lucky, right?

to be in this family? Isn't it wonderful that you're, that you've been adopted by this family? And, you know, that, that, right. And, and, and it may not be the only feeling they have about it.

[36 : 39] Um, you know, as communities to understand that, um, you know, there's joy and loss and pain and, um, happiness and, you know, feeling, really affirmed in family, but also there's, there's always that thing of like, of the, um, you know, of, uh, of the loss in person's background.

And, you know, um, uh, open to, uh, open to learning, you know, and we're all gonna make mistakes, right? And, um, you know, for, you know, and, but just open to the voices of adoptees and adoptive families.

Um, uh, in, uh, our child's, uh, kindergarten class, they did, they did a story book, um, and, um, I think for most people, they wouldn't kind of have a problem with it.

Some, but some of the themes in it, um, you know, um, kind of worked against the, you know, that idea of permanence, which we really, you know, work really hard to establish and saying like, you know, you will always be our kid, you know, no matter what you do or, you know, whatever issues come up, um, you know, health issues or, or whatever, lovely book.

You know, it kind of worked against that in, in some ways. And, um, you know, I kind of brought this up with, um, kindergarten principal and, and she was, I mean, she was super great about it, right?

[38 : 05] Like, you know, she hadn't sort of before, she hadn't really had cause to think of it from that perspective, but was really open to kind of seeing it from our perspective and be like, oh yeah, I understand that. Okay.

Yeah. I think, um, uh, really important thing. And, and just as, as you journey as a church is also not to put, uh, people who step forward to the adoptive parents or foster parents or support, you know, um, teen moms on a pedestal.

They don't have more faith than anyone else. They don't have more courage. And, and when you put people on a pedestal, they actually can't share their struggles. They can't share their challenges in the same way. Um, and so just really recognizing that everyone needs support.

Um, and, uh, there's just so many ways for the community to support. It's not just, you know, kind of family like ours. It's actually every single person has, has a role to play. Um, and especially, you know, with, uh, with, with foster care, you know, the whole idea of foster care is that that child will leave and you need to have your support network around you to, to, to come alongside you to help you.

Um, and adoption too. It doesn't just finish when you sign these legal paperwork. It's a lifelong journey. So I think, you know, we're super excited for, for Watermark church, you know, as a family to step forwards in this, um, and to really say, you know, we're in this together and, and, um, so, yeah, it sounds like we, there's just so much a community, a faith community, a church can do in terms of just being literate, educating ourselves about what we can do, what to say, not to say, how we can come alongside.

[39 : 39] Um, we have our work cut out for us, but it's just so illuminating to hear, um, from you guys from the horse's mouth. So thank you so much for joining us today. Thank you.

Thanks for having us. Yeah. Uh, let me just pray for us real quick. Lord, thank you so much for this family. Thank you for their stewardship and for speaking into our lives this morning in Jesus name.

All right. Amen. Church. Um, we're going to wrap up with a couple of things, uh, just to kind of tie up some loose ends.

And. I think there's a vision for us, both from myself and I think the leaders, we've really seen that there is a clear need in Hong Kong, for the church family to step into this gap that orphanages institutions.

They simply cannot fill. So we're, we're going to take a step of faith to really explore what it would look like for watermark to have some kind of fostering adoption ministry of some sort.

[40 : 42] And, you know, we've heard God's word and now we must do. And just, I just want to imagine for a moment, just kind of dream with me for a minute. Just imagine like a bunch of us in watermark, bringing these kids into the church community, you know, whether it's through fostering or adoption, you know, mobilizing financial support for couples who need it.

You know, you have entire CGs, including singles rallying around them, providing supplies, childcare, counseling, emotional support, whatnot. And you might have one couple who's going through the fostering process itself, but you might have a couple singles who are walking with them, who are getting legally qualified as well, so that they can actually be qualified and legally to babysit for them in times of need.

You know, we might even have a church wide system to provide supplies and other things. And guys, we do such a great job with pregnant mothers. You know, we've, Julie and I have experienced that firsthand.

We could do an equally amazing job for those who are expecting a foster or an adoptive child. And I want, I'm just dreaming here, but I just want to invite you.

We want to invite you into this process and actually dream. What could this look like? And I think if God is in it, which we believe he is, then only he knows how amazing this could be.

[42 : 04] You know, personally, I've been thinking about adoption for quite a while now. And, but something recently has really kind of significant in my life has, has kind of shaped the way that I see orphans and vulnerable children.

Many of you know, this my wife and I, uh, welcomed our first child into the world, our little girl, Ava. And now I'm not saying that everyone needs this kind of experience, but I think for me in my own faith journey, I think before I had, I had a bit of a detached and maybe a bit self-centered view of orphan care, where it was like, Oh, there's kids out there who need a family.

So I'll do it. God kind of, I'll step in. And I think there was definitely an element where I thought it was more about, it was more about doing the right thing rather than really seeing these children the way that our heavenly father does.

And now that I've gone through, you know, the nine months of seeing my, my wife grow this baby and all the, all that goes into that. And, and the, the painstaking labor that goes into bringing a child into this world and, and all the things it takes to keep her alive after she's been born and, and well.

So when I look and I think about the orphans and the children in need out there, I, I know because I've seen myself and I've been convicted. I know that every single one of them have gone through that experience that they were fearfully, wonderfully made knitted together in their mother's wombs that God piece them together crafted.

[43 : 50] They are his handy work and that this precious, beautiful image of God that I see in my little girl is repeated in every single one of those kids out there.

And so the question that now kind of becomes to me is, well, why wouldn't we reach out? Why wouldn't we love them? Why wouldn't we care for them? Because it was the same God who knitted them together, who piece them together painstakingly.

They went through the same experience of coming into this world. And it's just that they don't have physical parents or in a difficult situation. So who cares whether they were, whether God knitted them together in someone else's womb.

It was our heavenly father who did that. It was my heavenly father who did that. And so as we wrap this up, I just want to make sure you remember two specific things that we heard today.

First, we must remember our own adoption. James is talking about religion that is pure before God, the father, and that's our father. And that true religion must flow out of true relationship with God.

[45 : 04] And I want to hear, I want you to hear God, your dad telling you this morning that, that you are a son and daughter, that I love you and I want what's best for you. I want to teach you what's good. I want to show you my heart and let's take care of orphans together.

Church, we're in this together. Second, I want to just echo James's call that we hear this, but we don't stop there. And we respond by doing because this call for orphan care is a call to the entire church.

And so it's not a question of whether you should be involved, but simply how. And we have a few specific action points. We'll touch at the end of the service. The reality is not everyone will actually foster and adopt, but all are commanded to play a role.

And I know some of you guys out there, I know that some of you guys are already feeling the stir and a prompt or a thought about really considering fostering and adoption. And I encourage you, don't snuff that thought out.

Really take a hold of it. Come before the Lord. Tell me, I'd love to talk with you and really begin thinking how we as a church can walk alongside you. And encourage you. This morning, we've been hearers of the word.

[46 : 20] And the challenge to us from James and from our Lord Jesus is, will we be doers? Let's pray. Father, we just come before you right now and say thank you for our adoption, Lord.

Thank you for knowing our spiritual father. God, thank you for the security, Lord. And help us not to just take hold of that. Help us not to just hold it into ourselves, Lord, but to let that overflow in grace and love to all those who are in need, God.

As we have been orphans who are adopted by you, Lord, let us reflect that same love, Lord, to those around us, God. I just want to pray specifically, Lord, for just us as the next step.

This is a huge enterprise, a grand God-sized vision, God. And so, Lord, we humbly ask for your guidance, your conviction, your leading. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.