

WHY FAMILIES MATTER



A toolkit for churches

Study guide

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A Toolkit for Churches

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WHY FAMILIES MATTER

A STUDY GUIDE FOR CHURCHES

Understanding God's Context for Families:

God | Child | Family | Church | Community | Commission

"A Father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy dwelling.
God sets the lonely in families"

Psalm 68:5-6

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CONTENTS

SETTING THE SCENE.....	7
PURPOSE OF THIS TOOLKIT	8
HOW THE TOOLKIT WORKS.....	10
HOW TO USE THE STUDY GUIDE	11
10 TIPS ON HOW TO HELP PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND.....	13
GOD	15
CHILD	20
FAMILY.....	25
CHURCH.....	29
COMMUNITY	34
COMMISSION.....	39

SETTING THE SCENE

David described God as "A Father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families" (Psalm 68:5-6).

In a world where there are estimated to be 145 million orphans (UNICEF) to know this feels like refreshing rain on a hot, dry day.

Of the 145 million children estimated to be orphans, only about 9 per cent have lost both parents. Many families are unstable and children are separated from one or both parents due to violence, abuse, alcoholism, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, and other conflicts. Too many children are suffering in silence. Millions run away from home, and small babies are abandoned to institutions, the parents perhaps not realising the effects of orphanages on a child's physical and mental development, behaviour, mental health, intellect, social abilities, and emotional wellbeing.

So if God sets the lonely in families, then how should we as the Church respond to God's heart for children? We need to work together to build strong families, to help families in crisis, and to embrace children who have no experience of a loving family. Governments around the world have strengthened the law to protect children, but they cannot manage alone. They need us, and God has called us, to extend the boundaries of our own families and embrace children who need to know the love of Father God.

This Toolkit will help us to study the Bible together to find out how God intends us to meet these immense challenges and to keep children safe in families. It is daunting, because we already feel pressed to the limit and unable to help any more children. Yet God has called us to be the expression of His loving kindness to the world. So we pray that as we walk this journey together, the Lord would help you to believe that He who called you to be His ambassador here on earth in caring for children will enable and strengthen you for this immense task.

PURPOSE OF THIS TOOLKIT

Every child is a precious, unique gift from God. A child thrives when they are raised in a loving family. Yet this is not the experience of every child. This Toolkit will help us to see from the Bible why children matter and how God created families to nurture and care for children. As Christian leaders, we need to help build strong families where children are loved and cared for, and where children without families are embraced into a new family.

This Toolkit has been designed to help us think about understanding God's heart for children to belong in families. It presents a Christian theological perspective as well as some universally acknowledged principles of keeping children safe from harm and parenting positively.

While recognising that families face numerous pressures, problems and issues and that the shape and form of a family differ vastly, we believe that children grow and develop best when they are brought up in the care of loving and nurturing caregivers, in the context of their own communities. There is a strong Biblical mandate to care for vulnerable children, particularly those without parental care. The Bible shows us that the family is the only institution designed by God for the care of children.

The Body of Christ (through the Church and Christian ministries), is in an ideal position to be able support children to remain in families, even if one or more parents are absent. Through the care and support of struggling families, the Church has the potential to influence whole communities with God's values. Where children are unable to stay with their biological family or next of kin, the Church is ideally placed to offer alternative families through fostering or adoption. We believe that when the body of Christ works together as described in Romans 12.5 and 1 Corinthians 12, that there is more potential for the Church to transform situations facing vulnerable children, including those without parental care.

Throughout the Toolkit we draw on 'Understanding God's Heart for Children' as a Biblical framework as a way to organise and clearly communicate what God says about and intends for children. These statements created by a

group of theologians and practitioners are integrated to paint a whole picture of God's heart for children.

1. God creates every unique person as a child with dignity.
2. Children need parental love in a broken world.
3. God gives children as a gift to welcome and nurture.
4. Society has a God-given responsibility for the well-being of children and families.
5. Children are a promise of hope for every generation.
6. God welcomes children fully into the family of faith.
7. Children are essential to the mission of God

In addition, we acknowledge that all children everywhere – without discrimination – have the same basic rights. These rights are spelt out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This is the most influential, powerful and respected secular document that promotes the welfare of children. This convention was ratified in the 1980s by all but 2 nations in the world, which means that national governments have committed themselves to protecting and upholding the rights of children included in the document and have agreed to hold themselves accountable before the international community. It spells out that all children have a right to survival, an opportunity for full development, protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation, and a right to participate fully in family, cultural and social life.

HOW THE TOOLKIT WORKS

The Toolkit is intended to be used as a six-week series in your churches. There are two parts to the Toolkit.

1. **Part One: A Study Guide** provides a framework for **Pastors** to lead their churches in understanding how to support families and nurture children and can be used to guide discussions in **Small Groups**.
2. **Part Two: Resources for children** is to help Children's Leaders prepare to teach **Children** the same principles about children needing a loving family.

The Toolkit will help you to grow in your understanding as a local church as to why families are so important to children and how you can nurture children and their families to be all that God intends. There is a different theme for each of the six weeks which will help to build a holistic Biblical view of how God intended children and families to operate, and what provision He made within the community of faith when families find themselves in crisis. These are our six themes:

1. **God**: because God has adopted us and is father to the fatherless, he is at the centre.
2. **Child**: every child has inherent value and an unconditional right to holistic development.
3. **Family**: a healthy family is the best environment for a child to develop and thrive.
4. **Church**: the body of Christ is commissioned to care for the children without parental care and has the capacity to lead the local and global effort to end orphan hood
5. **Community**: broad scale collaboration is required to transfer these core values across societies and see transformation occur.
6. **Commission**: The mission is immense so we can only move forward with God's commission to present life in all its fullness.

HOW TO USE THE STUDY GUIDE

Whether you are a Pastor, Small Group Leader, or Children's Leader, please study the outlines before leading others. Guidance for each theme is given in a study outline. Each study is divided into six parts: **Approach, Study, Meditate, Reflect, Pray, What Next? Multimedia Resources**. You will benefit greatly if you can first listen to the sermon that is referenced in each of the 'Multimedia Resources' sections.

The application and resulting actions from using the Study Guide will be made easier by involving people with social work experience in the small groups.

APPROACH

The opening of the study begins with a **Purpose Statement** that sets out the focus on the main theme of the study. A succinct **Key Principle** then outlines the most important statement for the theme and a **Fact** is presented.

A concise **Overview: Setting the Scene** follows. This sets the scene and describes the Biblical understanding of the theme and why families matter.

1. STUDY

The study section will help you look at key Biblical texts that explain the theme. Some simple questions are asked about each of these texts. **Selected Texts** highlight key passages for reading and reflection. For each text, you can ask the following four questions:

1. **What does the passage say?** What do the words say? Listen to what the text is actually saying, not what you want it to say.
2. **What does the passage mean?** How should we understand this passage as it was written for the people at the time it was written? Sometimes reading the surrounding verses will help to do this. You can also ask how this fits in to the big picture of the Bible.
3. **What does it mean today?** Having understood something about the original meaning of the text, consider what it means today.

4. **How shall we do this?** Ask yourself what should be done about what the passage says and means. How can we apply these truths?

2. MEDITATE

A reflective meditation on the theme using Biblical passages has been prepared for each week. If you do not have access to audio-visual resources, please get a good reader to read the text in this section slowly and deliberately as people think about the words.

3. REFLECT

The reflection exercise seeks to unfold and apply the implications of the study exercise. Reflection requires a looking inward and a looking outward. Some questions will help individuals to think about specific actions they could take to help children in their community to be in a safe family.

4. PRAY

In the Bible we see that God wants us to worship him, and to express to him what we have learned from His Word. Take time to pray as a group or in threes to work through the implications of the study. Guidance is found at the end, giving pointers for prayers of thanks, confession and intercession.

5. WHAT NEXT?

Some ideas are given for how you as a church could respond to the theme.

6. MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

Some multimedia resources have been created to help you learn together as a church. You can find them at <http://www.cranenetwork.org/working-groups/churches/>. These are short video clips around the theme. You can also watch or listen to Revd. Stephen Gaukroger speak on the theme.

7. ANNEXES

At the end of the Study Guide are annexes for each chapter, which are exercises, which can be used as a group discussion or personal study.

10 TIPS ON HOW TO HELP PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND

It is essential that as a leader, you are able to ask yourself, “Are these people learning?” rather than “Am I speaking?” Your purpose is to help others in their learning journey having first learned something yourself.

1. Remember you are not alone. God says, “I will never leave you or forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5). Therefore, you can ask God to help you
2. Don’t try and manage alone. Find one or two other people who will support you in your leadership.
3. Be friendly and be yourself. Use your gifts and talents to make people feel at home. And if something doesn’t go well, remember to say sorry and try again.
4. Prepare in advance. You will have a much better study time if you have already studied the materials yourself. Start preparing at least 4 or 5 days in advance.
5. Pray for your members by name. Pray for them before, during and after the meeting.
6. Ask for volunteers to read out loud. Some people find reading very difficult. Always thank the person who reads out loud.
7. When you ask a question, give people some time to think. If you are able to give time for group discussion, if there is a long silence, rephrase the question. Always thank people for their answers. If there are people who are very quiet, ask simple questions and say that you want everyone to share something small.
8. If you can, break into smaller groups. This normally helps shy people to express themselves more easily.
9. Share the leadership with your fellow leaders as each of you will have a different style and so together you will provide a good balanced diet!
10. Prepare your own heart for leading people by reading these passages: Matthew 9:36-38; John 10:14-15; 1 Peter 5:2-4; Philippians 2:1-5; Hebrews 11:23-25; 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, 11-12

GOD

Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

Romans 8:23 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

APPROACH

Purpose Statement

We will only understand how important families are to our emotional wellbeing when we understand that God created families as an expression of himself. Since we are created in His image, we will only thrive when we reflect His nature. This is why raising children in families is crucial for their emotional, social and physical wellbeing. If families are in crisis, we need to help the family to know God's intention for them to be together and to help them to prevent family separation. For children who do not know the love of a family, we need to help them to know God's love and care.

Key Principle

Because God has adopted us, and is father to the fatherless, he is at the centre.

Fact

The Bible is very clear about God's call on us to serve the needs of those children who are vulnerable, specifically those who lose parents. The word 'orphan' appears 30 times in scripture where we are asked to be kind and generous to fatherless children. In the Bible, there is no precedence for a model, which removes children from their communities in order to respond to their needs. Instead throughout scripture, there is emphasis on the importance of relationships and of family. "He sets the lonely in families" Psalm 68:6

Overview: Setting the Scene

Faith-based communities (including churches, mission agencies and third sector charities) have at their core a belief in God. The Christian God is seen as all-knowing and all-powerful, morally perfect and defined by love.

God expresses himself through His creation, conscience, and reveals His purposes through a book, the Bible. We know God substantially through relationship. God is in relationship with Himself (the doctrine of the Trinity) with the supreme expression of His love for humanity expressed through His Son. God the Father sends God the Son to save the world, revealed by God the Holy Spirit. This language of 'family' defines the kind of God Christians worship and follow.

We are invited to life through His Son, and so invited into God's family, now in relationship with the ultimate Father!

STUDY

Take time to study what the Bible says about this theme. Read the selected texts to help set the Biblical context and as you do, ask yourself the four questions about each text.

Selected Texts

Psalms 68 v 5-6

Exodus 2 v 1-10

Esther 2 v 5-7

Romans 8 v 23

Ask Four Questions

1. What does the passage say?
2. What does the passage mean?
3. What does it mean today?
4. How shall we do this?

MEDITATE

Ask a good reader to read these words slowly and thoughtfully to the group.

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow...

*A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.
(Psalm 68:5)*

See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are! (1 John 3:1). Because God has adopted us, and is Father to the fatherless, He is at the centre of everything we are and everything we do.

At the very core of all we do is belief in God. The Christian God knows everything and is all-powerful. He is always perfect in all his thoughts and ways, and he is a loving God.

God shows himself to us through everything he has created; he reveals his moral laws through our conscience; he makes his purposes clear through the Bible. All of these help us to know him. But the greatest way we know God is through relationship.

God is in relationship with Himself—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—what we understand as the Trinity. The greatest expression of His love for humanity came through His Son, Jesus. God the Father sent God the Son to save the world, revealed by God the Holy Spirit. This is the language of ‘family’ ‘Family’ describes the God that Christians worship and follow.

Jesus, God’s Son, invites us to life in him. When we come to him, we are invited into God’s family. This means we are now in relationship with the best Father ever!

God sent his Son, so that we could be adopted into his family. Because we are his children, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’ So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child. (Galatians 4:4-7)

REFLECT

Reflection Questions

1. What do the Bible passages teach us about the nature of God?
2. Why does it matter what kind of God we believe in?
3. How should our church life change in response to this material?

Application Questions

1. What do these passages tell us about the importance of children being raised in a family?
2. How do these passages help us to know how to keep families together?
3. What ideas do these passages give us about how we can help children who have no family to find a new family?

Action Questions

1. How can I help children who do not know what a loving family is like to know the love of a family?
2. What can we do to embrace children who need a family and to support families in crisis?

PRAY

Thanksfor a God who loves us as His children

Confessionfor ignoring our Heavenly Father

Intercessionfor children who feel abandoned and fatherless

WHAT NEXT?

It is an amazing truth that God has adopted us into His family, giving us the full rights of being children of God. Maybe there are people in your church who are caring for children as if they were their own but need help to make it legal. How can you support them? Are there children that you have contact with that need the support of a family? Have a look at Annexe 1 at the end of this Study Guide to help you think more about this.

MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

Inspirational Video

You can find a short video called '**God as Father**' that will help you to meditate on this theme by going to <http://www.cranenetwork.org/working-groups/churches/> or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B2DCiwlpUA8>

Sermon Video

To see Revd. Stephen Gaukroger preaching on this theme, please go to the <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fg9gmu2cRFU>

CHILD

Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him.

Psalms 127:3 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

APPROACH

Purpose Statement

Children are a gift from God. They bring joy to life. Since they are the smallest and the weakest, they are the most vulnerable and therefore deserve the highest levels of protection and support. Loving parents are the best protectors of a child, and if the parent is not able to do this, then a child needs to be found an alternative family as soon as possible. As Christians, we need to think about how we can play our part in protecting children from harm and to provide support and care to children in crisis.

Key Principle

Every child has inherent value and an unconditional right to holistic development.

Fact

Each of us was created with a capacity to receive love from a mother and father. Unconditional love is the most important need of every child. This is most easily expressed where one or two parents can respond to the individual needs of the child. Strong emotional and physical attachment to at least one primary caregiver (usually a child's mother) is critical to a child's development.

Overview: Setting the Scene

Different societies have very different ideas about the place of the child! The world of the first century tended to view them either as utilitarian ("they can care for us in our old age") or as a burden on the family purse. Some societies have seen children as of little or no worth, until they reach an age of 'adulthood'

Jesus, by contrast, saw intrinsic value in the life of a child, expressed anger at their maltreatment and viewed their 'innocence' as a paradigm for all humans in their approach to God. Christians (by definition followers of Christ's teachings and example) are called to emulate their Master's attitudes and actions. For faith communities the child is not a 'second-class citizen', an accidental by-product of sexual activity or a means of cheap production. Rather, the child is valued, as being created in the image of God, in their own right.

STUDY

Take time to study what the Bible says about this theme. Read the selected texts to help set the Biblical context and as you do, ask yourself the four questions about each text.

Selected Texts

Psalms 127 v 3

Matthew 19 v 13-15

Proverbs 20 v 11

Matthew 18 v 5-6

Ask Four Questions

1. What does the passage say?
2. What does the passage mean?
3. What does it mean today?
4. How shall we do this?

MEDITATE

Ask a good reader to read these words slowly and thoughtfully to the group.

Every one of us started life as a child. God made us as children, created in his image. Being created in his image means that every child has intrinsic value and worth.

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." (Mark 10:13-15)

Jesus also gave us a profound insight into how much God the Father values little children: "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven." (Matthew 18:10)

Children have great potential, and we, as adults, can help develop that potential. Our responsibility is to teach them well, with clear and loving guidance.

Proverbs tells us that if we "Start children off on the way they should go, even when they are old they will not turn from it." (Proverbs 22:6) Children need loving care and direction so they can grow to be the person God wants them to be.

The Bible contains many stories of children who were used by God to further his purposes. One of them was King Josiah. "Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and followed the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left. In the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David." (2 Chronicles 34:1-3a) Josiah is a great role model for children---AND for adults!

Jesus made his attitude to children clear when he said, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me." And he reserved some of his harshest words for those who cause harm to children: "If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better

for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.” (Matthew 18:5-6)

The Bible values children. Jesus values children. Let us, also, value children as “a heritage from the Lord” and “a reward from him.” (Psalm 127:3)

REFLECT

Reflection Questions

1. How is Jesus’ view of children different from other people in the first century, and why does it matter?
2. What do the bible passages teach us about the place of the child?
3. Why does it matter how children are viewed?
4. How should our church life and family life change in response to this material?

Application Questions

1. What do these passages tell us about the importance of children being raised in a family?
2. How do these passages help us to know how to keep families together?
3. What ideas do these passages give us about how we can help children who have no family to find a new family?

Action Questions

1. How should I look after and care for the needs of the child?
2. How do I help children to grow to know who they are?
3. How can I offer my home to a child who needs a home?
4. What should we do in church to keep children safe?

PRAY

Thanksfor God’s gift of children

Confessionfor society’s abuse of children - in all its forms

Intercessionfor healing for damaged children

WHAT NEXT?

How child friendly is your Church? Can your church services involve children more? Could you have a five-minute Children's Time? Could the children lead? Could the church have a special Sunday where children invite other children to be a part of church? Have a look at the Annexe 2 at the end of the Study Guide to see how child friendly your church is.

MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

Inspirational Video

You can find a short video called '**Children Made in God's Image**' that will help you to meditate on this theme by going to

<http://www.cranenetwork.org/working-groups/churches/> or

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NP5A1GVmxNU>

Sermon Video

To see Revd. Stephen Gaukroger preaching on this theme go to

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LmyVanhChRs>

FAMILY

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

Ephesians 3:14-15 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

APPROACH

Purpose Statement

When a family is working well, it brings great joy, love and security. A child who lives in a dysfunctional family or who has no family at all will always be at a disadvantage. That is why it is so important for every child to know what it is to live in a loving family. As Christians, we need to open our families to children who need to experience what a loving family is and how strong families work so that when they grow up they are able to build strong families.

Key Principle

A healthy family is the best environment for a child to develop and thrive.

Fact

Children who are cared for by families within communities are more likely to thrive than those who are separated from their families. This is because children growing up in families generally receive the kind of love, attention, and care essential to their wellbeing. Children and young people who are removed from their family suffer separation and feelings of loss, even if they have been maltreated and children who have experienced repeated traumatic separations often become permanently damaged

Overview: Setting the Scene

The Biblical model of family, with its roots in middle eastern culture, shares much with the 'extended' model of family. It sees a 'healthy' family as the best context for the flourishing of childhood. This 'family' values long-term sexual faithfulness, trans-generational (e.g. grandparents/aunts/uncles)

support and moral education in a loving framework. The wholesome interplay of these priorities provides the best possibility for childhood thriving.

STUDY

Take time to study what the Bible says about this theme. Read the selected texts to help set the Biblical context and as you do, ask yourself the four questions about each text.

Selected Texts

Ephesians 3 v 14-21

1 Timothy 3 v 4, 12

1 Timothy 5 v 4, 10

Ask Four Questions

1. What does the passage say?
2. What does the passage mean?
3. What does it mean today?
4. How shall we do this?

MEDITATE

Ask a good reader to read these words slowly and thoughtfully to the group.

Family is God's idea. It is the structure He has put in place as the best environment for a child to develop and thrive.

The Bible tells us that a family where one man and one woman are married to each other and are sexually faithful is God's ideal scenario. This family would value the input of grandparents, aunts and uncles; would provide moral and spiritual education for children in a safe and loving environment; and would be a place where every member of the family would be encouraged to be the best they can be.

Yet we live in a broken world where many families do not look like God's ideal. Children are being raised by single parents or have no parental care at all.

God's values of sexual faithfulness, consistent and loving discipline, and care and protection of children are not present. These families and children are still loved by God. He longs that the church would demonstrate his compassion and help to all families.

The Bible teaches Christian leaders to be faithful to their wives and to manage their families well, helping each family member to flourish. Leaders must be role models, encouraging the same values among all Christian believers.

Our job as followers of Jesus is to pass on God's Kingdom values to our children within the protective framework of the family and the church.

Let each generation tell its children of your mighty acts; let them proclaim your power. Psalm 145:4

REFLECT

Reflection Questions

1. What is the biblical view of 'family'? What does family mean to you?
2. Why is this important for the well-being of a child?
3. How should our church life and family life change in response to this material?

Application Questions

1. What do these passages tell us about the importance of children being raised in a family?
2. How do these passages help us to know how to keep families together?
3. What ideas do these passages give us about how we can help children who have no family to find a new family?

Action Questions

1. What can our church do to embrace children who need a family and protect children and families?
2. Raising children in families is critical for their healthy emotional development. What implications does this have for how we educate our children and how we care for orphans?

PRAY

Thanksfor our own families

Confessionfor the way society damages family life

Intercessionfor parents and grandparents as they raise their families

WHAT NEXT?

How is the Church supporting and nurturing families? Could the church set up small support groups to help each other? Do you have people in the church who could do a training in financial management, parenting skills, or teaching a new skill to someone else? Look at the qualities of strong families in the Annexe 3 at the end of this study guide and answer the questions below the table of qualities. How is your family doing against these qualities?

MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

Inspirational Video

You can find a short video called '**Family**' that will help you to meditate on this theme by going to <http://www.cranenetwork.org/working-groups/churches/> or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FIezC44B2mk>

Sermon Video

To see Revd. Stephen Gaukroger preaching on this theme Uganda, please go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MLNkltOcGIA>

CHURCH

Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow. 'Come now, let us settle the matter,' says the LORD. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.'

Isaiah 1:17-18 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

APPROACH

Purpose Statement

The Church is the spiritual family for people who believe in Jesus and are seeking to follow him in a path of discipleship. The Church can provide a place of hope and healing for children and adults who have not had a positive family environment. The Church can help to embrace the lonely child who does not know the love of a family, and we need to support families in the church who are willing and able to embrace one more child into their families.

Key Principle

The body of Christ is commissioned to care for all children including children without parental care and has the capacity to lead the local and global effort to end the situation of children living outside of family care.

Fact

There are increasing numbers of children unable to live with their own families that need to be accepted and cared for by alternative families that can offer them the love, individual attention and stability that they require. The Church is uniquely placed to offer its help to meet this need. This is by families or caregivers from the church offering alternative family care for children, while other church members support them in what they are doing.

Overview: Setting the Scene

Christianity is personal but also corporate. It is a series of beliefs and values but also a 'movement' for change. The institution that embodies all these things is the Church.

The Church operates locally, nationally, and internationally, as an agent of God's purposes on earth. These purposes include a priority place for the care of the vulnerable, disadvantaged and powerless. When a child has a dysfunctional family – or no family at all – they come within this 'priority care' of God. The expression of this care falls to the Church, as God's agent on earth. Its role is both the delivery of care and the catalyst for care by other agencies. The Church should act as the conscience of the State, exercising a prophetic role in the world by strong advocacy on behalf of vulnerable children and families.

STUDY

Take time to study what the Bible says about this theme. Read the selected texts to help set the Biblical context and as you do, ask yourself the four questions about each text.

Selected Texts

Isaiah 1 v 17-18

James 1 v 27

Psalm 10 v 18

Psalm 27 v 10

Ask Four Questions

1. What does the passage say?
2. What does the passage mean?
3. What does it mean today?
4. How shall we do this?

MEDITATE

Ask a good reader to read these words slowly and thoughtfully to the group.

Christianity is personal: it is about individual people being in relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Christianity is also corporate: what we can be together has greater impact than what we are separate, isolated and alone.

Christians together--The Body of Christ—the Church—is called by God to reflect his heart for the vulnerable, disadvantaged and powerless. God gives His community a task:

Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow. (Isaiah 1 v 17-18)

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. (James 1 v 27)

When a child has a dysfunctional family or no family at all, they come within the priority care of God. The expression of this care falls to the Church as God's agent on earth. The Church is commissioned to care for children without parental care. The family is the inward facing mechanism which provides for healthy flourishing for a child. The Church is the outward facing mechanism, towards the world, so that the values of the family can be communicated externally through Christians, acting individually and together as the people of God

When churches work together, we have the capacity to lead the local and global effort to end the situation of children living outside of family care.

The church should act as the conscience of the state exercising a prophetic role in the world by strong advocacy on behalf of vulnerable children

The task is huge—in our city, and in our nation. But care for the vulnerable is part of our calling as the church. Jesus promised never to leave us or forsake us. He is near to us, giving the church power to be all that he wants us to be.

REFLECT

Reflection Questions

1. What do these bible passages teach us about the child and the family and the Church?
2. How can families be supported to provide safe, nurturing and loving environments for their children?
3. What practical programmes should the Church put in place to provide protection and development opportunities for children?

Application Questions

1. What do these passages tell us about the importance of children being raised in a family?
2. How do these passages help us to know how to keep families together?
3. What ideas do these passages give us about how we can help children who have no family to find a new family?

Action Questions

1. What can our church do to help keep families together and help children to find families?

PRAY

Thanksfor the Church as the 'family of God'

Confessionfor the way our Churches sometimes ignore or neglect children

Intercession ...for churches to begin/continue good programmes for children

WHAT NEXT?

Annexe 3 at the end of this Study Guide describes ways in which Church members could offer alternative families to children who can no longer live with their biological families. Is there anything you could do? Could you invite someone to your Church to speak about the needs of vulnerable children and families in your community or get someone to share a testimony of how they have adopted or fostered a child?

MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

Inspirational Video

You can find a short video called '**Church**' that will help you to meditate on this theme by going to <http://www.cranenetwork.org/working-groups/churches/> or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9S9pKidj6wU>

Sermon Video

To see Revd. Stephen Gaukroger preaching on this theme go to [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= CO70IUU5zk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CO70IUU5zk)

COMMUNITY

Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door-frames of your houses and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

APPROACH

Purpose Statement

The Church does not exist in isolation; it is a part of vibrant community life. As such, the Church should engage with its community, embracing those in need, and especially reaching out to children and families in crisis, helping them to recover from trauma, isolation and a lack of love. We need to do this in the right way by working with the authorities who have the responsibility to manage the social welfare of those who need help and support.

Key Principle

Broad scale collaboration is required to transfer these core values across societies and see transformation occur.

Fact

The most common reason quoted as why children become separated from their families is lack of access to education or poverty, while disease, abuse domestic violence, child labour or trafficking are some of the reasons that children may leave home. Of the estimated 2 million children living in institutional care, 80% of them have one living parent.

Overview: Setting the Scene

Faith communities do not exist in isolation from the communities that surround them. Christians live in contexts where their values are often ignored, or even opposed. The Biblical paradigms of 'salt' and 'light' express how they should relate to the world they find themselves in. Their role is to model compliance with the divine commitment to the child, and draw others – of differing faith or none at all – into shared action on behalf of children.

And faith communities do not exist in isolation from one another. Disunity and isolation hinder the work of societal compassion. Individual churches and Christian organisations must find ways to operate as 'networks of kindness', in order to be at their most effective. Territorialism must be replaced by collaboration and united action.

STUDY

Take time to study what the Bible says about this theme. Read the selected texts to help set the Biblical context and as you do, ask yourself the four questions about each text.

Selected Texts

Deuteronomy 6 v 4-9

Deuteronomy 31 v 12-13

Ask Four Questions

1. What does the passage say?
2. What does the passage mean?
3. What does it mean today?
4. How shall we do this?

MEDITATE

Ask a good reader to read these words slowly and thoughtfully to the group.

“You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavour? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.

You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.” (Matthew 5:13-16)

Faith communities do not exist in isolation from the communities around them. Even though some in our communities may ignore our faith—or even oppose it—the Bible calls us to model God’s values in everything we do.

As we put into practice God’s commitment to children and families, so we can draw others – of differing faith or none at all – into shared action on behalf of children and families.

Faith communities do not exist in isolation from one another. Individual churches and Christian organisations must find ways to work together as ‘networks of kindness’, so that we can see God’s heart for children and families worked out in our communities. We cannot refuse to work with others, or only build up our own church or organisation. When we do that, it is a denial of what Jesus prayed for the church in John 17—that Christian believers would be united so that the world would know who Jesus is and come to believe in him.

In the Bible, the child was always seen as a part of the wider community and would learn values as the adults recited the goodness of God:

Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk

along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (Deuteronomy 6 v 4-9)

No-one was excluded from the community and everyone was given the opportunity to learn who God was:

Assemble the people – men, women and children, and the foreigners residing in your towns – so that they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and follow carefully all the words of this law. Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.’ (Deuteronomy 31 v 12-13)

Today we as Christians need to find ways to work together across our communities to embrace those who are isolated and alone and without a family, and embrace them into the family of God and into our own families.

REFLECT

Reflection Questions

1. What do these bible passages teach us about community?
2. How does God envisage a just and fair society and how would this specifically benefit children?
3. What kind of things should we do, personally, and as a Church, to involve the community in this work?

Application Questions

4. What do these passages tell us about the importance of children being raised in a family?
5. How do these passages help us to know how to keep families together?
6. What ideas do these passages give us about how we can help children who have no family to find a new family?

Action Questions

7. How can we get involved in local child protection provision or providing emergency care for children at risk?

PRAY

Thanksfor all those in our community who look after children

Confessionfor our unwillingness to work with others

Intercessionfor a new attitude in our community toward children

WHAT NEXT?

Your church probably has an outreach strategy. Can you develop a missions team that will reach out to children and families who are in crisis in your community and offer them some practical support as well as inviting them to church. Annexe 4 at the end of the Study Guide may help you with some ideas

MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

Inspirational Video

You can find a short video called '**Community**' that will help you to meditate on this theme by going to <http://www.cranenetwork.org/working-groups/churches/> or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Rx8sOdUfHU>

Sermon Video

To see Revd. Stephen Gaukroger preaching on this theme go to <https://youtu.be/w8kmELyR8W4>

COMMISSION

Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

Matthew 28:18-20 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

APPROACH

Purpose Statement

When we know that we are children of God, that we have been adopted into His family, that children are the recipients of His special care, and that He has given us a responsibility to embrace those in need, then we know that our calling is to help struggling families to become stronger and to embrace parentless children into our own families.

Key Principle

The mission is immense so we can only move forward with God's commission to present life in all its fullness to a world in need of a father.

Fact

The world is changing rapidly. Where there were around 5 billion people in 1990, by 2050 there will be nearly 10 billion – more than 2.6 billion of them younger than 18. Many children born today will enjoy vast opportunities unavailable 25 years ago. But not all will have an equal chance to grow up healthy, educated and able to fulfil their potential. One of the greatest contributors to the vulnerability of children around the world is separation from the love care and protection of their family.

Overview: Setting the Scene

Christian faith places the child in the human family as the best place for their flourishing and thriving. This 'flourishing' involves physical protection and well-being, as well as emotional safety and life opportunities in education and employment. But it also involves spiritual wholeness. Being made in God's image, the child's relationship with Him completes the holistic package of care that faith communities seek to provide. A neglect of this element of wholeness is to the detriment of the child, and robs them of the spiritual resources needed for 'life in all its fullness'.

The needs of children world-wide are vast and complex. The causes of neglect and abuse are many and varied, deep-seated and often embedded in political and social dysfunction.... not to mention simple human selfishness. Faith communities embrace the invitation to spiritual regeneration as part of their divine commission.

STUDY

Take time to study what the Bible says about this theme. Read the selected texts to help set the Biblical context and as you do, ask yourself the four questions about each text.

Selected Texts

Matthew 28 v18-20

Hosea 14 v 3

Matthew 18 v 4

Ask Four Questions

1. What does the passage say?
2. What does the passage mean?
3. What does it mean today?
4. How shall we do this?

MEDITATE

Ask a good reader to read these words slowly and thoughtfully to the group.

Jesus came to his disciples and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.' (Matthew 28 v18-20)

This commission was not given by someone who then died and left us to complete it by ourselves. Jesus rose from the dead, he is alive today, and he has promised never to leave us! As Christians, our job is to preach and teach this good news and to make sure that all of the world is made aware of this!

Jesus said, "A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so they may have life. I want them to have it in the fullest possible way." (John 10:10)

It's a huge task, but God has called us to present life in all its fullness to our communities, our nation and the whole world. This means that every Christian believer – whether they are a lawyer, a teacher, a restaurant worker, a student, a farmer, a carer—must be God's agent of goodness, wherever they are.

As people discover the fullness of life that Jesus offers, they will change, and society will change. God's values of justice, honesty, integrity and compassion will be worked out in daily life.

These kingdom values will also reflect God's care for the vulnerable. Our God, who calls himself 'a father to the fatherless', longs to see society changed so that ultimately:

- all children grow up in a loving family
- all children have the opportunity for a brand new start spiritually as they come to know Jesus for themselves
- all children experience physical protection and emotional safety
- all children have life opportunities in education, employment and good relationships

As faith communities, let us embrace this divine commission!

REFLECT

Reflection Questions

1. What do these bible passages teach us?
2. How is personal transformation linked to societal transformation, and what impact does this have on the place of the child?

Application Questions

1. What do these passages tell us about the importance of children being raised in a family?
2. How do these passages help us to know how to keep families together?
3. What ideas do these passages give us about how we can help children who have no family to find a new family?

Action Questions

1. How should our church life change in response to these studies?
2. How can I share what I have learned with others?

PRAY

Thanksfor children who respond to God's love

Confessionfor ignoring the spiritual needs of children

Intercessionfor more children to become followers of Jesus

WHAT NEXT?

The task of strengthening families, keeping children in families, and finding families for children who have no-one is immense. As a long term strategy, think about these three key steps to building strong, healthy families:

1. What can the church do to protect children from harm?
2. What can the church do to support the role of women in the family?
3. What can the church do to help men to become good family leaders?

Annexe 6 will help you to think how you can put into practice some of the things you have learnt during this study.

MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

Inspirational Video

You can find a short video called '**Commission**' that will help you to meditate on this theme by going to <http://www.cranenetwork.org/working-groups/churches/> or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JStpcR7aGvQ>

Sermon Video

To see Revd. Stephen Gaukroger preaching on this theme go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MaB674wTZVI>

It is an amazing truth that God has adopted us into His family, giving us the full rights of being children of God. List what it means to you to be adopted into His family

List where you see issues of orphan hood and abandonment taking place in your community?

List how you can help those who do not know what a loving family is like to know the love of a family.

Child Friendly Churches

1. There is a vision for children's work in the church
2. Children's workers have been trained:
3. Child protection is in place and is being implemented:
4. The church building offers a safe environment:
5. Nurture groups are available for children and young people:
6. There are opportunities for children to engage in worship in the church.
7. Suitable facilities for under 5s are available
8. Children and young people are involved as equal members of the church community
9. There are outreach opportunities for and with children

Annexe 3 FAMILY

Search Institute® has identified the following key qualities that help all kinds of families be strong.

Nurturing Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Positive communication—Family members listen attentively and speak in respectful ways.• Affection—Family members regularly show warmth to each other.• Emotional openness—Family members can be themselves and are comfortable sharing their feelings.• Support for sparks—Family members encourage each other in pursuing their talents and interests.
Establishing Routines	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Family meals—Family members eat meals together most days in a typical week.• Shared activities—Family members regularly spend time doing everyday activities together.• Meaningful traditions—Holidays, rituals, and celebrations are part of family life.• Dependability—Family members know what to expect from one another day-to-day.
Maintaining Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Openness about tough topics—Family members openly discuss sensitive issues.• Fair rules—Family rules and consequences are reasonable.• Defined boundaries—The family sets limits on what young people can do and how they spend their time.• Clear expectations—The family openly articulates its expectations for young people.• Contributions to family—Family members help meet each other's needs and share in getting things done.

Adapting to Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management of daily commitments—Family members effectively navigate competing activities and expectations at home, school, and work. • Adaptability—The family adapts well when faced with changes. • Problem solving—Family members work together to solve problems and deal with challenges. • Democratic decision making—Family members have a say in decisions that affect the family.
Connecting to Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighbourhood cohesion—Neighbours look out for one another. • Relationships with others—Family members feel close to teachers, coaches, and others in the community. • Enriching activities—Family members participate in programs and activities that deepen their lives. • Supportive resources—Family members have people and places in the community they can turn to for help.

1. Do you agree that these qualities help families to be strong?
2. Are there any qualities listed that you disagree with?
3. Are there any qualities that you would add that are not listed here?
4. Do you see families with these qualities in your community?

Annexe 4 FAMILY

There are growing opportunities for Churches to make family based care a significant part of their life and ministry

Kinship Care: Most children who do not have both living parents, can be cared for by relatives or extended family members. Kinship care includes care by aunts, uncles, grandparents and older siblings and in most countries kinship care is a traditional form of caring for children and enables children to maintain a sense of belonging and family ties.

Respite families can provide short-term care to children who live in their own families with relatives or in adoptive families. This is especially important for children who have medical problems or developmental disabilities that require parents to provide many hours of direct care.

Mentor Families or ‘God Parents’ can provide a one-to-one relationship and specialised attention to children or young people who lack permanent family connections. Mentor families commit to share a child’s life by regularly meeting and connecting with them, taking them out, sharing their joys and pains, taking interest in their lives and choices. Mentor Parents can bring children a sense of continuity and stability, forming strong, family bonds.

Foster Care: In foster care, the natural parents, or the state, remain the legal guardians but the child lives temporarily with another family or foster carer. This option can be used to provide the time needed to create the environment where the child can return to his or her family. It can also provide time to find the right permanent solution with a new family. Foster Carers can be single adults or families. Research has shown that foster care which offers stability, security and good relationships can help children to develop and mature emotionally

Adoption: When all efforts to enable a child to be re-united with his or her biological family or kinship care have been exhausted, domestic adoption may be considered. Adoption is the process where the legal guardianship of a child is transferred from his or her parents (or from the state) to new parents. Those offering adoption are ‘forever families’ for children.

The most common reason quoted as why children become separated from their families is lack of access to education or poverty, while disease, abuse domestic violence, child labour or trafficking are some of the reasons that children may leave home

The 12 strategies below can be used to support families and children. Think through how you could do this practically within your context. Are there other Churches or agencies already doing this? If so, how could you link with them?

1. Focus on the most vulnerable children, not only orphans.
2. Strengthen the capacity of families and communities to care for children.
3. Reduce stigma and discrimination.
4. Support HIV and AIDS awareness and prevention strategies, particularly among youth.
5. Strengthen the ability of caregivers and youth to earn livelihoods.
6. Provide material assistance to those who are too old or ill to work.
7. Ensure access to health care, life-saving medications, and home-based care.
8. Provide day care and other support that ease the burden on caregivers.
9. Support schools and ensure access to education, for girls as well as boys.
10. Support the psychosocial as well as material needs of children.
11. Engage children and youth in the decisions that affect their lives.
12. Protect children from abuse, gender discrimination, and labour exploitation.

Strategies taken from <http://faithtoaction.org/resources/journeys-of-faith-study-series>

Annexe 6 COMMISSION

We want to celebrate as a Church that in response to children and families we are doing the following:

Three new things we have learnt as a result of this study on why families matter are:

As a result of this study on why families matter we will do the following new things:

We will link with the following Churches, organisations, agencies to do these things.

We would appreciate more training on the following for our work with children and families.



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