



# JUST CARE: JUST VOLUNTEERING

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF VOLUNTEERING IN  
ORPHANAGES AND INSTITUTIONAL CARE ON THE  
LIVES OF VULNERABLE CHILDREN.

*BIBLICAL REFLECTION COMPANION  
FOR CHURCHES AND FAITH BASED YOUTH GROUPS*

## Introduction

Welcome to this Bible based reflection tool designed to be used as a companion document to the Tearfund Ireland Just Care:Just Volunteering<sup>1</sup> resource.

The idea of “giving back” or ‘making a difference’ by volunteering overseas is well known in Ireland. Many of us have either volunteered overseas ourselves, or know someone who has. Volunteering in orphanages is popular with many travellers; spending time caring for, or teaching children living in residential care.

Although it is usually done with the best of intentions; research shows that: volunteering in orphanages fuels systems that separate children from their families, harms their development and increases the risk of them being abused. Even well run, well-resourced, orphanages with staff that care about the children cannot replace the care and stability of family-based care in the community.

At Tearfund Ireland we believe that children belong and thrive best in families.

**“A Father to the fatherless, a defender of widows is God in his holy dwelling.  
God sets the lonely in families;” Psalm 68:5-6a**

This resource contains three short Biblical reflections which can be used with groups exploring the impact of volunteering in orphanages and institutional care on the lives of vulnerable children.

Each reflection includes a Bible reading, some thoughts related to the passage, questions for discussion in a group or for personal reflection and a prayer.

There is one reflection to accompany each section of the Just Care:Just Volunteering resource as follows:

**SECTION 1: What’s it all about? - Jesus Welcomes Children**

**SECTION 2: Going a bit deeper - God places the Lonely in Families**

**SECTION 3: Taking Action - The Widow’s Oil**

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<sup>1</sup> You can download Just Care:Just Volunteering here: <https://www.tearfund.ie/get-involved/resource-hub/development-education/alternativecare/>

## SECTION 1 - What's it all about?

### Jesus Welcomes Children

**Read:** Mark 10:13-16

There are several examples of Jesus interacting with children in the New Testament. On one occasion when the disciples were trying to give Jesus some space, they tried to stop some parents from bothering him with a request to bless their children. But although Jesus must have been tired after a busy day, he welcomed the children, embraced them and blessed them.

Jesus then went on to turn the situation into an opportunity to teach one of the most familiar truths about entering the Kingdom of God. Honouring the unique qualities of children, he said:

“Anyone who doesn’t receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.”

### Questions for discussion and reflection

- What does this passage tell us about attitudes to children at that time?
- What does it tell us about Jesus’ attitude to children?
- Can you think of another time when Jesus showed his concern for the wellbeing of children? (Examples include Matthew 18:1-10, the raising of Jairus’ daughter Mark 5:21-43)
- Do you think Jesus is still concerned about the wellbeing of children today?



### Prayer

Jesus, you welcomed young children, taking them in your arms and blessing them when you walked this earth.

Help us to see children as you see them, an example of trust and dependence on you.  
Help us to pause and consider how we can best welcome and care for vulnerable children today.

Transform our hearts and open our eyes to see families and children the way that you see them.

**Amen**

## SECTION 2 - Going a Bit Deeper

### “God places the lonely/solitary in families”

**Read:** Psalm 68:6

This is a simple verse but says so much. God places the lonely or solitary in families. Right from the very beginning of the Bible we find out about the human longing and need for supportive, consistent relationships. A God created need.

Has it ever crossed your mind that even God himself lives in a relationship with others? As part of the Trinity, God the Father lives in constant loving fellowship with God the Son, Jesus Christ and with God the Holy Spirit. The Gospel or good news of Jesus is an invitation to us all to begin a relationship with God.

And God created family as the place for children to receive the love, belonging and protection they need in order to thrive.

### Questions for discussion and reflection

- Why do you think the writer of this Psalm says that God places the lonely or solitary in families?
- In what ways could a child be lonely living with a large group of people? (For example in a children’s home or an orphanage)
- Can you think of anything that a family might bring to a child’s life that an orphanage or children’s home might not be able to?



### Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you that Jesus taught us to address you as ‘Our Father’.  
We pray for the 8 million or so children in the world who are currently living without father or mother in orphanages and institutions.

We pray that you would make a way for them to be reunited with their families and provide new families for them where this is not possible.

We pray for Tearfund Ireland partners and organisations around the world working hard to keep children in families. Give them the strength, resources, compassion and grace that they need at this time. **Amen**

## SECTION 3 - Taking Action

### The Widow's Oil

**Read: 2 Kings 4:1-7**

This passage is set in the time of Elisha, a powerful prophet endowed with the spirit of Elijah.

In the story we read about a vulnerable, helpless widow, in serious debt. It was an accepted custom in Israel at that time that if a family could not pay off its debts, some members of that family would be taken to work for the debtors (Leviticus 25:39-41).

The woman was really desperate; if her children were taken from her she would lose her only family.

But she worshipped the Lord and believed that Elisha, God's prophet, could help her.

Elisha showed the woman that by using what she had to hand (a small jar of oil), with the help of her neighbours and a miracle of God, she could be released from her life-threatening debt and keep her children with her. This story points out that poverty does not only affect people physically and materially, but also places extra pressure on vulnerable parents who want to do the best for their children but may find it hard to provide for their basic needs.

As the Body of Christ, the Church, we can be the neighbours, the people giving some empty jars to those in need, so the oil can flow, the debts can be paid and the families can stay together.

### Questions for discussion and reflection

- What was the threat that the widow in this story was facing?
- Do you think that there are still people facing similar challenges today?
- Who was involved in taking action in the story?
- What can we learn about our role in keeping children in families from this story?



### Prayer

**“Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed.  
Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.” Isaiah 1:17**

Dear God we hear your call to take action for the fatherless and the widow.  
Like the widow in the story may we turn to you and pray for orphaned and vulnerable children.  
Like Elisha give us wisdom about how we can take action to help keep families together.  
Like the widow's sons may we join in and help with initiatives and projects to help vulnerable lone parents provide for their own needs and strengthen their families.  
Like the neighbours in the story, may we share what we have to hand to help with the miracle of your provision.  
Help us to discern what unique part we can play in volunteering our time and expertise in the global movement to see children thriving in safe and loving families.

**Amen**

## JUST CARE: JUST VOLUNTEERING

Exploring the impact of volunteering in orphanages and institutional care on the lives of vulnerable children.  
Biblical Reflection Companion Resource for Churches and faith based Youth Groups

## Further resources and websites that may be of interest:

**The Faith to Action Initiative** Bible Study resources for churches and groups: <https://www.faithtoaction.org/journeys-of-faith-study-series/>

**The Viva** 'Why Families Matter' study series for churches and groups: <http://learn.viva.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Part-1.-Why-Families-Matter-Study-Guide.pdf>

**The Home Coming Project** run by **Home for Good** with the aim of inspiring and equipping individual Christians and churches to promote family-based care for children around the world: <https://homecomingproject.org/resources>

**World Without Orphans** Resources for Churches: <https://worldwithoutorphans.org/resources/for-churches>

**The Global Churches Pledge:** <https://globalchurchpledge.org/>

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