ABSTRACT

Alternative Parenting Experience: A Training for Increasing Participation in Foster Care in the Life and Ministry of Memorial Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri

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This project will introduce the Alternative Parenting Experience (APEX) training as a process for increasing participation in foster care in the life and ministry of Memorial Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri. The project will implement a seven-week intervention with the APEX training, which has three main components: 1) training and certification as a Certified Respite Provider through the Cole County Department of Social Services, facilitated by a licensed social worker, 2) training on the biblical, theological, and social reasons for foster care in the local church, 3) engaging in two respite care events (one in-home interview and one three-hour group respite), and 4) a guided journal to record the experiences of each participant throughout the trainings. Eight church members were selected to participate in the APEX training, each of whom was asked to complete all seven-weeks of the intervention and to take part in pre- and post-intervention interviews. The research of this project was guided by two major research questions: 1) What effect did the APEX Training have on participants’
involvement in foster care in Jefferson City, Missouri and 2) What effect did the APEX Training have on members’ understanding of their relationship with God as parent?
Alternative Parenting Experience: A Training for Increasing Participation in Foster Care in the Life and Ministry of Memorial Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri

A Culminating Project Report Submitted to the Faculty of George W. Truett Theological Seminary Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Ministry

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<tr>
<td>NRSV</td>
<td>New Revised Standard Version</td>
<td>NIVAC</td>
<td>The New International Version Application Commentary</td>
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<td>AB</td>
<td>The Anchor Bible Commentary</td>
<td>NICOT</td>
<td>The New International Commentary on the Old Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>WBC</td>
<td>The Word Biblical Commentary</td>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>The International Critical Commentary</td>
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<tr>
<td>IB</td>
<td>The Interpreter’s Bible Commentary</td>
<td>EBCR</td>
<td>The Expositor’s Bible Commentary Revised</td>
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<tr>
<td>NIBC</td>
<td>The New International Bible Commentary</td>
<td>WB</td>
<td>Westminster Bible Companion</td>
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<td>Interpretation Bible Commentary</td>
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<td>Spurgeon’s Commentary</td>
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<td>NIBC</td>
<td>The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary</td>
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<td>The New International Commentary on the New Testament</td>
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<td>MAL</td>
<td>Mounce Analytical Lexicon</td>
<td>NAC</td>
<td>The New American Commentary</td>
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<td>ZIBBCNT</td>
<td>Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary New Testament</td>
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I am very grateful for my family who have helped me in so many ways to finish this degree and specifically this project. Mom and Dad, thank you for never giving up on me. You have encouraged me to follow Jesus my whole life. I love you.

Finally, to my wife, Amanda, I share this joy with you. You are my inspiration. You provided challenge and compassion when I needed it most. Your reassuring belief eased the stress of staying the course. I am so proud that you are mine and I love you.
DEDICATION

To my wife, Amanda,
and our children, Maryemma, Caleb, Nathan, and Joy.
I love you.
CHAPTER ONE

Statement of the Problem

*Problem Statement*

There is a need for members of Memorial Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri (hereafter, MBC) to be more involved in the care of foster children. Caring for foster children is connected to God’s plan for the church because his care for every believer is demonstrated in how we, though once “orphaned,” are adopted into his family as sons or daughters (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:4–5; 2 Cor. 6:18). When MBC members do not connect with foster children who are desperate for care, they can lose sight of how God cares for his people.

*Purpose of the Project*

The purpose of the project is to increase the involvement of members of MBC in the care of foster children through the Alternative Parenting Experience training (APEX), which was a program I developed to add a biblical/theological foundation and an experiential learning environment to the state’s certification program. Furthermore, the project is designed to positively affect the participants’ understanding of their relationship with God as parent.

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1. APEX training is an Alternative Parenting Experience that provides: 1) training and certification as a Certified Respite Care Provider through the Cole County Department of Social Services, facilitated by a licensed social worker, 2) training on the biblical/theological and social reasons for orphan care in the local church, 3) a guided journal for each participant to record experiences during each phase of the training, and 4) training by engaging participants in one 24-hour and one three-hour respite care event.
Definitions

**Foster Child** — a child who lives with a state-certified alternative parent(s) who is either kin or non-kin of the child. A foster child generally has at least one living parent who is temporarily unable to provide care for him or her. The foster child will remain in state custody until one of three options is satisfied: 1) the foster child is reunified with the biological parent(s), 2) the foster child is released from foster care through the termination of parental rights and the subsequent pending adoption, or 3) the foster child reaches the age of emancipation and therefore is released from state custody (defined below).

**State Custody** — The legal, judicial, physical, and protective custody given to the state regarding the care of a child who is removed from their home temporarily.

**Foster Care** — The care provided to a child in state custody due to situations where it is impossible for the child to remain with members of a non-biological or biological family. Foster care is facilitated by alternative parenting measures through subsidized, state-certified caretakers.

**Foster Parent** — an individual who is biologically or non-biologically related to a child in foster care and certified by the state to provide temporary, alternative parenting for the child.

**Parent** — an individual who commits to the care of a child as guardian, provider, protector, advocate, and authority, either through biological birth or adoption. This

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2. There are other less likely situations that can occur after the foster child reaches adult age and decides to forfeit the benefits available, through the state, until an advanced age beyond eighteen (depending on individual state law).
project will focus on both single-parent and dual-parent homes for involvement in the care of foster children.

*Foster Respite Care* — exclusive temporary relief of a caregiver of foster children.

**Rationale for the Project**

The project has the potential to serve as a catalyst for leading the members of MBC to engage in the care of children who are in foster care. Throughout its sixty-seven-year history, MBC has historically committed to international missions as its primary connection to the care of vulnerable children separated from their parents. The support for traditional mission projects (e.g., Annie Armstrong North American Mission Offering, Lottie Moon International Mission Offering, Ruben L. South Missouri State Mission Offering) meant that MBC had only supported efforts to impact children locally and globally in broad and general ways. Aside from the conviction of a few individual families, the church had not engaged in unified congregational support for children facing crisis and separation from their parent(s).

Five years ago, the church began a partnership with Global Orphan Project (GO) in Kansas City, Missouri, which focused on the ministry of orphanages in Haiti and Uganda as well as the growing needs of U.S. children in foster care. The partnership with GO encouraged MBC to become more involved with caring for children on a personal level through participating in short-term mission trips to orphanages in St. Croix (Léogâne, Haiti), where we packed food and sponsored the children’s education.

As strong as the GO project partnership was, however, there was still a disconnect between our congregation and the children. To help bridge this disconnect, MBC
partnered with the Central Missouri Foster Care and Adoption Association (CMFCAA), which began to utilize the church facility for monthly training meetings for foster parents as part of the continuing education requirements for keeping their foster care license. Typically, a meal will be served before foster parents meet their facilitator for training, and while the parents are in training, the congregation helps the foster children as they engage in open gym play, crafts, yoga, and other experiences. The CMFCAA partnership has provided an ideal opportunity for MBC members to intersect with foster children, since their training brings between fifty and eighty foster children to the church campus monthly.

Although any member could sign up and get involved in mentoring and building relationships with these children, relatively few volunteered for this ministry. Instead, other “outside” ministries began to come to our building to provide support for the foster children on our campus. My thinking was that the church’s slowing of support was an indication of its lack of understanding of God’s special love for foster children (or “orphans,” to use the Biblical parallel). This thought in turn inspired the idea for a training that connected Christians with a biblical command to care for children in crisis.

Research for the project included an immersion into the rich history of “orphan care” in the Christian church. As Chapter Two will show, Scripture reveals God’s call to his people to care for orphans. This call is inseparably linked to God’s nature as Father (or parent) to his people, which means we reveal God’s heart when we care for those without loving parents (Ps. 68:5). God’s example to us is a commitment of unending care, nurture, protection, and belonging. Following the divine model, all children ideally
should have parents who show them such love. Referencing a picture from the OT, Mark Strong draws the connection between a father’s heart and his love for his children:

In the Old Testament, part of Aaron’s priestly garb was the breastpiece. It was a nine-by-nine, artistically crafted, rectangular item worn over Aaron’s heart. On the breastpiece were four rows of three gemstones set in gold filigree. Engraved in each of the twelve stones was the name of one of the sons of Israel. The beauty of this imagery is that Aaron carried the children of Israel on his heart as he came into the presence of God. Whenever he went into the holy of holies, the sons of Israel went in with him.\(^3\)

The picture of God’s high priest wearing the names of God’s children on his heart is an image of God’s love for the children of Israel. What a beautiful image it would be if his church wore the names of foster children on their hearts as they worship God. I am personally impacted both by the image of Aaron’s breastpiece and the call of God to connect with foster children.

I have deeply personal reasons for desiring to do this project. Like many other authors referenced, I have personally experienced fostering, adopting, and providing respite care for foster children. My wife and I have four adopted children, the two oldest of whom were in foster care before we adopted them. Our family fostered our two youngest children for one year before we adopted them, and we have also engaged in respite care for several children over the last five years.

Being personally involved in foster care has shaped my desire to lead others to champion the cause of the children as well. I believe that God has put our family together much like he does his own because he chooses us as his sons and daughters. I have committed myself to serving foster children by finding a way to get more people involved, and I am committed to working with the church where I serve to inspire more

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members to become involved. The sheer number of foster children in America provides a ready and growing opportunity to serve.

Indeed, the alarming and ever-growing number of foster children in the U.S. should reawaken the church to God’s love for the “orphans.” In the U.S., it is estimated that more than 400,000 children have been placed in foster care. In Missouri alone, an estimated 13,000 children currently are in foster care. This trend may have historical roots in Missouri’s history of care for foster children due to the arrival of The Orphan Train in the 1830s. It is estimated that 100,000 of the 400,000 orphans placed on trains to the Midwest from the East Coast were placed with families in Missouri. Many of these children were separated from their parents on the East coast and sent to the West to live on farms. Some were adopted as family members; others were made to work for the families as payment for living in their home.

Although the historical significance is important, the spiritual connection to foster care is critical. The care of foster children is central to the story of every believer, as all have been spiritually separated and apart from God because of sin. As our heavenly Father did for each of us as believers, however, so he continues to welcome all of his “separated” children into his family through his son, Jesus Christ. The care that God

4. Johnny Carr, Orphan Justice: How to Care for Orphans Beyond Adopting (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 111. As of 2104, there were 415,000 children in foster care in the U.S. In 2015, there were 650,000 children who spent time in foster care during the year. The estimates are fluid concerning how many and how long the children remained in care and how many times they returned to care after reunification. From Child Welfare Information Gateway, “Foster Care Statistics 2014” (March 2016), accessed September 2016 https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/foster.pdf#page=3&view=Children%20in,%20entering,%20and%20exiting%20care.


provides is both individual and communal as each is called by name and brought in to be sons and daughters of the family of God. The reunification process is performed through his sacrificial atonement and resurrection from the dead, as the Psalmist declares, “Father of orphans and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation” (68:5). The story of adoption into the family of God is a gracious work that involves the past, present, and future aspects of salvation freely offered to all.

While adoption is one vital option for children in foster care, in the state of Missouri reunification is the priority for children. This means that the children will remain with a foster care provider until further notice. Naturally, the foster family will need intermittent breaks while caring for these children, at which time they rely on certified respite care providers for such assistance. The State of Missouri provides certified training for individuals who desire to participate in respite care, which covers the details of compliance and care regarding respite for foster children. Being a government agency, however, it does not include a biblical/theological component.

In response to this gap, I developed a spiritual training that coordinates with the state training. My hope was that this biblical/theological training would affect how believers understood both their own relationship with God and how they could impact the lives of foster children. The church needed proper training to effectively connect with God’s heart for foster children, and I believed this training would provide the needed addition to the state training that would result in increased participation of MBC members in the care of foster children.

7. Scripture quotations are from the NRSV unless otherwise noted.

Research Questions

There was a need for members of MBC to be more involved in caring for foster children. To help rectify this, I proposed a project designed to increase such involvement by:

1) Providing training and following certification as a Certified Respite Provider through the Cole County Department of Social Services, facilitated by a licensed social worker.

2) Providing training on the biblical, theological, and social reasons for foster care in the local church.

3) Engaging members in two respite care events (one twelve-hour and one three-hour) using a guided journal to study the effects of the certified respite and biblical/theological trainings.

The inquiry into the effectiveness of the project was guided by the following research questions:

1) What effect did the APEX training have on participants’ involvement in the care of foster children in Jefferson City, Missouri?

2) What effect did the APEX training have on members’ understanding of their relationship with God as their spiritual Father/parent?

Significance of the Project

Many authors have written with passion and personal connection about the biblical, theological, and practical reasons for increasing participation in the care of foster children. This project attempted to expand that knowledge by providing an example of how the church might attempt to increase involvement in foster care. It was my hope that this project would affect the way members connected personally with caring for foster children.
I researched how state training equips people for respite care and how my project would further enrich the connection between state and church through biblical/theological training. In addition, I observed how a personal connection with foster children affected members after they completed both the state and the biblical/theological training. I anticipated that members of MBC would find the APEX training beneficial, and that their involvement in the care for children in foster care would enhance their understanding of God as provider and caretaker.

My aim for this project was to create a vision for Christians to partner with foster care families to provide respite care for foster children. Every fostering family occasionally needs respite care, for both the children and themselves, yet the foster children need to consistently experience the caring presence of God’s people. The plan for the project’s biblical/theological training was to help connect God’s heart for his people with the people’s heart for foster children. This training, combined with the practical, hands-on experience through APEX, would result in more children receiving more care and more church members being inspired to be more involved.
CHAPTER TWO

Biblical and Theological Foundations

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to look at the biblical and theological foundations for foster care and adoption, why they should matter to Christians, and how the Bible’s description of the characteristic of God as Father—especially his concern for the orphan—makes participation in foster care a matter of discipleship. As such, this chapter draws parallels between God’s care for orphans and believers’ care of foster children.

Both the OT and NT reveal the importance of family in God’s plan for humanity. The promise God made to Abraham contained his covenant to bless all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:3); thus, even in their old age, Abraham and Sarah had a child named Isaac who began the fulfillment of that promise (Gen. 17:15–16). The Abraham and Sarah story is characteristic of other Bible stories that communicate parents’ roles in caring for children and raising them in the knowledge of God.

Abraham’s faith was tested when God told him to sacrifice his son Isaac. His parental commitment was second only to his obedience to God, which led him to raise a knife over his son on Mt. Moriah before God intervened (Gen. 22:9–14). This kind of commitment is shown in other examples of biblical parents, such as when Hannah gave birth to Samuel, and she determined to commit him to the Lord’s purposes (1 Sam. 1:22). Additional examples include Jochebed’s willingness to hide Moses against Pharaoh’s orders (Ex. 2:2–3), Rizpah’s devotion to look after her deceased sons and protect their bodies from “birds of the air” and “beasts of the field” (2 Sam. 21:10), and the
Shunammite woman who showed great faith in the prophet Elijah when her long-awaited son fell ill (2 Kings 4:32). These fathers and mothers are a few among many examples of godly devotion and the nurturing and care of children recorded in the historical, prophetic, and various narratives of the OT.

Arising from this context, the focus of this chapter will narrow on the passages that primarily describe the parenting attributes of God as Father to Israel, which focus reflects God as a parent rather than solely as a male/father.\(^1\) Guided and inspired by this dual gender characteristic of God, believers can be encouraged to model the commitment of God toward the orphan—the “least of these” (Matt. 25:45)—including foster children, children of single parents, and all other children in vulnerable situations. As an example of God’s parenting of Israel, selected Psalms of Ascent (Ps. 120–134) will be applied to encourage a vision of foster care for believers.

In addition to such OT examples, the NT gospel writers Matthew and Luke begin by telling the stories of Mary and Joseph and Elizabeth and Zachariah (Matt. 1:18–25; Lk. 1:5–38). These passages vividly illustrate the births of Jesus and John the Baptist, respectively, and show the unique way that God uses parents to participate in the spiritual and physical growth and development of children. It is noteworthy that these examples do not portray perfect, but rather obedient, parents.

Likewise, Jesus used the family language (father, mother, sister, and brother) to describe relationships outside biological kinship. When instructing about his relationship with his disciples, he explained that his family members were those who do the will of his Father in heaven (Matt. 12:46–50). Followers of Jesus carry the designation of family

\(^1\) References of God also include motherly/female traits—e.g., Gen. 1:27, Deut. 32:8, Isa. 42:14, Isa. 66:16, Ps. 131:2.
members as they live out his commands, which is further demonstrated in caring for the least of these, the poor and needy, the outcast, widows, and other marginalized members of society (Matt. 19:21, 25:40; Luke 4:18–19). Jesus lived to bring these and all other willing people into relationship with his Father.

Jesus was also concerned about taking care of his disciples in his absence, continuing to care for their needs as they surrendered in obedience, and promising to not leave them as orphans (John 14:18). He determined to provide for them as a faithful parent, which example is consistent toward all who would place their trust in him. For instance, the Apostle Paul is one example of someone who obediently surrendered to the Father’s will. Paul uses familial language about his relationship to younger Christian disciples, like Timothy, whom he names his spiritual son (1 Tim. 1:2). Paul’s reference to Timothy’s family heritage (2 Tim. 1:5–6) highlights the importance of family relationships for faith development. Even beyond bloodlines, all believers are adopted into God’s family and given a place of belonging.

As if to emphasize this even further, Paul chooses “adoption” language to describe the theological significance of how people are brought into relationship with God (Rom. 8:15), who chooses believers to share in his eternal family through the atonement and resurrection of Jesus (Rom. 1:4, 3:24, 8:23). This extended use of adoption points to the security God offers spiritual “orphans” who need a home. James’ use of “orphan” reveals the same perspective, since for him, security was an important theme directly linked to caring for orphans (James 1:27). He instructed believers to practice a religion that cares for orphan’s physical needs for family, resulting in a continuity of care and the security of family for those without one. James’ example will
be expanded further in the NT section, along with a close look at Jesus’ orphan language in John 14:18 and Paul’s adoption language in Rom. 8:15. Together, these biblical texts will function as part of the foundation for a theology of foster care and adoption that informs our Christian understanding of what it means to hear God’s call and exemplify his love in this context.

Beyond the biblical mandate to take care of orphans, church history provides many examples of God’s people responding to the plight of orphans in their communities, which stand in contrast to ancient cultures who practiced infanticide in cases of fatherlessness. According to Joanie Gruber, “Infanticide was universal in ancient Greece and Rome. Babies would often be rejected if they were illegitimate, unhealthy or deformed, the wrong sex, or too great a burden on the family. Female infants were particularly vulnerable.” The early church both prohibited the practice of infanticide and encouraged believers to take these children into their homes. Since infanticide was legal in Roman culture, many children were left to die through a cruel practice called exposure, about which John Aloisi says, “In the ancient world, children who were exposed usually met one of three fates: death, slavery/prostitution, or Christian ‘adoption.’” Gruber and Aloisi both describe a world where one third of children died before ten years of age. This was the context of the first century church—a world where one in three children faced a literal crisis of life and death. Such context equally provided an opportunity for


3. Ibid., 5.

individuals to champion the cause of children, which in turn created concentric circles of compassion that continue in today’s church culture through giving money and various levels of personal involvement.

The early church fathers led the church in this matter through application of Scripture and by living example. In 110 AD, Ignatius challenged the church at Smyrna: “Now note well those who hold heretical opinions about the grace of Jesus Christ that came to us; note how contrary they are to the mind of God. They have no concern for love, none for the widow, none for the orphan, none for the oppressed, none for the prisoner or the one released, none for the hungry or thirsty.”\(^5\) Ignatius connected the reception of grace from God with the giving of grace to orphans and others in need. Polycarp likewise instructed church leadership to pay close attention to the care of orphans as they led the church to fulfil God’s will and bring him glory.\(^6\)

In the East, fourth century Christians developed many hospitals to devote care to orphans, widows, foreigners, the sick, and the poor.\(^7\) Additionally, Western Christians transitioned some of their hospitals into orphanages.

During the period of the Reformation, both Martin Luther and John Calvin recognized the need to care for orphans. Their personal convictions led to a deeply personal connection to orphan care and adoption. Calvin never personally adopted children, but he has been quoted at least twice about his resolve to care for his step-

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5. Aloisi, *Orphan Care, Adoption, and the Church*, 1.

6. Ibid., 2, Aloisi writes, “The presbyters, for their part, must be compassionate, merciful to all, turning back those who have gone astray, visiting all the sick, not neglecting a widow, orphan, or poor person, but always aiming at what is honorable in the sight of God and of people.”

7. Ibid., 3.
children and a close friend’s children as his own, that he might not leave them as orphans. Although Luther did not speak about adoption and orphan care, he and his wife adopted four children who were orphaned after a plague took their mother; additionally, they would eventually take in seven orphaned nieces and nephews.⁸ Among many other examples, these are living witness from church history fulfilling the consistent OT and NT message to care for orphans, the trajectory of which continues to the present.

Orphans in the Hebrew Scriptures

Deuteronomy 10:17–18 (Justice for the Orphan)

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing. (Deut. 10:17–18)

Deuteronomy declares God’s desire for orphans to experience justice and love. God calls his people to act justly toward the marginalized and the neglected and to do so based on their own needs. Deuteronomy 10:18 expresses the mighty nature of God in the superlatives (God of gods and Lord of lords) and connects these directly to his love for orphans. God’s appeal for justice is founded in the emphasis on impartiality, as Duane Christensen notes, “[T]he people are reminded of the fact that they were sojourners in the land of Egypt as ‘resident aliens’ (v. 19).”⁹ There is a direct correlation between the people remembering their own needs and their attending to the needs of others. God’s care for orphans is directly related to his care for Israel, both in Egypt and while being led out in the exodus. He hears his people’s cry for help and answers with justice and mercy.

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⁸. Aloisi, Orphan Care, Adoption, and the Church, 3.

The execution of justice that God requires is personal in nature and provisional in substance. “The phrase (sh mspt) in this context does not mean to sit in judgment and adjudicate the case but to administer justice by helping the poor and the needy, which is one of the main functions of the ruler in the ancient Near East.”10 Based in divine justice, God commands his people to act in love toward the poor, needy, fatherless, homeless, and vulnerable. Weinfeld continues,

It is remarkable that this line of thought—avoiding partiality and therefore caring for the stranger—is attested in the legal codes of the Tetrateuch. Thus we read in the covenant code, ‘Keep far from a false charge . . . do not take bribes . . . do not oppress the stranger for you know the feelings of the stranger having yourself been strangers in the land of Egypt’ (Exodus 23:7–9).11

Thus, God’s care for orphans should become his people’s care as well, and the treatment of orphans should be as people would treat their own children and even themselves. God’s design and desire is for his people to have a special place in their hearts for those who are unable to care for themselves. The Israelites were reminded that they were delivered from slavery, brought out of bondage, faithfully cared for in the wilderness, and eventually led to the Promised Land (Deut. 24:18). Consequently, their bondage and release from Egypt became the foundation and classic illustration of God’s heart of justice for the orphan, and their care of those in need was to be a mirror of what God had done for them.

The God of love calls his people to show his love and execute justice for those who likely have never experienced impartial love. S. R. Driver explains, “[I]n your

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11. Ibid.
attitude towards the dependent foreigner imitate Jehovah, by not only treating him with
justice, but also befriending him with the warmer affection of love.”¹² God alone is
perfect in what he demands of earthly judges,¹³ yet he demands that his people obey his
commands and follow his ways, as Daniel Block observes, “The principle of *imitatio dei*,
the imitation of God, represents one of the fundamental pillars of biblical ethics—Old
and New Testaments. If elsewhere Yahweh calls on people to be holy as he, Yahweh
their God, is holy (Lev. 11:44; 19:2; 20:7; 1 Pet. 1:16), here Moses calls on Israel to
imitate Yahweh’s compassion.”¹⁴ It follows that orphan care is fundamental for
obedience to the will of God.

_Deuteronomy 14:28–29 (Resources for the Orphan)_

Every third year you shall bring out the full tithe of your produce for that year,
and store it within your towns; the Levites, because they have no allotment or
inheritance with you, as well as the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows
in your towns, may come and eat their fill so that the Lord your God may bless
you in all the work that you undertake. (Deut. 14:28–29)

Here, God’s people are challenged to share his blessings through their expanded
obedience and commitment to care for orphans. Agricultural living provided blessings of
harvest for the people who owned land, but those who did not own land were unable to
receive the rewards of landownership. In this passage, the people are commanded to take
a three-year tithe offering specifically for the welfare of the poor, and store it in the

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¹⁴ Ibid., 277.
villages and not in the central sanctuary. Orphans are listed as those who would take advantage of this supply, as Block describes, “The Torah does not envision a welfare system administered by a political bureaucracy and based on a centralized system of taxation. The well-being of the potentially marginalized depends on the charity of all citizens.” Moses initiated a triennial offering that would exclusively support the underprivileged within the community of God. The offering further widened the ethical understanding of “who is my neighbor” among the Israelites. The challenge was for God’s people to better understand who needed help and who should help them.

The resources provided by the triennial offering are linked specifically to Levites who were not given lands to provide for themselves. The destitute, foreigners, widows, and orphans would require the benevolence of the community to survive. In turn, God’s people would receive a direct blessing related to their obedience and generous response to this offering. This call to generosity is on full display in Deut. 15:1–11.

_Psalm 68:5 (Father to the Orphan)_

*Father of orphans and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.* (Ps. 68:5)

Like the passages in Deuteronomy, the Psalms continue the emphasis of God’s care for orphans. God as Father to the fatherless is a title given to display his mighty power as God of compassion. Not only does he defeat the enemies of Israel, but he alone is the “one who defeats the enemies and provides for the forsaken ones with a home.”


16. Block, _Deuteronomy_, 358.
Since Israel rejected its responsibilities to look after orphans and widows in their social contexts, God as Father to the fatherless reveals his concern for this neglected part of society. Orphans and widows depended “on their own ability to scratch out a meager existence on the margins of society or were dependent on acts of charity by compassionate individuals.”\footnote{Gerald H. Wilson, \textit{Psalms}, New International Version Application Commentary, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2002), 936 (cf. Deut. 14:29; 16:11, 14; 24:17-21; 26:12, 13; 27:19).} Without an adult male to help them, they were on their own, but Israel’s Father to the fatherless desired for his people to provide shelter for the homeless. As well, they were to encourage released prisoners to return home to care for their orphaned children.\footnote{Wilson, \textit{Psalms}, 937.}

Father to the fatherless, according to Beth Tanner, “was and remains one of the oldest and most enduring declarations of this God. This is who God shows God’s self to be in the exodus, wilderness, and conquest narratives.”\footnote{deClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, \textit{The Book of Psalms}, 548.} Understanding God as Father connects his people to the legacy of his faithfulness to everyone who has ever wandered aimlessly without hope for a home. God was faithful to provide a home for the Israelites as they left Egypt, and he was faithful to go with them through the wilderness as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exod. 13:21, 14:15–31). He was faithful to defeat Israel’s enemies and to continue to present his people as victorious. Israel’s true home was consistently threatened by foreign enemies, but God faithfully defeated them and reestablished his people’s home.


\footnotetext[18]{Wilson, \textit{Psalms}, 936 (cf. Deut. 14:29; 16:11, 14; 24:17-21; 26:12, 13; 27:19).}

\footnotetext[19]{Wilson, \textit{Psalms}, 937.}

\footnotetext[20]{deClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, \textit{The Book of Psalms}, 548.}
The imagery of God riding on the clouds in Ps. 68:4 is also pictured as God riding through the wilderness. This image reveals God’s power to aid his people and to provide help and hope for all among them who are oppressed. The wilderness represents the earthly dwelling, and the clouds represent the heavenly dwelling; both are brought together to communicate God’s promise to Israel as Father. This image connects God’s desire with his sovereign ability to provide a permanent home regardless of present circumstances.21 The wilderness and cloud imagery also connect the reader to the reality that God pursues his people—who once were orphans—and makes his dwelling among them. He solves the question of who parents Israel by personally removing their orphan status.

God as Father to the fatherless means that he brings the powerless out of exile and returns them to their rightful home. He calls his people home by challenging the alternative realities of life outside his presence. Walter Brueggemann explains exile as “not simply a geographical fact, but also a theological decision.”22 The idea of exile is matched with Yahweh’s promise of homecoming, which is only possible when his people agree with him that they are not home.23 This means that God cannot call one to come home if that one is not in agreement with him that where they currently are is, in fact, not home. “The exiles were securely and perhaps despondently exiles. They could not imagine any other status. They accepted Babylonian definitions of reality, not because


23. Ibid., 94.
they were convinced, but because no alternatives were available.”24 The Israelites did not have any alternatives until God provided one through his power, which is shown as an extension of his faithfulness to fulfill his promises to his people. He released his people from Egyptian bondage and delivered them from destruction. Both releasing and delivering are examples of how God faithfully performs his commitment as the Father of Israel.

_Psalm 146:9 (Watcher Over Orphans)_

The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. (Ps. 146:9)

Psalm 146:9 echoes the message of Ps. 68:4–5 with the addition that God upholds (or reassures) the fatherless and the widow. The root (‘ud) of the verb translated “upholds” carries the meaning to restore, relieve, or repeat.25 God’s assurance is found in his ability to faithfully and completely restore the orphans and widows. This means that he becomes their Father, which was understood in the Hebrew culture as necessary for the permanence of family and home. The verbs in v. 9 are in the imperfect tense, meaning that the action God initiates to assure orphans is a promise of continual action. What God has planned, he will continue until completion.

_Psalm 10:14 (Helper of the Orphan)_

But you do see! Indeed you note trouble and grief, that you may take it into your hands; the helpless commit themselves to you; you have been the helper of the orphan. (Ps. 10:14)


The psalmist declares that God’s vision for his creation includes a deep concern for orphans. He has a heart of compassion for orphans in their distress and power to relieve them from their trouble, grief, and oppression. In deClaissé-Walford’s words, “Here, the psalmist’s trust in God’s sight and the power of God’s hand both bear witness to an active trust in God’s ability to intervene and save. But the psalmist’s trust is more than simply about God’s power; it is also about God’s character.” The personal nature of God’s caring heart provides instruction for his people to follow. Thus, the care for orphans is presented both in God’s transcendent and eminent nature, and his desire is that his people should model the same concern for orphans.

The images of eyes (see) and hands in Ps. 10:14 are combined with others within the whole chapter. The eyes, hands, mouth, heart, face, and nose (the Hebrew word [’ap] translated as anger, literally means “nose”). On some occasions “the metaphorical use of these bodily images soars to the height of synecdoche, in which the wicked persons are portrayed by means of nothing other than their body parts: ‘curse fills his mouth’ (10:7); ‘his eyes lie in hiding for the unfortunate’ (10:8). It is not pushing the use of this metaphor too far to suggest that we all embody our faith, or lack thereof.” People reveal through their actions whether they are God’s people or wicked people, and the care of orphans is a clear indication of the life of faith present in God’s people. The choices God’s people make declare their obedience or disobedience to his prescriptive treatment of the vulnerable in society. Care for orphans is not a one-time act of mercy or


27. Ibid., 144.

28. Ibid.
benevolence; rather, in obedience to God and following his example, it is a lifetime commitment to shelter, relieve distress, and defend the oppressed.

In contrast, the arrogance of the wicked blinds their understanding of God’s ethic of justice, and he knows their evil deeds. According to Wilson, “The wicked enemy claims that God has forgotten and does not see the violence done to the helpless (Psalm 10:11).” He further shows how the repetition of the phrase “seek out; inquire” is evidence of God’s activity to consistently pursue those who oppress the orphan. He continues, “God seeks out (and avenges) acts of blood guilt perpetrated on those who seek him by those who refuse to seek him and who think God will not seek out (or avenge) their wrongdoing.” Thus, God is a true Father to the fatherless who not only cares for them but pursues justice for those who do harm to them.

*The People of Israel as Fatherless Children*

*Selected Psalms of Ascent (120—134)*

The Psalms of Ascent are a collection of fifteen psalms that form a book within the book of Psalms. Willem VanGemeren states that the “Mishnah links the collection of fifteen songs with the fifteen steps of the temple where the Levites were said to sing these songs of ascents (m. Mid. 2.5).” Others call on the historical journey of the Israelites to Jerusalem for the three festivals. Broyles posits, “The precise meaning of the title is


30. Ibid.

31. Ibid., emphasis added.

debated, though it probably refers to the pilgrims’ ‘ascent’ to Jerusalem (cf. 24:3; 122:4; Isa. 2:3).”33 The picture is one of the people of Israel as pilgrims ascending the hill of Jerusalem from their various dwellings in Palestine. They then ascended the Temple mount, the steps leading to which were intentionally staggered to slow their pace.

The songs sung on this journey point toward the relationship that Yahweh desires to have with his people. The concerns expressed in each song are congruent with human experience, as James Limburg states, “In a lecture series on these psalms, Martin Luther said they ‘deal with important teaching and almost all of the articles of our Christian faith, of preaching, forgiveness of sins, the cross, love, marriage, authorities,’ so that they set forth as it were a summary of all essential teachings.”34 The songs have a diverse teaching and application for sojourners of this world—those who need to be reminded of their true home, and those who need to know their true Father (parent) as they journey.

Journeying as orphans holds many parallels to the Israelites as they journeyed to Jerusalem for the festivals. The message of the songs of ascent are significant to communicate to a people who have no father with whom to connect and who lack a most necessary link to home. In this way, the songs of ascent express themes that orphans need to know to understand the love of God and his commitment to orphans expressed in the scriptures. This section will discuss the themes of six selected songs of ascent: He will keep us forever (Ps. 121), he will not abandon us (Ps. 124), he will be our security (Ps. 125), he will be our joy (Ps. 126), he will build us a home (Ps. 127), and he will be our


hope (Ps. 131). The six songs of ascent provide a thematical vision for how God’s people can help connect foster children to the forever care of God as a parent. This vision is God’s eternal plan to adopt “children of wrath” into his family as his sons and daughters.

*Psalm 121 (He Will Keep Us Forever)*

The psalmist expresses anxiety about the environment that surrounds his current state. The hills present a dilemma when considering making an advance toward Jerusalem. Any pilgrim inevitably will encounter difficulty in life and thus be forced to ask the question, “From where will my help come?” In Palestine, the hilltops are shrines and haunts of the gods, according to Hans-Joachim Kraus, who suggests that in a moment of doubt, the question could be asked this way: “From which of the heights does help come to me?”

Similarly, orphans and other sojourners may encounter desperate situations while journeying through life. How one answers this question is based on one’s understanding of God as creator and parent of the pilgrim wanderer. Of course, the psalmist answers his own question with a personal response, “My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”

The creation theme is conveyed in the psalmist’s confident response, as Karus observes, “Because all things are God’s handiwork, he has the power to help whatever may happen; for even now all things are still in his hand.”

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35. “I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore” (Ps. 121:1–8).

psalmist is further conveyed in his “development of the doctrine of God; the guardian of Israel is the guardian of every believer (vv. 3–5).”\(^{38}\)

The description of God as guardian begins with the individual, then moves to the community and then back again to the individual. In other words, God’s complete care is afforded to all who will trust him. The connection of the individual to the community means the individual is helpless to remain individual. In James Mays’ words, “But this individualization of the LORD’s role as protector does not create an independent individual. It is only as one who says ‘our help’ that the pilgrim can say ‘my help.’”\(^{39}\)

God’s complete care is further described in his faithful watch both night and day; he will not rest or take a break when guarding his own.

As VanGemeren explains, the language transitions toward the end of the psalm: “The change from the participial use of ‘guardian’ or ‘watch’ (somer) to the imperfect (\textit{yismor} [three times], vv. 7–8) marks the new emphasis from the present to the future.”\(^{40}\)

God will guard the pilgrim both in the present and forevermore. The psalmist’s assurance gives those who journey a proper vision for dealing with the unknowns of life: “He will keep us now and he will keep us forever.” This is the confidence of the pilgrim, orphan, and all who trust in God, the Father and keeper of Israel.

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Psalm 124 (He Will Not Abandon Us)\textsuperscript{41}

The psalmist declares here, as in 121, that help comes from the Lord. In the former, the declaration is directed toward the individual, whereas Psalm 124 gives a declaration aimed at the community. The repetition of the first stanza in Psalm 124 rallies the community in a unified celebration. The emphasis in this psalm is in vv. 6–7, in which the psalmist declares that the Lord did not abandon his people when the situation was at its worst with no hope of release.

Moreover, the Lord satisfies the needs of his people with deliverance and justice, for within his perfect care are limitless resources to release from trouble. Kraus elaborates on the image of a bird caught in the fowler’s snare,

> It is especially a matter of the little round net that is stretched over a loop and is fitted with a stick bearing bait, or the square net stretched over crossed sticks which was very likely arranged as a shutter and therefore resembled a trap. . . . In its mortal fear the bird that has been caught can tear the net and escape. Israel is like this bird which at the last moment tore itself loose and escaped.\textsuperscript{42}

The celebration of release is joy-filled exuberance as the community realizes that their freedom has been given by God. Kraus translates the last phrase of v. 7 simply, “and we are free!”\textsuperscript{43} One can hear the surprise in their voice as they realize they are no longer dinner for their enemies—rather, they are set free by the faithful commitment of God without a moment to spare. This is the celebration of sojourners, pilgrims, and orphans

\textsuperscript{41} “If it had not been the Lord who was on our side—let Israel now say—if it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when our enemies attacked us, then they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us; then the flood would have swept us away, the torrent would have gone over us; then over us would have gone the raging waters. Blessed be the Lord, who has not given us as prey to their teeth. We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers the snare is broken, and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth” (Ps. 124:1–8).

\textsuperscript{42} Kraus, Psalms 60-150, 442.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 439.
who have learned to trust in the faithfulness of a God who will never abandon them.

Psalm 125 (He Will Be Our Security)\textsuperscript{44}

The immovable presence of Mount Zion and the ring of mountains surrounding Jerusalem combine to provide a vivid image of the security of God. Limburg captures, “The sight of the city nestled in the middle of the protecting mountains strikes the psalmist as a good illustration of God’s relationship to God’s people: God surrounds them, protects them, cares for them. Once again, the duration of the relationship between God and people is emphasized: ‘forevermore.’”\textsuperscript{45} This timeless security of God leads the righteous to confess that God will always protect those who are in his care.

God’s people, however, do not maintain their security through the strength of their commitment; quite the opposite, they are only secure by his presence. The memory of the wicked is a constant reminder to them of all that they have endured at the hands of their enemies. Even so, in the dwelling place of God, there is complete security, as Kraus emphasizes, “[A]n impenetrable boundary has been set for all hostile desires and ambitions of the ungodly which are intent on oppressing and destroying the people of God.”\textsuperscript{46} What God has established, he will secure for the one who trusts him, who trusts in his complete provision, no matter what their past experience has been. The pilgrim, sojourner, and orphan are safe and secure in the power of God.

\textsuperscript{44} “Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people, from this time on and forevermore. For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, so that the righteous might not stretch out their hands to do wrong. Do good, O Lord, to those who are good, and to those who are upright in their hearts. But those who turn aside to their own crooked ways the Lord will lead away with evildoers. Peace be upon Israel!” (Ps. 125:1–5).

\textsuperscript{45} Limburg, \textit{Psalms}, 434.

\textsuperscript{46} Kraus, \textit{Psalms 60-150}, 446.
Psalm 126 (He Will Be Our Joy)\(^47\)

The psalmist tells the story of God’s people released from Babylonian captivity, which VanGemeren describes as “a dream come true, especially in the light of the exalted interpretation of this event by Isaiah 40–55 as a second exodus, God’s ‘new thing’ (Isaiah 43:19).”\(^48\) Indeed, the people shouted for joy upon their release from captivity. The language of vv. 1–3 is pointed toward the past tense, where the language of vv. 4–6 is rooted in the present tense. The God who met the need of his people in the past is called on to meet the current needs of his people. The reminder is given that those who weep will rejoice as they did once before.

The tension of life for everyone is documented between vv. 3–4—the memory of what was fuels the belief of what will be. It is often impossible for those who have only known sorrow to experience the dream of restoration. The Israelites recalled God’s faithfulness during the difficult days of dryness portrayed in the dry river beds of the Negeb. The river beds were filled with the winter rains, however; there was refreshment where there was once parchment. As Broyles puts it, “Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy, is a call for both hope and patience. Hope is as certain as reaping follows sowing.”\(^49\) The celebration of God’s people will return in due time.

The people rejoiced at the wonderful acts of God’s promises fulfilled. The work

\(^47\) “When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, ‘The Lord has done great things for them.’ The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced. Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the watercourses in the Negeb. May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves” (Ps. 126:1–6).

\(^48\) VanGemeren, Psalms, 1195.

\(^49\) Broyles, Psalms, 458.
of God to restore the worshipping community and the return of families to Jerusalem was almost more than they could imagine. What an ecstasy or euphoria to survive and recall the bitter turned into blessed, yet this is exactly what happened. The people participated in a congregational celebration of joy in reflection of their past wrapped up in God’s faithfulness. Allen observes, “[I]t [the dream state they were in] marked a sharp reversal of the harsh reality of their former distress. In the court of the sanctuary they recall their reaction of joyful excitement and record the Gentiles’ reactions of awe, whereby even they were forced to admit that Israel’s God must be the author of such a transformation.”

Just as God performed this unbelievable act of deliverance before, he can and will do it again. This is the hope of the pilgrim, sojourner, and orphan as they understand the reality that the joy of the Lord is their strength (Neh. 8:10).

_Psalm 127 (He Will Build Our Home)_

Psalm 127 functions as religious poetry in vv. 1–2 and 3–4 with the images of rest and bread combined with house and city, which according to Allen, “would not naturally in such a context be interpreted as indicating the temple and Jerusalem, and function as a warning to be alert to Yahweh’s personal will rather than trust in these mighty religious symbols.” The psalmist provides a picture of God’s plan related to building individual

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51. “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives sleep to his beloved. Sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of one’s youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them. He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies at the gate” (Ps. 127:1–5).

52. Ibid., 178.
homes and his commitment to make his people’s houses places of peace and blessing. At the same time, the caution to be alert for the prominence of futility is woven through the wisdom for the builder and the guardian. Believing the Lord will establish the present and future of his people is the foundation of trusting God.

The fundamental elements of Hebrew culture are expressed in this psalm. For Mays, Hebrew life “was set in the social unit of the family and supported by work.” Of course, there were no guarantees that the work performed would be profitable or that marriages would be fruitful. The psalmist turns the people toward the reality of God as the source of all of life’s blessings. “No projects are completed unless they are embedded in the larger purpose of God,” Mays states. God’s faithfulness is promised to those who will trust their whole lives to his complete plans. The picture of house building is dreary in this psalm, since all the toil and work results in meaningless effort apart from God’s help. Alister McGrath and J. I. Packer express this thought poetically, “Great houses have been erected by ambitious men; but like the baseless fabric of a vision they have passed away, and scarce a stone remains to tell where once they stood.” With God’s help, his people will build houses that last.

The psalmist concludes the song with the image of children, who are a heritage from the Lord and a blessing wholly dependent on the Lord’s work. Both the building of houses and the building of homes are carefully guarded and granted by the Lord. In addition, the psalmist points to the picture of the womb. Until this point, the psalm


54. Ibid.

concentrates on the male dominant image, but now the mother’s womb is pictured in the form of reward. The mother experiences the reward of children as well as the father, as McGrath and Packer point out, “He [God] gives children, not as a penalty nor as a burden, but as a favor.” God will reward his people with children to bless their homes.

While both the mother and father are brought into the blessing of God, the Psalm describes the father’s blessing and benefit on behalf of the family. Allen points out,

The psalm concentrates upon the particular value of sons born to a man not too late in life: they would be old enough to protect their father in his declining years. If he were wrongly accused in the law court just inside the city gate, they would rally round, ensuring that he was treated justly and defending his interests in a way denied to loners in society, such as widows and orphans (cf. Isaiah 1:23). Here, the implication of warrior is related to children as the eventual protectors of their parents: “[t]hey were God’s arrows against injustice within the local community.” In the same way, if orphans are received as a blessing from the Lord and welcomed into the hearts and homes of God’s people, not only will they receive the blessing of family, but they in turn will become a source of protection for the family.

Psalm 131 (He Will Be Our Hope)

With words of hope and trust, the psalmist declares a quiet reassurance in the care of a loving father. This begins with believers’ decisions not to fill their eyes and minds

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58. Ibid.
59. “O Lord, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like the weaned child that is with me. O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time on and forevermore” (Ps. 131:1–3).
with things that challenge the majesty of God. The psalmist acknowledges that looking down one’s nose is the only way to look at people once one’s eyes are raised. Limburg explains, “This sort of body language is an expression of arrogance, an attitude of self-promotion that finally ends up in wanting to take over matters properly belonging to God.”60 The psalmist admits some things cannot be answered in this life, and that for these questions, the individual must turn to the Lord.

God is also presented in this psalm as a nursing mother. Though rare, this is not the only occasion in which a feminine picture of God is used to describe his nature and function.61 For example, in Psalm 131, the “Lord is like a mother, the psalmist a child depending on that mother.”62 The supportive care of God during every season of Israel’s history is remembered in this image of mother and child. Allen describes the relationship as the psalmist “individualizes this communal caring (cf. 23:1), whether glancing at the child he was even now carrying or merely thinking of the welcome burden that was at other times his own or his wife’s. Such was his relationship to God, the mother and father of his soul (cf. 27:10), and he would not have it otherwise.”63

The weaned child is a picture of a child who has completed nursing and no longer needs the mother’s breast. The child has transitioned in relationship with the mother; the relationship now is enjoyed apart from direct nourishment. God’s faithfulness results in a maturing of the child and the resulting mature relationship that is enjoyed. “Having once found acceptance and salvation (the Hebrew root of ‘weaned child’ [גמל gml] means

60. Limburg, Psalms, 450.


62. Ibid.

63. Allen, Psalms 101-150, 199.
fundamentally to ‘deal fully with’) and nurture at the mother’s breast, the weaned child returns for comfort and security to the mother’s loving embrace,” Keck writes.64

Even though they have not been assured of salvation, the hope of Israel is found in the people’s willingness to return to God because they trust that he will give comfort and security. Like adult children who instinctively return to their mother as a source of faithful caring, so the pilgrim, sojourner, and orphan are called to return to God and experience a deep and abiding hope that God will care for and provide for them; and until he does, they will be kept in perfect peace.

Orphans and Adoption in the New Testament

The Gospels address the concept of orphans or desolate ones thematically as Jesus describes his ministry of reconciliation for all people. Although the word orphan only appears once in the Gospels (John 14:18), the concept of orphan care is displayed in Jesus’ teachings, e.g., “For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Matt. 12:50). Jesus dispels the notion that biological relationship is mandatory to bring people spiritually into the family of God. He changes the status of family and titles of individuals into a new definition of family in relationship with himself. This is good news for orphans since they have no connection to family lines.

Although Jewish leaders challenged Jesus’ authority to release people from captivity and grant them freedom from spiritual bondage, his language to call “sons and daughters” out of such bondage exists only in the context of that freedom. Even though they desired to follow him, the new believers in John 8:31–36 had a difficult time

understanding the relationship between freedom and the truth Jesus presented. He described the slavery that results from sin as a bondage from which they could not escape without his sacrifice. The people replied saying, “We are descendants of Abraham, we have never been slaves to anyone” (John 8:33). They considered the lineage of Abraham a link to righteousness but had forgotten that Moses said, “Remember you were slaves in Egypt” (Deut. 15:15). J. Ramsey Michaels notes, “Their answer conspicuously ignores Moses’ repeated commands in Deuteronomy.”

Not only did he offer freedom from slavery, but Jesus challenged the prevailing power of lineage regarding freedom and belonging as children of God. The Jews believed their hope was found in their history, but Jesus declared their hope was in the future. The true freedom that Jesus offered pronounced both release from the slavery of sin and the joining of an eternal relationship with God. He proclaimed, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:34–36). Jesus’ desire for all who would follow him was to experience what is meant to become children of God, a part of the Father’s household forever.

This is a powerful physical and spiritual contrast to the idea of orphans remaining outside the household of God unless someone provides entrance. Using the metaphorical image of sheep and shepherd to portray God’s relationship to his people, Jesus provides that way into the Father’s house, which highlights his character as caretaker for the weak. Sheep are desperate and helpless without a shepherd, and Jesus’ reference to himself as the Good Shepherd (John 10:10–11) emphasize the special relationship he desires with

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those who belong to him. John 10:29 says, “My Father, who has given them to me, is
greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the
Father are one.” The Good Shepherd is both compassionate toward the sheep and
defender of the flock, keeping them safe.

Jesus obeyed the Father’s commands and allowed his bodily sacrifice to secure a
relationship with his sheep that is eternal. This special relationship between sheep and
shepherd indicates that Jesus is concerned with bringing people into secure relationships.
His knowledge of the sheep is intimate, like members of a family: “My sheep hear my
voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27). The sheep will never be more
secure or more cared for than when a committed shepherd rescues them from eminent
peril. This is a natural parallel for orphan care and also a vision for reaching into the lives
of the most vulnerable and bringing them into the safety and secure care of families. The
degree of commitment is established in Jesus’ willingness to lay down his life for the
sheep, as in John 10:14–18,

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me. Just as the Father
knows me and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I
have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will
listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the
Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one
takes it from me, but I lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This
charge I have received from my Father.

Jesus declares that his passion and love for the sheep is based on his decision to
voluntarily give his life. He is not coerced or held against his will; rather, he voluntarily
desires to love the sheep sacrificially. His passion for the sheep is parallel to the Father’s
love for the world, a special relationship that George R. Beasley-Murray describes:

The Father’s love for the Son is linked with the Son’s death for the world. This
event is naturally not represented as the origin of that love but its supreme
manifestation and enactment. The Father willed that the Son should lay down his life for humankind (v 18), and the Son obeyed, in freedom, and with sovereign authority from the Father. The mutual love of the Father and Son thus was seen in a deed of love for the world, in which the Father in love willed to save all and the Son in love freely gave his all.66

Sin leaves people desolate and outside God’s family; it leaves them dead and without hope in the world. The love of Jesus, however, brings all people into a right relationship with the Father, and because of God’s sacrificial love, everyone has entrance into an eternal and inseparable relationship with the Father through the Son. This is good news for all people, including orphans.

Orphans in the Gospel of John

In John 14:28, the writer uses the Greek word (orphanos) which means bereaved of parents, orphan, or desolate one.67 The context is Jesus reassuring his disciples that he will return for them after he withdraws from them for a little while. The concept of orphan is placed between two references to the Holy Spirit’s accompaniment in the interim. Jesus affirms his commitment to his followers not only in his physical presence, but in both his physical and, most beneficially, his spiritual presence. Jesus is the faithful parent of his children who will never leave them to fend for themselves.

Jesus gives the Spirit to comfort and guide the disciples; he is both “Helper to be with you forever” and “Teacher to be with you forever” (John 14:16, 26). Because Jesus

66. George R. Beasley-Murray, John, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 171. [Beasley-Murray quotes an additional source for clarification to his own commentary. The significance of the statement was well perceived by Hoskyns: The love of the Father for the Son is set in the context neither of the original creation nor of a relationship which existed before the world was made, but of the love of the Father for the world of men and women . . . The love of the Father is directed towards the Son, because by him, by his voluntary death, the obedience upon which the salvation of men depends has been accomplished (379).]

promises to come back to his people, they can trust that he will fulfill his eternal commitment to care for them. In the meantime, the Holy Spirit is evidence of his eminent presence during his physical absence. It is this comprehensive care of his disciples that keeps them from becoming orphans. Moreover, Jesus’ reasoning as he explains his departure seems couched in orphan-related language: “I am going away to make a place ready for you, even give you a room in my father’s house, so you can be with me in that home” (John 14:1–3). The big picture is one of the Father’s love to accommodate into his eternal dwelling everyone orphaned by sin. In addition to making room, the picture conveys the grandeur of the accommodations provided by the grace of God for his beloved children, however formerly unloved or undeserving they had been. The Father is ready to personally provide for every orphaned soul. Jesus understands the troubling anxiety of a future without a connection to home. He comforts the disciples by telling them that their place is within the Father’s house—not annexed by relationship, but rather brought inside his personal residence—and there they will find their dwelling place.

Jesus protects the disciples from becoming orphans in three ways: 1) the presence of the Holy Spirit which he promised would come after he withdraws for a while, 2) the Easter celebration of his resurrection after his death and burial, and 3) the parousia (second coming) of Christ at the end of the age.

First, the Holy Spirit carries on the ministry of Christ’s presence through an increase of intimate care (John 14:12–13, 16:13). Jesus’ disciples experience the indwelling Holy Spirit as an unmertited favor based on his grace. Gerald L. Borchert informs, “It is, however, crucial to recognize that the gift of the Paraclete is not to be understood as some kind of *quid pro quo* between Jesus and his followers, as though the
market exchange for the Holy Spirit was our obedience.” The Holy Spirit is the gift of God’s presence to secure the relationship that he has begun and will complete when he brings his children to the Father’s house.

Second, since the church ultimately is beneficiary of his resurrection, Jesus’ rising from the grave gives evidence that nothing will be able to separate him from his disciples. His resurrection fulfills the comfort he gives to his disciples, because unless he is raised from the dead, there is no hope, and his commitments to keep his disciples are empty. Instead, the grave where he laid is empty and his promises are fulfilled. Even while absent from them, through the Spirit, he does not leave or forsake them.

Third, the second coming of Jesus is the final expression of the shepherd’s commitment to keep his sheep (disciples) until the end. He rose from the grave to secure the spiritual intimacy he desires with his people, he promised the Spirit to abide with his disciples in his short absence (John 14:19, ESV), and he will fill and finish his Father’s house in his second coming. Burge attests, “It is significant that in 14:3 Jesus does not simply promise his return, but adds, ‘I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.’ Jesus’ return will encompass a reunion with his disciples and a departure that escorts them to another place, where Jesus is.”

In sum, the above three realities of Jesus’ perfect care of his disciples means there will never be a break in fellowship, protection, guidance, love, forgiveness, or any afforded blessing to believers in him. The Father’s love for his children means they will


never be orphaned; rather, they have been brought into his family and are forever secure. Scripture encourages these characteristics of God’s love to be present in his people, exercising Jesus’ commitment to give sacrificially to provide and sustain a loving relationship with those who are orphaned, so that they might know the Father and live secure in the knowledge of his love.

Adoption in the Writings of the Apostle Paul

The Apostle Paul uses the word *huiothesia* (literally, to bestow sonship on someone) five times in three of his epistles (Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). The five usages can be grouped into three types: 1) about Israel (Rom. 9:4), 2) about the individual (Rom. 8:23), and 3) God’s desire to grant believers “sonship” (Rom. 8:15, Eph. 1:5, and Gal. 4:5). Sonship is equivalent to adoption, according to Longman and Garland, because it “bears a relationship to justification in that it is declarative and forensic (inasmuch as it is a legal term). Adoption bestows an object standing, as justification does; like justification, it is a pronouncement that is not repeated. It has permanent validity.”

In NT times, Roman law stated, “Adoption—which could take place at any age—canceled all previous debts and relationships, defining the new son wholly in terms of his new relationship to his father, whose heir he thus became.”


emphasis that God’s adoption belongs to Israel (Rom. 9:4) has now become a blessing “transferred to Christians.” Thus, the Roman audience would have understood that the sonship provided through adoption was a binding relationship. Roman historian William M. Ramsay explains,

The Roman-Syrian Law-Book . . . where a formerly prevalent Greek law had persisted under the Roman Empire—well illustrates this passage of the Epistle. It actually lays down the principle that a man can never put away an adopted son, and that he cannot put away a real son without good ground. It is remarkable that the adopted son should have a stronger position than the son by birth, yet it was so.

God takes believers out of their sin and brings them into his family as children of God, “and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17).

Adoption is God’s completed act of redemption for every orphaned sinner; they are saved by his grace, adopted into his family, and forever secure in his love.

In addition to Rom. 8:15, the NT texts around the theme of adoption have certain characteristics that can be readily understood:

a. Adoption is by God as Abba (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15).
b. Adoption is due to God’s love (Eph. 1:5; 1 John 3:1).
c. Adoption is through Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:26; Eph. 1:5).
d. Adoption involves the Holy Spirit’s joint testimony with the human spirit that believers are indeed children of God (Rom. 8:16).
e. Adoption means that those who are led by the Holy Spirit are sons of God (Rom. 8:14).
f. Adoption is a transition from slavery to the freedom of sonship (Gal. 4:5–7; Rom. 8:15).


74. Garrett, Systematic Theology, 315.
g. Adoption involves peacemaking (Matt. 5:9).

h. Adoption leads to the divine discipline of the sons of God (Heb. 12:5–11).

i. Adoption means that God’s children are to have the goal of Christlikeness (1 John 3:2).

j. Adoption brings to the adopted an inheritance (Gal. 4:7; Rom. 8:17; 1 Pet. 1:3–5).

Adoption brings sons and daughters into the family of God with all the privileges of natural children. Paul uniquely expresses this doctrine as one who received the spirit of adoption at his conversion on the road to Damascus. He writes as one who was brought into the family of God by nothing short of God’s grace through Jesus Christ, adopted and secure in the Father’s grip forever.

*Orphans in the Book of James*

The Greek word *orphanos* occurs in John 14:28 and James 1:27. James says, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world” (James 1:27). The practical Christianity that James presents is summarized in this passage as care for orphans and widows, which Johnson interprets, “As a moralist, the writer of James has concern for the way people carry out in action what they profess in speech. The contrast drawn is not between faith and law but between the empty profession of religion and its living expression.”75 James uses the word *threskos*, translated religious (James 1:26), which is the only occurrence of the word in Greek.76 The context shows that James is

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warning his audience of the trap of religious systems and religious piety that are recognized as detestable to God (Isa. 29:13; Matt. 15:8). He uses a more frequent term in the last part of v. 26 and the beginning of v. 27. The word *threskeia*, paired with pure and undefiled, points to the deeds of “compassion and holiness,” according to McKnight, who continues, “These qualities stand in contrast to volatility in speech, heartlessness in response, and being stained by the world. In light of this evidence, it is best to see *thresk* as James’ term for what is visible about one’s faith.” The religion with which James is challenging his audience is based on the combination of both religious worship and religious activity—specifically, the religious activity of participating with God in the care of orphans and widows in society.

The worship of God is focused on activities that change the heart and responses of the worshippers, as Nystrom asserts, “It is not clear what specific practices James has in mind, but like the prophets of old he claims that any religious practice that cannot influence the heart and therefore actions is worthless.” Caring for the marginalized in culture is close to Father’s heart and a mark of true discipleship. The diaspora Jews (James’ audience) would have connected with the OT teachings related to providing clothing and food to the fatherless, widow, and alien (Deut. 10:18; Isa. 1:16–17). Thus, in both the OT and NT, the mandate of care is essential for one to practice pure religion.

The second mark of pure religion is personal purity. The issue of morality is highlighted as James moves from outward to inward evidence of pure religion. He

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78. Ibid.

addresses the subjects of favoritism, riches, speech, and quarrels as ways that God’s people become polluted by the world. Ralph P. Martin remarks, “His admonition is for the readers to retain and guard their distinctive ethos as practitioners of true piety.” For James, the only way to remain pure in piety was to actively and practically serve disadvantaged widows and orphans in their distress and to live with a pure heart toward God and others.

These three NT examples are directly linked to what God determines as spiritual, but which are also capable of having physical implications. In other words, there is a direct link between the spiritual and physical when relating God’s plan for people to have a family. Jesus provided a spiritual promise for his disciples to be connected inseparably to him in his absence—they would not be orphaned. The Apostle Paul describes how God has connected orphaned people into his forever family through his design. Moreover, James connects the spiritual instruction of religion to the practical mandate of care for widows and orphans. These examples clearly show the correlation of God’s timeless plan for his people.

Reflections for the Church Today

The OT describes a God who full of compassion defends his own, showing his character as a dedicated parent, for example, in the Psalms of Ascents. In the NT, Jesus further reveals the character of God’s love as he provides family images, agrarian images of sheep and shepherds, and spiritual devotion to his closest followers while preparing to leave this earth. In addition, the Apostle Paul instructs multiple churches through letters revealing the promises of God for those who have received his grace in Jesus Christ.

Finally, James explains how our spiritual devotion is lived out in practical ways as we take part in God’s mission to connect people in family.

Christians live in light of the clear biblical witness of God’s redemptive example to his people, and are called to engage a world that continues to be filled with orphans. Today’s society continues to be a place of brokenness for families and children and the American cultural context even details strategic moves away from God’s plan for families. In so doing, however, it offers a clear pathway for churches to declare God’s love for foster children. When believers participate in God’s redemptive plan for orphans, they present an alternative narrative in society of the power of the gospel to transform lives.

*Are You My Daddy?*

Today, the ministry of the local church to families find itself in a culture often characterized by father absenteeism. The epidemic of children orphaned or in foster care is undergirded by the statistics of single parent homes. Mark Strong reports, “Studies in the 1990s demonstrated that never before had so many fathers willingly left their children. Many men left their homes and never glanced back.”81 In part, the history of father absenteeism in America was evident in the wake of World War II. Until that time, the family unit was a protected species in America, but during the outbreak of the war, a decision was made to draft fathers of children, which had never before been considered. Strong cites David Blankenhorn’s work, *Fatherless America*:

> Popular opinion remained decisively opposed to drafting fathers. A Gallup poll during the fall of 1943 found that 68 percent of Americans believed that compared to drafting fathers, it was preferable to draft single men employed in industries essential to the war effort. Public opinion also favored drafting single

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women for noncombat military service to avoid drafting fathers. As George Gallup put it, the public objected to the father draft because it would break up too many families where there are children.82

“The public was right,” Strong asserts, adding, “It’s estimated that three to four million fathers were killed in combat, and many others returned home as frustrated, angry men never able to readjust to family life. Others who made it out alive remained absent from their families for months and years.”83 Consequently, the greatest generation experienced the greatest shift in family life that this country had ever known, from which a permanent trend may have become normalized. As stated, Missouri alone has more than 13,000 children in foster care. The absence of one or both parents continues to weigh on the family unit today.

Is there any hope? The project contends that the church needs to increase her commitment to caring for these children and to work with at-risk families to prevent children from entering state custody. The church is equipped to minister to these children and families through the instruction of scripture regarding God as Father of the fatherless and parent of the parentless. The scriptures provide a vision of God’s heart for the underprivileged and forgotten, whether in a local or global context. Moreover, the scriptures will energize people to respond to God’s love in practical ways that impact foster children. “Perhaps no other issue in the scriptures will motivate people to radical, adopting love like seeing the details of God’s adoption of us through Jesus Christ,” Tony Merida says.84 So too, Packer in Knowing God writes, “Our understanding of Christianity

82. Strong, Church for the Fatherless, 20.
83. Ibid.
84. Merida and Morton, Orphanology, 82.
cannot be better than our grasp of adoption.”85 Every believer has been adopted through Jesus’ sacrifice. As sons and daughters, the church has personal experience of God’s love that will create a passion for displaying his love to foster children. The Father has revealed himself in Jesus as a calling to live as he lived and love as he loved.

Renewing the church’s understanding of God as parent will connect the body of Christ to the historical revelation of God and to one of the oldest titles of God in Scripture, “Father to the fatherless.” God personally takes responsibility for the vulnerable as he connects his people to the ministry of caring for foster children. Baptists are among those who have long taken responsibility to connect to the orphaned and orphanages. As an example, George W. Truett, pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas, rallied the giving of special offerings to support many Baptist causes. He was instrumental in developing what was known as “Baylor in Dallas” by leveraging the Baylor ministry and community in the Dallas area.86 In addition to Baylor Hospital, he elicited the support of many cattlemen from West Texas who sent money for the Buckner Orphans’ Home.87 Truett used his gifts to champion the care of orphans through the historic and ongoing work of Buckner.

As another example, George Mueller answered the call to personally impact the care of orphaned children. Faith Coxe Bailey tells Mueller’s story, which includes a dialogue between him and Conger, his headmaster. As Mueller is planning to build a school, he is faced with the fact that he has no students, so he is down and discouraged

85. Merida and Morton, Orphanology, 82.


87. Ibid.
about the lack of students to justify building a school. Even though he is passionate about relieving the plight of children and families in the slums, he is unable to see a way forward with his vision.

Conger acknowledges that Mueller’s vision is a situation over which he has no control, stating, “He might as well try to control the ocean tide that pushes up the Avon river and flooded Bristol harbor. But the tide was God-created. And the almshouses!”88 Mueller resists this notion of God-ordained causes that do not reflect God’s expressed purposes. He responds, “Conger, we can do something. We have to. We have to keep the children out of the almshouse.”89 After a short dialogue about Mueller’s vision of building an orphanage, Conger replies, “Why, sir, you don’t have the time. You’re the pastor of a church. And you have the day school already.” He adds, “Mr. Mueller, you don’t have the money either.”90 Mueller answers his headmaster, “Maybe not. But Conger, why did God put that thought into my head?”91

Mueller would go on to trust God’s calling to build the orphanage, and he continued to trust God to provide for every child in his care. His calling was realized personally because he believed Christians were called to care for orphaned and vulnerable children. Mueller’s view was that the state should not be the primary caregiver of foster children, so he looked after orphans with a personal commitment to love and care for them as if they were his own. Known as the father of orphans, he acquired a great reputation of faith and trusting God to provide for them.

89. Ibid.
90. Ibid., 80.
91. Ibid.
As mentioned, the Bible informs that believers are adopted into God’s family as sons and daughters. The power of adoption places significant emphasis upon God as a parent bringing in his children. Biological children are born but children received through adoption are chosen. God has chosen and appointed his children to be adopted (Isa. 45:4; 49:7; John 15:16, 19; Acts 9:15; Eph. 1:4). Indeed, God plans for every person to experience a relationship with him through the power of his choice. Ephesians 1:4–5, says, “[E]ven as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons (and daughters) through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.” Again, this is a specific reference to the personal nature of the heart of God for the vulnerable. Karl Barth’s theology proposes, “God has claimed human beings as his covenant partners by his powerful act of self-revelation; indeed, God is to be known only in his action, for God is the One whose being is in his act.”

Thus, the church performs the vital ministry of caring for orphans through individual believers’ personal callings based on the expressed desire of God’s will in Jesus Christ. As the incarnate presence of Jesus, the church will be known, in part, by its action toward foster children. Barth’s conception of faith “emphatically includes obedience in action; his position is deeply rooted in the Pauline understanding of participation in the faith of Jesus Christ.” In this way, the church will display the Father’s action of love. In William Klein’s words, “Paul asserts that God determined


93. Ibid., 227.
ahead of time certain states of affairs: that he conform believers to Christ’s image (Rom. 8:29–30), that wisdom achieve the glory of his people (1 Cor. 2:7), and that we be for the praise of his glory (Eph. 1:11–12).94 The church will follow God’s example by having a vision of the unification of children with family. The church’s vision also extends to building children and families to experience God’s image, wisdom, and the praise of his glory.

Although itself a collective, the church’s vision of foster care will remain personal. In order for the church to be involved, each member must make his or her decision about their role in the ministry to foster children. Currently, the government funds foster homes, transition houses, and therapy ranches. The church, however, is called to engage in reaching into the lives of these children to communicate the love of God in both their crises and development into adults. There needs to be a turnaround from the fatherless culture in which the church exists, to the contagious vision of God as a parent who delights in becoming “Abba” to his children (Mark 14:36; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6).

Are We There Yet?

Sometimes, it is easy to feel like children riding in the backseat of the family car when daily activity threatens to disconnect the journey of life from God’s purpose. With limited knowledge of how to get to the destination and even less information about the detours and delays yet to be experienced, believers can become impatient with the journey. One can almost hear the desperation in the exhausted children’s voices, “Are we there yet?” In some ways, the church is showing these same signs of exhaustion. Alan

Hirsch describes how the church must reactivate with Jesus as the central focus,

As must be the case for a movement to survive beyond the initial impulse, the Founder literally must somehow live on in his people, and the vitality of the subsequent message would henceforth depend on the willingness and capacity of his people to faithfully embody his message. The dangerous stories and memories of the Founder are alive in them and call them to a holy and integrated life. In a very real and sobering way, we must actually become the gospel to the people around us—an expression of the real Jesus through the quality of our lives. We must live our truths.95

All too often, the strategy adopted by the church is to employ the next program created and deployed by the convention for use in the local church. The reality, however, is that the new program strategy keeps the church in an unhealthy relationship with felt human needs. Little personal touch occurs when it comes to revealing Jesus in the community and transforming lives. To its enduring detriment, the church has long adopted the abstract program strategy over and above the missional strategy of personal connection to people in need, such as the ministry of foster care. Yet, it is living in the convention stream that can leave a church wearily saying, “Are we there yet?” Turning away from packaged church and turning toward the resurrected Christ is essential for the church to reimagine God’s purpose. Thinking about where people have come from is a sure way to clearly pursue where they are going.

Where have God’s people been? The book of Exodus recalls the story of the exodus of the Israelites from captivity in Egypt toward the land God promised. The Exodus story was then to be remembered as an essential narrative of God’s faithfulness to his people, and parents were to pass the story to their children, to their children’s children, and so on. The Lord commanded the people to remember the Exodus every

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Passover with a special commemorative dinner (Seder). The power of remembering God’s faithfulness would create a people connected to the end from the beginning, which would ensure that the people formed family and community closeness in response to God’s faithfulness. Every person would experience God’s personal care and share that image with the community.

Jesus told his followers to remember his sacrifice through a commemorative meal together. He instructed the disciples to remember his body when they ate bread and to remember his blood when they drank wine, exhorting, “Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19–21; 1 Cor. 11:23–26). The power of memory and remembering is both a catalyst for kingdom advancement and a great detriment to the same. The church gains strength of purpose when believers remember the sacrifice that Jesus made for them. At the same time, the church can experience the overwhelming memory of hard times that have been endured in the past, which can halt her forward progress.

The sacred memory of both the Exodus and the passion of Christ are essential for both Jews and Christians respectively. Miroslav Volf reminds, “To be a Jew is to remember the Exodus. To be a Christian is to remember the death and resurrection of Christ. Of course, Jews and Christians don’t just remember; they also act in the present.” He continues, “All elements of the Seder are designed with one overall goal: to take each person at the Seder back to Egypt, to re-enact the dramatic Exodus story, to make each one of us feel as if she or he had actually been redeemed from Mitzrayim (Egypt).”


97. Ibid., 98.
The same is true of the Christian community. The Lord’s Supper is meant to provide an experience in which the community of Christ reflects on the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus and remembers that each one in the community is a partaker in his death and resurrection.\(^98\) When the church remembers from where it has come, it is inspired to pursue the direction toward which God is calling his people. In this unified picture of sacrifice, the church reaches into a dark world with the light and love of Jesus.

For the Israelites to live in a proper relationship with other people outside their community, they had to first remember they were slaves. The memory of being treated badly would reflect both the way God treated them in deliverance and the way they would treat their own slaves one day. This is true for the Christian community as well, who must never forget they once were orphaned, apart from God because of sin. They were dead and without hope of ever being brought into the family of God, as the scripture says, “But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

The trouble that the church has endured will always be held in its memory but does not have to hold it back. Brueggemann says, “[L]oss leaves its mark,”\(^99\) quoting New York Senator Patrick Moynihan’s reflection on the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Having witnessed the ongoing grief of Kennedy’s wife and children as well as that of the nation, he responded, “We shall laugh again, but we shall never be young again.”\(^100\) Surely God weeps over the same struggles about which the church weeps; he is

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\(^98\) Volf, *The End of Memory*, 98.


\(^100\) Ibid., 73.
not oblivious to the needs of his people. Through every dark night, therefore, the church should carry the image of Christ crucified and Christ redeemed, always remembering that even though there is weeping at night, joy comes in the morning (Ps. 30:5).

The example of Christ in bringing together the wrongdoing and the wrongdoer is a powerful picture of how the church must live in the tension of what has happened to her and what has happened through her. Volf says,

In sum, since Christ identified with the wronged as well as took on himself the burden of wrongdoing, the memory of the Passion anticipates the resurrection from death to new life for both the wronged and wrongdoers. But since he also reconciled them in his own flesh on the cross, the Passion memory anticipates as well the formation of a reconciled community even out of deadly enemies.101

The vision of Christ to set people free is shown in his death as a wrongdoer and his resurrection as one wronged. Both aspects of the Passion are essential for the church to be forgiven of all wrongdoing and to realize that all wrongs can be transformed by his resurrection. This is the vision the church needs to effectively reach out to foster children. The church will pursue foster children when it is willing to let God redeem the difficulties it has experienced and allow their lives to be laid down for others in a redemptive way. The church just might forget how long she has been on this journey and return once again to the joy of traveling with loved ones.

*There’s No Place Like Home!*

The image of home, good or bad, strikes a powerful emotional chord for every person, and the idea of home resonates deep in people’s souls. The exile of Israel proved especially difficult because of their dislocation of home. Hebrew children would grow up

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in a foreign context, removed from the deeply embedded culture, history, promises, and presence of Israel’s God. How do people reconnect to their story when they return home?

The exile was “the end of life with God, which Israel had taken for granted.”\textsuperscript{102} Not only did the community lose their homes, but they lost their relationship with God and were forced to face the reality that they were under his judgment. The exile was a desperate time for Israel, filled with loss and despair, about which Brueggemann opines, “It is my judgment, I think without extravagant overstatement, that our present deep social dislocation is a parallel to that of Israel’s ancient exile in depth, intensity, massiveness, and urgency, in which we, like them, are tempted in the same ways to denial and despair.”\textsuperscript{103} He compares the condition of the church as one who has lost the idea of their spiritual home and their relationship with God. This symbolic parallel of loss that Israel and the church share has congruence with the plight of foster children. Foster children experience similar feelings of denial and despair while also believing that things will be different, and that it is just a matter of time before someone will love them. Many foster children face a long time of unresolved separation from home and family.

The Psalms of Ascent provide a pathway for reorientation to home. The rebuilding of Israel is predicated on the recoding or remembering of God’s truth and the story of his faithfulness. The Psalms of Ascent do just that—in fact, all fifteen psalms have the message of hope in common. For weary souls, the journey to Jerusalem three times a year provided a connection to their true spiritual home. Serving as a sort of respite from the troubles of life, going to Jerusalem flooded the heart with joy and hope.

\textsuperscript{102} Walter Brueggemann, \textit{Deep Memory Exuberant Hope} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 60.

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 60-61.
The themes of six of the psalms in this chapter are: He will keep us (Psalm 121); he will not abandon us (Psalm 124); he will be our security (Psalm 125); he will be our joy (Psalm 126); he will be our home (Psalm 127); and he will be our hope (Psalm 131). Each theme continues to build and rebuild confidence in God’s followers, reflecting longings that all humans exhibit on certain levels. Whether they have been exiled or taken into state custody, these themes communicate hope amid the heaviness of an uncertain future. They also describe the reality of God’s faithful care for his people.

Although God chose Israel to have a relationship with himself, the community was often separated from him because of disobedience. Yet, though the people consistently disobeyed, God was faithful to love them back, promising to never leave them or forsake them. The prophet Isaiah penned, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you” (Isa. 43:2). Inexplicably, no matter how much God committed himself to his people, the Israelites always found a way to run from him. Unchanging in nature, God also chose NT believers to be redeemed by his grace. In Christ Jesus, no matter how far people run from him, he is willing to forgive their sins. Jesus Christ suffered in his death and was raised triumphant, about which Lesslie Newbigin comments,

To be elect in Christ Jesus, and there is no other election, means to be incorporated into his mission to the world, to be the bearer of God’s saving purpose for his whole world, to be the sign and the agent and the firstfruit of his blessed kingdom which is for all. It means therefore, as the New Testament makes abundantly clear, to take our share in his suffering, to bear the scars of the passion. It means, as Paul says elsewhere, to bear in the body the dying of Jesus so that the life of the risen Jesus may be manifest and made available to others.104

God has elected people to share in his story of redemption; however, people are tempted to lose sight of the kingdom purpose of God as they live in an increasingly secular culture. God’s people must undergo a constant refreshing of the story of his redemption for mankind, which is particularly important when considering foster care. If God’s people forget they were chosen when they were lost, wandering, and without hope, then the church will struggle to engage in loving ministry to foster children. The timeless Psalms of Ascent offer this type of reconnection, which is necessary to believe again that God has in his purpose and plan for his people a supply that will be more than enough to reach out to even the hardest cases.

The Psalms of Ascent further provide a challenge for the church as she exists in a world that causes believers to focus more on the constant longing for what they do not have rather than being creative with what they have been given. Brueggemann asserts, “Consumerism is not simply a marketing strategy. It has become a demonic spiritual force among us, and the theological question facing us is whether the gospel has the power to help us withstand it.”105 As long as believers continue to live as though they do not have enough, they will not be confident in God’s provisions.

The Psalms of Ascent call the people to remember that God is building a relationship with his people through his own benevolent acts of mercy, not relying on anything done in return. This return to full reliance on God has the potential to call people to share in a radical ministry of love to foster children. God walks with his people on a journey to bring them into his presence—the Israelites to Jerusalem and Christians to Christ—and he spiritually guides them to ascend the mountain to spend time with him.

Angela Reed expresses, “By spiritual guidance, I mean a ministry of companionship in which Christians support one another in their Christian formation by helping each other to notice God’s presence and activity in their lives.” Ultimately, God’s faithfulness to lead his people is modeled in his people’s response to lead others.

In reflection, the Psalms of Ascent can serve as a pathway of discipleship for Christ’s followers as they learn both to release their grip on the world and take hold of the hand of the savior. It is possible that when this happens, Jesus’ followers may well find they have a free hand to take hold of an orphan or foster child on the journey of helping someone else to find the permanent home that followers of Jesus have found.

In climbing, the Sherpa are acclimatized natives of mountainous regions. They are responsible for helping carry supplies and to chart the route to both remove some of the climber’s burden and to make sure the way is trustworthy. Followers of Jesus have an opportunity to help foster children ascend the mountain of God as they have made the journey themselves. The help would come in the form of both lightening the childrens’ load of worry and cares as well as making sure of the way they should follow. This is the kind of responsibility that God desires for his children—welcoming people who have not found their spiritual home and, even more important, their spiritual parent.

Conclusion

Foster Care is a significant need in today’s world, and there are many ways to be involved in caring for children who need someone to care for them. This includes options for mentoring, training, fostering, respite care, and many other practical services for

foster children. The mandate of God to care for the fatherless is a personal call; the care of orphaned children is not meant to be outsourced to the world. It is the responsibility of the church to act as God has acted in his loving embrace to bring people into his family.

God the Father models his calling for his people to personally care for orphaned and vulnerable children. In the same way, Jesus’ commitment to his disciples was not to leave them as orphans; rather, he cared for his own in a special way to communicate the security of their place with him. The Apostle Paul inspired believers in the first century church to understand their place with God through adoption, secure in the Father’s love. James mandated the care of orphans as a practical outworking of a follower’s faith in Jesus Christ.

Each of these examples provides a biblical vision for why/how believers can/should engage in the care of foster children, orphans, and other children who are vulnerable. The church has an opportunity to take hold of the vision God has shown his people, who have the ability and means to relieve the disconnection of foster children and help bring them to their rightful home—at home with God.
CHAPTER THREE

Method

Introduction

There was a need for members of MBC to be more involved in foster care, because foster care is connected to God’s plan for his church in that every believer is adopted into God’s family as sons and daughters. MBC experienced a slowing of support for children in foster care that reduced their commitment level to an area that is close to God’s heart. As shown in Chapter Two, Scripture reveals God’s call to his people to care for foster children (or “orphans,” to use the Biblical parallel).

The purpose of the project was to increase the involvement of selected members of MBC in foster care through the Alternative Parenting Experience training (APEX),¹ which, as explained above, is a curriculum I developed to contain both state certification and biblical/theological training. The APEX training consists of a guided journal and an experiential learning environment designed to increase participation in foster care and strengthen each participant’s relationship with God.

Description of the Intervention

A primary goal of the project was to bring about an increase of participation in foster care through a nine-week intervention that included: 1) completion of the state respite care training, 2) six one-hour biblical/theological trainings, 3) one twenty-four-

¹. Alternative Parenting Experience, detailed in Chapter 1.
hour respite, and 4) one three-hour respite experiences. The state respite care training was 
a three-hour training that occurred on a Saturday morning at MBC. The training included:

- Meeting at MBC, a building with which the participants were familiar.
- Facilitation of State Certified Respite Care Provider training (see Appendix C) by a licensed social worker.
- The training covered topics such as trauma, medications, selection check lists, discipline, and communication with the Department of Social Services.
- The training concluded with filling out all certification paperwork provided by the State of Missouri (see Appendix D).
- The training was open to other people in addition to the participants of this research project.

The project brought together the state respite care training with a focused time of biblical/theological training, which included:

- Six one-hour lessons focusing on selected Psalms of Ascent and their respective themes linked to believers’ relationship with God as Father (parent), including: He will keep us forever, He will not abandon us, He will be our security, He will be our joy, He will build our home, and He will be our hope. These themes are developed in Chapter Two.
- The six lessons (see Appendix E) provided learning objectives that gave opportunities for the learners to use the information learned.
- The lessons encouraged the participants to expand their understanding of God’s promises to personally impact their lives with his presence.
- Each lesson was supported by Eugene Peterson’s work “A Long Obedience in The Same Direction.”
- Each one-hour lesson took place in the Fellowship Hall of Memorial Baptist Church.

2. Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in The Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000). Peterson’s work is a traveler’s guide for understanding the journey of discipleship through the Psalms of Ascent. Peterson provides graphic images related to the wandering community of Israel that I believe represent the condition of orphans. Three times a year, the Israelites would journey to Jerusalem singing the songs of ascent. This journey provided a renewal of their understanding of God as Father and Mt. Zion as their true home. I hope that the participants will make the connection between Israel, orphans, and themselves in relationship with God as Father.
Each participant responded weekly to questions in a guided journal (see Appendix H). The guided journal asked questions particular to the content of each week of the APEX training. The nine-week guided journal topics were:

- Week One: Certified Respite Care Provider training
- Weeks Two-Seven: The Selected Topics of the Psalms of Ascent (Chapter Two)
- Week Eight: twenty-four-hour respite care experience
- Week Nine: three-hour group respite care experience

The final APEX training component comprised two respite care experiences. The respite experiences included:

- One twenty-four-hour home-based respite care event that included an overnight experience with a foster child.
- The overnight experiences took place in the participants’ homes.
- The participants selected and interviewed a family and their child(ren) for consideration for respite care. Once selected, the participants arranged an overnight schedule for respite care.
- Overnight (twenty-four-hour) care experience included (subject to appropriate care of the child depending on their age and/or needs) feeding, playing, reading, preparing bedding, nurturing with biological children in the home, appropriate bathing, and night time routine.
- One three-hour group-based respite care event included group dynamics with multiple foster children (recreation, crafts, and snack).
- The three-hour group based respite care event took place in the gym at MBC, a facility with which the participants were familiar.
- The group-based event provided an opportunity for each participant to experience how other people engaged in respite care with foster children.

Statement of Research Questions

Inquiry into the intervention was guided by the following research questions:
1. What effect does the APEX Training have on participants’ involvement in foster care in Jefferson City, Missouri?

2. What effect does the APEX Training have on members’ understanding of their relationship with God as a parent?

**Description of the Method**

The research employed the multiple case study of individuals and couples, which provided the opportunity to observe and examine the effects of the intervention within the varied outlooks and perspectives of the participants. The multiple case study used in qualitative research focused on “participants’ perceptions and experiences, and the way they make sense of their lives. According to John Creswell, the purpose is therefore to “understand not one, but multiple realities”.

Second, the qualitative research method allowed me to serve as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. The primary instrument means that, “data are mediated through this human instrument, rather than through inventories, questionnaires, or machines.”

Third, I gathered information from participants and interpreted the data to formulate the resulting narrative of findings. Qualitative research best served this purpose because “the process of qualitative research is inductive in that the researcher builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, and theories from details.”

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4. Ibid., 145.

5. Ibid.
Fourth, I engaged the participants in their natural setting. Qualitative research is focused on a fieldwork format, meaning, “the researcher physically goes to the people, setting, site, or institution to observe or record behavior in its natural setting.”6 The environment of the study was the church setting with which each participant was familiar, where I am the pastor, and where the activities were replicated based on those that happen with regular frequency in the life of the congregation.

Role of the Researcher

I acted as a participant-observer in this intervention. I collected the data from the intervention while attending and overseeing the APEX training. This fulfilled my dual duties as participant and observer.

The Sample

The sample was criterion-based and purposive. The sample of participants was recruited by formal invitation letters (see Appendix J), which were hand delivered to each recruit. The sample included three couples (Paul and Suzanne, Austin and Grace, and Edward and Nicole) and two single individuals (Wade and Claire). The participants were between ages twenty-one and fifty-five. The sample was comprised of members of MBC who were regular in worship attendance and attended a small group (LifeLink group). Participants were not required to have already acquired any previous training or certifications for foster care. In addition, the participants were not disallowed for previous involvement in foster care at MBC or with any affiliated entities of the church.

Entering the Field

This project took place at MBC where, at the time of writing, I had been pastor for almost eight years. I acquired permission from the church body, the governing body of the church, to carry out the project in the context of the church. I recruited the sample of participants by way of second party to prevent any possible coercion that might result from the principal investigator also being the pastor leader of the intervention. I obtained informed consent (see Appendix A) from each participant for the research. I met with participants individually prior to beginning the intervention to provide an orientation of the intervention and to answer any questions or concerns they may have had. I allowed anyone to discontinue attendance at any time for any reason as needed.

Data Collection

Data was collected from April 2017 through June 2017 from several different types. First, I conducted individual interviews with each member of the sample before and after the intervention (see Appendix F). Audio recordings of each interview were transcribed.

Second, participants kept a weekly journal to record their experiences during the APEX training. The weekly journal questions were drawn from the research questions. The journal was turned in to me and secured in my office in a locked file cabinet (see Appendix H).

Third, participants completed a Demographic Questionnaire (see Appendix B) that provided background information useful during the interpretation of findings in Chapters Four and Five. The background information was secured in the same locked file cabinet as described previously.
Finally, I gathered field notes during the APEX training orientation, pre-intervention interviews, respite training events, Psalms of Ascent lessons, respite care experiences, and post-intervention interviews. These field notes were gathered from both verbal and non-verbal information.

**Data Analysis**

All data collected for this research project was processed using inductive analysis, which expresses the emerging aspect of qualitative research. Open coding was used to index the data. Axial coding was used to identify emerging themes, and selective coding was used to determine significant findings from the data. These coding types are used in case study research to search for “patterns” that develop from the data. The data was then coded to compare and contrast the information.7

**Data Reporting**

I made every effort to report the data with carefully verified accuracy. A summary of the data is presented in Chapter Four and major findings are presented in Chapter Five.

**Validity and Reliability**

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, I utilized triangulation to compare the results of the various data collection instruments. Triangulation is based on, “[T]he assumption that any bias inherent in particular data sources, investigator, and method would be neutralized when used in conjunction with other data sources, investigators, and methods.”8 Second, I utilized member checks to include participants in


8. Ibid., 174.
both clarification of data acquired and to allow them the opportunity to comment on the findings. Third, I worked to provide rich, thick descriptions of the data to allow for detailed findings.

I was aware of the presence of bias during the research project, and I was aware that I brought biases into the intervention that threatened its validity. I acknowledge that I desired for this project to increase the participation of members of MBC in foster care. I also acknowledge that, considering God’s faithful care for them, I believe that all believers should participate in some way in the care of orphaned and vulnerable children. I further hoped that this project would increase the participation of believers beyond MBC and that other churches would begin to participate in foster care. While I was aware that the APEX training might not fulfill the desired results, whatever the results show, the intervention would serve to increase each participant’s understanding of orphaned childrens’ needs and how God brings spiritual orphans into his family.

Having adopted four children, I acknowledge that I brought preconceived judgments about the overall need and level of Christian participation in foster care and adoption. This bias was controlled by my understanding that there are many ways for people to engage in foster care and by allowing each person the decision of what was right for him or her and what was God’s will.

Finally, I am also aware that the participants related to me not only as participants but also as church members. I made sure to communicate to them that the results of the research would not affect their status as church members or their relationship with me. I allowed them the freedom to communicate freely and honestly in the collection of data for this project.
Ethical Issues

The rights, needs, values, and desires of the participants were my priority. I clearly communicated, both orally and in writing, all the requirements for participation in the research project. All the information was contained in the informed consent that each participant reviewed and signed before the intervention began, and a signed copy was given to each participant (see Appendix A).

As stated in the informed consent form, there was no risk of harm to any participant during this project. All findings were used with integrity and were not misrepresented. Participants did not receive compensation or any other benefits by agreeing to participate. They were free to withdraw from the project at any time without fear of penalty.

The names of participants were changed and pseudonyms used for the reporting of the findings in this study. All records related to this research have been kept in a locked file cabinet in my office. The digital recordings were stored, as were all electronic data, on an encrypted, password-protected computer and will be destroyed in three years after the project is published. I alone will have access to the data.

No deception was used in this project. Integrity and honesty were upheld in the highest manner throughout this research project.
Chapter Four
Findings of the Project

*Introduction*

Believers at MBC needed to experience an increase in both their participation in foster care and their understanding of God as a Father/parent, both of which are vital expressions of God’s commitment to care for his creation. Because God reveals his caring nature by inviting his people into an eternal relationship with him, those who belong to him are in parallel fashion called upon to invite orphaned and vulnerable children into a caring relationship with them.

The APEX training was specifically designed to addressed the two above mentioned purposes of the project. Our ministry at MBC has primarily focused on individual member’s spiritual health. Although there has been a significant increase in missions and community outreach during the eight years I have been there, the past four years has seen a steady decline. Among the hardest hit areas with volunteer decline was support for foster care initiatives. In my thinking, training was needed to continue building on the foundation of each believer’s relationship with God as the foundation for his call to serve in a broken world. I developed the APEX training with the above purposes in mind. The inquiry into the effectiveness of the project was guided by these two research questions:

1) What effect did the APEX training have on participants’ involvement in foster care in Jefferson City, Missouri?

2) What effect did the APEX training have on members’ understanding of their relationship with God as parent?
For the intervention, the research created a pool of fifteen couples and ten singles who fulfilled these criteria: 1) members of MBC, 2) regular in worship attendance, and 3) faithfull attendance in a small group Bible study (LifeLink). The desired group size was determined to be three couples and two singles (either male or female or one of each gender). The potential participants were sent an invitation letter via email and received a phone call, both from a neutral person. The invitation letter included detailed information about the intervention and welcomed any questions for clarification. The phone call was provided to expedite the decision process and to make sure recruitment was performed within the time allowed. Initially, two singles and one couple were recruited. The remaining two couples required significant communication and clarification to secure their participation.

Several factors listed below contributed to the modification required for the recruitment process:

1) *Family schedules in the month of May*. In reflection, asking families to engage in the intervention during a busy month for their children/families was a big request. Each of the participants in the intervention had grade school children, which was a considerable conflict when recruiting from the pool of couples and individuals. Graduations, vacations, and extended family events posed major concerns for people to weigh regarding their inclusion in the study.

2) *The invasive/personal nature of the study*. The intervention was centered on the evaluation of each participant’s preparation for and inclusion of foster children in their homes. This dynamic proved to be a significant increase of participation in foster care for several couples and individuals in the selection pool. Clarification and flexibility were
necessary to help participants to engage in the study. The goal was to recruit eight people for the intervention, which would require the facilitation and overlap of schedules and dates for each component of the study. These components were listed as a) a Saturday training, b) six one-hour Bible studies, c) a twenty-four-hour in-home respite experience, d) a three-hour Saturday group respite experience, e) two sixty-minute interviews, f) an orientation, and g) all of the necessary requirements for state-certification of respite providers. These components added up to a significant commitment for each family. To maximize each participant’s time, I creatively altered the times and experiences to help facilitate the scheduling of each family. Following are the changes that were made:

a. The orientation was conducted immediately before the pre-intervention interview. This allowed the family an opportunity to ask questions and complete the Informed Consent prior to the interview, thus maximizing their time.

b. The six one-hour Bible studies were held at the MBC campus and conducted in a seminar format spread over a Friday night and Saturday morning. The families involved in the study agreed that they could give up time on Friday evening and on the weekends more readily than during the week.

c. The twenty-four-hour in-home respite experience was changed to an in-home interview with a family that was serving or had served as a licensed foster parent or adoptive parent. It was determined early on that although each family and individual would successfully complete the certified respite provider requirements, they would not be complete before the scheduled end of the intervention. The twenty-four-hour in-home experience was changed to an interview with a family that was practicing the same things that were taught in the intervention. This resulted in a maximizing of the family’s time and consequently maximized their experience of respite care and foster care understanding. Additionally, the interview served as an introduction of a future respite provider to a foster family, which unintended benefit fulfilled a desire of mine to pair each foster family with a respite care provider. This also gave the foster families added peace of mind regarding who was giving care to their children. The altered experience also allowed the respite care family an opportunity to build a relationship with foster children.
d. The group respite event was changed from a partnership event with the Central Missouri Foster Care and Adoption Association (located in Jefferson City) to an event that was scheduled, planned, and staffed by the intervention participants. The event included twenty-seven children for three hours of respite care at the MBC campus. Rescheduling this event allowed more flexibility for the intervention participants’ schedules.

e. The remaining scheduled experiences did not require any alterations in order to accommodate the participants. These experiences included: two sixty-minute interviews, an orientation, and completing all of the state requirements for becoming certified respite providers.

3) *The amount of work loaded into the seven-week intervention.* The original plan was to allow nine-weeks for the completion of the intervention. When the recruitment was final, there were seven weeks available before there would be significant conflicts with the participants’ schedules. It was necessary to reduce the number of weeks for the commitment; however, each of the components remained with the aforementioned alterations.

All who agreed to participate in the project remained with the project to completion. Of the eight participants, six were married and two were single; all were Caucasian; all had children; five had been divorced and three were remarried; their ages ranged from thirty-five to fifty-two years. Two had been Christians for more than thirty years, three for twenty-six to thirty years, two for sixteen to twenty years, and one for six to ten years. One couple had been foster parents for six months and respite providers for one year, but they had not been certified as respite providers. Their foster care license was a Kinship placement license, which limited their placement potential to children or families that they know or were related to before the child entered state custody.

4) *The shortened intervention also affected the work that was asked of the Missouri Licensed Social Workers.* Because social workers often are overworked, efforts
were made to ask the Cole County Children’s Division to coordinate with those who had been requested to be certified for the intervention. Consideration was not made, however, for the possibility that participants would live outside of Cole County. There were three counties involved in the intervention—Cole, Boone, and Calloway. Although contact was made with Cole county, the oversight to contact the children’s division social workers in Boone and Calloway counties resulted in needless anxiety and stress on behalf of the families in the intervention and the social workers involved.\(^1\) The state of Missouri requires families to be certified as respite providers in their home county, after which the families are approved to provide care for children from any county in the State of Missouri. Each of the participants completed all the state requirements and became Certified Respite Providers.\(^2\)

Following an orientation and pre-intervention interview with each of the participants, the APEX Training began with the Certified Respite Care Training, which was facilitated by a Licensed Social Worker of the State of Missouri. The training involved three hours on a Saturday morning, from 9:00 am to 12:00 noon. Two participants, both male, were unable to attend the training—one was on call with the Missouri National Guard, and one had unavoidable family commitments. A summary of

\(^1\) Multiple counties required facilitating with individual caseworkers in each respective county. The social workers assigned to Calloway and Boone counties were contacted when the intervention began. The Cole county social worker was contacted three months prior to the intervention. The additional stress added to the Calloway and Boone county workers could have been avoided if this situation had been anticipated. In the future, advance notice should be given to any social workers who represent potential respite care or foster care families who take part in the APEX or similar training.

\(^2\) The requirements for certification involve preparations in the home. I purchased some of the items necessary for home certification, including: a fire extinguisher, a carbon monoxide detector, and several child-proof cabinet locks. Those considering adoption or fostering children should take note of items required by their state for each phase of certification. These items imposed considerable cost on one participant. These items should be listed in any orientation or included as soon as possible to assess if this will discourage participation due to extenuating costs.
the Respite Care Training materials was provided to both individuals (see Appendix C). The one with unavoidable family commitments worked for the State of Missouri in the Department of Social Services (specifically in foster care). He indicated that he was involved in developing the training; thus, his involvement behind the scenes in foster care had been instrumental in providing support to families at an arm’s reach.

The following Friday night and Saturday morning, the Psalms of Ascent training was presented to the participants (Psalms 121, 124, 125, 126, 127, and 134; see Appendix E). The Psalms of Ascent studies were supplemented with selected readings from Eugene Peterson’s book, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. Each of the lessons focused on a key theme related to God’s parent relationship with his people and how that related to orphan care. The six topics of focus were: He will keep us forever (Ps. 121), He will not abandon us (Ps. 124), He will be our security (Ps. 125), He will be our joy (Ps. 126), He will build our home (Ps. 127), and He will be our hope (Ps. 131). The lessons were primarily conversational and each lesson provided space for recording thoughts.

The intervention was accompanied with guided journals designed to record reflections and to organize thoughts for the post-intervention interview. These journal entries were separated in topics that corresponded to the five components of the intervention: 1) Certified Respite Care Training, 2) APEX Training session one, 3) APEX Training session two, 4) In-Home Respite Interview, and 5) the Group Respite Care experience (see Appendix H). A post-intervention interview was conducted at the end of the intervention. The findings that follow were the result of the intervention and related to one or both primary research questions:

1) What effect did the APEX training have on participants’ involvement in foster care in Jefferson City, Missouri?
2) What effect did the APEX training have on members’ understanding of their relationship with God as parent?

*Preliminary Findings and Explanations*

**Pre-Intervention Finding One**

The first pre-intervention finding was that participants initially exhibited conviction of support for foster children with a limited support through personal practice. The common theme during the pre-intervention interviews related to how important it was to encourage people to provide care for fostered and orphaned children. Each participant was quick to explain how others should make room for the care of these children. Austin simply said, “The kids need your help.” Grace shared, “It’s our duty to do that [care for orphaned children].” Participants responded quickly to how important it was to care for orphans and children in foster care. Edward said, “Just as I go to God as my daddy, every child deserves to have that. If I have resources that would help ease their pain and would help introduce them to God, then I have a responsibility to use those resources in such a way . . . if you really love God, you’ll care for them.” Edward had served as a pastor for twenty years, and his conviction was strong for supporting orphan and children in foster care, yet there was no personal involvement.

The conviction of caring for foster children revealed a conflict when relating the conviction to personal involvement. Nicole indicated that caring for foster children was a call for certain people whom God would appoint for that service. She said, “Why should we do that [care for foster children]? Because God tells us to. God tells us to care for other people and I think we all have [to]. My mission may not be foster care, it may not be what God is calling me to do, so even though it sounds horrible and selfish, I don’t
want to do foster care per se. God has other callings on me.” Nicole was stern in her refusal of involvement in foster care.

The conflict of conviction and personal involvement was addressed by Austin during the pre-intervention interview. After answering more than two-thirds of the questions, he paused and expressed how his answers were contradicting each other. His concern was based on how willing he was to encourage and command others to be involved, yet in his personal life there was no involvement. He said, “The kids need your help. The families need your help. You’re there to bridge that gap of kid and family to hopefully get back together and be functional again.”

Austin had been involved in foster care administration as his professional work. He indicated that his professional response was to encourage others to be involved, yet his personal response, though motivated by a biblical mandate, was to avoid involvement. He said, “Cause one of my responses was if somebody were to ask me about foster care, I would encourage them to do it. But I won’t do it through my parental view; I’m not interested.” He continued saying, “And I based [this] on the biblical beliefs that we’re supposed to take care of widows and orphans, and it’s the right thing to do, but I’m still not interested.” He was quick to respond to the conflict with a willingness to reconcile the conflicting values he was expressing.

Claire had served in the Central Missouri Foster Care and Adoption Association’s monthly In-Service Training at the MBC campus. This training included a time of respite care for children who attended with their foster parents. She had been regularly involved in these monthly respite experiences, and said,

These kids need love . . . a little extra love. . . . There are a million different reasons why people will give excuses for it, and believe me, there has been some
nights at in-service training that my patience was tested to the brink, but it didn’t stop me from coming back because I really, truly enjoyed it. I enjoy sitting down and doing crafts with these kids. . . . They just want your attention. That’s all they are asking for.

A committed single mother, Claire was passionate about providing family experiences for children who were at risk. She was willing to step out of her comfort zone to reach out in love, becoming a powerful example and witness to others. In addition to Claire’s involvement, Grace expressed involvement in foster care with the differentiation of local versus global. She said, “I guess in my head, it’s sort of local orphans versus global orphans. I had an opportunity to go to Haiti, two different trips . . . I can go and hug on kids and let them sit on me and we can do puzzles together and I can just be loving and supportive of them.” Orphan care for Claire was understood in terms of geography and poverty; however, the kids she encountered were “kids too.” They were no different than kids she encountered at her school as librarian or at church. Paul and Suzanne were the only ones to have prior experience with foster care and respite care.

Paul was first aware of orphans and orphan ministry through Compassion International, which experience occurred as a junior/senior in high school. He said, “This was the first time he actually got involved in some type of mercy ministry . . . just seeing different ways that you could minister to people . . . that is when I really started to ask more questions and to be more aware of the importance of foster care, adoption, and mercy ministries.”

Likewise, Suzanne became involved with orphan care as a college intern for a local pastor. Several members of the congregation had adopted Chinese girls. Suzanne would babysit these girls and learned to love on them. She said, “I was . . . forced to go on a mission trip . . . we went to Guatemala to an orphanage . . . my plan was always to
internationally adopt until I found out more needs in the States.” Both Paul and Suzanne were involved in youth ministry, had three biological children, and their experience in orphan care occurred early in their formative years. This exposure led them on a trajectory of becoming kinship foster parents and respite providers; both desired to adopt a child in the future.

Paul, Suzanne, Claire, and Grace all had some involvement with foster care prior to the intervention. In addition, Wade stated, “I haven’t had any direct participation in orphan care”; however, during the interview, he asked me the question, “What do you mean by involvement?” He was quick to communicate his belief, “I think that there’s some very definitive direction from God that our job is to take care of the orphans. I think it’s left up to each of us individually on how to do that best, whether it’s financially or emotionally or where we fell God puts us in that place to do that.” He continued with a structured way to understand levels of involvement.

Wade broke up involvement into three separate categories, explaining, “Level one is direct support . . . physically providing a safe place, actually getting the services to the children, to the families that need it.” He stated that level two was passive, which was done by “supporting those people, directing them where they need to go, what they need to do, giving them a sounding board.” Finally, level three operated behind the scenes: “In general, here’s some support that I can give, whether it be financial or donations of some sort (money, clothing, food, or other necessities).” He did not dismiss the biblical calling to care for orphans; rather, he clarified with levels of connection. His belief was that “[foster care] is one of the highest callings that the Bible has us do.”
While each participant shared a biblical conviction for involvement in foster care, Wade was the only one to make the differentiation of levels or some degree of involvement. Providing a range of involvement possibly would have encouraged the other participants to better differentiate their level of concern. For instance, many were involved in the ministry of MBC during the time when my family and I were fostering our two youngest children. Their support during that time ranged from participating in a church-wide baby shower and helping to facilitate meals for our family. I believe more participants would have made the connection to involvement in foster care if some different examples of involvement would have been given.

*Pre-Intervention Finding Two*

The second pre-intervention finding was that participants in the study exhibited an understanding of both God as a parent and God’s presence in their lives daily. More than eighty-five percent of them had been professing Christians for more than sixteen years, and their median age was approximately forty-three. This meant that the average person in the study had been a Christian for close to half their life and had been involved in a Christian church for the same duration and more. The participants exhibited an active understanding of God as a parent in reflection of biblical evidence and in their family relationships.

The participants were asked to list nouns that they most often associated with God, which included: home, love, comfort, peace, father, safety, stability, provider, caregiver, and perspective changer. These nouns are descriptive of biblical images and personal testimonies on which each participant focused. Paul said, “Simply love. He’s angry and he’s jealous because he loves us and he cares. If he didn’t care, he didn’t love
us, he wouldn’t be jealous . . . he also gives his love because he’s gracious.” Paul
demonstrated the fierce example of God in his love for people. His awareness of God in
his nature was expressed in how he experienced that knowledge of God. Likewise, Claire
explained her understanding of God as love through her personal testimony of
experiencing his love. She said, “There was a time in my life when I tried to push God
out of my life, and it was . . . the darkest time . . . I was in an abusive relationship. I tried
to end my own life. I found myself in my bedroom floor, on my knees, praying for him to
come back into my life. It hit me. He didn’t ever leave.”

Claire knew that God’s love was constant and never failing; she lived daily with
this knowledge, and she was not alone. Nicole developed a thorough description of God
through her list of the nouns: shelter, refuge, safety, and perspective changer. Regarding
perspective changer, she said of God, “Come on up here, honey, and let me show you
something a little bit different, because where you are down here, which is where I like to
be in the details, it’s different up here. I’ve got a bigger plan.” Nicole expressed a clear
understanding of God’s perspective while having a disagreeable belief toward
participating in orphan and foster care. Regarding her willingness to participate in the
study, she stated, “I’m doing it more out of honoring my husband because we’ve talked
about it. Which means that that’s the only thing that’s motivating me and therefore I’m
pretty darn selfish, because . . . I think about what I have to give up, how my life would
have to change . . . so somebody’s got to push me.” Treatment of this conflict of values
will be explained later in Chapter Four.

The participants were asked to reflect on their knowledge of God and how their
lives modeled God’s parenthood. They all expressed some uncertainty regarding how
they measured up to God’s standard; however, the responses were focused on how they engaged with their own family and children—trying to be loving, protective, providing, teaching, and present parents. Nicole said, “I need to know who God is, so I know who I am . . . I cannot behave in a godly way if I don’t know how my God behaves.” She stressed the need for knowledge to directly affect people’s actions.

Claire modeled God’s parenthood by attending church with her son and building a trusting relationship with him. She recognized that her son would be responsible for his own decisions; however, about modeling the parenthood of God, she said, “It’s okay to falter as long as you come back . . . I don’t try to be somebody that I’m not. I’m doing the best I can . . . we all fall short.” Claire modeled the grace of forgiveness in her life as an extension of God’s parenthood to her; thus, her knowledge was unique among the responses. Edward’s response was closest, saying, “I’ve blown it.” Being recently divorced and remarried, his two teenage boys had watched him fail miserably and be restored. In some ways, he felt like a failure; however, his commitment to his boys and new wife had increased since his fall.

The participants’ knowledge of God was joined with their awareness of God’s presence daily. When asked to give a value of one to ten (ten being most aware), none gave less than a six on the scale, seven gave a value of seven or higher, and four gave a value of nine or ten. The participants’ assessment of their awareness of God did not always translate into obedience. Each was quick to admit that there were moments daily when their awareness of God was overlooked or ignored to pursue a personal selfish bent. This finding sheds light on some of the reasons why the participants may have avoided being involved in orphan and foster care.
When asked to reflect on the terms Father (God as parent) and father (earthly father) their awareness was decisive. Some of the responses were anchored to past hurt and abandonment; for example, Edward said, “When I think of little ‘f’ father I think of failure. I think of opportunity lost.” He said his relationship with his two boys was not what it should have been and hoped it will be better in the future. Nicole said, “I know my father loved me and I know that there were a lot of times that I wished that he could communicate in a way that spoke love to me, not just tell me from time to time but to actually feel love.” Again, the awareness that something was missing in the relationship was acute. This missing component had been recovered in her relationship with her husband. She was descriptive in how he led the family spiritually and how he devoted his time and attention to building the best relationship possible.

While five of the participants’ fathers were still living, others recalled a longing to have their fathers back. Two participants’ fathers had died; one never had a dad in her life. Those whose fathers had died both longed to have them back. Each of the participants were living to provide a healthy example of father for their families. Even Claire, a single-mother, was living with a devotion to her son to help him fill the void in his life, as he saw his father on sporadic weekend visits.

When asked about their understanding of God as a parent (Father), the responses were geared toward trusted leadership, safety, protection, guidance, and love. Wade said, “I give him the attributes of a father. Someone who’s going to guide me, is going to show an example for me, have expectations of me, and love me in that father way.” The comment regarding God showing the example was an interesting connection to the understanding and knowledge of God and the way people are prone to choose to act.
otherwise. This participant had made the decision to be involved in foster care on a level of personal commitment. Paul found it difficult to explain God as Father without utilizing the attributes of his earthly father, saying,

I don’t really think I can really explain what it means for him to be my Heavenly Father without including my idea of my earthly father as well. . . . I was very privileged to have a Christian dad . . . he showed me the right way of doing things . . . discipline. I see God as the same thing but on more of a supernatural level as God is the creator of life. He provided life to me and he gave me a way of salvation to have spiritual life. He also gives me direction. He gives me discipline. All these things through scripture.

Paul echoed the link that most participants had of their understanding of God as a parent. Half of the participants had a good experience with their earthly father that impacted their understanding of God as their heavenly Father.

These findings were preliminary and revealed a basic understanding of what it meant to participate in foster care and what it meant to understand God as a parent. The results that follow occurred following the APEX project intervention and account for the major findings of this report.

Primary and Secondary Findings and Explanations

Primary Finding One

The first primary finding was that the APEX experience caused the participants to increase their participation in foster care. The experience sequentially led the participants from knowledge to personal involvement. The range of experience demonstrated at least three levels of involvement in foster care. First, the APEX training utilized the State of Missouri Certified Respite Care training, facilitated by a state licensed social worker. This training brought an awareness of how the state intervenes in the lives of children who have been surrendered to state custody. Edward was concerned about the state’s
level of control over foster children. He wrote, “The state controls the game . . . there is a risk in providing respite care and that is to put yourself under the state’s control.” The training outlined the state’s requirements for potential respite providers, for which many provision must be followed. The knowledge of what the state requires and how difficult it is for people to follow the prescriptive policies was a hindrance for some who otherwise would provide care.

Claire responded to the most significant aspect of the training by simply writing, “The amount of information to digest.” The training for respite providing was overwhelming for those who had not had or taken the opportunity to be informed. It was a good opportunity to see how the state had responded to the ever-growing needs of children and families. Yet, it remained a spiritual matter for Claire, who stated, “God loves these kids despite their afflictions and that He will give me the knowledge and patience to do the same.” The framing of the state training for Claire was to allow the magnitude of the training and issues that foster children face to give her a new understanding of how much God knows about and cares for all his children.

On the other side of the respite training knowledge, Grace wrote, “After getting all the details, I felt less scared or apprehensive about practicing respite care. Being familiar with it made it seem more like babysitting . . . if taking care of kids for a little while didn’t seem so challenging, why would providing orphan care be that much more?” Grace’s understanding was that the information neutralized the concerns that she had prior to the training. From this it could be said that the training or knowledge could remove barriers that might keep people from engaging in foster care.
Nicole reflected on the barriers of the training saying, “The significant amount of paperwork . . . is undoubtedly a strong barrier that prevents people from moving forward.” She then added, “God provides security, protection, and care for his children. And God does this quite simply—straightforward in who He calls us to be. God wouldn’t have all the paperwork—yet, God does, ‘prequalify us.’ He continually prepares me for what he has already ordained for me.” Nicole made the connection between being prepared to engage in respite care to how God is prepared to care for his children’s needs, after which he releases them to care for others. Some of the barriers that were previously hindrances for the participants were neutralized in reflection of God’s own identity as parent and how he calls believers to follow his example. Thus, the intervention facilitated an increase in participation in foster care through the addition of knowledge that subtracted barriers.

The second participation increase provided through the APEX Training was the group respite experience, which was a three-hour respite for twenty-seven children hosted at MBC. Each participant could attend and each had a specific task to help facilitate the experience. The simple structure was check-in, meal, age-appropriate activity, craft, movie/playtime, and check-out. The participants relied on each other and built a deeper friendship together.

An unexpected finding was how each participant centered on how normal the kids were at the group respite. During the planning of the event, some of the barriers previously mentioned had been removed; however, now there would be personal contact with foster children. In reflection of the group respite event, all the participants expressed how “normal” the foster children were. Grace said, “My thought was there might actually
be some kids out there that I feel like I could do some good with, because there are some that I feel like I would clash too much and it wouldn’t go well. I thought that there could be a chance there, that before, I just thought, ‘No way, Jose, not me.’” She concluded that foster kids have the same needs as any other children, which was a powerful revelation for her compared to what she assumed foster children to be like.

The issues boil down to the power of labels, which can be helpful for categorizing; however, they fall short when expectations are automatically pressed on to children because of the label. The label “foster child” has connotations that cause even Christians to keep them at arm’s length. Grace said, “Children are a reward, so let’s step in and show that kid that they’re a reward. . . . They’re of value to us or to someone. Unfortunately, it might not be your parent but somebody who loves you and values you.”

When asked the question regarding the emotional difference between hearing orphan care versus foster care, the participants overwhelmingly pointed toward a more compassionate response to the label orphan care than toward foster care. Orphans, as a title, tended to have more of a connection to a victim of unfortunate circumstances, rather than foster children, who tended to be victims of a judgmental view of their behavioral, familial, and social impairments.

The participants desired an understanding of normalcy for foster children as simply children in need of being treasured. Paul said, “I definitely can say I can see them more as just kids, not as a problem child or he or she’s going to be a handful automatically just because they’re in foster care.” He also commented that one of the reasons he felt closer to the term orphan was because of the biblical link to the believer’s
adoption in Christ as sons and daughters. Naturally, this would lead Christians to have a closer connection and vision for orphan care contrary to foster care.

Austin concluded, “As we had all these different experiences, I didn’t see any difference in the experience of them being foster kids versus other experiences with other groups of children or being in other households with unfamiliar children. Kids as kids; it’s just being with kids . . . that foster care label doesn’t make it exceptional. It’s just another kid . . . and you roll with it.” The group event showed a group of kids who were open to strangers and supportive toward each other.

There were children helping each other, and many of the children found an adult during the event onto whom to attach, which surprised the adults. Edward said, “One of the things that stood out to me is just how much these kids are just regular kids . . . you wouldn’t know they were foster children if you saw them on the school yard . . . as far as foster care goes, it really for me underscored the need for all kids to have a place to belong.” He continued saying, “I would think of a child in foster care as being needier and expressing that, or maybe acting out. And sure, there’s going to be some of that, I’m sure. But one of the things I was most . . . touched by is just the way that some of the kids just leaned on each other and helped each other. It was amazing. I mean, that support system they were for each other was quite inspiring.”

The group respite experience further removed harmful preconceived ideas of foster children and recovered a vision of how to help children know how important they are to God. Overall, normalcy was shown to be important for Christians to think about when considering increasing participation in foster and orphan care.
Finally, the third involvement in participation in foster care through the APEX Training was the in-home visit with a foster/adoptive parent(s) and family. This experience created further awareness and knowledge of how families and children are affected through foster care and adoption. Nicole wrote, “God is responsible and he calls us to demonstrate our responsibility through actions which glorify him. We are not called to sit on the sidelines. Part of being a joyful giver is to give of time and to share my abundance just as God lavishes his love on my family.” Nicole was resistant to involvement in foster and orphan care prior to the intervention. Now, she says, “My understanding of the sacrifices God is calling me to is growing . . . and that I seek the joy of blessing his children in the ways he’s calling me . . . My overall awareness of the need for taking care of orphans [foster children] has grown.” She completely changed her idea of foster children and her personal connection to affecting kids in foster care.

Additionally, Grace was apprehensive regarding personal involvement in foster care before the intervention, saying, “Talking with the in-home family, I saw their love of children not caring about color or ADHD or sensory issues. They just love. That makes me think of God as just loving us all, regardless of race and issues. God is love . . . parenting is love.” The in-home experience brought the option of respite care into her personal vision of how she could affect the lives of children in foster care. She wrote, “This event continued to make me feel like respite care is a piece of cake compared to foster care . . . where the idea of respite care seemed like a large undertaking before this study, group event, and in-home event occurred.”

Claire had previously desired to become a foster parent before the study. While there had been no formal movement toward achieving that goal, the passion was there.
She said regarding the in-home experience, “It only reinforced my desire to become a respite care worker and ultimately a foster parent.” After seeing the foster family and interviewing them, she commented that her experience caused her belief in God to be stronger.

Wade’s experience showed him that there are “rewards and frustrations” of foster care and “the rewards outnumber the frustrations.” The family he interviewed was transparent about their battles with the decision to become foster parents, which included their journey from foster parents to adoptive parents. He recalled, “They saw the need and answered it . . . they realized that they could offer love . . . kids need love.” He recognized the power of showing love as the summation of what it takes to get involved, and he commented that love is enough reason to get involved.

Participants experienced a break down of conceptual barriers that often cause believers to resist involvement in foster care. Removing these barriers and providing resources to educate and motivate the participants moved each of them beyond their prior conceptions of foster care. As stated earlier, each participant in the study determined to participate in foster care in the future.

**Primary Finding Two**

The second primary finding was that the APEX Training experience caused the participants to increase their willingness to have their comfort zones invaded. The training gradually caused a reorientation of the Christian life through an opening of each participant’s minds, hearts, and homes regarding God’s parenting care of his children and a vision of how believers can live as an extension of the care they have received. Participants conveyed how the APEX Training created a change in how they saw their
personal lives and how they opened their family to other people. The participants were surprised how the experience required a complete commitment of their personal space. Wade said, “I got to experience something that was outside my comfort zone.” He was immediately attached to a little girl at the group respite event. She was quite comfortable with him as well, and this was a complete surprise. He said, “I had some situations where kids at certain times bonded to me for a short while . . . I would think that for a stranger that there would be an anxiety there.” He recalled that the kids just wanted attention; they were defused and their guards were down. They gave off an air of comfort in a way that kids who had not been through trauma might not have. In other words, the foster adoptive kids had been forced to accept strangers many times in their young lives. It could have been a conditioning developed purely by circumstances, but it affected the participants in this study as they themselves were processing the comfort zone issue. How willing would they be to be put in a situation where they were asked to welcome a stranger into their lives and/or their homes?

Claire explained the personal involvement of in-home relationship to comfort zone saying, “It’s about providing that feeling . . . when you’re at home, you feel at ease, you feel comfortable, because you’re in place that you’re loved.” Providing a home for foster children far outweighed any reason to resist because of personal comforts. In fact, her peers asked her, “You know it’s going to be hard and you’re going to get bad kids. Why would you want to take that on?” She responded,

If everyone that was taking on these foster kids right now and adopting kids said the same thing that you said, where would all of these kids be? They’re going to grow into adults that, if they’ve never felt loving connection to anyone . . . Do you want to live in a generation of people that have never felt loved and connected to anyone? It’s our job as Christians to spread the word of love, and love is not turning our backs on those that are less fortunate to us.
Claire’s was a strong example of the resolve to give up personal comforts to be used by God to show his love to a stranger.

Austin and Grace spoke specifically about their comfort zone changes, saying, “Things had to change in our house a little bit to get approved. There were some things . . . I would not have considered and nor do I necessarily agree with, but the rules are the rules.” This family was forced to alter their home to become certified respite providers. In fact, these were the same demands required of each family. The reality began to set in for this family as they were making the changes. Austin said, “The closer we get to getting approval, the stronger my feeling is, ‘Oh crap, this might actually happen.’”

This was the same person who said in his pre-intervention interview that he would not have been willing to do this before being asked to take part in the APEX training program. Now, when asked, “What would you say when asked why should a person be involved in foster care?” he responded saying, “Get out of your own space and your own comfort zone. You need to experience being a light to another child or a family and have that experience, so that you can get out of your own way being the way you are.” Thus, personal comfort zone was shown to be a major issue for involvement in foster care and each participant had to decide to allow it to be breached.

Primary Finding Three

The third primary finding was that the APEX Training experience caused a renewal of God’s parenting relationship with believers through the selected Psalms of Ascent and how that knowledge is applied in relationship with others. As explained in Chapter Two, the Psalms of Ascent were used as a reference point to God’s commitment
to care for his children Israel. The fifteen Psalms, 120–134, encourage the reader to consider how God reorients his people to his perpetual provisions and eternal promises. The participants in the APEX Training were asked to consider how their relationship with God could be understood as a vision for helping foster children and orphans in general to know the absolute truth of being a part of God’s family. The participants could make the connection and recorded visions of how God’s parenting of his children is portable to a hurting world through the believer’s example. For instance, Nicole and Claire both recalled the focus of God’s constant and eternal love as beginning points for understanding what children need, reinforcing that unconditional love is constant.

Children in foster care have experienced a fracture in their understanding of family commitment and care, about which Nicole expressed, “God’s unfailing love is so far above our ability to love and yet God calls us to parent in his image . . . God will never abandon me.” She focused on the word resolve, saying, “God is resolved to seek his children.” Edward added, “He is truly long suffering with us. He is about us even when we do not choose him.” The participants were keenly aware of the issues that foster children present in care.

The correlation between the behaviors of children in care and the behaviors that people in general exhibit were drawn in parallel. It was noted that believers sometimes act out to test the resolve of God and just how long he will love and how many times he will forgive. Edward said, “We need to teach them [foster children] that being loved doesn’t depend on their performance.” It was agreed that this would be a liberating vision for both the children and the care providers.
The images of the selected psalms centered on how God will keep us, not abandon us, be our security, be our joy, build our home, and be our hope. Grace stated, “Joy provider . . . that’s what stuck with me . . . and how that is like He is for us, to be a part of helping kids who do not have that in their life, come to see that, and know it, and recognize it, and appreciate it.” She began to realize how joy could transform the life of a child in foster care. Wade, having been a Christian for the shortest time in the study, made the connection that the Psalms of Ascent helped him to understand who God is to him as a parent. He said, “[God] will never leave us . . . it is nice to know that God will never leave me and looking at those Psalms of Ascent from a parental perspective, shows me that I should not leave my children even though they don’t please me all the time.” He put the command into practice immediately when he heard the example of God’s care for his children.

The participants responded with characteristics of God from the Psalms of Ascent when responding to how they think about God as a parent. They focused on key words such as: watches over, encourages, loving, warm, committed, shelter, healer, friend, always there, protector, and unmoving mountain. In addition, when asked about their thoughts about adoption, they were challenged by the Psalms of Ascent in response. They listed: a happy ending, home, joy, belonging, integration with struggle, making a family or finding family, and a part of something. The connections with the Psalms of Ascent helped with a vision and vocabulary to focus on the needs of children in foster care. It should be noted that the Psalms of Ascent are not isolated in application to foster care but primarily are focused on discipleship for application to all of life.
Secondary Finding One

The first of the secondary findings was that the APEX Training experience caused couples in the study to come together regarding participation in foster care. Two individuals of the three couples recruited disagreed about participating in foster care at the beginning of the APEX Training. The husband in one couple and the wife in the other disagreed about their family’s involvement. Nicole was quite concerned about how having a child in her home would cause her authority to be challenged. She explained that she was a control freak and needed to maintain control in her home. Having a child in the home who was not used to her rules would drive her crazy. After being a part of the group respite event, however, she began to “have a desire to do that where there wasn’t a desire before.” She continued, saying, “I can’t get to the point of saying that we would be permanent foster parents, and I think that that’s okay.” She said that by the end of the training she was willing to provide respite care and build relationships with foster families and their children to give them a needed break. This was a significant breakthrough and a unifying experience in their relationship.

Austin and Grace experienced something similar. After the training, they realized that although they had opposing understandings of involvement, they both came to appreciate the perspective of the other. During the post-intervention interview, they said they experienced an epiphany. Addressing Grace, Austin said, “It’s interesting that you would move toward the results [of adoption] where mine is more toward the implementation and the reason.” To this, Grace replied, “Functional versus Rational. We see things totally different.”
When probing deeper, they were asked about their willingness to be involved in foster care based on their new knowledges through the APEX Training. The response was a further indication of their differences when Grace said, “They’re not just some big idea of ‘What is that? That sounds scary.’ Getting there and knowing more about them, I’m like, ‘Oh, okay, you know, let’s see how it’s baby steps.’ Let’s start with respite and see how those events go.” Austin answered, “I ain’t surprised by Grace’s responses here to some extent. I expected a little bit more of, ‘Okay, I had the experience. Done with this.’” Grace added, “Very interesting, I was thinking a willing participant. I’ll drag along whichever way we go.” Even though this couple seemed conflicted in their desire to participate in foster care, they made the decision to be respite care providers and were looking forward to their first placement.

Secondary Finding Two

The second of the secondary findings was that the APEX Training experience caused the participants’ children to become involved in foster care. Early in the study, some had expressed a concern about having foster children in their homes because of potential harm to their own kids or subjecting their children to inappropriate language and/or behavior. By the end of the training, all the participants’ kids had been involved in the group respite experience. When asked how they would feel about having a child come into their home, Grace’s child responded, “Yeah. Cool. Neat. All right. We’ll have somebody here to play with.” Grace replied, “I’m like, okay. Good. I guess we can do this then.” The parents’ concerns ranged from how their kids would model appropriate behavior for the foster kids. Would their children take an active role in participating in
the ministry of respite care? Much to their parents’ surprise, they were ready and willing to participate. Another family, Paul and Suzanne, stated,

We were gathering up toys to give to somebody and the little one was like, “Why are we giving this away?” [Nicole] said, “Well, I got a message and a foster mama wants some toys for her foster daughter,” and the resistance at first was, “I don’t want to get rid of my stuff,” but they’ve learned so much about foster care through this church that they came in their rooms and came out with way more stuff than this mama even wanted because she only had one kid.

Their kids were beginning to think, “This is an opportunity to love somebody a little extra that we wouldn’t maybe even think about.”

Only one participant, Wade, experienced a little disgust from his teenage boys when he told them that a case worker was coming over to inspect their house for the respite certification. The teenage boys really did not express a desire to be a participant in respite care. When they were given the explanation of what to expect, they were more concerned about having to give up or share their personal stuff and space. Wade said, “Then it goes back to the foster family that I visited with and they said, ‘Hey, it’s good to have your children help out the less fortunate. To know what that means.’ It’s working my own boys out of their comfort zone.”

Conclusion

This project intervention accomplished its stated purpose of increasing participation in foster care and the participants’ understanding of the significance of God’s character as a parent. Each of the intervention experiences provided the participants with an opportunity to engage in foster care and learn more about God’s commitment to them. They were readily able to communicate and apply their experiences in both the training and respite components. The results of the intervention revealed a positive change
through the successful completion of the respite-care certification and in the desire of each participant to personally provide respite care in his or her home. Moreover, participants exhibited growth both in their knowledge of children in foster care and in their understanding of God as a parent. It is expected that the results will continue to positively affect each of these families as well as the children and families they serve.
CHAPTER FIVE
Discussion and Reflection

The purpose of this project was to increase participation in foster care through a deeper understanding of God as a caring parent among members of MBC. The intervention was created in the hopes of addressing these issues and encouraging the church members to respond. The two research questions that provided an anchor for the project intervention asked,

1) What effect did the APEX training have on participants’ involvement in foster care in Jefferson City, Missouri?

2) What effect did the APEX training have on members’ understanding of their relationship with God as parent?

This chapter will provide discussion and reflection on the findings that arose from these questions.

When the participants were asked about how their knowledge of God as a caring parent influenced their involvement in foster care, their responses revealed a conviction of the need to participate but with a lack of personal involvement. These results confirmed a disconnect between knowledge and practice pre-supposed in the research questions. They expressed a conflict of connecting their beliefs with action when responding to the issue of foster care. The participants responded positively when asked if Christians should engage in the care of children who had been left alone in the world and/or surrendered to state custody. Through the intervention, participants were given the opportunity to match their convictions with experiences with foster children. They were given the opportunity to grow in their knowledge of issues that children experience in
foster care. Additionally, they were engaged in biblical and theological reflection of how God relates to believers as a parent. Finally, they had personal contact with foster/adoptive children and parents through a group respite experience and in-home personal visit with a foster/adoptive family. In conclusion, each participant successfully obtained a state licensed respite care certification and welcomed the opportunity to have their comfort zone infringed by the anticipation of a foster child in their home.

Participants also experienced several secondary results after engaging in participation in foster care for seven weeks. They recalled how their relationship with their spouse was strengthened because of the study. Though one couple disagreed (about being involved in foster care) prior to the intervention, they were unified after the project. Others observed their own children growing in their understanding of participating in foster care and how that reflects the love of God.

Overall, the participants each declared that they were surprised at how much they looked forward to having a foster child in their home. Each indicated a growing desire to participate in foster care and to show the vision of how God parents believers to foster children.

**Theological Significance**

Action was the primary theme of the project’s intervention. For example, Chapter Two explained how God is both known in his nature and through his people by actions, which utilized the summary of Karl Barth’s theology, who articulated, “God has claimed human beings as his covenant partners by his powerful act of self-revelation; indeed, God is to be known only in his action, for God is the One whose being is in his act.”

The theological significance of this project was in the observation and disruption of the inactivity of participation in foster and orphan care. The findings suggest that there are more ways to be involved than outlined in the intervention. Still, the intervention moved the participants to engage in a clear path of participation through personal action. In fact, this often is the greatest obstacle to participation, as foster care is an extremely personal undertaking.

While there are many way to support foster care from a distance, there must still be action that leads to personal connection with children, families, and state workers from believers who have been discipled with an understanding of how God parents his people. The personal action component is a level of participation that calls into consideration individual comfort zones, one’s own children, personal resources, and time that otherwise would not be an issue. Participation at a distance is necessary and is in no way an action that is diminished through the findings of this study. Participants learned that God’s example in action as a parent to his people required personal contact and intervention to rescue his children’s spiritual orphaned status.

The fundamental theology of a faith with action requires God’s people to welcome any aspects of incarnation possible in relation to the many needs of children and families in the world. In fact, carrying the concept of actionable faith, Barth’s conception of faith “emphatically includes obedience in action; his position is deeply rooted in the Pauline understanding of participation in the faith of Jesus Christ.”2 The actions that believers take in obedience to the commands of Christ are only accomplished by faith. No matter what the believer is asked to do, faith will always be an element of personal

sacrifice and potential discomfort because the first consideration is predicated on the command given versus personal preferences.

Maintaining comfort and personal preferences, when engaging in foster care and adoption, is the wrong vision for believers. There is a vision for parenting, however, that reveals God’s plan for believers as well as how they relate to foster children as parents. Caring for foster children is a ministry that leads parents to take into consideration the needs of a vulnerable and powerless child who requires complete care for vital life needs.

The APEX Training proposed a vision of an alternative parenting action that draws on the visible and tangible characteristics of God’s relationship with believers. This vision arms believers with a valuable plan for accommodating and enriching children who have and are experiencing trauma and crisis.

In this way, believers are given the ability to purposefully respond to various needs with which they are presented while being empowered with appropriate action. Believers have been shown through God’s nature what they are to show through personal contact with foster children. The theological themes of the selected Psalms of Ascent, utilized in the intervention and examined in Chapter Two, provided a starting point for a vision of personal care for foster children. As noted, however, the Psalms of Ascent are not limited to application in foster care but are a basic lesson in relationship with God that is understood best as Discipleship. The resulting truth is that when believers act on what they know about God, they are in fact living witnesses of God’s love for others.

Foster care is one essential action for the church to engage. The breakdown of the family and challenges in financial, social, health, and educational areas have caused a substantial need for a renewal of support and care for children caught in the middle of
crises and trauma. God has uniquely equipped the church to intervene and live the vision of God’s parenting of believers to a world hurting for real love. The vision of God’s love is a call to action.

**Practical Significance**

*Local Significance*

The practical significance of the project at MBC is centered on the increase of participation in foster care. As stated in Chapter One, there had been a decline in participation in MBC foster care ministries over the last five years. The project encouraged participation and increased members’ knowledge of issues in foster care.

The intervention showed that the project was successful at accomplishing its projected goals. The response of the participants to willingly connect to the personal care of foster children, and to do so with a vision of God’s parenting commitments to his people, fortified the use of this project to recover participation in foster care at MBC.

Additionally, the project provided a practical recovery of basic discipleship lessons for all believers. No matter how long they have been Christians, the participants responded with enthusiasm regarding the selected lessons from the Psalms of Ascent. These Psalms created a renewal of appreciation for how God relates to believers and how believers reflect his love and commitment to others in general. The Psalms of Ascent in total are useful for strengthening the foundational knowledge and faith of all believers.

*Significance for the Field*

The project has the portability to be used in congregations beyond MBC. The elements involved in the intervention are present in the broader cultural experience. The
key considerations pertain to municipal and state regulation regarding respite care providers and qualifications of said providers, communication with licensed social workers to facilitate training opportunities, and communication with foster/adoptive families that either require respite or are allowed an account of respite hours to utilize annually. While these aspects of the intervention are subject to the laws of specific states, the only barrier is finding out what is required and then complying with the guidelines.

The project has significance for bridging ministry to current foster parents through providing support and training to help with a vision for fostering children. Many foster parents lack support from their local congregations. They have already made the decision to be involved either because of a personal conviction to care for children or to potentially adopt a child through the state. Whatever the motivation, many congregations lack the ability to adequately connect with these families and understand their needs. This project can give congregations the opportunity to build a support group for foster parents, provide instruction for caring, and deepen their understanding of God as a parent.

Finally, the project has a broader appeal to help families with biological children to understand how to parent their children with a vision of how God parents believers. Foster children are not the only children who need to experience the love of committed parents. This project could be adapted to provide instruction for discipling families to build relationships with their children that points them toward the redemptive love of God. This same material could be adapted to provide training for workers in the various ages of children and student ministries at local churches.
Future Research

Several areas observed during the project and intervention would be helpful to address in future research. Foster care ministry is a volatile and fluid ministry, and many factors contribute to the lack of participation among churches and believers, some of which are imposed upon the children due to lack of education and knowledge. For instance, an area of future research to pursue is linked with the issue of titles for children, such as orphan and foster, which could create stereotypes regarding who the children are and expectations of their behavior.

Titles have powerful connotations in virtually all cultures, and the American culture is no exception. Other home-grown titles are: ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), autistic, RAD (reactive attachment disorder), and others. These titles can create barriers between potential caregivers and the children who need the care. Some would hear the title orphan and immediately feel compassion for a child who is all alone; however, that same person might hear the title foster child and think, “Run! That kid has issues!” More research would be important to pursue regarding how the title of foster child potentially creates a barrier between believers and children in foster care.

Another future research possibility would be to explore how the erroneous belief of the separation of church and state affects the church’s participation in a largely state-operated service to foster children. Many Christians believe that the separation of church and state is a bold line that should not or cannot be crossed. To the contrary, the observation within this study shows that the state welcomes the participation of the church in partnership with caring for foster children. In fact, I observed the relief that social workers had when they knew that the people in the study who were seeking
certification would finish the paperwork and all requirements and become licensed respite care providers. The truth is that many who begin the process eventually discontinue their progress due to the unforeseen requirements or personal comfort zones that are challenged during the process. While the participants in the intervention counted the costs beforehand, each was informed of their right to withdraw from the project intervention at any time. The encouragement for the social workers was that they would not be wasting their time by half-way completing the requirements. Their time is valuable and they are already overworked, so it is of benefit to them to have people who know what it takes to sign on and become certified.

Other research possibilities could be considered regarding how the community understands the mission of the church using church facilities for respite care. The group respite experience was conducted at MBC, so when foster/adoptive families dropped off their children at the church campus, what message did they receive from that experience? What does it communicate to the church family that the church buildings are used to care for foster children? Another perspective is that MBC became debt-free about ten years ago. This continues to be a priority for the congregation as an example of each family to live as good stewards of what God has given his people. A relevant question and worthy pursuit for future study is whether using the church building for respite care would have any bearing on how or whether members used their own homes for respite care.

Finally, the issue of conflicting values among believers regarding what they believe versus what they do showed up during the intervention. Such a future study at both an individual and church level would reveal inconsistencies and potentially help churches as a whole and individual members prayerfully consider how to bring their
beliefs into practice. For instance, a church might say that they believe in missions; however, there is no practical expression of missional living or missional engagement in the life of the church; they believe that Jesus alone saves, but evangelism is not a priority. Or, members believe in stewardship but struggle with idolatry; they believe in moderation but many are obese, and so on. Further research beyond the conflict of participation in foster care would be useful for helping to bring beliefs to action in the local church as a whole and the lives of the members.

Conclusion

This project concludes that it is possible to increase the participation of believers in foster care while increasing their understanding of God’s character as a parent. Congregations will continue to be challenged with engaging various needs in culture, and foster care is one of those needs. This project shares that church members can grow in their desire to serve foster children through living and loving as God has modeled.

Foster care is connected to discipleship. Believers are called to follow Christ. Part of being a Christ-follower is taking the risk to put personal comforts away and say yes to God’s commands. The APEX training provided a discipleship opportunity for participants to understand the needs of foster children and how to build a relationship with them. The participants utilized their understanding of how God parents them as a vision for helping children separated from their parents. As a result, the participants experienced a dynamic change in their willingness to care for foster children.

The participants overcame personal, relational, and scheduling challenges during the project. They experienced a renewed understanding of God as a parent. They established new relationships with foster/adoptive families. They engaged in a group
respite event for foster children. In short, they demonstrated the practical aspects of the love that God demonstrates and calls believers to have for foster children when he rescues spiritual orphans and welcomes them home.
APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Form

Baylor University
George W. Truett Theological Seminary

PROTOCOL TITLE: The purpose of this study is to research the increase of participation in foster care among members of Memorial Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Mark Towns

SUPPORTED BY: Baylor University

Please read this form carefully:

The purpose of this form is to provide you with important information about taking part in a research study. If any of the statements or words in this form are unclear, please let us know. We would be happy to answer any questions. You have the right to discuss this study with another person who is not part of the research team before making your decision whether to be in the study.

The person in charge of this study is Mark E. Towns. We will refer to this person as the “researcher” throughout this form.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this study is to increase the involvement of members of Memorial Baptist Church in foster care. We are asking you to take part in this study because you are a member of Memorial Baptist Church. We are asking 8 people to take part in this research study.

Research study activities:

- Attend a 3-hour Certified Respite Care Provider training facilitated by a licensed social worker with the Cole County Division of Family Services (or arrange self-study)
- Complete all state certification paper work and procedures including fingerprinting, home-walkthrough, and background check
- Attend five, 1-hour meetings to discuss the Psalms of Ascent and Eugene Peterson’s book, A Long Obedience in the Same Direction
- Complete a weekly guided journal that will ask 4 questions to record experiences during each part of the intervention (2 hours total)
• Participate in two, 1-hour interviews with the principal investigator
• Complete 2 respite care experiences: one in-home (12-hour) and one group (3-hour)
• The total required time for the intervention is figured at 27 hours stretched over six weeks

Risks and Benefits:

To the best of our knowledge, taking part in this study will not hurt you. There are no benefits to you from taking part in this research.

Confidentiality:

We will keep the records of this study confidential by keeping them locked in the researcher’s office at Memorial Baptist Church. We will make every effort to keep your records confidential. However, there are times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of your records.

The results of this study may also be used for teaching, publications, or presentations at professional meetings. If your individual results are discussed, your identity will be protected by using a code number or pseudonym rather than your name or other identifying information.

Study Participation and Early Withdrawal:

Taking part in this study is your choice. You are free not to take part or to withdraw at any time for any reason. No matter what you decide, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are entitled. If you decide to withdraw from this study, the information that you have already provided will be kept confidential. You cannot withdraw information collected prior to your withdrawal.

There are no costs to you for taking part in this research study.

Questions about this research study?

You can call us with any concerns or questions about the research. Our telephone numbers are listed below:

Mark E. Towns          Dr. Preben Vang
Researcher              Dean of Doctor of Ministry Program/
573-635-7131            Faculty Supervisor
903-571-7080            254-710-6380

If you want to speak with someone not directly involved in this research study, you may contact the Baylor University IRB through the Office of the Vice Provost for Research at 254-710-1438. You can talk to them about:
• Your rights as a research subject
• Your concerns about the research
• A complaint about the research

A copy of this form will be provided to you for your own records.

I have read and understand this form, am aware of my rights as a participant, and have agreed to participate in this research.

__________________________________  ______________________________
Signature      Date

__________________________________
Print Name
APPENDIX B

Demographic Questionnaire

Name: ____________________________________

1. In what year were you born? ________________

2. What is the highest level of school you have completed?
   a. High School □
   b. Tech School □
   c. College □
   d. Graduate □
   e. Post-Graduate □
   f. Other: ______________________________

3. What is your marital status?
   a. Married □
   b. Divorced □
   c. Single □
   d. Widowed □

4. What is your gender?
   a. Female □
   b. Male □
5. How long have you been a Christian?
   a. 1–5 years  
   b. 6–10 years  
   c. 11–15 years  
   d. 16–20 years  
   e. 21–25 years  
   f. 26–30 years  
   g. 30 + years

6. What is the Christian tradition of your background?
   a. Baptist  
   b. Methodist  
   c. Catholic  
   d. Presbyterian  
   e. Pentecostal  
   f. Christian  
   g. None  
   h. Specify Christian Background if not listed above:
      ______________________________________________________________
      ______________________________________________________________

7. How do you participate in the life of Memorial Baptist Church? (Check all that apply)
   a. LifeLink small group  
   b. Deacon Ministry  
   c. Serve Team Member  
   d. Worship Ministry  
   e. Staff Member  
   f. Other: ____________________
8. How many children are in your immediate family?
   a. 0–2  □  b. 3–5  □  c. 5 +  □

9. Are any of your children adopted?
   a. No  □  b. Yes  □  If yes, how many? _____________

10. Have you ever been a foster parent?
    a. No  □  b. Yes  □  If yes, how many years? ________

11. Have you ever been a respite provider?
    a. No  □  b. Yes  □  If yes, how many years? ________
APPENDIX C

Summary of
Missouri Respite Care Provider Training

An Introduction to Foster Care

Goals for Respite Care Provider Training:
- Develop trust between providers, families, and the respite program agency, and help them work together in children’s best interests
- Build relationships and communication between providers and families
- Share information about the children who will be using respite services and develop a deeper understanding of their needs
- Provide expectations regarding the role of the respite provider
- Provide information regarding available resources

Part 1: Getting Started

A. Common Ground Questions

1. How many of you have provided respite in the past?
2. How many of you have a child with special needs?
3. How many of you are working with agencies that serve children with special needs?
4. How many of you are friends of people with adoptive, foster, relative or kinship children?

B. Discussion Questions

1. How would respite services help your friend/family member?
2. What would be your greatest concern about leaving your child with another provider?
3. Why do people need respite?
4. Why is respite important to the health of a family?

C. Current research regarding respite

1. Respite care increases:
   a. Feelings of well-being for families
   b. Community and peer contacts for the children
   c. Social activities for families
2. Respite improves:
   a. Coping abilities of families
   b. Attitudes about caring for child with challenges
   c. Families’ ability to care for their child at home
3. Respite care reduces:
   a. Stress in Families
   b. Risk of abuse and neglect
   c. Marital or partnership tension
   d. Feelings of depression and isolation

D. Most important outcome of respite: Effective respite care reduces out-of-home placements, disruptions, and dissolutions so that children can stay at home with their families.

E. Why is respite training important?
   • Training providers to develop their skills and the quality of care they can offer to families helps families to feel comfortable leaving their children with a provider. Without this comfort level, parents may not be willing to access respite care.
   • Equally important is the task of preparing providers to do their job well. They experience success and the rewards of their service, and are more likely to continue to provide respite care.

Part 2: Communication & Relationships

A. Developing communication between parents, youth, and respite care providers
   • Communication between the parent and respite care provider is imperative. Over time parents have developed success strategies for discipline and building a relationship with their children. They need to share this information so that respite care providers can experience success right away and will want to care for the child again.

B. Case Study
   • A mother of five children gave her son his medication to treat ADHD 20 minutes before he or anyone else was awake. She would go into his room, briefly wake him up, give him his medication, rub his back and quietly tell him she would wake him up in about 20 minutes. This routine dramatically affected his relationships with his siblings, his parents, and helped ensure positive relationships and outcomes at school.

C. Questions providers may want to ask parents are:

1. Does your child have special routines and schedules?
2. What are your child’s likes and dislikes?
3. What are the expectations at bedtime? When is bedtime? Are there special routines? Does the child wake up, sleep walk, and wander at night? Does the
child wet the bed? How do you handle these issues?
4. Does your child require special food preparation or have any food allergies?
5. Is your child safe alone?
6. Can your child be outside? Will your child wander?

D. Information parents may want to share with a provider are:

1. Sensitivities your child has to touch, teasing, sound, and light
2. How your child best communicates with others
3. Calming activities that soothe your child
4. Past abuse experiences that may be triggered by specific activities; how to avoid such situations, and strategies for providers if your child becomes upset
5. Your child’s fears
6. How you respond to your child’s certain behaviors.

Part 3: Special Needs

A. There are many issues that may be addressed in this part of the training:

1. Attachment
2. Effects of child abuse and neglect
3. Child development
4. Issues of adoption/foster care/kinship care
5. Mental health diagnosis
6. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
7. Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD)
8. Other common special needs

B. Discussion

1. What are the core issues in adoption/foster care?
2. What are the ways to encourage attachment?
3. What are effective ways to work with or parent children with FASD or ADHD?
4. How does abuse and neglect affect children?

C. Handouts provided for training

1. Common Special Needs in Adoption/Foster Care
2. Attachment Disorder
3. Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
4. Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
5. Sensory Integration
6. Core Issues in Adoption
7. Positive Adoption Language
8. Resource List for Special Needs
Part 4: Behavior Management

Dealing with children’s behavior is typically the biggest day-to-day concern of respite providers. One effective way to manage the behavior of children with special needs is to carefully plan activities that are fun, safe, and developmentally appropriate. In addition, providers need to know how to redirect the behavior of children with special needs and ensure that the children are safe.

A. Moderated discussion answering questions that illustrate effective behavior management techniques:

1. When do problems need to be managed?
2. What are some basic rules for behavior?
3. When do you notice that problems generally occur?
4. How can you track behaviors, anticipate problems, and redirect the child before the trouble starts?
5. How can you best handle behavior problems during transitions between activities?
6. How can you improve cooperation and impulse control?
7. How can you best use structure and consistency to manage behavior?
8. What behavior management techniques may be used?
9. What behavior management techniques are prohibited?
10. How can families and providers manage their own mounting frustration when trying to manage children with special needs?

- Encourage experienced providers to offer examples of effective behavior management techniques
- Close with encouragement and humor and talk about the importance of laughing with the children. Encourage respite providers to have fun with the children. These children need to have fun, and to be encouraged to learn new things and experience a variety of activities.
- Be proactive when you take care of a child with special needs. If you want a child to succeed, it is better to over-supervise than to under-supervise, especially when the child is in the provider’s home. Providing structure and preventing problems is much better than trying to repair problems after they have happened.
- Self-care for respite providers is important. What do you do to calm yourself? What is your back up plan if you need help?

B. Handouts for behavior management

1. How to Mean Business without Being Mean
2. Tips for Parents & Caregivers of Children who have Experienced Trauma
3. Top Ten List for Parents Caring for Children with Multiple Diagnoses
4. Avoiding Power Struggles in Parenting
Part 5: Respite Care Provider’s Role and Tools for Success

A. Supporting the family

A respite care provider’s number one job is to support the family. Providers need to listen carefully to what parents tell them about their children, respect their knowledge and understanding of their children, and follow through with providing care according to the parent’s wishes.

B. Getting Information

To be successful and support the family, providers need to get all the useful information they can about the child and the family.

C. Sharing Strategies for Emergencies

It is very important to talk about emergency situations with the family before they happen. Know what providers’ responsibilities are for the child and to the family.

1. How to handle the following situations*:
   a. A runaway child
   b. Raging behavior, violent outburst
   c. Night terrors
   d. Inappropriate sexual behaviors
   e. Stealing
   f. Legal matters
   g. Medical emergencies

*Explore solutions for each of these areas. Any one of them can happen.

2. Reporting to families
   a. Remember that family’s request respite care because their children have challenging needs.
   b. When reporting behavior, start with positive reports and work into negative issues that occurred.
   c. Focus on the big picture not isolated events.
   d. Know that children often will test a new caregiver to see what they can get away with. Build a relationship with the child(ren) and the family. As you do, the children will do less testing.
   e. Think about the child: Would you want to build a relationship with someone who tells every little thing you did wrong? Watch for positive experiences and build trust with the child.
   f. Do not parent the parents.
   g. Know that children sometimes act better around strangers than they do with their regular caregivers. Do not play into the child’s games.
h. Untrained respite providers may not realize they are experiencing the shallow bond with an unattached child, misinterpret their observations of the parents, and wrongly believe the parents are causing the child’s misbehavior.

D. Providing respite is a journey

1. Providing respite is a journey. You do not need all the answers. There will be:
   - Opportunities for ongoing learning and training
   - A learning curve
   - Time to keep growing

   You are on this journey with parents, children, and other resource providers. Keep talking and learning from each other.

E. Forms

   - Application to Provide Respite Care, CS-RC-1
   - Foster Respite Care Provider Checklist, CS-RC-2
   - Sign a Respite Care Provider Approval, CS-RC-3
   - Sign a Cooperative Agreement for the Purchase of Respite Care Services with the Children’s Division, CM-10
   - Read, agree to and sign the Resource Parent Discipline Agreement, CD-119
   - Read, agree to and sign the Safe Sleep Practices, CD-117

Part 6: Knowledge Assessment

Answers are True or False

1. A respite provider must complete all the same background checks as a foster parent applicant.

   □ True   □ False

2. A respite provider must be at least 21 years of age.

   □ True   □ False

3. A respite provider may be married or single.

   □ True   □ False
4. All information about the child, their birth/first families or adoptive and kinship families is considered confidential and must not be shared with others.

☐ True  ☐ False

5. To provide respite services in my home the Respite Care Providers Checklist, CS-RC2, must be completed by a licensing worker.

☐ True  ☐ False

6. I have read all the handouts and resources provided for this training.

☐ True  ☐ False

7. I must be approved and sign a Children’s Division Cooperative Agreement to provide respite services for foster parents.

☐ True  ☐ False

8. Part of the process to be approved to provide respite services requires the respite provider submit fingerprints.

☐ True  ☐ False

9. The respite provider must sign the Resource Parent Discipline Agreement, CD-119, regarding types of discipline that is not allowed and alternative methods of discipline that may be used to train a child in a positive way.

☐ True  ☐ False

10. Respite providers are required to cooperate with the treatment team for the foster youth placed in their home for respite services.

☐ True  ☐ False
APPENDIX D

Respite Care Provider Certification Paperwork

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
CHILDREN’S DIVISION
SAFE SLEEP PRACTICES RECOMMENDED BY THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

The Children’s Division has adopted the following recognized practices for resource providers regarding safe sleep of children placed in their home:

1. Healthy babies should always sleep on their backs.
2. Side sleeping is not as safe as back sleeping and is not advised.
3. Get a physician’s note for non-back sleepers that explains why the baby should not use a back-sleeping position.
5. Keep cribs free of toys, stuffed animals, and extra bedding.
6. Place the child’s feet to the foot of the crib and tuck in a light blanket along the sides and foot of the mattress. The blanket should not come up higher than the infant’s chest.
7. Use sleep clothing and nothing else in the infant’s crib.
8. Sleep only 1 baby per crib.
9. Keep the room at a temperature that is comfortable for a lightly clothed adult.
10. Visually check on sleeping babies often.
11. No smoking around babies. Make sure babies are being watched when you go outside to smoke. Child care providers who smoke should do so outside. Never allow smoking in a room where babies sleep.
12. Have supervised “tummy time” for awake babies. This will help babies strengthen their muscles and develop normally.

I/we ___________________________ have read the above listed safe sleep practices recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics and accepted as policy by the Missouri Department of Social Services Children’s Division. I understand and will adhere to these practices with infants placed in my home.

I/we have participated in discussion with the licensing worker regarding the dangers of co-sleeping with an infant including information discussed in the presentation, SIDS and Safe Sleep, located on the Internet, http://www.dss.mo.gov/statstatpres/prevention.htm. I/we understand the dangers and will not co-sleep with an infant 1 year of age and younger.

Signed ___________________________ Date ___________________________

Signed ___________________________ Date ___________________________

CD licensing worker ___________________________ Date ___________________________

CD-117 (11/06)
MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
CHILDREN'S DIVISION
COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT FOR THE PURCHASE OF FOSTER RESPITE CARE SERVICES

COUNTY

DVN-DEPARTMENT VENDOR NUMBER

AGREEMENT NUMBER

RS

The Missouri Children's Division and the Resource Provider(s) agree that providing quality care for homeless, dependent, and neglected children in the custody of the Children’s Division shall be the principal consideration of both parties in entering into the Cooperative Agreement.

The Cooperative Agreement is made by and between the Children's Division and the following provider:

PROVIDER NAME(S)

PROVIDER'S ADDRESS

CITY

STATE

ZIP

This Agreement shall become effective beginning this date with applicable foster care licensure: BEGINNING DATE:

With applicable foster care license in place, this Agreement shall continue in force through the date listed or current fiscal year end date with automatic contract amendment renewal updates unless amended by mutually accepted written amendment, in which case the effective dates in the amendment shall apply. END DATE:

No employer/employee relationship or principal/agent relationship is created by this Agreement.

The Resource Provider agrees to the following terms and conditions by signing this agreement:

1. To serve as a temporary placement resource for a planned period of time for foster youth a minimum of 12 hours per day, for a planned period of time in a facility approved for such care by the Division.
2. To provide the foster youth with a wholesome living environment, adequate food, shelter, clothing, affection, understanding and encouragement.
3. To hold the Children's Division harmless for any negligence attributable to the acts or omissions of the Resource Provider(s).
4. To report to the Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline (1-800-392-3738) any suspected instance of child abuse or neglect. As a mandated reporter, the failure of the Resource Provider(s) to report shall be cause for immediate cancellation of the Agreement.
5. To comply with rules established by the Children’s Division in the Code of State Regulations, Title 13, Division 35 as follows:
   a. Licensed Foster Families shall comply with Chapter 60, " Licensing of Foster Family Homes";
   b. Group Home Facilities shall comply with Division 40 Chapter 72 " Licensing Rules for Group Home Facilities";
   c. Child Caring Agencies shall comply with Chapter 71, " Rules for Licensing Child Caring Agencies"; and
   d. Career Respite Care Providers who are not licensed but are providing care in their own home shall comply with Chapter 60, Care of Foster Children (CSR 40-60.050) and " The Licensing of Foster Family Homes", Physical Standards for Foster Homes (CSR 40-60.040) as applicable.
   1. General Requirements, Sections A through G;
   2. Sleeping Arrangements, Sections A through I;
   3. Fire and Safety Requirements, Sections A through I.
5. To indicate preferences as to the number, age, sex, handicap or race of children that the Foster Respite Care Provider(s) is equipped to care for and to otherwise not discriminate in the provision of services to foster youth based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex or handicap status as prohibited elsewhere herein.
7. To notify the Children's Division when the resource provider receives any payment in excess of the amount the resource provider is entitled, including any payments that are received when the child is not placed in the resource provider's home.
8. To cooperate with the Children's Division's right to recover any overpayments which are received, including but not limited to an error caused by the Children's Division.
9. To repay the division by recoupment from future payments owed to the provider, repayment by the provider, or any other collection method allowed by statute, regulation or Children's Division policy once an overpayment has been established.
10. To comply with all Children's Division policy and practices contained in the Child Welfare Manual.
11. It is the intention of the Department of Social Services to move all payments to direct deposit/electronic fund transfer.
The Children's Division agrees to the following terms and conditions with execution of this agreement and the provider(s) listed:

12. To comply with rules established by the Division in the Code of State Regulations, Title 13, Division 35, Chapter 60, “The Licensing of Foster Family Homes” or Division 40 Chapter 72, “Licensing Rules for Group Home Facilities” or Chapter 13, “Rules for Licensing Child Caring Agencies”, as applicable and to give the Foster Respite Care Provider(s) upon completion of approval, a copy of both the applicable rules and the written application/home study.
13. To reimburse the Respite Care Provider(s) for all service rendered under the terms and conditions of this Agreement at the current apportioned rate per unit. However, reimbursement shall not begin until a foster youth is placed in care.
14. To hold the Foster Respite Care Provider(s) harmless for any negligence attributable to the Division's acts or omissions.
15. To provide close supervision, support services and crisis intervention, as needed, if needed, 24 hours per day.

The Children's Division and the Resource Provider(s) agree:

17. To comply with the 1964 Civil Rights Act, as amended; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended; the Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 1981, as amended; the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended; and all other applicable Federal and State laws which prohibit discrimination in the delivery of services on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, sex, handicap/disability or religious belief. Further, all parties agree to comply with the Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, sex, handicap/disability, and religious beliefs.
18. That the Children's Division has the right to recover any overpayments by recoupment, repayment, or any other collection method allowed by statute, regulation or Children's Division policy.

That termination of this Agreement may occur prior to the date agreed upon by the parties as follows:

a. In the event funds from local, state, and federal source are not obtained and continued at a level sufficient to allow for the indicated reimbursement rate, the obligations of each party shall thereupon be terminated immediately upon receipt of written notice.
b. Either the Provider(s) or the Children's Division Director may terminate this Agreement at any time upon thirty (30) days notice.

Any written notice of termination shall be sent by certified mail, first class, postage paid, and the notice shall be effective upon receipt or upon ten (10) days after deposit with the U.S. Postal Service, whichever comes first.

19. The Children's Division may at its sole option, with written notice to the Provider(s), annually renew this Agreement with applicable licensure procedures in accordance.
20. The Provider(s) further understands that the Children's Division has no commitment to renew this Agreement after the above mentioned expiration date.

The Children's Division and Resource Provider(s) hereby execute this agreement by the following authorization signatures and dates:

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<th>RESOURCE PROVIDER</th>
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<tr>
<td>RESOURCE PROVIDER</td>
<td>DATE</td>
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<tr>
<td>CHILDREN'S DIVISION DIRECTOR</td>
<td>DATE</td>
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Note: Requirement for RS cooperative agreement. RS approval. Current Fiscal Year Amendment updates reflect licensure verification prior to auto update.
RESOURCE PARENT DISCIPLINE AGREEMENT  
MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES  
CHILDREN'S DIVISION

Missouri 13 CSR 35-60.050 (5) (2006). Foster Home Licensing Regulations, Care of Children, Discipline, outlines the types of discipline that a resource parent shall **not** use with a foster youth placed in their home:

- No corporal punishment
- No verbal abuse, threats of corporal punishment, derogatory remarks about the youth or members of the youth's family, threats to withhold family visits, threats to have the child removed from the resource home or withholding of food, shelter or clothing
- No abuse or neglect
- No foster youth permitted to discipline another foster youth in the home
- No depriving of mail or family visits

The following forms of discipline/punishment are **NOT** permitted:

- Corporal punishment on any part of the body, i.e., spanking, swatting, switching, using any instrument such as hand, paddle, belt, stick, switch, hair brush, fly swatters, electrical cords, ropes, or any action which causes physical shock.
- Verbal abuse such as threatening, name calling, screaming, harshness, humiliating, belittling, degrading responses.
- Allowing a foster youth to discipline another foster youth in the resource home.
- Threats to remove the foster youth from the resource home.
- Requiring or forcing the foster youth to take an uncomfortable position such as squatting, bending, or standing against the wall.
- Using profanity at or in front of a foster youth.
- Shoving, pushing, pinching, squeezing, poking, choking, biting, hitting with the fist.
- Tying up a child or using any type of physical restraining except to protect child/children from imminent danger.
- Chemical, drug or mechanical restraints.
- Placing the foster youth in a frightening environment for punishment.
- Withholding food, shelter, clothing, or bedding.
- Placing or keeping a foster youth in a locked room.
- Requiring a foster youth to remain silent for a long period of time.
- Assignment of unduly physically strenuous or harsh work.
- Prolonged confinement to bed.
- Destruction of the foster youth's property.
- Aversive or intrusive practices such as putting Tabasco on fingers or washing mouth out with soup.
- Any unusual, unnecessary or severe punishment including physical, emotional, sexual and verbal abuse.

The list above is not all-inclusive.
Appropriate alternative methods of discipline that can be used to train children in a positive manner include the following:

- Time out (usually one minute per age of the child)
- Withdrawing privileges
- Charting positive behavior (stars, stickers, or other rewards)
- Praise
- Grounding
- Re-directing the child's activity
- Developing a behavioral contract

A check mark is made by those appropriate methods of discipline above that I/we agree to use.

I/we agree to follow policy concerning the discipline of the foster youth placed in my/our home.

Discipline will be fair, consistent and related and in proportion to the offense so as to be a positive, educational tool to help children develop inner controls.

I/we understand that inappropriate discipline may result in removal of the child/children and closing my/our resource home license.

The Children's Division has explained the term "Corporal punishment" and how it relates to foster care youth. I/we understand this explanation and I/we agree that corporal punishment will not be administered to any foster youth placed in my care.

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<th>Resource Parent Applicant</th>
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CD-119 (1/09)
MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES  
CHILDREN'S DIVISION  
RESPITE CARE PROVIDER CHECKLIST FOR:

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<th>Date Completed:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Home Address:</td>
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<td>Telephone Number:</td>
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<td>Email Address:</td>
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### Physical Standards of Respite Care Home

- [ ] Home is located so as to have access to schools, recreation, religious and other community resources.
- [ ] Home is constructed, arranged, and maintained to provide adequately for occupant's health and safety.
- [ ] Size, space, furnishings, and equipment comfortably accommodate the family and children in care.
- [ ] The home meets all local, county, and state fire, health, sanitation, and safety requirements. (The Division can require an inspection by officials.)
- [ ] All flammable liquids, matches, cleaning supplies, poisonous materials, medicines or other hazardous items are stored so as to be inaccessible to children, taking into consideration the age and mental capacities of the children.
- [ ] Private water supply is safe for human consumption. Testing may be required. (Cost for testing shall be covered by the applicant.)
- [ ] The interior of the home is free from an accumulation of visible dirt and any evidence of vermin and rodent infestations.
- [ ] All rooms have proper lighting and ventilation. Windows and doors shall be screened as needed unless the area is air-conditioned.
- [ ] All interior doors, when locked, may be opened from the outside in an emergency.
- [ ] The home has space for indoor play and access to outdoor play. The outdoor play space shall be fenced when, in the judgment of the Division, nearby street traffic, railroad tracks, lake, river, swimming pool, or other potential hazards suggest the necessity.
- [ ] A mobile home has lattice or solid skirting and is securely anchored by cable to the ground.

### Sleeping Arrangements

- [ ] Sleeping rooms for the foster child(ren) are located within the respite family home.
- [ ] No foster child shall be permitted to sleep in any unfinished attic or basement or any other room not normally used for sleeping.
- [ ] Sleeping rooms for children under ten (10) years of age are not located in finished basement bedrooms or above the second floor of a single family dwelling unless suitable heating, ventilation, and humidity control, and all exits from such bedrooms are approved by the Division.
- [ ] A responsible adult sleeps within call of the child at night.
- [ ] Foster children of the opposite sex, who are six (6) years of age or older shall not sleep in the same room. Foster children two (2) years of age or older shall not sleep in the bedroom of the respite parent(s) except for special temporary care, such as during a child's illness.
- [ ] Each bed or crib is of such size as to insure comfort of the foster child, and shall have a firm mattress or an orthopedic supportive surface, in good, clean condition, with water proof covering (if needed) and suitable covers adequate to the season.
- [ ] Foster children under age two (2) shall have separate beds.
- [ ] Foster children over age two (2) shall have bed space equivalent to one-half of a full size bed.
Fire and Safety Requirements

- The home shall have a working telephone or an agency approved form of emergency contact.
- Telephone numbers of the fire department, police, doctor, and ambulance are posted at all times.
- The house number is plainly visible from the street in case of an emergency.
- The respite care family has a posted plan for evacuation in case of fire. Foster children will be instructed in the evacuation plan.
- Every room used for sleeping, living, or dining purposes has at least two means of exit, at least one of which is a door or stairway providing a means of unobstructed travel to the outside. An operable window will be considered as one means of exit.
- Rooms or space accessible by ladder, folding stairs or trap doors is not used for living or sleeping purposes.
- In apartment buildings, where the respite care family’s residence is second floor or above, there is an exit stairway.
- An operable smoke detector, with batteries installed, is located where sleeping areas can be alerted.
- A charged, portable ABC fire extinguisher of at least 5-pound capacity is located near the kitchen area.
- Heating appliances are not located in a place which blocks escape in case of malfunctioning, which could result in a fire.
- Fireplaces, woodstoves, heaters, radiators, or floor furnaces are protected as required by the fire inspector.
- A carbon monoxide detector is installed if the home has gas appliances.

Weapons Requirements

- Firearms and ammunition are stored so as to be inaccessible to children.
- Ammunition is stored separately from any weapons.
- Firearms and ammunition are stored in locked areas or cabinets with keys secured so as to be inaccessible to children.
- No firearms shall be kept in any vehicle transporting (unless weapons are inaccessible to the foster child — i.e. in a locked glove box or other locked container or in the trunk of the vehicle) or on any person providing care or supervision to foster children. (An exception will be made for any person transporting a foster child who must carry a weapon as part of their job responsibilities — i.e. law enforcement officers.) No firearms possessed in violation of a state or federal law or local government ordinance shall be present at any time in the home, on any household member, or in any vehicle in which the children are riding.

Comments:

Worker completing checklist:

Provider Signature
## MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

### CHILDREN'S DIVISION

APPLICATION TO PROVIDE RESPITE CARE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date of Birth</th>
<th>SSN</th>
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<tr>
<td>Spouse</td>
<td>Date of Birth</td>
<td>SSN</td>
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Home address:

Telephone number:

Email address:

Please list other persons residing in the home, date of birth, relationship to head of household, and Social Security Number. Attach additional pages, if necessary.

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date of Birth</th>
<th>Relationship to Head of Household</th>
<th>SSN</th>
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Please respond to the following questions:

1. What is your understanding of the Children's Division Respite Care program?

   

2. What motivated you to become a Children's Division Respite Care provider?

   

3. What child care experience do you have?
4. Are you currently providing care for other unrelated children? If yes, how many unrelated children are you providing care for in your home/facility?

5. What is your understanding of Children's Division regulations regarding corporal punishment?

6. What is your understanding of the laws governing confidentiality of foster children placed in your home?

I (We), the undersigned, certify that I (we) have received an explanation of the Respite Care program as provided through the Children's Division and understand the terms as stated in this application.

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This is to certify that I have completed the walk through of the applicant’s home and completed the Respite Care Provider Checklist, CS-RC-2.

Children's Service Worker Signature | Date

This is to certify that I have provided an explanation of the Respite Care Program as provided through the Children's Division to the Respite Care applicant.

Children's Service Worker Signature | Date
The minimum standards for the care of foster children have been explained to me and I agree to adhere to them. These standards include the following policy concerning discipline:

*Discipline shall be fair, consistent, related and in proportion to the offense so as to be a positive, educational tool to help children develop inner controls. Harsh and humiliating punishment, including physical, emotional, and verbal abuse is prohibited.*

a. Positive corrective procedures shall be used as disciplinary measures. These measures include, but are not limited to:

1) Loss of privileges
2) Time out (usually the age of the child plus two minutes)
3) Grounding to a certain area
4) Redirecting the child's activity
5) Developing a behavioral contract
6) Extra chores
7) Restitution by child of other persons' property damaged or destroyed by child

b. Certain types of punishment shall not be used. These include, but are not limited to:

1) Corporal punishment
2) Strapping, striking, or hitting the child's face
3) Hitting with a fist
4) Shaking the child
5) Chemical, drug, or mechanical restraints
6) Use of instruments (i.e., belts, switches, extension cords, etc.)

I further state that no member of my household has been convicted of a felony or misdemeanor involving: 1) a sex related crime; 2) serious intentional, reckless or negligent physical injury, danger or death of any person; 3) a crime against a child; 4) major intrusion upon property or use of weapon to secure property; 5) arson; or 6) manufacture, sale, distribution or possession of controlled substances, opiates, illegal, addictive or narcotic drugs.

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The Missouri Children's Division has evaluated and approved the above named respite care applicant as a respite care provider.

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<tr>
<th>Children's Service Worker Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Circuit Manager/Supervisor</th>
<th>Date</th>
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Lesson One

He Will Keep Us Forever

Focal Texts: Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore. (Psalm 121:1-8)

Background Texts: Psalm 68:4-5; Psalm 146:9.

Main Idea: The Lord will keep his children forever.

Question to Explore: What difference does God’s promise to believers make on how believers are involved in foster care?

Study Aim: To explore how God cares for believers and how his care affects our care for foster and orphaned children.

Quick Read: God is Father (parent) of the fatherless (parentless). The relationship that believers have with God is a spiritual orphan welcomed home. God promises to keep us forever.

Learning Objectives:

- The learner will demonstrate their understanding of Psalms 121 by giving examples of how God provides care for him/her.
- The learner will relate the principles from Psalm 121 to contemporary practices of foster care.
• The learner will evaluate an foster care case study in light of the fatherhood (parenthood) of God principles given in Psalms 121.

Introduction
Psalm 121 focuses on the problems of life and where a person looks for help. The psalmist declares his personal decision to trust the Lord. As a result, we are led to make a personal decision. Where will our help come from? How a person answers will impact his/her life by leading them toward God or far away from God. The Psalms of Ascent are a collection of 15 songs that the Israelites sang three times a year as they journeyed to Jerusalem. The journey was one that involved ascending up to the highest point in Palestine. The songs called for the Israelites to remember their relationship with the Lord and to consider his perfect care for their lives. Each of the Psalms of Ascent in this study will focus on God’s promises to care for his children. Each of God’s promises will also serve to give a vision for believers when working with foster children. The Psalms of Ascent will help believers to show the same commitment for vulnerable children that God shows to his people.

Where Does My Help Come From?
Psalm 121:1–2 begins with a question, “Where does our help come from?” This question is asked while engaged in a journey. The psalmist identifies the hills as obstacles in the traveler’s way.

1. What are some ways that God provides care for your life?

2. What are some ways that God’s care is realized in contemporary foster and orphan care?

The hills were home to pagan temples attracting the devotion of weary travelers.

Psalm 146:9

The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

1. What examples can you think of that are present attractions in our culture?

2. Without God as your Father (parent), how would you respond to the psalmists’ question?

“Psalm 121 is a quiet voice gently and kindy telling us that we are, perhaps, wrong in the way we are going about the Christian life, and then, very simply, showing us the right way.” (Eugene Peterson, A Long Obedience in The Same Direction, 38)

1. What about Psalm 121 supports Peterson’s claims?
2. What challenges you most about Psalm 121?

God Is My Constant Care
Psalm 121:3–5 describes God’s commitment to care for his children:

1. How would you describe God’s practical care for you?

2. What practical example of God’s care helps you understand God as Father?

“Three times in Psalm 121 God is referred to by the personal name Yahweh, translated God. Eight times he is described as the guardian, or as the one who guards. He is not an impersonal executive giving orders from on high; he is present help every step of the way we travel.” (Eugene Peterson, A Long Obedience in The Same Direction, 43)

3. How does God as guardian help you understand God as Father?

God’s Care Is Eternal
Psalm 121:7–8 says, God Makes an eternal commitment to care for your needs:

1. How does this affect your understanding of God as Father (parent)?

2. What does God’s commitment to us say about our commitment to foster children and orphans?

“All the water in all the oceans cannot sink a ship unless it gets inside.” (Eugene Peterson, A Long Obedience in The Same Direction, 43)

3. How does the hope of God’s care impact your relationship with him?

Case Study: What She Taught Us (by Troy and Leigh-Ann Campbell)

1. Evaluate The Campbell’s care in light of the fatherhood of God in Psalm 121.

Conclusion:
Psalm 121 focuses on trusting God as Father. God keeps us now and forever in his perfect care. God’s commitment to us leads believers to commitment to foster care.

**Case Study: What She Taught Us** by Troy and Leigh-Ann Campbell

Troy and Leigh-Ann started life together like many twenty-somethings…full of love, passion and a desire to change the world. They shared a love for Jesus and believed that they could make a difference.

The first years of their marriage were packed with travel, friends and church. After some time, Troy accepted the call to transition from business to ministry as a pastor. They took a dramatic cut in pay and settled in to a life of serving.

Over time they had two kids, a nice house and plenty of hope for a comfortable future.

After two miscarriages, Leigh-Ann began to investigate adoption and then foster care. After a “random” call from a licensing worker and a home interview, they decided to enroll in foster classes for nine weeks as a planned “date night.” During this time, Leigh-Ann realized that she was pregnant again, but after learning about the need, both Troy and Leigh-Ann felt led to keep going through the doors that God was opening.

Shortly after licensure, they received a phone call…

It was an opportunity to accept a newborn that had been drug-exposed and needed foster care. The baby’s older sibling had already been adopted and it seemed that the likelihood of this story repeating itself was high.

Leigh-Ann said, “Yes” on the phone and then called Troy to confirm. Within two hours they went from two kids to three.

Two-day-old fingers and toes…

Crying…

Drug Withdrawals…

Middle of the night feedings…

Life would no longer be the same!

A decision to enroll in a foster care class and then a decision to accept a two-day-old baby girl born at North Kansas City hospital rear-ended their lives and smashed their mental picture of a comfortable life spent entertaining their family.

Nearly four years after their first foster daughter was delivered in stork-like fashion, God woke Leigh-Ann up in the middle of the night and through tears she typed out the following:
Two years ago today, I left a little girl. The little girl had blonde hair, fine to the texture with sweet, goldilocks-type curls at the bottom. She had beautiful blue eyes and a smile that could light a million bulbs.

But on this day, the beautiful girl was not smiling. She was sobbing…hard.

We had to leave her behind.

She kept saying “Please don’t go! Let me come! Please let me come,” in the most pitiful, panicked cry that to this day haunts my heart.

It was like she sensed what was to come…she sensed what I did not. She sensed that moment was the last time we would see each other for a long time, possibly forever. I wished I’d kissed her one last time-or a hundred more times-given her one more squeeze, one more bit of wisdom to keep herself safe, one more of anything. I regret that every day. But I left. I had no choice.

The little blonde girl we called daughter, and lover her as such.

The precious girl who came to us at a day old, ravaged by drug addiction that was not her own.

The girl we nursed back to life with the feedings by the hour; the towel changing around her shaking body because the withdrawals ravaged it, as it violently shook to rid itself of the poisons.

The little girl who melted our hearts when her eyes first focused on the world 7 ½ weeks later, and then a couple of months later, learned to smile when she saw our love looking at her!

The little girl who would belly-laugh with her two, older sisters, and who would scream incessantly because she hated her car seat!

The little girl who LOVED fudgsicles, and cookies, and anything Daddy was eating!

The little girl who won every heart in our church body with her infectious giggle and her boisterous personality.

The little girl who didn’t mind sharing baby status when her brother was born a mere six months later and who loved him and wanted to do EVERYTHING with him, including boss him, which he strangely did not mind one bit.
The little girl who would climb into our bed ridiculously early every single day, and we would just watch sleeping soundly though we could never seem to fall back asleep.

The little girl whose little brain was “damaged” yet spoke in sentences by 16 months, and who hated her hands being dirty and her face being washed.

The little girl whose favorite book was “I Love You Stinkyface,” and who was so full of drama that she could scream loudly enough that her aunty could hear her at the other end of the mall.

The little girl who loved hotels, because we all slept in the same room and could swim in a pool and finish the fun by staying up way too late and have popcorn stuck in the sheets from little fingers not noticing the kernels they’d dropped.

The little girl I dreamed would be mine, and almost was…

Until the day I was given one hour to hand her over after a commissioner with all the power gave her away to someone with the same blood as hers—her biological mother….

The same biological mother who decided a year later, right then and there on that step that she was completely done with us and that we were to be done with the little, blue-eyed girl with blonde curls who etched a place so deep in my heart that it still aches every day.

A little girl who still called me by my favorite name—Mommy.

The little girl’s other “siblings” for those three years: a 6-month-younger brother who still prays for her every night at bedtime; an older sister, whose friend passed from a brain tumor and whose only wish during that time was to see her for a minute to give her a hug, because she realized right then how short life really is; the oldest sister who still cries when we mention her name and struggles to see the good, but hopes in God every second that His promise is true—that all things will work out for good…eventually.

And a littlest brother who asks about her picture—and knows the name that goes with it but not the person. All while I pray the little girl doesn’t think that he simply replaced her and that’s why we’ve never seen each other again…

The blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl with chubby cheeks, piano fingers and knock-knees whose favorite songs were “I Can Only Imagine” and “The Cuppy-cake song.”

I could only imagine…..
The little girl who is probably now a completely different little girl than I knew, yet I still love so much. I can barely breathe if I think about her too long.

This is the little girl who God used to teach me everything:

She taught me what it was like to step out in faith and lose everything I held dear—and never, not even for a second, wish that I hadn’t experienced every single second of it.

She taught me that the only time to step out in faith and serve God was today.

She taught me to appreciate every second, because you never know when that time will be over.

She taught me to see the positive and the negative and to embrace both.

She taught me that there are never enough hugs and kisses, and that presents aren’t as important as presence.

She taught me that, while some days are never-ending, most days end too soon.

She taught me that its’s through hard times that we learn who are our real friends are, and that family has nothing to do with blood.

She taught me that my husband is amazing, loving and upright—things I knew but were even more evident because of going through a loss together.

She taught me that doing the right thing is always right, even if it kills your heart.

She taught me that loving more only grows more love in your heart, and that every child I love only makes my heart stronger, healthier, and sweeter.

She taught me that Satan will use the hardest of times to attack you and make you feel worthless, that those who spread his message of hate are used of him, and to shut them out with honesty, tears, and integrity…and the occasion chocolate treat.

She taught me that whenever you are being attacked, God sends the most amazing angels—many of them with skin on—to help you thru the worst of it.

She taught me that serving God brings out the absolute worst in me…and brings out His absolute best.

She taught me that whenever someone says, “I just can’t do that. I couldn’t handle it,” I hear, “I just won’t do that.” I’m not called to handle it. I’m called to obey.
She taught me that there are those believers who will never jump in the pool, but will try to pee in yours.

She taught me that God can use even my personality to serve Him—someone who wear everything on the outside—and that there are amazing people who love me in spite of it and some even for it! Deep friendship comes through growing together while purging the yuck, and that those who appreciate honesty usually share with me the best and worst of themselves, and I love them for it.

She taught me that when people say, “God never gives us more than we can handle,” that they don’t know what they are saying. The truth is that God never lets us be tempted to sin more than we could handle and if we are tempted, He always, ALWAYS, gives us way out (1 Corinthians 10:13). Serving Him is totally different. It’s ALWAYS, more than we can handle, and that’s how it should be. His strength is made perfect in weakness.

She taught me that sometimes God says, “no” to me, because someone else needs a “yes” more than I do…And that just sucks for me…it seriously does.

She taught me what it looks like to be Jesus’ hands and feet: bloody and dead…and then raised back to life with a fight inside me that I never knew existed. A fight to seek justice, love mercy and walk humbly with my God (Micah 6:8).

She taught me that God is enough. Even when my feelings say it’s not true…God is enough. He is always enough.

Thank-you, blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl, for forever changing me. It was by loving you that I was able to grow and truly serve God for the first time. It was by losing you that God changed my lens and how I see the world. Now I know why He commands each of His children to have pure religion. You have given me more than I could have ever given you, and you have no idea…May you always know that love that’s all around you in prayer every single day. I miss you every second of each one.

Since this time, Troy and Leigh-Ann have welcomed a total of six foster children into their home, and they have adopted two. Each child represents an incredible amount of pain and an even greater need for love. A kind of love that is not natural, that can breathe hope into defeat and passion into emptiness.

It was C.S. Lewis who explained, “Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pain. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” Foster care and adoption is PAINFUL. It is a painful process that God uses to shape His children. Like a Potter and His clay, God’s fingers lovingly use the reality of orphans, social workers, family and friends to provide samples of His kingdom on this earth. Maybe this is why James said that pure religion is to care
for widows and orphans (James 1:27) and maybe Bob Dylan was right when he said, “Behind every beautiful thing, there’s some kind of pain.”
Lesson Two

He Will Not Abandon Us

Focal Texts: Psalm 124

If it had not been the Lord who was on our side—let Israel now say—if it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when our enemies attacked us, then they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us; then the flood would have swept us away, the torrent would have gone over us; then over us would have gone the raging waters. Blessed be the Lord, who has not given us as prey to their teeth. We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers the snare is broken, and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.
(Ps. 124:1-8)

Background Text: Psalm 10:14

Main Idea: The Lord will not abandon his people when things get bad.

Question to Explore: How does God’s commitment to us affect our willingness to stay committed to others going through bad situations?

Study Aim: To explore how God cares for believers and how his care affects our care for foster children and orphans.

Quick Read: God can free his people from any trap that threatens our future. There is great joy experienced when we realized there is hope for freedom!

Learning Objectives:

- The learner will demonstrate their understanding of Psalms 124 by giving examples of how God stays faithful during our worst situations.

- The learner will relate the principles from Psalm 124 to contemporary practices of foster care.

- The learner will analyze the poetic language of Psalm 124 and translate the experiences of trouble into practical fears that foster children face.
Introduction
Psalm 124 reminds God’s people that the Lord will never abandon his people when things get bad. God’s care is constant and dependable. How does God’s care for us impact our care for children in crisis? How can we model the same level of care for children in foster care? God is powerful to release us from any trap that holds us captive. What difference does this knowledge make when it comes to our consideration of children in foster care? God’s faithfulness is the example for all his people to model. This will be our focus on Psalm 124.

The Lord Is On Our Side!
Psalm 124 begins with the repetitive declaration of God’s favor on his people. Like a pep rally, God’s people are unified in their celebration of God’s providential care.

1. What are some ways that you celebrate God’s favor in your life?

2. How would you describe what it means to experience God’s favor?

The enemies we face are many and can destroy us. God’s power protects us from the fears we face.

3. What do you think are some fears that children in foster care experience?

4. How can Christians help to protect foster children from these fears?

“No longer does it seem of the highest priority to ask, “Why did this happen to me? Why do I feel left in the lurch?” Instead we ask, “How does it happen that there are people who sing with such confidence, ‘God’s strong name is our help’?” (Eugene Peterson, A Long Obedience in The Same Direction, 72-3)

1. How is it possible to communicate the deliverance of God to children who are still in the middle of crisis?

Poetic Analysis (Eugene Peterson, 75):
1. Identify the honesty in Vv. 3–7
2. The truth of a life lived in faith

a. How do you describe living your life in devotion to a God whom you have never seen?

b. How does Eugene Peterson describe our lives once we choose to put God at the center?

**We are set free!**

What a surprise that the cage door opens and freedom is ours. This is the experience the psalmist describes regarding the rescue of God’s people.

Peterson reflects on this psalm as a sample of some of life’s most difficult moments. He says, “Psalm 124 is an instance of a person who digs deeply into the trouble and finds there the presence of the God who is on our side.”

1. What do you think Peterson is saying?

2. How could foster children benefit from a vision of God’s favor?

**Translate:** How would you translate the poetic example of “beast and weather” to practical fears that foster children face?

**Conclusion:**

Safety and security are important values. God has shown us through his perfect care that He can be trusted. When we trust in him we will never be abandoned.
Lesson Three

He Will Be Our Security

**Focal Texts:** Psalm 125

Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people, from this time on and forevermore. For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, so that the righteous might not stretch out their hands to do wrong. Do good, O Lord, to those who are good, and to those who are upright in their hearts. But those who turn aside to their own crooked ways the Lord will lead away with evildoers. Peace be upon Israel! (Ps. 125:1-5)

**Background Text:** Psalm 10:17-18

**Main Idea:** The Lord will be our security as we live to obey his commands.

**Question to Explore:** How does God’s security encourage our obedience?

**Study Aim:** To explore how God cares for believers and how his care affects our care for foster children.

**Quick Read:** God’s security is forever and ever. He will never let down his guard when protecting his people from the wicked ways of the evildoer.

**Learning Objectives:**

- The learner will demonstrate their understanding of Psalms 125 by giving examples of how God secures his people with his abiding presence.

- The learner will relate the principles from Psalm 125 to contemporary practices of foster care.

- The learner will sketch a picture of what God’s security looks like and how that image can help serve as a vision for foster children.
Introduction
Psalm 125 reminds God’s people that the Lord will secure his people. God’s security infuses his people with confidence to stay the course. The emphasis is placed in the permanence of God’s care and likewise the people who trust in him. The surrounding presence of God releases the anxiety of those who journey through the adventure of life. Many have fallen by the wayside; however, God is faithful to deliver the righteous safe and secure. The path of destruction is reserved for those who are determined to walk the crooked way.

We cannot be moved!
Psalm 125 describes God’s people as the mountain of God. The grounded permanence of God’s dwelling place is transferred to his people.

1. How would you describe God’s provisions of security in your life?

2. What thoughts do you have when you hear the words “abide forever?”

God’s protection of his people is an embrace of his eternal character and his fierce commitment.

3. How would you describe the feelings of security (or lack of security) that foster children have?

4. What are some ways that a Christian could build the certainty of God’s presence in the life of a foster child?

“For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribes, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing. (Psalm 10:17-18)

“Discipleship is a decision to live by what I know about God, not by what I feel about him or myself or my neighbors. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the LORD is round about his people. The image that announces the dependable, unchanging, safe, secure existence of God’s people comes from geology, not psychology.” (Eugene Peterson, A Long Obedience in The Same Direction, 87)
1. How can Christians share the dependable presence of God to foster children?

2. List some ways that Christians communicate what is known about God:
   1. Tithing
   2.
   3.
   4.
   5.

**Relax! We Are Secure!** (Peterson, 91)
Peterson says, “God is running the show.” (91) The terrible troubles of life do not
determine our present or future security. God is in charge and he is not shaken.

1. How do you know when God is running the show in your life?

2. How would it impact foster children to know that God is running the show?

**Illustrate** (on separate page): Draw a picture illustrating what you think
Psalm 125:1–2 looks like.

**Conclusion:**
God provides security now and forevermore. We are secure to continue following his
will and obeying his commands.
Lesson Four

He Will Be Our Joy

Focal Texts: Psalm 126

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, “The Lord has done great things for them.” The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced. Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the watercourses in the Negeb. May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves. (Ps. 126:1-6)

Background Text: Nehemiah 8:10

Main Idea: The Lord will be our joy. He will restore what was once missing.

Question to Explore: How does God’s restoration produce joy in our lives?

Study Aim: The testimony of God’s people is a story of great joy and laughter though there was once suffering and loss.

Quick Read: The history of God’s people was filled with captivity and loss. God took the refugees and restored them to their promised land. The people rejoiced!

Learning Objectives:
- The learner will demonstrate their understanding of Psalms 126 by giving examples of how God restores our joy when trouble takes over.
- The learner will relate the principles from Psalm 126 to contemporary practices of foster care.
- The learner will examine the imagery of the watercourses in the Negeb to compare with a personal life experience.
Introduction
Psalm 126 describes God’s ability to restore our joy. God’s people were released from Babylonian captivity. They were in a dream-like state. The experience was more than they could have ever imagined happening. God’s people became a testimony to the nations which declared the amazing works of God. The psalmist related this experience to the sowing of seed and the reaping of a harvest. The sowing is a work of toil while the reaping is an intense celebration! God’s people were sowed into captivity however God brought them forth as a mighty harvest!

We Were Like Those Who Dream!
Psalm 126 describes God’s people as dreamers. The Israelites were released from a certain destruction. There was no prospect of a future for the people. They were resigned to the hopeless situation they were in. No way out. We are doomed.

1. What experience(s) have you had where God transformed your life and woke you up to his powerful presence?

2. Have you known someone else that experienced a life changing announcement that broke out into celebration?

What God has done before, he can do again!

3. Do you recall a time in your life when you wanted God to repeat something that he had done in the past?

4. What are some ways that Christians could restore the joy of a family for foster children?

“Joy has a history. Joy is the verified, repeated experience of those involved in what God is doing. It is as real as a date in history, as solid as a stratum of rock in Palestine. Joy is nurtured by living in such a history, building on such a foundation.” (Eugene Peterson, A Long Obedience in The Same Direction, 99)
1. How can Christians share joy with foster children?

2. What do you think is the biggest miracle foster children want performed in their lives?

**God, Do It Again!**
The historical goodness of God is dependable. Christians should live with expectant hope that God will repeat and exceed his historical goodness to his people. The certainty of God’s willingness and power are reason for us to rejoice!

1. What practical way can you share your joy with foster children?

2. How would it impact foster children to know that God is able to change their situation?

**Inventory:** List several ways Christians could use respite care to be a joy-filled experience for foster children:

**Conclusion:**
God will restore our lives. God alone can cause his people to rejoice and then do it all over again!
Lesson Five

He Will Build Our Home

Focal Texts: Psalm 127

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives sleep to his beloved. Sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of one’s youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them. He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies at the gate. (Ps. 127:1-5)

Background Text: Psalm 146:9

Main Idea: God builds houses that last. His blessings reproduce lasting fulfilment.

Question to Explore: What does it mean to let God build our home?

Study Aim: The houses that God’s people dwell in are established and guarded by God. He alone guarantees the lasting impact of the family who trusts in him.

Quick Read: God builds a legacy for his people. God does not rely on the effort of anxious workers. He will fill the house and fulfill his plans for his faithful ones.

Learning Objectives:

- The learner will demonstrate their understanding of Psalms 127 by listing ways that contemporary culture has continued the work of Babel.

- The learner will relate the principles from Psalm 127 to contemporary practices of foster care.

- The learner will organize an acronym that describes their understanding of how God desires his people to value children.
Introduction
Psalm 127 describes God’s construction of godly homes. The people are instructed to remember that there is no substitute for God’s activity when establishing a legacy. The endless toil and anxiety of the busy will never compare to God. The psalmist reminds the pilgrims to trust in God’s perfect design for houses and families. Fathers and Mothers are given children as a heritage and example of God’s lasting commitment to his people. Children are a blessing from the Lord. The more children the richer the blessing.

Unless the Lord…
Psalm 127 points the reader to the essential quality of God presence in each person’s life. The projects of man are only completed if they are joined with the larger plans of God. The house that God builds is established as a part of his glorious and lasting commitment to his people. Anything less than God’s complete work is a fractured incomplete work.

1. How does your family life connect to the larger story of God?

2. What practical ways does your home tell the story of God? How do you tell the story of God’s legacy with your house?

“…We have forgotten our collective ends, and we possess great means: we set huge machines in motion in order to arrive nowhere.” Jacques Ellul

3. What are some ways that foster children experience a disconnect from the larger story of God’s desire for family?

4. What are some ways that Christians could restore the experience of home/family for foster children?

“The Lord watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. (Psalm 146:9)

“Western Culture takes up where Babel left off and deifies human effort as such. The machine is the symbol of this way of life which attempts to control and manage. Technology promises to give us control over the earth and over other people. But the promise is not fulfilled: lethal automobiles, ugly buildings and ponderous bureaucracies
ravage the earth and empty lives of meaning. Structures become more important than the people who live in them. Machines become more important than the people who use them. We care more for our possessions with which we hope to make our way in the world than with our thoughts and dreams which tell us who we are in the world.” (Eugene Peterson, A Long Obedience in The Same Direction, 107)

1. How can Christians restore the value of the house connected to God’s big story?

2. For many foster children returning home will never happen. How can you imagine connecting a child to the big picture of God’s story?

Children Are a Heritage
“People are at the center of Christian work…The character of our work is shaped not by accomplishments or possessions but in the birth of relationships.” (Peterson, 110)

1. In what ways do you think our culture has misunderstood God’s plan for children?

2. How do you think Christians can help restore God’s heritage with foster children?

Acronym: Create an acronym that describes how God desires his people to value children.

Conclusion:
God desire to connect every person to his big story. Every house can be built by the power of God. God’s people will show the example of how God desire children to be valued when we build relationships with people as the priority of our lives.
Lesson Six

He Will Be Our Hope

Focal Texts: Psalm 131

O Lord, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like the weaned child that is with me. O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time on and forevermore. (Ps. 131:1-3)

Background Text: Psalm 27:10

Main Idea: The maturity of Israel’s relationship with God is described with hope.

Question to Explore: What does it mean to have hope in God?

Study Aim: God gives us many things that satisfy us. There is one thing that satisfies more than all else; hope. When we hope in God we are calmed and quieted.

Quick Read: God becomes the sole focus of the mature follower. No longer bothered by the temporary comforts of this life. Hope relieves all anxiety—forevermore.

Learning Objectives:

- The learner will demonstrate their understanding of Psalms 131 by identifying worldly comforts that temporarily satisfy our deepest longings.

- The learner will relate the principles from Psalm 131 to contemporary practices of foster care.

- The learner will memorize Psalm 127:10 (For my father and mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me in).
Introduction
Psalm 131 describes the humility that God’s people must have to mature in their relationship with him. “God is presented in this psalm as a nursing mother. Though rare, this is not the only occasion in which a feminine picture of God is used to describe his nature and function.” (Limburg, 450) The weaned child has transitioned in relationship with the mother; the relationship is now enjoyed apart from nourishment. The byproduct of continued intimacy is hope.

My Heart…My Eyes
Psalm 131 vividly explains the connection of the heart and the eyes in relationship with our humble attitude before God. We are challenged to replace our relationship with God with other things or people that have importance in our culture. Sometimes, it is easy to look down on others and judge them for the trouble they are in or their condition. God’s people are called to focus only on God and his hope.

1. What consistently tempts you from being completely focused on God and his will for your life?

2. Describe a situation(s) in your life where you find it easy to look down at people and judge them?

“For my father and mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me in. (Psalm 27:10)

“Humility is the obverse side of confidence in God, whereas pride is the obverse side of confidence in self.” John Baillie

“Robert Browning’s fine line on aspiration, ‘A man’s reach should exceed his grasp, or what’s a heaven for?’ has been distorted to ‘Reach for the skies and grab everything that isn’t nailed down.’” (Peterson, 153)

3. How do you describe the difference between Aspiration and Ambition?

4. What are some ways that Christians could return to godly aspirations regarding serving foster children?
Like a Weaned Child

“Christian faith is not neurotic dependency but childlike trust. We do not have a God who forever indulges our whims but a God whom we trust with our destinies.”
(Peterson, 154)

1. How does your life show childlike trust?

2. How do you think Christians can help restore childlike trust with foster children?

Memorize:

For my father and mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me in. (Psalm 27:10)

Conclusion:
Humility is a sign of maturity. Maturity is a defining aspect of our faith relationship with God. God determines for his people to develop into fully mature followers that lead others to do the same.
APPENDIX F
Pre- and Post-Intervention Interview Questions

1) Describe your journey, to this point, related to your involvement in foster and orphan care?

2) When you say, “God is my heavenly Father” what does that mean to you?

3) When you hear about the needs of orphans and foster children, what motivates you most to respond?

4) What are some nouns that you most often use to describe God?

5) If someone asked you why they should be involved in foster and orphan care what would you say?

6) How does the Bible inform your view of foster and orphan care?

7) How does your life model the fatherhood of God for others?

8) When you hear the word adoption, what thoughts come to your mind?

9) On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being most aware), how would you describe your awareness of God’s daily presence in your life?

10) When you think of “father” what thoughts come to your mind?

11) How does your role as a parent affect your involvement in foster and orphan care?

12) When you think of orphans and foster children, what personal connections do you make?
## APPENDIX G

Research and Interview Question Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Related Interview Question(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What effect does the APEX Training have on participants’ involvement in foster care</td>
<td>1) Describe your journey, to this point, related to your involvement in foster and orphan care?</td>
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<tr>
<td>in Jefferson City, Missouri?</td>
<td>2) When you hear about the needs of orphans and foster children, what motivates you most to respond?</td>
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<tr>
<th>What effect does the APEX Training have on members’ understanding of their relationship with God as Father?</th>
<th>1) When you say, “God is my heavenly Father” what does that mean to you?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

157
2) What are some nouns that you most often use to describe God?

3) How does your life model the fatherhood of God for others?

4) On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being most aware), how would you describe your awareness of God’s daily presence in your life?

5) When you think of “father” what thoughts come to your mind?
APPENDIX H

Weekly Guided Journal Questions

Guided Journal One: Certified Respite Care Training

Prayerfully consider the components of the respite care training.

1. What did you find most significant about the respite care training?

2. How did what you found significant impact your thoughts about foster care?

3. How did what you found significant impact your thoughts about God as Father?

4. Please describe any additional experiences of life change that occurred this week as a result of the intervention? You can answer simply, “nothing changed” if you did not have any additional life changes.
Guided Journal Two: Psalms of Ascent Training- Session One
(Psalm 121&124)

Prayerfully consider Session One of the Psalms of Ascent Training.

1. What did you find most significant about the Psalms of Ascent Session One?

2. How did what you found significant impact your thoughts about foster care?

3. How did what you found significant impact your thoughts about God as a parent?

4. Please describe any additional experiences of life change that occurred because of the intervention? You can answer simply, “nothing changed” if you did not have any additional life changes.
Guided Journal Three: Psalms of Ascent Training- Session Two
(Psalms 125, 126, 127, & 131)

Prayerfully consider Session Two of the Psalms of Ascent Training.

1. What did you find most significant about the Psalms of Ascent Session Two?

2. How did what you found significant impact your thoughts about foster care?

3. How did what you found significant impact your thoughts about God as a parent?

4. Please describe any additional experiences of life change that occurred because of the intervention? You can answer simply, “nothing changed” if you did not have any additional life changes.
Guided Journal Four: In-Home Interview Experience

Prayerfully consider the In-Home Interview Experience.

1. What did you find most significant about the In-Home Interview Experience?

2. How did what you found significant impact your thoughts about foster care?

3. How did what you found significant impact your thoughts about God as a parent?

4. Please describe any additional experiences of life change that occurred because of the intervention? You can answer simply, “nothing changed” if you did not have any additional life changes.
Guided Journal Five: Group Respite Care Experience

Prayerfully consider the Group Respite Care Experience.

1. What did you find most significant about the Group Respite Care Experience?

2. How did what you found significant impact your thoughts about foster care?

3. How did what you found significant impact your thoughts about God as a parent?

4. Please describe any additional experiences of life change that occurred because of the intervention? You can answer simply, “nothing changed” if you did not have any additional life changes.
# APPENDIX I

## Research and Guided Journal Question Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
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</tr>
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<tr>
<td>What effect does the APEX training have on participants’ involvement in orphan care in Jefferson City, Missouri?</td>
<td>1) What did you find most significant about the respite care training?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) How did what you found significant impact your thoughts about foster care?</td>
<td>2) How did what you found significant impact your thoughts about God as Father?</td>
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APPENDIX J

Invitation Letter

January 1, 2017

To Whom It May Concern:
As you know, I have been engaged in my doctoral studies at Baylor University’s George W. Truett Theological Seminary. Currently, I am planning to implement a nine-week intervention in order to complete the degree requirements. The intervention will include:

1) A 3-hour Certified Respite Care Training that will be facilitated by a licensed social worker. The training will be conducted on a Saturday morning at Memorial Baptist Church. Certification includes completing all compliance material required by the State of Missouri including a background check and finger printing.

2) Six 1-hour trainings that will focus on selected themes from the Psalms of Ascent. These trainings will take place on Sunday mornings in the Memorial Baptist Church Fellowship hall.

3) A weekly guided journal that will ask 4 questions for you to record your experiences during each part of the intervention.

4) 2 respite care experiences: The 2 experiences are: One in-home (24-hour/overnight and one group (3-hour).

I am looking to select 3 couples and 2 individuals (a total of 8 people), between the ages of 21 and 55, to participate in this research project. I will make every effort to keep participation in this process confidential. In all reports, names will be changed to help maintain confidentiality and anonymity. Also, all the data collected from the research will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the pastor’s office and then destroyed after three years. If you agree to participate you will be asked:

1) To fill out the demographic form (10 minutes)
2) To participate in a pre-intervention interview (1 hour)
3) To keep a guided journal during the intervention collected weekly by the researcher (3 hours)
4) To participate in a post-intervention interview (1 hour)
5) To attend an orientation and sign a consent form agreeing to participate in this research (30 minutes)
6) To attend 6 lessons on the Psalms of Ascent (6 hours)
7) To participate in 2 respite care events (one 24-hour and one 3-hour)
8) To participate in the Certified Respite Care Provider training (3-hour)

Participation in this research project will require a total of time of 41.50 hours. Six of those are during regular church hours. The remaining 35.50 hours involve time beyond regular church activities that will be stretched over a nine-week period.

I want to give you the ability to refuse participation in this research study. In order for this to be possible, I have utilized a couple of methods that are helpful to make sure that your participation is voluntary. First, I have enlisted someone to hand deliver this letter to you. I do not know that you have received it. Second, I have provided a pool of names (to a trusted individual) of people that are members of Memorial Baptist Church and attend a LifeLink group. The people selected are people that I think would do well in this study. You are a part of that pool of names. You have been randomly selected from a pool of 15 couples and 10 individuals. If you refuse, I will never know that you were asked. The individual who gave you the letter will only inform me of the 3 couples and 2 individuals who agree to participate.

Please call the delivery individual at phone number if you have any questions about the requirements for participation or the process by which you have been invited to participate in this research.

Would you be willing to participate in this research project as explained to you in this letter? If so, please reply to the delivery individual by date to be determined with either your agreement or regret.

I want to thank you for your consideration of participating in this research project. I consider you an important part of the ministry of Memorial Baptist Church whether you agree to participate or not.

Sincerely,

Pastor Mark E. Towns
APPENDIX K

APEX GRAPHICS

LOGO
BIBLIOGRAPHY


