



Orphan Sunday: Suggested Prayer & Responsive Reading

See www.orphansunday.org for more information.

Recommended: If your church supports any organizations or missionaries who work with orphans, ask them to speak (live or by internet) or to send an update with prayer requests that can be read to the congregation before beginning.

Ask someone who knows about Orphan Sunday to give a brief informal introduction for those who are not familiar with the day, and, if it seems appropriate, to describe the different parts of the service.

First part: Readings from Scripture

*Congregation to join the reader on the lines in **bold** or as marked.*

Leader: Listen to what Scripture says about God's relationship with orphans:

Reader 1: God has taken his place in the divine council;
in the midst of the gods he holds judgment:
**“How long will you judge unjustly
and show partiality to the wicked?”**

Give justice to the weak and the fatherless;
maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute.
**Rescue the weak and the needy;
deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”**

Reader 2: You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.

Reader 1: The Lord is king forever and ever;
the nations shall perish from his land.
**O Lord, you will hear the desire of the meek;
you will strengthen their heart, you will incline your ear**
to do justice for the orphan and the oppressed,
so that those from earth may strike terror no more.

All: **Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.**

Reader 2: The Lord watches over the sojourners;
he upholds the widow and the fatherless,

but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

Reader 1: God sets the lonely in families.

All: **For my father and my mother have forsaken me,
but the Lord will take me in.**

Reader 2: To all His people, including those who have no earthly families, He says:
I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

[silence]

Leader: Listen to what Scripture says about how we are to treat orphans:

Reader 1: Blessed is the one who considers the poor!

All: **Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression;
bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.**

Reader 2: But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.

If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. 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.

Reader 1: Thus says the Lord: Do justice and righteousness,
and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed.

Reader 2: ...If you hold back from rescuing those taken away to death,
those who go staggering to the slaughter;
if you say, “Look, we did not know this”—
does not he who weighs the heart perceive it?
Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it?

[silence]

Reader 1: Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. **For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.**’ Then the righteous will answer

him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ **And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’**

Second part: Prayer

***Leader:** Dear Father, we join with Your people across our country and in countries across the world to pray for orphans. We know that love for these children begins not with us, but with You. You pursued us when we were wayward and alone. You made us Your children. You invite us to address you as *Abba*, Daddy, and to live as Your sons and daughters. We can only act in love because You first loved us.

You tell us You are near the downtrodden and destitute. You champion the cause of those who have no one else to take their side. And you call us to do the same.

So we lift up to You the millions of children who have lost their parents due to disease, war, addiction, poverty, abandonment. As You promise to do, place the lonely in families. Be their defender, their provider, their hope and peace. Help us to do the same.

We confess that we have often lived with little regard for the lives of orphans, who are precious in Your sight. Forgive us. Lead us to take up their cause, not in guilt or in obligation, but as a joyful response to Your great love for us.

And we ask You to bring about transformation: to transform the lives of orphans, physically and emotionally and spiritually; to transform Your church as we lift our eyes beyond our own comfort to live out the Gospel; and to transform a watching world as it catches glimpses of Your love made visible through the actions of Your people.

Reader 1: And now we ask You, our powerful and compassionate Father, you who “made the earth by your power,” to intervene in the lives of orphans. We pray,

[Alternate two readers; use multiple readers/those sitting in the congregation; or one reader. Leave a few moments of quiet for everyone to pray between lines.]

For children living on the street, that You would provide them with shelter, food, and clothing.

For young children growing up in orphanages, that they would have loving, competent caretakers and positive relationships with other children.

For children in foster care, both here and in other countries, that You would provide them with safe, loving families with whom they can remain long-term; and grant them the ability to change unsafe and unhealthy behaviors.

Comfort those whose loving parents have died.

For those whose parents have unlovingly rejected them, or who have lost parental rights because of alcoholism, drug abuse, mental illness, or imprisonment, grant forgiveness and healing.

For those whose parents loved them and gave them up out of necessity, grant forgiveness and healing.

For birth parents, grant peace and healing.

For those orphans still in school, provide competent teachers, and grant the ability to work hard and understand what they are learning.

For those aging out of orphanages and foster care, provide loving adults to walk beside them.

For those who are tempted, protect them from alcohol and drug abuse.

Protect them also from harmful sexual relationships.

For those thinking of taking their own lives, stay their hands and feet; and give them a new sense of hope.

For those in transitional programs, grant the ability to trust the adults who love and care for them.

For those making the transition to independence, grant places to live, sustainable work, and welcoming church communities.

For orphans raising children, grant financial provision, patience with their little ones, and friends or mentors who will model good parenting.

For those whose years of living in orphanages or foster care are far in the past, grant healing and peace where deep wounds remain.

For those among us who have been orphaned – whether we know they are orphaned or not, and whatever form their orphanhood takes – we ask for Your comfort, peace, and healing, and allow them to find friends and family among us.

Show us how we can participate in caring for children without families, beginning with those in our own community.

Give us wisdom as we consider how to participate in worldwide orphan care.

You know the number of hairs on every orphan's head; for this we praise You.

For those whom You have placed in families or provided the help an orphan needed, we praise You.

For all orphans, we pray You would provide someone to share with them about Your love and the good news about Your son Jesus Christ, and open their hearts to trust in You.

[silence]

Third part: Action

Leader: Take two minutes of quiet listening to consider how the Holy Spirit is moving you to participate in how God is meeting the needs of orphans.

[silence]

***Leader:** We commit all this to You, the One who is both our Father and a Father to the fatherless, in the name of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

*Adapted from the Orphan Sunday Prayer on the Orphan Sunday website: <http://orphansunday.org/wp-content/uploads/Orphan-Sunday-Prayer-2013.pdf>

References:

Matthew 25:34-40
Job 31:16-23
Exodus 22:22-24
Psalm 82:1-4
Psalm 10:16-18
Psalm 27:10
John 14:18
Psalm 41:1
Isaiah 1:17
James 1:22-27
Psalm 68:5
Psalm 146:9
Jeremiah 22:3
Proverbs 24:11-12
Psalm 68:6