



# **From the Father's Heart to the Church's Hands**

What the Bible says about  
caring for the vulnerable.



# Our heart for this study

This 9-session study was designed to trace a theme through the entirety of God's Word. By starting on the first pages of the Bible and working our way through Scripture, we begin to see a picture of a Creator God that loves and cares for vulnerable people and who calls His followers to do the same.

This study is meant to be completed in community with fellow believers. Whether at the dinner table with your family or in your church small group, we pray that the Scripture references and questions in these pages would prompt conversations about what it looks like to protect, defend, and love the most vulnerable people in our society.

What do we mean by "vulnerable people?" A vulnerable person is anyone whose life circumstances leave them at risk of abuse or harm. This could be the single mother down the street, or the hungry orphan across the world. As you will see in the pages to come, God places extraordinary value on every human life, even those who society may cast aside.

As we look for the most vulnerable people in our local communities, we believe that the state agencies have already done the hard work of identifying these individuals. In Arkansas, there are over 4,700 children in foster care. Their circumstances leave them at risk of harm and make them vulnerable to the brokenness of our world. These children and youth need the Church to embrace God's heart for the vulnerable and demonstrate His life-changing love.

As you begin this study, pray that God would open your eyes and heart to the needs of the vulnerable children and families in your community. Pray that He would move your family, small group and church to action.

# Made in God's Image

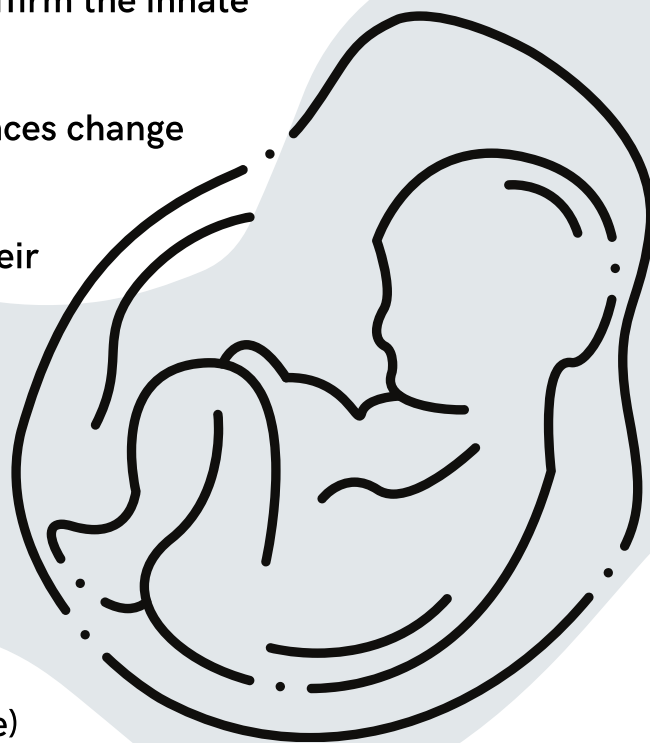
## Genesis 1:26-27

When God created man and woman, He gave them the unique honor and responsibility of bearing His image. As image-bearers, every human life has innate value. This should inform the way we interact with those around us. Every person we encounter reflects the image and beauty of the Creator God, regardless of their age, color, creed or status. Much like a parent feels loved when their child, their image bearer, is shown love by another, so God has told us our love for Him is expressed by loving His image bearers. We cannot love God without loving those made in His image.

READ Genesis 1:26-27

1. What does it mean to be made in God's image?
2. If we know that every human life is made in God's image, how does that change the way we interact with people who are not like us?
3. What is one way that you can work to affirm the innate dignity of the people around you?
4. Does a person's decisions or circumstances change their status as an image-bearer?
5. Why do we treat people according to their circumstances instead of their God-given dignity?

**CHALLENGE:** Identify someone culturally different than you (age, race, belief, lifestyle) and encourage them.



# God hears and rescues the oppressed and vulnerable.

## Genesis 21:17-21

When we read in Genesis 21 that Hagar and Ishmael are cast out from Abraham's family and sent into the wilderness, we're left to wonder if that might be the end of their story. But God, in His miraculous grace, hears and sees the plight of this woman and her son and steps in to rescue them. Hagar and Ishmael represent two of the most vulnerable people groups during this time in history: single women and children. And because Hagar was a slave, she was even more isolated and marginalized. God has a history of caring for people who might otherwise be pushed aside.

READ Genesis 21, Exodus 2:23-25, Psalm 10:13-14, and Psalm 68:5-6

1. What do these Scriptures tell us about the character of God?
2. Who are some of the most marginalized people groups in our culture today?
3. How does knowing that God hears and rescues the vulnerable and marginalized change the way you think about and interact with these people groups?
4. How might God use *you* to rescue and protect these people?

CHALLENGE: Make a list of needs you see around you. Work from physical needs to relational needs to spiritual needs.



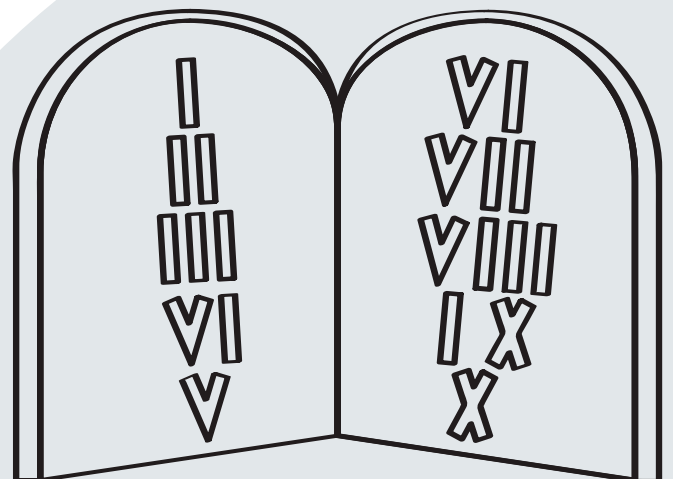
# God's Law points to His desire that His people would care for the vulnerable as He does.

## Exodus 22:21-23

As a nation set apart from those around them, God expected His people to care for the marginalized. His law asked them to provide for, defend, protect and welcome the most vulnerable. This was accomplished through God's people as He generously provided for them. This generosity toward the weak stood in radical contrast to the nations of this age using their power and position to oppress others. God reminds His often displaced people that they are no different than the displaced and outcast people they welcomed. Showing the depth of love to others God had shown to them was not the exception, but the expectation.

READ Exodus 22:21-23, Leviticus 19:10, Leviticus 25:35, Deuteronomy 10:17-20, Deuteronomy 14:28-29, Deuteronomy 15:11, Deuteronomy 24:17-22, Deuteronomy 26:12-13, and Deuteronomy 27:19

1. What do these Scriptures tell us about what God cares about?
2. How do these ancient laws and rules inform the way we live today?
3. What are some provisions in our modern law that help those who cannot help themselves?
4. How should believers look and act differently from non-believers when it comes to the ways we protect and defend the poor and vulnerable?
5. What prevents most modern believers from caring for the vulnerable?



# God enacts justice against those who harm and oppress the vulnerable.

## Malachi 3:5

As we read through the major and minor Prophets of the Old Testament, we see God's wrath play out against a variety of injustices taking place among His people. Our world today can look a lot like ancient Israel. We see poverty, homelessness, foster care, crime, oppression and injustice almost everywhere we look, even within the walls of the Church. But we can take hope in knowing that God will ultimately enact justice against the sinful ways of this world. He is on a mission to bring his righteous, just Kingdom to earth, and He invites us to take part in that mission.

READ Psalm 12:5, Psalm 82:3-4, Psalm 140:12, Psalm 146:9, Isaiah 1:16-17, Jeremiah 22:3, Micah 3, Zechariah 7:9-10, and Malachi 3:5

1. What do these Scriptures teach us about true, Biblical justice?
2. How is God's justice different from the justice we often see depicted in TV shows and movies?
3. How does it comfort you to know that God will ultimately enact justice against the sin in our world?
4. How can we display Biblical, godly justice in our everyday lives?

**CHALLENGE:** Make a list of the injustices in this world that bother you. Commit to praying for them every day this week. Reflect on where you feel injustice against you and, knowing God is the one to carry out justice, resolve to forgive and trust God with the outcome.



# The Old Testament shows us what it looks like to care for the vulnerable and oppressed.

## 2 Samuel 9

The Old Testament records stories of violence, corruption, disobedience and the wrath of God as a reminder of where choosing our own way leads. Among those stories, there are also hopeful ones reminding us that we can choose God's way. One of those stories can be found in 2 Samuel. Years after Jonathan's death, David remembers his dear friend and seeks to show kindness to anyone from Jonathan's family that is still alive. The servants find Jonathan's grandson Mephibosheth, who was crippled in both feet at a young age. David invited Mephibosheth to join the King's table, where he and his family ate as if they were part of the royal family. This act of great kindness to someone who would otherwise have been marginalized and isolated reflects the heart of God for the vulnerable.

READ Ruth 2, 2 Samuel 9, 2 Kings 4:1-7, and Nehemiah 5

1. What do these Scriptures teach us about caring for the vulnerable and oppressed?
2. How do the actions of Boaz, David, Elisha and Nehemiah reflect the heart of God for vulnerable people?
3. What does 2 Kings 4:1-7 tell us about God's heart for children and families?
  4. Why do you think God performs this miracle through Elisha?
  5. Can you think of any other stories in the Old Testament that show us how to care for the vulnerable and oppressed?

**CHALLENGE:** Consider getting a few gift cards (\$5-\$10) to an easily accessible restaurant like McDonalds or Subway. Keep them in your car so you are ready to give to a person in need. OR Identify someone you could bring to your table to celebrate the inherent value they have.



# Jesus cared deeply for the vulnerable and marginalized.

Mark 1:40-42

As we turn from the Old Testament to the life of Jesus, we see that Jesus embodies the Father's heart for the outcasts, the isolated, the untouchables, and the weak. We read stories of Jesus interacting with and touching people who were thought to be "unclean" and dangerous. We see Jesus being moved to compassion by the helplessness of the crowds of people who have traveled to see him. We watch him invite children to come close to him when his disciples wish to cast them off. Jesus is the true and best example of caring for, loving, and protecting those who society would deem unworthy.

READ Matthew 9:10-13, Matthew 19:13-15, Mark 1:40-42, Mark 10:45, Luke 4:40-41, Luke 7:11-17, Luke 8:42-48, Luke 14:12-14, Luke 19:1-10 and John 4

1. What do these Scriptures teach us about what Jesus values?
2. How should these Scriptures impact the way we interact with people on the outskirts of society?
3. If Jesus lived in modern America, what kinds of people would he protect, defend, and care for?
4. Read Matthew 19:13-15 again. Do the words and actions of Jesus' disciples surprise you?
5. Why might the disciples not want the children to come close to Jesus?
6. What kinds of children in our society might cause us to have the same reaction as the disciples?
7. How should Jesus' response to the children inform the way we interact with marginalized children in our society?





# Jesus commanded His followers to love and protect their neighbor.

Luke 10:25-37

Jesus not only modeled sacrificial love towards those around him, but he also invited and commanded his followers to do the same. In the parable of the Good Samaritan found in Luke 10, Jesus taught that loving your neighbor means seeing and caring for individuals in need regardless of their condition or religion. He elevates as a hero the one who cared for the man others ignored. Then He commands us to do likewise: love those who are hard to love.

READ Matthew 5:14-16, Matthew 22:36-40, Matthew 25:31-40, Luke 6:27-31, Luke 10:25-37, Luke 12:33-34 and John 5:12

1. Why do you think Jesus cares whether we love the people around us?
2. Read Luke 10:25-37 again. Why did Jesus use a Samaritan man in his parable?
3. What sometimes makes it difficult to love people?
4. What kinds of people in our society are often hard for us to love?
5. How do Jesus' commandments in the Scripture passages above impact the way we love people who are difficult to love?

**CHALLENGE:** Pray for a week about your role in providing love for the "thrown aside" of our culture.



# The Church is called to protect, defend, and care for the most vulnerable in our world.

## 1 John 3:17-18

The call to the Christian church is to follow Jesus' example and carry out His commandments. Jesus' example is of loving and caring for marginalized people, and His commandments are for his followers to do the same. Interestingly, it seems this depth of care is not an effort of God's people, but a natural response to belonging to God's people. The chapters of Acts and Paul's letters show us a continuation of God's heart for His people to care for others, especially those who are victims of the sinful world in which we live.

READ Acts 4:32-35, Acts 20:32-35, Romans 13:10, Romans 15:25-28, Galatians 2:10, 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15, James 1:27, James 2:2-4, and 1 John 3:17-18

1. Why is it important for the Christian church to care for the poor, fatherless, and widow?
2. How did the early church exhibit the heart of God for needy people?
3. What practical things can a church do to follow the commandments and examples in these verses?
4. How is your church similar to the early churches depicted in these scriptures?  
How is it different?
5. What is your personal responsibility to the examples and commandments in these Scriptures?



**CHALLENGE:** Ask your pastor what rhythms of the church provide care for the vulnerable in your area. Consider where you could get involved or what might need to be started.

# Moving Forward

## Isaiah 1:17

Now that we have traced the heart of the Father and the responsibility of the Church through the Law, Prophets, Gospels and Letters, let's take a closer look at each of our lives to see how we can each move forward in light of what we now know.

READ Psalm 41:1, Proverbs 31:8-9, Isaiah 1:17, and Jeremiah 22:3

1. What is one new thing you have learned about the character of God through this study?
2. Which Scripture verse or passage stood out to you the most? Why?
3. In light of the truths you have learned, what is one thing you are going to *stop* doing?
4. In light of the truths you have learned, what is one thing you are going to *start* doing?

PRAY that God would open your eyes and heart to the needs of people in your community. Pray that He would open doors for you to love and care for people as He does.

Interested in learning more about the needs of children and youth in foster care in your community? Visit [www.TheCALLinArkansas.org](http://www.TheCALLinArkansas.org) to learn how you and your church can get involved.

