

SMALL GROUP STUDIES

Case File #127

A one-time adult small group lesson to better understand God's heart for the vulnerable

FOSTER THE CITY

Solving the Mystery of God's Heart for Vulnerable Children

A small group investigation guide

Use this guide any time before or after a foster care vision cast, whether your church heard a full sermon, a shorter message, or a video from Foster the City. It works with any of the vision cast options and is meant to be simple enough for any small group leader to pick up and lead well.

How to Use This Guide

- Plan for 60 to 90 minutes, since this version includes a longer scripture activity. Trim discussion questions if you are short on time.
- Before you gather, print page [# determined after design] and cut out the cards. Have Bibles or a Bible app on hand for every group. It will also be helpful to have a whiteboard (or a poster board), dry erase markers, and post-it notes. This piece is not required but builds interaction and visual connections.
- No foster care background is needed to lead this group session. You are creating space, and you don't need to know the answers.
- Keep it low pressure. The goal is honest group dialogue and prayerful reflection.

Open (5 minutes)

Invite everyone to share briefly, then move on to the next section.

When you hear the phrase "vulnerable children," what comes to mind for you? A feeling? A memory? A news story? Someone you know?

Case File: A Scripture Mystery (20-30 minutes)

Read this briefing aloud to open the activity:

“The Cycle”
Something is attacking families generation after generation and our communities are paying the price. Today we are investigating a question that runs through the entire Bible: does God actually care about vulnerable children and families, or is this just something we will have to live with for the foreseeable future? We have several pieces of evidence pulled from different parts of scripture, as well as statistics. Your job is to examine your piece, report on what you find, and help the group reach a verdict.

How It Works

1. Divide into three groups and hand out one Clue Card per group.
2. Grab your poster board or white board to record the group discussion. Have everyone take turns writing down themes, ideas, questions, pictures, words that stick out, or even dotted lines to connect points on a large poster board, or share them aloud. This is your Evidence Log.
3. Pick one of the following questions to discuss as a group:
    a. Why aren’t there better solutions for vulnerable youth by now with our many cultural advances?
    b. Doesn’t God care? Why doesn’t HE act?
    c. Now pass out the Scripture Cards. Look up the passage together and answer the prompt (aka, evidence report) on the card in one sentence.
4. Give teams 4 to 5 minutes to look up their verse and write their “evidence report,” by simply answering the questions on their assigned cards.
    a. Have each team read their verse aloud and share their evidence report. Have a volunteer jot each one on the poster board as your group's Evidence Log.
    b. Write down themes, words that stick out, or even dotted lines to connect points.
    c. Once all Scripture Cards have been read, look at the full Evidence Log together and ask: what pattern connects throughout the Bible?
    d. Then reveal the verdict. Have someone read James 1:27 aloud:

“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”

Discuss

- Looking at your Evidence Log, does it surprise you that this theme runs through the Law, the Psalms, the Prophets, the Gospels, and the Epistles? Why might that matter?
    - Who are the helpers?
    - Who are the bystanders?
- James calls this “pure and undefiled religion.” Why do you think God attaches that kind of weight to it?

Solve The Case (10-15 minutes)

Now read and reveal John 10:10 together.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy...

Method

Now ask, without diving too deep, “when in life did you experience your deepest wounds?”

- What is Satan actually after when he seeks to destroy us? Answers might include:
  - Identity.
  - Hope.
  - Family.
  - Trust.
  - Future generations.
  - Image bearers.
- Ask: What happens when the enemy seeks to steal from children, and how do you see the enemy destroying the lives of vulnerable youth in our communities?

Cycle Breakers

- Give three participants a Cycle Breaker Card. Have each participant read their card one at a time, addressing the following question for each role:
  - Then discuss how the Body of Christ has the power by the Holy Spirit to reverse the cycle in the lives of kids experiencing foster care.
- Go over the following questions as time allows making sure to leave 10 minutes at the end for a time of response and prayer:
  - What is sticking with you?
  - Why is it so hard to obey in this area as a Christian?
    - What feels like the biggest barrier for you personally: time, fear of the unknown, uncertainty about your role, something else?
  - Why don’t we hear more about this?
  - How would my life change if I acted? Do I have what it takes?

Move Toward Response (10 minutes)

Foster the City believes everyone is called to a unique way of serving, and there are many ways to contribute. This is not only about becoming a foster parent.

- As a group, name as many different ways to support vulnerable children and families as you can. (Foster parenting, support friends, meal trains, respite care, mentoring, advocacy, prayer, and more.)
- Take two minutes in silent prayer as a group to hold the following question before the Lord. Is there a next step, (it might be small, doable or giant), that you sense you are being invited into? You do not need to announce it to the group, just notice it and hold it before the Lord together.

- Is there a next step that feels right for our group to take together?

(As the group leader, consider RSVPing to an Interest Meeting as a group in lieu of meeting one week.)

Close in Prayer

God, thank You for Your heart toward the vulnerable and for inviting us into that same compassion. Show us our part to play, however big or small. Give us courage where we feel afraid, and clarity where we feel unsure. We pray for every child in our county that is entering foster care or currently navigating the foster care system. Provide more safe and loving homes for these children. May they encounter your love, redemption, and restoration. In Christ's name, Amen.

Want to go deeper? Foster the City has a team available to answer questions, share more ways to get involved, or connect your group directly with a local family. Connect with us by joining one of our Interest Meetings (www.fosterthecity.org/rsvp).

Cards

Print this page and cut along the lines to make seven clue cards for the Case File activity.

Scripture Card

Deuteronomy 10:17-18

If God has to command His people to defend the fatherless and the widow what does that suggest happens when they don't?

Scripture Card

Psalm 68:5-6

What does He do for the lonely?

Clue Card

Homelessness

Stat:
Did you know that 33% of youth who age out of the foster care system become homeless. Without a net of support, stable adulthood is far from their reality.

Scripture Card

Isaiah 1:17

What four actions does Isaiah command God's people to take?

Scripture Card

Mark 10:13-16

What does Jesus prioritize here and who is creating barriers?

Clue Card

Health

Stat:
With a high level of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), kids in foster care are twice as likely to develop PTSD than war veterans, 2.5 times likely to develop heart disease, 3-4 times likely to develop lung disease, and 5-7 times likely to experience depression over their peers.

Scripture Card

Acts 4:32-25

What did the earliest church do so that no one among them was in need?

Scripture Card

Ephesians 1:5

What word does Paul use to describe how God brings us into His family? How did God feel about His choice?

Clue Card

Justice System

Stat:
It is estimated that 25% of former foster youth will become involved with the criminal justice system within two years of leaving foster care. This stems from unmet needs and traumatic histories.

Based on research on NFYI

Cycle Breaker Card

Foster Parent

When a child is welcomed into a safe and loving home that provides for their physical and emotional needs, they gradually begin to heal and trust again.

(According to Positive Childhood Experiences Research)

Scripture Card

Safe Adults/Mentors

Youth benefit from at least two non-parent adults who take genuine interest in them. This serves to build resiliency and greater emotional health.

(According to Positive Childhood Experiences Research)

Clue Card

The Local Church

Children enjoy participating in community traditions and this fosters resiliency. Local churches provide weekly and seasonal traditions that help youth to feel rooted in community and life giving practices.

(According to Positive Childhood Experiences Research)