



FIELD GUIDE

to Pure Religion Sunday



PURE RELIGION
PROJECT

Pure Religion Sunday

facilitated by the CAFO community

For more than 20 years, churches all around the world have rallied together each year — on the second Sunday in November — to draw attention to God’s heart for orphaned and vulnerable children and families and to invite their own local congregations to respond in deep and meaningful ways. Through the power of this focused and unified Sunday, churches have stood in solidarity with the heart of God, the global Church around the world and the most vulnerable right there in their own communities.

This is the powerful story we all have the opportunity to participate in again this year — the story of God’s heart for and actions toward the orphaned and vulnerable, told throughout the narrative of Scripture and expressed through centuries of faithful devotion and service by Christians all around the world. We participate this year as a celebration of all that has been done while eagerly anticipating all the ways God will continue to work through His Church.

The heart of Christian discipleship reflected in James 1:27 is that while we care for “orphans and widows” and various expressions of vulnerability around us (helpful) we would remain “unstained by the world,” living lives that are distinctively different from the rhythms and patterns of the world around us (holy). Pure Religion Sunday is a celebratory and catalyzing opportunity to inspire and equip God’s people to live out this “pure religion” described in the book of James and expressed throughout Scripture. This is the framework of Christian discipleship — a holy and helpful vision for the Church, and more specifically, for your church in your community.

Throughout this simple guide you will find helpful tools to explore unique and creative ways your church can participate in Pure Religion Sunday. You will get access to resources curated and created through the work of the Pure Religion Project, the church ministry initiative of the Christian Alliance for Orphans (CAFO). These resources are designed to help you — the local Church — live out your calling to care for vulnerable children and families while growing closer to Jesus as His disciples.

As you take your next steps forward, know our team stands ready to serve and support you in any ways we can. It’s our honor to walk alongside you as we increasingly live out “pure religion” together.

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is intended to be a primer as you plan and prepare for your Pure Religion Sunday events! You'll find resources, stories, practical ideas and a sample rollout plan to help equip you for the months ahead — and beyond! Use any of the ideas throughout this guide or feel the freedom to creatively come up with your own.

**WE ARE HERE TO HELP YOU AS YOU PLAN.
SIGN UP FOR A COACHING CALL TO GET
SUPPORT AND BE INSPIRED.**

SIGN UP FOR COACHING

BECOME A CHAMPION ADVOCATE

A young girl with dark hair in a bun, wearing a yellow dress, is climbing a blue plastic slide. She is looking back over her shoulder at the camera with a smile. The background is a green lawn.

The Bible calls God's people to advocate for the weak and vulnerable. In Proverbs 31:8 it says,

“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves.”

When we act as advocates, Scripture shows us that we are reflecting the character of Jesus and how He first loved us. Both Jesus and the Holy Spirit are referred to as our advocates — Jesus advocates for us to the Father (Hebrews 7:25, Romans 8:24, 1 Timothy 2:5) and the Holy Spirit advocates for us when we don't know how to pray (Romans 8:26).

At CAFO, we see committed Christians in all spheres of influence — from the church and Christian NGOs, to businesses, social welfare organizations and government entities — seeking to advocate for orphaned and vulnerable children more effectively.

And we also see the unique challenges that come with advocacy, where problems feel complicated, solutions are varied and issues of protection and privacy can often seem limiting when it comes to connecting the needs of vulnerable children with others in the community.

GROWING THE GLOBAL MOVEMENT OF ADVOCATES

This is one reason we launched an on-demand course to strengthen and unite the voices of Champion Advocates just like you — to help grow and guide the global movement of Christians working together to be God's answer, through the local church, to care for vulnerable children and families.



**ENROLL IN THE CHAMPION ADVOCATE
ON-DEMAND COURSE**



Across Zimbabwe, churches are increasingly embracing Pure Religion Sunday as a time to reflect God's heart for vulnerable children and families. This year, leaders shared encouraging testimonies of how the day is awakening believers to action.

In one congregation, the pastor showed a film on adoption and challenged his church to make a tangible difference for vulnerable in their community. Many others responded by praying, planning and discussing how to serve families in need long after the day itself.

"Pure Religion Sunday is becoming a movement," Pastor Nyarendu said. "One that is inspiring the church in Zimbabwe to lead with both conviction and compassion."



PURE RELIGION SUNDAY

A story from churches in Zimbabwe



LEGACY STORIES

*of Christians standing for the
orphaned and vulnerable.*

Pure Religion Sunday rises from the heritage of Orphan Sunday and Stand Sunday, where a small, humble church in Zambia (Orphan Sunday, 2002) and another in Brownwood, Texas (Stand Sunday, 2004) responded to God's call to welcome and care for the vulnerable children of their communities. Over the decades since, tens of thousands of local events have been held in churches all over the world — often under the name Orphan Sunday or Stand Sunday. Today, churches are encouraged to continue this heritage, and CAFO provides free guidance and resources to make planning events and activities easy.

The Legacy of **ORPHAN SUNDAY**

Orphan Sunday came as a gift from the Church in Africa. While attending a church service in Zambia, an American visitor witnessed the local pastor's passionate call to care for orphaned children in a community that had been ravaged by AIDS and poverty. Members of the church faced deep needs themselves. But as that first-ever Orphan Sunday service ended, one person after another stepped forward with money, food and other goods — some even taking off their own shoes and placing them in the offering for orphans.

That visitor, Gary Schneider, was so deeply impacted by what he had witnessed that he began to help Zambian leaders coordinate Orphan Sunday efforts across Zambia and shared the vision in the US as well.

***“God sets the lonely
in families.”***

PROVERBS 68:6

In 2009, the Christian Alliance for Orphans began providing united leadership to make Orphan Sunday a catalyst for awareness and action across the US and worldwide. Today, churches and organizations in more than 100 nations observe Orphan Sunday annually. Through Orphan Sunday, we join in the promise of “One Day, One Voice, One Purpose.”

We pray the Church all over the world may be as faithful as our Zambian brothers and sisters to reflect God's heart for vulnerable children both near and far.

The Legacy of **STAND SUNDAY**

When Bishop Aaron Blake, a pastor and foster/adoptive father, left his breakfast table for church on the second Sunday in November of 2004, he had a sermon prepared ... and it wasn't about foster care:

"I had prepared a sermon to preach that morning that I had worked on all week. I stood up to bring the message when the breakfast table image of our boys came back to my mind. The faces of our sons seemed to multiply in my emotions as I recalled that image. I knew then that God was prompting our church to answer the call to care for children and broken families."

Without explanation, Bishop Blake said to his congregation, "Brothers and sisters, there are about 30,000 children in the foster care system in Texas and nearly half a million in the US." He then asked this one simple question (and he wasn't expecting a verbal answer):

"Who will stand with me to defend, care and support abused, abandoned and neglected children in our community?"

After a brief moment of silence,
one lady in the back of the church
stood up and simply replied,

"Pastor... I will."

Like a tiny smoldering ember dropped in a pile of thirsty pine needles, her voice began to multiply. To his amazement, Bishop Blake watched as one family after another stood up and joined their voices to hers. As a result of that day, this church and the surrounding community has cared for and adopted hundreds of children in foster care over the years. In fact, at one point their county had more than enough families to meet the need.

Each year since 2004, the church has celebrated on the

SECOND SUNDAY IN NOVEMBER.

— In 2017, these two efforts merged:

*Orphan
Sunday* & *Stand
Sunday*

— for the purpose of inviting
the church to care for
orphans worldwide

— for the purpose of calling the
church to stand for children
and families in the US foster
care system

— In 2024, these two identities officially became
one unifying vision, known now as:

*Pure Religion
Sunday*



One church in Morgantown, WV leveraged the weekend to celebrate the 5th anniversary of the launch of their statewide, collaborative ministry - Foster West Virginia. They held a foster and adoptive parent appreciation dinner on Saturday, used the Sunday morning services to celebrate and invite people to get involved and hosted a luncheon after church for people to learn more and take action.”

PURE RELIGION SUNDAY

A story from Chestnut Ridge Church



In preparation for Pure Religion Sunday, a church in Comstock Park, Michigan invited its entire congregation to help pack care bags filled with soft fidgets, tissues, joke books, snacks and more for social workers to have on hand. More than a service project or educational moment, the evening was intentionally designed to help cultivate a lasting culture of care for vulnerable children and families.

PURE RELIGION SUNDAY

A story from Cedar Springs Baptist Church



Ridge Point Community Church shared a personal testimony from Wendy and Mike Cheek about using Pez dispensers to build trust and connection with children in foster care. Their story helped attendees understand the heart behind the ministry and inspired meaningful engagement and support.

PURE RELIGION SUNDAY

A story from Ridge Point Community Church



THE PURE RELIGION PROJECT

A Holy and Helpful Vision for the Church

WHAT IS THE PURE RELIGION PROJECT?

The Pure Religion Project aims to inspire and equip God's people to live out the "pure religion" described in the book of James and invited throughout Scripture by caring for vulnerable children and families while growing as disciples of Jesus. The Pure Religion Project at CAFO provides resources, supportive community and ongoing connection and coaching to help churches engage in effective adoption, foster care, global orphan care and wrap-around family support ministry.

HOW DOES THE PURE RELIGION PROJECT HELP CHURCHES?

Through world-class resources, supportive community and ongoing connection and coaching, the Pure Religion Project is here to help you disciple your church to live out the "pure religion" described in James 1:27 and invited throughout Scripture.

HOW DOES PURE RELIGION SUNDAY FIT INTO THE PURE RELIGION PROJECT?

Pure Religion Sunday, by this or any other name that resonates with your church community, is an incredibly powerful tool that can be used to help disciple your people into greater intimacy with Christ and invite them into specific opportunities to serve and support the vulnerable around you. As we look to the future, we recognize the need to have a strong, solid and clearly-defined toolbox in which the growing number of tools in this field can rest. The Pure Religion Project provides the framework through which teaching, coaching and other tools and resources — like Orphan Sunday and Stand Sunday — are made available to pastors and lay leaders hoping to build effective foster, adoption, orphan care and family support ministries within their churches.

WHAT SHOULD WE CALL OUR SUNDAY?

While we believe “Pure Religion Sunday” is an excellent way to frame this day or weekend, as it encompasses the legacies of both Stand Sunday and Orphan Sunday, feel free to use your creativity in how you choose to recognize and leverage this powerful, globally-unified day of celebration and action. For example, we know of one church that calls it their “Justice and Mercy Weekend” because that language more closely aligns with how they regularly refer to their outreach, missions and engagement initiatives within the church.

DO WE HAVE TO DO THIS ON THE SECOND SUNDAY IN NOVEMBER?

No. We believe God calls His people to live out this vision every day of the year, so the date definitely isn't the most important thing! That said, there can be something especially meaningful about joining with God's people across town and all over the world on the same day — and we'd welcome you to do so if you can.

RESOURCES & TIMELINES

to help you plan

RESOURCES TO SHARE

Use these posters, slides, social media graphics, videos and more to promote your Pure Religion Sunday events. These are available in English and Spanish, and are customizable to fit your church community!



Access Canva Resources

Access Print-Ready Resources

Access Video Resources

Access Logo Files

Access Worship Resources

Other Art and Media Resources

*click to
access*



SAMPLE TIMELINE

AUGUST

Become familiar with the Pure Religion Project resources, including the Leverage book which provides instructions for before and after event planning. Consider working with other churches and organizations in your community to share resources and plan events together!

SEPTEMBER

Download and customize promotional graphics for your event and modify them to fit your church and community!

OCTOBER

Continue spreading the word about your event. As you plan your upcoming Pure Religion Sunday service, consider using the worship resources from The Worship Initiative, or hosting a screening of Sound of Hope, to inspire your congregation to take action.

NOVEMBER

Second Sunday in November

Today, churches and individuals worldwide are sharing about God's heart for the vulnerable.

DECEMBER

Host an informational meeting, or make appropriate connections, for those who want to get involved and learn more!

JANUARY

Kick off the new year with strategic follow up and collaboration for the next year.

SPEAKING

on Pure Religion Sunday

On Pure Religion Sunday, you have a focused opportunity to draw your church's attention to God's heart for vulnerable children and families and to call them to take the action that's right for them.

Whether this happens from the pulpit, a short missions highlight, a small group discussion or another setting, it's an exciting privilege to get to speak to those in your congregation or community about the gospel and what it means to live that gospel out in pure and undefiled ways.

This is a task with eternal significance. To help you make the most of whatever preaching, teaching or speaking opportunity you have on Pure Religion Sunday, we've put together a few suggested starting points for you to take and use as you see fit.



ANCHOR POINTS

First and foremost, we must remember that our goal is not recruitment or activism; it is discipleship. Far above our desire for more foster families, more wraparound support or more of any other good and right activity is our desire to see God's people deeply celebrating His love and widely demonstrating that love to the most vulnerable.

This is not a message about activity, but identity. Rather than trying to churn up more acts of service, we want to see the gospel transform hearts and minds to the point that caring for vulnerable children and families becomes an extension of our identity as the people of God. In other words, it's not just something we do as a church, it's who we are as a church. We preach the gospel above all else, then invite others to demonstrate that gospel in specific ways.

In our preaching, we want to:

ONE | Point people to the work of Jesus.

TWO | Reinforce our identity as those who do for others what Jesus has done for us.

THREE | Reinforce the idea that "everyone can do something", highlight the diverse ways to get involved and give clear pathways for people to take their right next step.

FOUR | Celebrate the unique ways your church is engaging.

THREE KEY THEMES

All throughout Scripture consistent themes emerge about who God is, what He does and how we should live in response. Consider using these three key themes in your message:

THEME ONE: **GOD INCARNATES**

Throughout Scripture, we see a God who moves toward hard places and struggling people. He is not afraid of our brokenness, but draws near to us in the midst of it.

When we do the same and draw near to the vulnerable, it puts God's heart on display in vividly "pure and undefiled" ways (James 1:27).

VERSES FOR REFERENCE:

"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel (which means 'God with us')." (Matthew 1:23)

"The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us." (John 1:14)

THEME TWO: **GOD WELCOMES**

In God's character as our good Father, He welcomes us into the security and provision of His family as His dearly loved sons and daughters.

Welcoming others is a correct and necessary response to God welcoming us. When we foster, adopt or otherwise open our lives, families or homes to others, we follow in His footsteps.

VERSES FOR REFERENCE:

"A Father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families..." (Psalm 68:5-6)

"To those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God."
(John 1:12)

THEME THREE: **GOD PROTECTS**

God fends off that which seeks to destroy us and defeats that which we are powerless to fight on our own.

We extend protection to those in need because we have received God's Fatherly protection. We're invited to "seek justice...defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow" (Isaiah 1:17).

VERSES FOR REFERENCE:

"He defends the cause of the fatherless." (Deuteronomy 10:18)

The consistent theme in Scripture is this: "We do for others in response to what God has done for us through Jesus." This ultimately becomes the "why" that drives our people to engage and sustains them along their journeys.

GOD INCARNATES

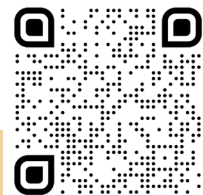
So we move toward hard places, not away.

GOD WELCOMES

So we open our lives and homes to the most vulnerable.

GOD PROTECTS

So we fight against that which fights against them.





LEVERAGING THE 2026 SUMMIT THEME

Consider tying this year's Summit theme into your Pure Religion Sunday message! At CAFO Summit 2026, we're reflecting on the idea of "less" — fewer branches, better fruit.

This year, the most important thing you do may be what you don't do. Our lives and work can become woefully overgrown with tangled branches winding every which way. But our Father is tender and wise, and every branch that bears fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. Pruning can sometimes feel brutal, yet it is an act of faith and focusing that yields the good fruit we long for both within us and in all we do. It is the intentional reallocation of life toward fruitfulness — cutting back what divides and diverts our time, energy and attention. Less becomes the path to more: a harvest that is fuller, sweeter and more enduring.

WHAT'S THE CAFO2026 THEME?

THREE KEY PRINCIPLES

Below you'll find three key principles we recommend in making the most of this opportunity to engage your church on Pure Religion Sunday.

Principle One: **Make It Special**

Make your message stand out from the norm. Pick a specific Sunday or weekend to join with a global community of churches in emphasizing this call to care for vulnerable children and families. Pure Religion Sunday is officially on the second Sunday in November but can be celebrated any time throughout the year. Find what works best for your church!

Consider crafting an entire sermon series on this topic; emphasize mission, hospitality and the variety of ways your church wants to make an impact locally and globally. Provide specific calls to action for your people to get involved with those right there in the church or community.

Principle Two: **Make It Normal**

Though we want to make Pure Religion Sunday feel special, we also want this message to be “normal” within our churches. Throughout the year, take every opportunity to spotlight the moments in Scripture where you see God moving toward hard places and struggling people, rather than away. Use this to reinforce vision for your church and invite your people to take action.

EXAMPLE: “Here again we see the character of God in how He moves toward a hard situation or a struggling person. This is who we are striving to be as a church. That’s why we have strategically engaged in the space of caring for vulnerable children and families through foster care, adoption and global orphan care. Learn more about how to get involved in those spaces at our church by...”

Be sure to regularly share stories that celebrate what God is doing and the ways people are engaging within your own community; this is another great way to keep the message in front of your congregation!

Principle Three: **Make It for Everyone**

We're not all called to do the same thing, but everyone can do something! This is the essence of what it means to be members of the same body, each with unique gifts and functions yet working together for the good of the whole (1 Corinthians 12). We all celebrate the same gospel; how incredible that we get to demonstrate that gospel in diverse ways!

This means the question is no longer "Can I do something?", but now "In light of what Jesus has done for me, what is my something I can do for others?"

Provide a variety of ways to get involved, reinforcing the "everyone can do something" message while highlighting and celebrating the different "somethings" that your people are doing.



additional resources

WEBINAR: Preaching that Moves

MINI-BOOK: Preach

SERMON: A Pure and Undefined Reflection

PODCAST: Father to the Fatherless

BLOG: Preaching about the Gospel and God's Heart for the Vulnerable



MOVING BEYOND

a One-Day Event

POST PURE RELIGION SUNDAY

Remember, the goal of your Pure Religion Sunday event is two-fold: 1) To honor, recognize and celebrate the heart of God for vulnerable children and families and how you may already see that playing out in your church, and 2) To utilize this focused Sunday (or weekend) as a catalyst for further, ongoing, long-term engagement in the lives of vulnerable children and families. These resources are designed to help you do just that.



LEVERAGING THE POWER OF A PURE RELIGION SUNDAY

This simple guide is designed to help your church prepare for and execute a meaningful Pure Religion Sunday event, as well as build an actionable follow-up plan to help your people take their next steps. You'll discover principles and practices for how to plan effective follow-up events designed to connect and encourage people as they follow how God is inviting them to respond. If you're operating within a team, this is also a great tool to process together. Simply walk through the content and ensure everyone is aligned on the vision, purpose and next steps of your Pure Religion Sunday event.

ACCESS THE BOOK



THE FOSTERING CHURCH PODCAST

This limited series is specifically designed to help churches grow their foster care ministry — no matter where they are on the journey. In each episode you'll gain insight on where to focus your efforts and the encouragement you need to take your next best steps forward. And if you're working with a team, this is a great series to share with them. Follow up with them to learn what their takeaways were and how together you can execute the most effective strategy moving forward.

LISTEN NOW



EVERYONE CAN DO SOMETHING

This book is designed to rally churches around the care of the vulnerable in strategic, effective and sustainable ways. You'll discover the principles you need to help you take your next best steps in areas like clarifying your message, making the problem relatable, connecting people into a community of support, developing a strategic plan, planning and promoting events and more! Again, if you are working with a team this is a great gift to them — one you can have them look through to get ideas and perspectives for follow-up conversations and planning.

Now available in Spanish!

LEARN MORE



cafo.org/purereligion