Bob: If a man’s going to assume the responsibilities of spiritual leadership, one of the issues he’s going to have to ask himself is, “What is my response and what is our family’s response to the needs of orphans?” Here’s Johnny Carr.

Johnny: Adoption is certainly a spiritual issue. We can certainly tie in the theology of adoption to physical adoption because we can go to just simply caring for orphans. Most of us, as conservative evangelicals, we hold the Bible up and we say: “Well, men are supposed to be the head of the household. Men are supposed to take the lead in spiritual issues. So, if an issue needs to be adopted, why in the world, men, are we not leading the discussion when it comes to caring for orphans?”

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Friday, [April] 18th. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. The message of Good Friday is that God gave His Son to rescue spiritual orphans. What is our response to the orphan crisis in our world today? We’ll talk about that today. Stay tuned.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. You know, over the last decade, there has been something of an awakening, I think, among Christians, around the world—an awakening to the issue of the needs of orphans. Adoption has been more on the forefront—the needs of kids in foster care has risen in awareness—with that, we’ve seen some critiques start to come about—you’ve seen the articles and the books that have come out that have said, “Oh, we’re buying babies from other countries,” or, “We’re setting up an orphan industry in third-world countries.” Are you concerned about that?

Dennis: Well, it’s not that there can’t be an abuse because, wherever humans go, there can be abuse; but overall, within the evangelical Christian community, where this orphan movement is taking place—overwhelmingly, there is a positive movement to address the needs of orphans, globally—in many cases, help orphanages adopt some of those children. Also, here in America, the foster care system—there are some churches trying to completely empty the foster care system in their state.

Bob: Right.
Dennis: There’s a huge need for the Christian community to step up and go near the orphan. Johnny Carr joins us again on FamilyLife Today. Johnny has written a book called Orphan Justice: How to Care for Orphans Beyond Adopting. Johnny—welcome back to the broadcast.

Johnny: Oh, thank you. It’s a pleasure.

Dennis: Johnny works for a ministry called Help One Now. He is Vice President of Strategic Partnerships. He and his wife have five children, three of whom are adopted. I’m just curious—you’ve heard the critique I’m talking about—where people are saying, “This is an issue.” Are there third-world countries, where people are saying: “We have a new racket. If we can just turn out babies, we can make some money”?

Johnny: I wouldn’t say there are countries—I would say there are some evil people that would like to do that. Of course, we’re talking about the most vulnerable of the most vulnerable—when we’re talking about orphaned children—that have no family, that have no standing in community, that have nothing. Certainly, there are those who are out there trying to do that.

Dennis: Well—human trafficking, as an illustration, is the ultimate of evil, in my opinion.

Johnny: Absolutely. This is another form of that—when that happens, of course—but that’s why we have rules and regulations. For—let me say this—since I worked for an adoption agency for six years—that’s why adoption is expensive, too, because a lot of that money goes to trying to make sure that (a) the families who are wanting to adopt are safe and good families; and then, on the other end, to make sure that due diligence has been done to make sure that these children are truly orphaned children that need to be adopted.

There’s a *lot* of work that happens on both ends of those things, and I’ve been on both ends of those things. I’ve been in hours, and hours, and hours of meetings where these types of things were discussed. We talked about the heart issues and, really, took it head-on.

Bob: You have already shared with us, this week, about your wife’s desire that you would be adoptive parents—her skill as a signer and working with deaf children. You adopted a son from China, who was four years old. He was deaf—his name is James. Before you went to China, the adoption story got a little broader than just going over to get a little boy; right?

Johnny: Yes. I remember the day Beth called me back to the computer room and said, “Hey, come and look at this sweet little picture.” Back in the day—this was really before blogs were really popular—adoptive families, who are adopting internationally, were in these Yahoo groups.
In one of those, a family had taken an orphanage director out for dinner. Along with them, came this little girl. The lady said, “I leaned down into her ear and whispered, ‘Jesu ami,’” which is, “Jesus loves you.” The interpreter said, “Oh, she can’t hear you; she’s deaf.”

They posted a picture of her sitting down on the floor, with her tongue sticking out at the camera. Beth said, “That little girl needs a family.” I said: “Well, that’s wonderful; but are you kidding me? We haven’t even gone to adopt James yet, and you’re already thinking about a second one.” And this is before my conversion, if you will—

**Bob:** Right.

**Johnny:** —“into all of this.” So I’m like a total arms-length, just thinking, “You are nuts, woman.”

**Bob:** Right. [Laughter]

**Johnny:** We go to China. She was from the same province as James. When we went to adopt James, we met some missionaries, who are actually from Pensacola—that were working in that province and working with orphans. That began a friendship.

Six months later, we went back, just to encourage them. We didn’t really know what to do on a mission trip, but we just wanted to go and encourage them. They wanted to show us around. One of the places they took us, on that trip, was to her orphanage. We were waiting for our contact to come in. We were at the director’s office. The translator said, “Oh, this is the lady who wants to adopt Xiaoli.” I looked at her and went, “Excuse me?”

I found out—she had been communicating with them, through these friends over there. I’m like, “Are you kidding?” Well, the orphanage director took a file from his desk and handed it to me. It was actually her adoption file that he was putting together. He said: “This is her file that’ll be going to the central authority in Beijing. From there, I have no idea where this file will go. It could go to any country in the world that does adoptions from China. Then, if it comes through the United States…”—if it comes through the United States—there were, at the time, over 150 agencies doing adoptions.

So we would have to find that specific agency with that file. This was like more than a needle in a haystack situation.

**Bob:** Right.

**Johnny:** Coming back from that trip, Beth started emailing agencies and just saying, “If you get this little girl, from this orphanage, that’s deaf, please let us know.”

**Bob:** Wow.
Dennis: Your wife is tenacious; isn’t she?

Johnny: Yes, she is. Yes. [Laughter] Eleven months later, we get a phone call one night. We had moved. Our email had changed. Our phone number had changed—everything. This agency in Chattanooga had tracked us down through the internet and said, “We think we have the file on that little girl.”

In May of 2007, we go back and adopt Xiaoli. So, she and James are now the same grade. She’s profoundly deaf. James can hear a little, so he can talk a little bit; but Xiaoli is profoundly deaf. It’s just been amazing to see how God has worked in both of their lives.

Bob: So, at that point, now your family’s—you have four kids, right?

Johnny: At that point, we had four.

Bob: And, were you thinking—

Dennis: And his stiff arm is down. [Laughter] He surrendered!

Bob: What were you thinking? Were you thinking, “We’re just going to become a dozen kids,” or were you thinking, “This is all over”?

Johnny: I really thought that was going to be it because, at that point, I had started working for Bethany. I was doing a lot of traveling. Beth just loves to work in the school system, and so—

Dennis: Hold it, stop. Stop, stop; stop. This is the guy who had stiff-armed his wife—he’d been in a personal lockout situation with his wife because she’s trying to get your attention around adoption. You’re not working for Bethany Christian Services, one of the leading orphan-care advocates in the world—

Bob: And you thought it was all over?

Johnny: —at a national level.

Dennis: Now, wait a second. [Laughter] How did you end up going to work for them?

Johnny: It was on that trip to adopt Xiaoli that we knew God was calling us to do something different, but we weren’t sure exactly what it was. We actually thought He might be calling us to be missionaries in China. We decided to use that trip because, at that—and again, this is before really cell-phones were that popular—so you were kind of just stuck in your hotel, with CNN International was the only English you got to hear—and you’re there for two weeks.
So, we used that time to really pray. We got to the end of that trip—and I’ll never forget thinking, “This is not what God is calling us to do.” Beth had the very same feelings. It was really odd because it was kind of the first time in our lives we’ve felt like God was leading us to something. Then, at the very end, it was like, “No.” But we knew it was something different—we just didn’t know what.

I knew this—every time I would talk to one of my pastor friends and share my story—share my burden with them—they would say: “Could you come to my church? I’d love to see our church do something like that.” I had become friends with Paul Pennington, here from Hope for Orphans, as well.

So, I’m sharing this story with Paul. A few weeks later, Paul called me back and said: “You’re about to get a call from Bethany Christian Services because they’re looking for a pastor who has adopted—who has a heart to do this kind of work—that can go, and engage the church, and really try to lead the church in doing orphan care and adoption ministries. I gave them your name. I told them your resume fits their job description perfectly.”

Sure enough, in August 2007, I went to work for Bethany as their first national director of church partnerships.

Bob: That’s a big switch from being on a local church staff—being a pastor—to move in this new direction. It doesn’t sound like it’s because you’d gotten burned out in the local church or because you’d lost any love for pastoring, but God was really stirring in your heart; wasn’t He?

Johnny: He really was. It was something that we really couldn’t get away from—even to the point that we had started to put together a plan of—because I’m thinking, “Who’s going to pay me to travel around and talk to churches to do this?” I mean, it just seemed crazy, at the time.

We were even thinking: “You know what? Come December 31st, if”—because this was in May, when we had adopted Xiaoli—“if something doesn’t happen by then, we’re going to put together a plan to start our own ministry—try to get some fundraising and just, you know, do what Dennis Rainey did, years ago—and do something crazy and start your own ministry.”

Little did I know that God was going to bring Bethany into the picture—that is the largest adoption agency in the United States.

Dennis: Well, I just want to say a word on behalf of your choice to go do that. I really do think this is one of the pioneering areas in ministry where God is at work. Henry Blackaby talks about: “Join God in what He’s doing—
**Johnny:** Yes.

**Dennis:** —“and be a part of what He’s up to.” This is one of the ministries where He’s at work. If there are pastors listening to us, or moms and dads, husbands and wives—even single people who have a passion to start an orphan care, or a foster care, or adoption ministry in their local church—this is a great ministry because there are people that’ll come out of the woodwork to help fuel and provide the leadership to drive this forward.

**Bob:** What did you learn in six years of traveling around to churches, and talking about this, and encouraging folks? What was your biggest takeaway?

**Johnny:** I haven’t found any pastor that’s against orphans.

**Bob:** Right.

**Johnny:** You don’t go in and have this conversation; and then, at the end, some pastor goes, “You know, I just can’t see from the Bible, where we need to do this.” I never, ever got that; and I don’t think we ever will. But it was the lack of understanding of the reality, and it was the lack of understanding of what this can look like.

**Dennis:** You’re talking about the need?

**Johnny:** The need itself: “What is the reality of orphans?” And that’s what I came away from. When we first adopted James—coming home from that trip—it was: “What does God’s Word say, and what is the reality? What is ‘…in their distress’ when James 1:27 says, ‘…in their affliction,’ or, ‘…in their distress’?”

**Dennis:** —to visit them, and go into the orphanage, as you did—

**Johnny:** Yes.

**Dennis:** —as you mentioned, earlier, where you walk in and you see a couple dozen kids, sitting in like high chairs—

**Johnny:** Yes.

**Dennis:** —where they don’t leave all day—

**Johnny:** Yes.

**Dennis:** —I mean, they’re going to sit there. They’re not connecting with other human beings.
Johnny: That’s it. And how many pastors know how many children there are, like that, in the world? How many pastors know how many kids are in the foster care system in their own county? How many of them know any of those statistics? And that was what I found—because I certainly didn’t. Before I went to China, I had no idea what these numbers were. I felt like I was a pretty common type pastor, you know. If I didn’t know it, they probably didn’t either. As I traveled around, that is exactly the response that I learned.

Bob: Do you know the average church in America is a hundred people or less / maybe two hundred if you’ve have a good group. You’re thinking: “Okay, we have the homeless issue. We have the hungry people in town. We have…” I mean, it can be overwhelming! How does a church make this a priority, or why should they make it a priority?

Johnny: Well, they can make it a priority simply by preaching. The why is the preaching because it’s simply of matter of Scripture—and in doing so in such a way to say that this is not to pressure anyone into adopting—that’s the last thing we want to do.

Bob: Right.

Johnny: We never want to make guilt part of this, but we do want to expose what the Scripture says; and then again: “What is the reality? What does that mean to us, here?” Maybe for the small church of 75—that’s mainly senior adults—that every year, on orphan Sunday week, or May, as Foster Care month—they prepare a meal for the social workers in their area, and just go down and say: “Hey, here’s lunch. We love you. We appreciate you. How can we be praying for you?”

Dennis: I want to tell you something—I spoke at one of these lunches one time—where half the audience were church members, and half the audience were social workers—about 40 in each group / 80 total—the courage that that gave those social workers, and the appreciation in what is a thankless job / a tough job of social workers, working in the foster care system.

Bob: Yes.

Dennis: This is a set-up for a church—this is a great ministry! It’s evangelistic. It shows them what the love of God looks like in a family—I mean, my daughter can tell you. She’s now cared for 18 foster care kids. She’s as busy as they get. She has five boys, ages 4 to 14. She’s extremely busy, but she’s caring for an infant right now. The needs of these children are real; and the church, I think, needs to step forward and deal with these needs.

Bob: I want to go to the last child that you adopted.

Johnny: Yes.
Bob: Share with our listeners because that child came out of the foster care system.

Johnny: He did. I got an email one day. It was from the lady who had taken us through our foster care training. She said: “Got a little boy here who’s deaf. Would you be interested? He also has cerebral palsy. He’s on a feeding tube. He’s blind. He’s…” She just listed all these disabilities.

Bob: Wow.

Johnny: I’m like: “Oh—no way. There’s no way…”

Dennis: And that sounds—I mean, I understand exactly where you are—it just sounds overwhelming. It sounds like: “We wouldn’t have the margin to be able to give that boy what he needs”; right?

Johnny: Absolutely—with Beth working, full-time, my travel schedule—so, three weeks later, I get another email from her. It says, “Have you thought any more about this little boy?” She attached a picture of him. When I opened the picture, he was a two-year-old African-American boy, putting together a puzzle, smiling at the camera. I’m thinking, “If he’s putting a puzzle together, he’s not blind.” His hands don’t look like he has cerebral palsy. I emailed her back and said, “I think you’ve given me the wrong picture here.” You know: “This little boy doesn’t fit the description you gave me before.”

She said: “Oh, actually, I gave you some erroneous information. He is deaf. He does have cerebral palsy, but it’s just in his lower extremities. He is on a feeding tube—but not like a tube through the throat—but it’s more of a G-tube in his stomach.” J.J. was born at 25 weeks—

Dennis: Oh. Wow!

Johnny: —weighed a pound and three ounces—actually, had a twin who passed away at birth. When God brought J.J. into our lives, my heart was softened. My mind was even—I would say—a lot more open. After we started doing our visits with J.J., we took it very slowly. We asked more questions than you could ever believe. Matter of fact, I even met with his medical doctor, who had been treating him since the day he was born.

I’ll never forget, I asked him two questions: “What is he doing now that you never thought he would be doing?” and, “What is he not doing, that you thought he should be doing by now?” He looked at me and said: “I’ll tell you what he’s doing, and this will answer your question. He’s alive—that’s it. I never thought he would be alive.” Now, he said: “If you had come to me a year ago, I would say, ‘Be very cautious.’ Today, I’m telling you, ‘All this boy needs is love.’”

Bob: Wow.
**Johnny:** So, J.J. joined our family, officially, in May of 2011.

**Dennis:** Well, I'll tell you what—when we get to heaven, maybe God will give me the privilege of washing your feet— you know—you and Beth. I mean—

**Johnny:** Beth's—not mine.

**Dennis:** I really am humbled to hear of your story. I know our listeners are kind of going, "Yes, that's true sacrificial love." I think it's good to hear these stories today. We live in such an affluent country. It's not a matter of providing a high standard of living for a kid.

**Johnny:** Yes.

**Dennis:** It's a matter of providing the love of God, poured out in their hearts, and letting them sit and soak in it, and receive that love.

**Johnny:** You know, that's interesting, Dennis, you say that. I was just talking with the international director at Bethany recently. I was asking him about the foster care program that we implemented in Ethiopia and how the children were doing.

And he said: "Johnny, I just talked to this little boy, the other day. He's actually being fostered by a family who lives in a hut, and he said—I asked him—'Would you rather go back to live at the orphanage, where you have a nice bed, and walls, and even electricity?' "He said, 'No, I would rather sleep on the dirt, and have the love of this family, than to sleep in that building and have electricity and a bed.'"

**Dennis:** Well, if our listeners didn't take a look at this earlier, they need to go online to FamilyLifeToday.com, and click on a link there that has “Hope for Orphans” attached to it. It’s a five-minute video, by a teenage girl, who came to a family, as a little girl, who was abandoned by her family. She’s from Romania. You better get a couple of Kleenex®es because it's a powerful story of how the love of a family can make a difference in another human being's life.

Johnny—thanks for being on the broadcast. Thanks for your passion for orphans. I pray God’s favor on you as you continue to partner with the church and challenge them—each church—to make a difference and go near the needs of orphans.

**Johnny:** Thank you, and thank you all for being a voice. You all have played a very important role in all this. I think you know that; but I want to say that publicly: “Thank you.”

**Bob:** Well, we appreciate that. Again, our listeners can go to FamilyLifeToday.com. In the upper left-hand corner of the page, you'll see a box that says, “Go Deeper.” That will take you to the link to the video from Hope for Orphans. There's information available
there about the upcoming orphan summit in Chicago. Dennis and I are going to be
there, at the summit. Johnny, I think you’re going to be there, as well. We’d like to invite
as many of our listeners to join us for this two-day focus on how individuals and
churches can care for the needs of orphans in our world today.

Again, you’ll find the link at FamilyLifeToday.com. Click the button in the upper left-hand
corner that says “Go Deeper.” All the information you need is available there. There’s
also information about Johnny Carr’s book, Orphan Justice: How to Care for Orphans
Beyond Adopting. We have copies of that book in our FamilyLife Today Resource
Center. You can order online. Again, go to FamilyLifeToday.com and click the button
that says, “Go Deeper,” in the upper left-hand corner of the page. Order from us, online;
or call 1-800-FL-TODAY; 1-800-358-6329—that’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life,
and then the word, “TODAY.”

Now, we are always grateful when we hear from listeners, who get in touch with us and
share their thoughts about—either things they hear on our program, articles they’ve
read on our website, FamilyLifeToday.com—we’re hearing more and more from podcast
listeners, as well—always great to hear from the folks who are regular FamilyLife Today
listeners. If that’s you, and you’ve never gotten in touch with us and let us know that
you’re listening to FamilyLife Today, we’d love to hear your thoughts about the
program—hear how God has used this program in your life.

We also want to say, “Thank you,” to those of you who help make this program
possible—those of you who make donations to help support the ministry of FamilyLife
Today, either as monthly Legacy Partners or as you get in touch with us, from time to
time, to make a donation. We are grateful for your support. In fact, this month, we’d like
to say, “Thank you for your support,” by sending you a bundle of three prayer cards.
These are cards designed to help husbands and wives pray for one another, and
together pray for their children. We’ll send these out to as our thank-you gift during the
month of April when you make a donation to support this ministry.

You can donate, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com. Click the button in the upper right-
hand corner of our screen that says “I Care”; or call 1-800-FL-TODAY and make your
donation over the phone. Mention that you would like the prayer card bundle when you
contact us. Or you can write to us and mail a check. Our mailing address is FamilyLife
Today, P O Box 7111, Little Rock, AR; and our zip code is 72223. We’re grateful for
your partnership with us in this ministry—always nice to hear from you.

And we hope you have a great weekend. Hope you and your family are able to worship
together this weekend. And I hope you can join us back on Monday. Our friends, Tim
and Darcy Kimmel, are going to be here. We’re going to talk about what grace looks like
in a marriage: “What does it look like to have a grace-filled marriage?” We’ll explore that
next week. Hope you can tune in.
I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I'm Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

*FamilyLife Today* is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

We are so happy to provide these transcripts to you. However, there is a cost to produce them for our website. If you’ve benefited from the broadcast transcripts, would you consider [donating today](http://www.FamilyLife.com) to help defray the costs?

Copyright © 2014 FamilyLife. All rights reserved.

www.FamilyLife.com