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For the Love of a Dog

My family and I have this mutt dog named Charlie. Charlie is a wonderful dog, however sometimes his behavior is less than stellar. But yet I find that I really love this dog! He is so expressive. He has these beautiful eyes which never fail to show me that he thinks I am wonderful. He will sit at my command although he groans as he tries to contain his boundless energy that really makes him want to jump up on me. His mother dropped him off on our back door step about 3 years ago. He was just a tiny ball of black fur. He just looked through our back door and cried as if to say, "Hold me. I'm scared. Don't leave me. Where's my mama?" Now he is this big, **big** dog with a humungous tail that swings back and forth offering a large thump to whatever it touches. Someone once told me that he looks like the dog from Dr. Seuss' Whoville. Let's just say he has many family lines.

One day last week I drove into our garage and as always, Charlie met me at the door of my car waiting for me to rub him on the head and tell him how beautiful he is. Then it happened. I got a revelation. I finally understood why I loved him so much. I walked into the house and found my husband Eddie. "Eddie" I said. "I figured out why I love Charlie so much." He said, "Okay" while his face said "Here it comes. Another reason to keep Charlie." With a smile of joy I pronounced, "He is an orphan! His mother dropped him on our back door step!" To which my husband groaned with a slight smile and said, "He and ten thousand other dogs" as if that muted my point.

Well the jury is still out at my house as to whether or not we get to keep Charlie short of flying in the Dog Whisperer for an intervention, but nonetheless my moment of revelation prompted me to think about what it means to be an orphan.

Here are some of the definitions for the word **orphan** at Dictionary.com.

1. a child who has lost both parents through death, or, less commonly, one parent.
2. a young animal that has been deserted by or has lost its mother.
3. a person or thing that is without protective affiliation, sponsorship, etc.
4. not authorized, supported, or funded; not part of a system; isolated; abandoned:

So we see that some people are orphans because they have lost parents through death, but many others are orphans because they are (**or feel**) isolated, abandoned; they are without protective affiliation, not supported, authorized, or sponsored.

One of the functions of the church is to provide support, affiliation, and connectedness for the body of Christ that helps us all to overcome the feelings of aloneness or purposefulness.

In recent years, a buzz word or catch phrase among churches has been the phrase "an orphan spirit". We use the phrase to talk about how many people "**feel**" even though they are not orphans in the sense of the word that indicates that their parents are dead, but they are orphans in that they "**feel**" disconnected, rejected, or isolated. We have come to realize that a person with "an orphan spirit" often has great difficulty being filled by human love or God's love because they are filled with a sense of emptiness or aloneness. In reality, we know we as humans cannot fill anyone. We often try in our relationships to be filled from what we draw from others but going back to the Garden of Eden for our example, man and woman were both filled with God before they were brought together. Then they were able to relate to one another in a way that didn't deplete each other, but completed each other. God invited them into intimacy with Him and with each other.

The feeling of being an orphan is often rooted in the fear of abandonment which is sometimes identified by psychologists as the fundamental human fear that emerges even before we acquire the language to voice it. Clinton and Sibley in *Why You Do the Things You Do* say "*This fear is so powerful that it activates our body's autonomic nervous system, causing our hearts to race, our breathing to become shallow and rapid, our stomachs to quiver, and our hands to shake. We feel a sense of panic that will not go away until we are once again close to our caregivers – until we regain a feeling of security.*"

As Jesus was getting ready to transition back to heaven, he knew his followers were going to feel disconnected and isolated. They were going to feel abandoned. So he went to great efforts in his last days on earth to teach them that even though they were going to **feel** abandoned, in truth and reality, they were not. He said, "I will not leave you orphans."

I remember when my twin brother Mike was killed in an auto accident. His children were 12 and 14 at the time. I wanted to give them things that represented something important to Mike. As I went through the items from his desk at work, I saw the pictures of his children that he had on his desk. I found his calendar where he had noted important events in his children's lives that he didn't want to forget. I found coloring sheets from years gone by that my niece had made for Mike where she had written "I love my daddy". They were important to him, and I wanted to give them to his children as if to say, "Don't ever forget that your daddy loved you so much!"

In much the same way, Jesus wanted to be sure we didn't ever forget how much he loves us.

Mother Teresa once said "The biggest disease today is not leprosy or tuberculosis, but rather the feeling of being unwanted, uncared for, and deserted by everybody. The greatest evil is the lack of love."

Yes, we as humans we are often abandoned and at times we feel abandoned even when we are not. God cares, and we also should care. What can we do to deal with abandonment or the feeling of abandonment? What should be do in regards to those who are orphaned?

Well, tomorrow I will plan to share more thoughts on that. Right now I've got to go feed Charlie.

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