

Templates of Truth with Rick Smith  
Audio Script – July 24, 2009

One day the commotion you hear outside is local law enforcement arresting a mom and dad across the street, while state human services takes custody of their two small children. What can you do? James puts the response in the context of genuine religion in today's Templates of Truth.

What is genuine and effective religion? It can be many things, but James brings it right down to the practical ways in which we relate to those around us: *This is pure and undefiled (effective) religion in the sight of our God and Father; to visit orphans...in their distress* (1:27). The word James uses for *distress* refers to afflictions and was a word often used to describe the process of crushing grapes in a wine press. No better graphic picture could be offered to describe the neglect & abuse of children than this meaning to the word *distress*. When parents and children are separated under conditions of criminal behavior, neglect or abuse, these innocent children become, in essence, *orphans* or wards of the state. The directive James gives to *visit* them, means for the purpose of providing comfort and relief. Being involved in this kind of response is what God approves as genuine and effective religion in action.

This Biblical text gives me an opportunity to espouse the work of CASA, an incredible organization I have recently become associated with through appointment to their board of directors. Court Appointed Special Advocates has a mission to provide abused, neglected & dependent children a voice in the court process in order to find a safe, permanent home as quickly as possible. That mission is accomplished through volunteers who are trained and appointed by a juvenile judge to represent the best interests of such children in court proceedings.

What do these volunteers do? They provide the judge with carefully researched information about the child to help the court make a sound decision about the child's future. The CASA volunteer talks with the child, his parents, family members, social workers, school officials, health providers and others who are knowledgeable about the child. They review all the records pertaining to the child, including school, medical and human service caseworker reports & documents - all of which are made readily available to the volunteer under court-ordered appointment. They offer trust and advocacy during complex legal proceedings, explaining to the child the events that are happening, the reasons they are in court, the role of the judge, lawyers and social workers. In a very special, compassionate way, they are a child's very best friend during a very uncertain and frightening time in his or her young life.

Research shows that children who have been assigned a CASA volunteer spend less time in court and less time in the foster home system than those who do not have a CASA volunteer. More than 1,000 CASA programs exist across the United States, involving the work of 68,800 volunteers that helped nearly 250,000 children last year. Here in Arkansas, there are 19 CASA programs operating in 59 of our 75 counties. Our local program serves Pope, Johnson and Franklin counties, and works in cooperation with the Honorable Ken D. Coker, Circuit Judge of the 5<sup>th</sup> Judicial District. The executive offices of our local CASA program are housed in the

Pope County courthouse.

Being spiritual and fulfilling the ministry work that is Biblically mandated for all believers can involve more than preaching, teaching and busy church work. We can effectively be salt and light in an evil and wicked world by coming along side those who are suffering, hurting and in need of special help. If you have available & flexible time in your daily schedule, good communication & administrative skills, and can remain objective & composed in often harsh & emotionally challenging circumstances & situations, being a CASA volunteer may be a great opportunity for you to express pure and effective religion for God in the life a precious and innocent child. I encourage you to contact your local CASA program and inquire about becoming a CASA volunteer. You can make a difference, one child at a time.

That's today's Templates of Truth. This is your Bible teacher, Rick Smith, reminding you to attend church this Sunday for Bible study and worship, pray for one another, and always strive to abide. Until next time, have a blessed and glorious day in Christ Jesus.

© Copyright 2009 – All Rights Reserved – Renewal Resource Services, PLLC