

"Widowhood: From Sorrow to Service"

ABOUT 1 MILLION WIDOWED IN USA EVERY YEAR
all races, social backgrounds, financial standing
DEATH KNOWS NO PREJUDICE

most older people, many young widows with children
WOMEN OVER 21 - 1 OUT OF 6 - IS A WIDOW
WOMEN BECOMING WIDOWS AT YOUNGER AND YOUNGER AGES

THOSE MARRIED OVER AGE 65: Men - 70% Women - 30%

1. Problems faced by the Biblical Widow

OT term "almana" (Hebrew) a woman whose husband died / abandoned
NT - SAME SOCIAL AND LEGAL POSITION AS OT

ALL BIBLICAL TEACHING REFERS TO WOMEN - PRINCIPLES APPLY TO MEN

a. No Property

Numbers 27:8-11 IF NO MALE HEIR - PROPERTY GIVEN TO DAUGHTERS

Numbers 27:8-11 "Say to the Israelites, 'If a man dies and leaves no son, turn his inheritance over to his daughter. {9} If he has no daughter, give his inheritance to his brothers. {10} If he has no brothers, give his inheritance to his father's brothers. {11} If his father had no brothers, give his inheritance to the nearest relative in his clan, that he may possess it. This is to be a legal requirement for the Israelites, as the LORD commanded Moses.'"

- no son, could lose property of her deceased husband
THROUGH DECEPTION AND EXTORTION

Job 22:8,9 you were a powerful man, owning land-- an honored man, living on it. And you sent widows away empty-handed

Job 24:2 Men move boundary stones - i.e. FROM POOR AND WIDOWS

Mark 12:38-40 Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law...They devour widows' houses and for a show and make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely."

EMBEZZLEMENT OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS // TV PREACHERS TODAY
VICTIMIZE SINCERE WOMEN - TAKING THEIR MONEY

b. No Provision

OT ECONOMIC SECURITY FOR WIDOWS - four ways:

1) LEVIRATE MARRIAGE - husbands brother, or other male relative, expected to marry her,
e.g. Ruth

- 2) Return to her father's house
- 3) Remarriage
- 4) Remain unmarried, support herself (and children)

Widows were TYPICALLY POOR -

Luke 21.2-4 (Jesus) saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. "I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others...she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

Acts 6.1(the Grecian Jews) widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

c. No Protector

Isaiah 1.23 Your rulers are rebels...the widow's case does not come before them.

Ezekiel 22:6-8 "See how each of the princes of Israel... uses his power to shed blood...they have oppressed the alien and mistreated the fatherless and the widow.

Psalms 94:3,6 How long will the wicked, O LORD, how long will the wicked be jubilant? They slay the widow and the alien

WITHOUT A LEGAL PROTECTOR - PRECARIOUS POSITION
- often neglected or exploited

Widows were VICTIMS OF EXPLOITATION (even by religious leaders)

2. Provision for the Widow 1 Timothy 5 (p. 1276)

a. Promise of God

v. 5 The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help.

WIDOWS - SPECIAL CONCERN OF GOD

Psalm 68.5 a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.

Proverbs 15.25 The LORD tears down the proud man's house but he keeps the widow's boundaries intact.

Exodus 22.22-24 "Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless.

Malachi 3.5 "...I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against...those who...oppress the widows and the fatherless...but do not fear me," says the LORD Almighty.

b. Duty of the Family

vs. 4 But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.

FIRST TO TAKE CARE OF THE WIDOW IS HER CHILDREN & GRANDCHILDREN

v. 8 If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

EVEN ANOTHER WOMAN IF NECESSARY

v. 16 If any woman who is a believer has widows in her family, she should help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need.

NO FAMILY AVAILABLE TO CARE FOR HER - THE FAMILY IN CHRIST MUST

c. Duty of the Church

v. 16 ...the church can help those widows who are really in need.

v.3 Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need.

CARE FOR WIDOWS - PRIORITY OF THE CHURCH - GOD'S PEOPLE

"really in need" - CHURCH SHOULD KNOW THE PEOPLE IN NEED
SHARE WITH DEACONS / PASTOR - CANNOT KNOW EVERYONE'S SITUATION

James 1.27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

TRUE RELIGION "helping widows in their distress"

SPECIFIC HELPS

- Immediate - food, company, legal advice
- Long Term - acceptance, support services, remembrances
support networks/friendships
- Ministry - focus on the needs of others, not self centered

FROM SORROW TO SERVICE

3. Picture of Two Widows - Ruth and Naomi (p. 280)

NO TWO PEOPLE REACT TO THE DEATH OF A SPOUSE THE SAME WAY

VARIETIES OF REACTION TO DEATH OF SPOUSE, factors:

- degree of attachment, dependence on spouse
- support network, family and close friends
- cultural/ethnic attitudes toward death and grief
- couple's previous history of loss

DEVELOPMENT OF FEELINGS, PERIOD OF ADJUSTMENT

STORY OF RUTH - ELIMELECH AND WIFE NAOMI - SONS MAHLON & KILION

TIME OF JUDGES IN ISRAEL - FAMINE IN LAND - WENT TO MOAB FOR FOOD

SONS MARRIED MOABITE WOMEN - ORPAH AND RUTH

WITHIN A FEW YEARS - ELIMELECH, MAHLON, & KILION DIED - 3 WIDOWS

NAOMI PLANS TO RETURN TO ISRAEL - HER HOMELAND

a. Naomi - the "Older" Widow

1) Pleasant lit. def. "Naomi" - GODLY EXAMPLE TO DAUGHTERS-IN-LAW

HAD BEEN AN EXAMPLE OF FAITH AND PIETY - FOLLOWED GOD OF ISRAEL

1.8 Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. {9} May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband."

TRAGIC LOSS HAD MADE HER BECOME -

2) Bitter CALLED A PITY PARTY FOR HERSELF

1.11 Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for --even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons-- would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has gone out against me!"

1:20 "Don't call me Naomi, " she told them. "Call me Mara, (lit. "bitter") because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me."

PART OF THE NORMAL GRIEVING PROCESS - NEED TO GO THROUGH & OUT

DANGER OF REMAINING IN IT - BEING CONTROLLED BY BITTERNESS

Hebrews 12:15 See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

Proverbs 17:22 A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER - NOT UNCOMMON

can occur over one year after death of the spouse

- flashbacks - disturbing dreams - psychic numbness - loss of sleep and appetite -

EVEN PHYSICAL DISORDERS LIKE - sleep disorder - dizziness - rashes - palpitations - and shortness of breath

3) Idle TOO MUCH TIME TO THINK - SELF-CENTERED

2.2 Ruth said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor." Naomi said to her, "Go ahead, my daughter."

NOT "GREAT IDEA - A LITTLE WORK WOULD BE GOOD FOR US!"

NO THANKS - I'LL STAY HOME AND WATCH TV - MY FAVORITE SOAPS

Proverbs 31:27 THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN

She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of [idleness].

1 Timothy 5:13 they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying things they ought not to.

1 Timothy 5:6 the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives.

Dorcas or Tabitha Acts 9:36 In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor.

NT "OFFICE OF WIDOWS" - set apart for the work of the Lord

// Mother's Club at Haili - devoted to prayer and service

4) Reminded SAW HIS ABUNDANT PROVISION THROUGH RUTH'S GLEANING

2.20 "The LORD...has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead"

GOD HAD BEEN FAITHFUL IN EVERY SITUATION - ISRAEL - MOAB & BACK

Psalms 103:2 Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits

WE NEED TO BE REMINDED - END OUR BITTERNESS AND SELF-PITY

"Count your many blessings, name them one by one..."

2 Timothy 2:8 Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David

DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME - SINFULNESS AND GRACE

Book "Widow" by Lynn Caine LOSS OF IDENTITY WHEN HUSBAND DIED

"we add ourselves to our men, pour ourselves into them and their lives. We exist in their reflection"

BECOMING A WIDOW MEANT BECOMING:

"a second-class citizen, a member of the invisible minority of widows..And like all members of a minority group I was deprived - sexually, emotionally, socially, and financially. My very identity was shaken. At times I felt practically nonexistent."

COMMON THOUGHTS - PAINFUL STRUGGLE

CHALLENGE - RE-ESTABLISH IDENTITY IN CHRIST - YOUR BRIDEGROOM
HE IS OUR COMFORT AND STRENGTH - HE WILL FILL OUR CUP

RIGHT VIEW OF GOD - RIGHT VIEW OF YOURSELF

5) Renewed

4.14 The women said to Naomi: "Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth."

GAVE HERSELF TO HER GRANDCHILD - FOUND JOY AND FULFILLMENT
BLESSING OF KNOWING GOD WAS PASSED ON

b. Ruth - the "Younger" Widow

1) Faith

GENTILE FROM MOAB - JOINS WITH THE PEOPLE OF GOD - CONVERT

1.16,17 Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me."

Job 1.21 Job said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked will I depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."

2) Comfort

2.11,12 Boaz replied, "I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband--how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge."

SHE TOO HAD LOST HER HUSBAND - YET SHE GIVES COMFORT TO RUTH

2 Corinthians 1.3-6 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer.

BASIC PRINCIPLE OF GOSPEL - IN DYING WE LIVE, GIVING WE RECEIVE

WIDOW - SEEN THE REALITY OF DEATH - KNOWS SHORTNESS OF LIFE
URGENCY OF RECEIVING ETERNAL LIFE IN CHRIST

3) Service

2.2 Ruth "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain

2:7 She went into the field and has worked steadily from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter."

NOT ONLY DID SHE GET NEEDED FOOD - IT WAS HEALING THERAPY

1 Timothy 5:14 So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander.

4) Patience THINGS DID NOT GET BETTER RIGHT AWAY

2.23 until the barley and wheat harvests were finished. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

Luke 2.36,37 a prophetess, Anna...was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.

UNBROKEN - PATIENT - DEVOTION TO GOD

5) Promise

4.14 May he become famous throughout Israel!

4.17 Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Psalm 146.9,10 The LORD watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked. The LORD reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD.

Luke 2.38 Anna the prophetess...(she was) looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.