

The Widow and Her Children

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A Family Studies supplement from NYM Ministries

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this study on THE WIDOW AND HER CHILDREN. This booklet is a supplement to the NYM *Family Studies* series.

In the past few years, many church leaders and Christian missionaries have been very concerned about the breakdown in families. They have seen a great need for Bible teaching in this area. A number of pastors, church leaders and missionaries started specific teaching on family life. In 1977 they began putting their teaching together into a set of lessons that everyone could use.

Since *Family Studies* deals primarily with two-parent families, THE WIDOW AND HER CHILDREN was written specifically to address the needs of widows and their children. This booklet can be used by widows for personal use and by pastors or other leaders involved in ministry to widows.

The Widow and Her Children

*"The Lord ... sustains the fatherless and the widow."
(Psalm 146:9 NIV)*

What is it like to be a widow? Here is what some widows have said about their feelings.

"It's really lonely being a widow."

"I need someone to share the little things of the day. I need someone to laugh with me when I am happy and to cry with me when I am sad."

"I often need advice, and I miss my husband for that. Also, I miss the times of being able to give him advice. That made me feel needed."

"I just wish a man would say something nice about my hair or clothing or cooking. Often I just want to hear a man's voice."

"I have an unsatisfied physical desire for a husband."

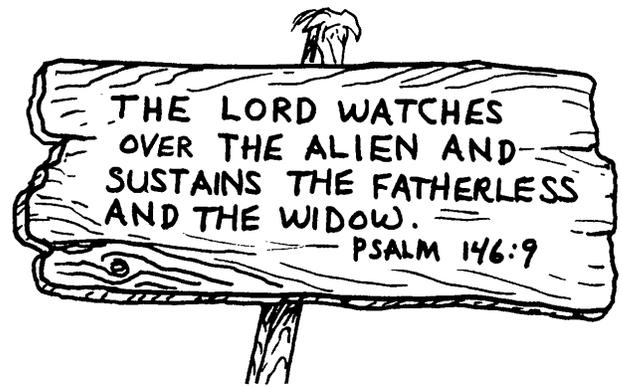
"I need someone to give me advice about money and to help make a budget."

"I often need someone to talk about the children, a man who is really interested in the children."

"I need a chance for an outside ministry to other people."

Widows have had very great changes in their lives. They

have suddenly moved from the rich fullness of a marriage relationship to singleness. They have new feelings and new needs.



WIDOWS ARE SPECIAL TO GOD

The Bible shows that widows have a special place in the heart of God. God made mention of the widow when He first gave the law to the Israelites. He said,

"You shall not afflict any widow..." (Exodus 22:22)

In Psalms the Bible says that

"The Lord preserveth the strangers; He relieveth the fatherless and widow ..." (Psalms 146:9)

Widows are precious to the Lord.

Elsie Barton tucked the bundle of mail under her arm as she left the post office. She had just been to the store for a few things, and on the way home she had stopped for her mail. She was always excited to get mail. She enjoyed writing letters, and she enjoyed getting letters from friends.

As soon as Elsie got home, she sat down at the kitchen table and began to go through her mail, the usual magazines and advertisements. Then she saw a letter from her sister. It will be exciting to find out how she is getting along with her new baby, she thought.

And then—a letter addressed to Walter Barton. Suddenly the excitement and joy of the day left her.

A strong feeling of loneliness and emptiness came over her and tears filled her eyes. It had been three months since Walter had died. She had pretty well gotten over her grief in the first month. Now, in the last few weeks, she felt as if she was getting used to being alone again.

It was just a little moment like this, with sudden reminders of Walter, that her feelings caught her off guard. There was that sharp stab of sadness that Walter was really gone and that she would never see him here on earth again.



God's Concerns for Widows

God does help the widows. He is their protector and provider. He also promises to judge those who harm the widows.

"I (the Lord) will come near you for judgment... against those who exploit...widows and the fatherless..." (Malachi 3:5)

James, an early church leader, gave this definition of religion that pleases God.

"Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble..." (James 1:27)

One of the deeds that pleases God most is to visit and care for widows. Church people do God's will when they take good care of widows.

The first church of believers in Jerusalem took this responsibility seriously. When the leaders discovered that some of the widows in the church were being neglected, they appointed seven deacons to make sure the needs of the widows were met (see Acts 6:1-7).

If the church is to take care of widows, that care means more than just food and clothing. Widows often need advice and spiritual counsel. They need help and guidance on how to plan their lives in new and very different relationships.

A widow came to the prophet Elisha in tears. Her husband had died and had left her with a large debt. The creditor had come to her and told her that if she did not pay up, he would take both her sons as slaves.

What could she do? Her husband had been a preacher and her family was poor. But she had heard of Elisha's great power. Certainly he could help her with this problem.

When she told Elisha her story, he thought and prayed about it. What could he do for her? He was poor himself. Then he asked, "Do you have anything of value in the house?"

"Nothing but a jar of olive oil," she replied.

Elisha, a man of great faith, knew that God could use even a small thing like a jar of oil to meet this widow's need.

"Go to your neighbours," he told her. "Borrow from them all the empty jars you can find. Get lots and lots of them. Take them home and shut the door behind you. Then start pouring olive oil into them from the jar that you have. When each empty jar gets full, set it aside and keep pouring into the jars that remain."

She did as she was told. Her sons kept bringing jars to her and she kept pouring until all the jars were full of olive oil. When the last jar was full, the oil stopped flowing.

Excited, she went to Elisha and told him what had happened. He said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debt. Then you and your sons can live on the rest."

This thrilling story of faith is found in the Bible in 2 Kings 4:1-7.



WIDOWS AND REMARRIAGE

The Apostle Paul, an early church leader, advised young widows to get married again.

"Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children,

manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully.” (1 Timothy 5:14)

Why did the Holy Spirit tell Paul to say this? Some reasons are given in the verses just before. Younger widows are not usually as stable and reliable as older widows. A younger woman has stronger physical desires which her husband is no longer there to fulfill. These desires can lead her into unhealthy relationships. Even if she wants to give herself in full-time service to the Lord, she will find it very hard to continue in this service. She will long for marriage. If she marries, she will feel guilty for not being able to keep her promise to serve the Lord full-time. It is better not to make a promise to God than to make a promise and not keep it.

Paul understood how hard celibacy (sexual abstinence) could be. He said in another place,

“But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: it is good for them if they remain even as I am; but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry...” (1 Corinthians 7:8–9a)

The physical relationship of marriage is hard to forget. A woman who has been living in that warm, loving relationship with her husband cannot just turn off her physical desires all at once. Paul understood that in the marriage bed the body belongs not only to its owner but also to the marriage partner.

A widow has sexual needs. She must have a way to control these so that they do not “burn her up.” A good way to meet these needs is to marry again. Some churches offer specific help to widows in planning for remarriage. This is not done as much in North America. If no one marries the widow, she needs the help of the church all the more for her guidance and support.



FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

The Apostle Paul also writes that the family and relatives of a widow have the first and greatest responsibility to care for her.

“But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and

acceptable before God. But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” (1 Timothy 5:4, 8)

If a widow has children who are old enough to work, they should help to support her. A widow's male relatives can also help her. These men can also help the children by giving advice and direction and companionship that the missing father might have given.

If a widow does not have family or relatives who can care for her, God wants the Christians in her church to provide that care.

“Honor widows who are really widows.” (1 Timothy 5:3)

Church members should be quick to come to the aid, both of new widows and widows who have no family to help them.

Mrs. Thomas' husband died after a long illness, leaving her with seven children ages three to sixteen.

Both Mrs. Thomas and her husband had been strong Christians and loved the Lord. Their deep devotion to the Lord and to each other influenced their children. Before he died, Mr. Thomas often talked to his wife and children, encouraging them to keep on following the Lord. He also encouraged the children to help each other as they grew up and to get an education and start good homes. The children never forgot their father's words.

After her husband died, Mrs. Thomas spent much time praying for her family. She knew that God had promised to be a helper of widows. He did answer her prayers, and His help and direction in the family was often seen.

Mrs. Thomas often went to her older brother Bill for advice. He and his family lived nearby. He always took time to help his sister and took special interest in her children. In some ways, he took the place of an earthly father to them.

Mrs. Thomas' friends at church were very kind. They were always doing extra little things to help her and were careful to see that all her needs were provided.

With the help of her Heavenly Father and care from her family and Christian friends, Mrs. Thomas



was able to raise her family. Today all of them love the Lord and have many happy memories of their family as they grew up.

HOW TO HELP THE WIDOW

For younger widows who have recently lost their husbands and have no relatives to support them, here are some ways to help.

Finances- A widow may need advice in the use of her money. While her husband was still alive, he likely looked after the finances. She may not know as much about money management. She may want to find someone who can teach her budgeting and other management skills.

Authority- A widow can find comfort in the thought that she has special authority over her children as she teams up with God, who promises to be “a Father of the fatherless.” She may need to do more spiritual teaching and discipline of her children than if her husband were alive. God will give her wisdom and strength for this.

This is where a man of the church can be of special help, relating as an “uncle-father” to the children. He can spend time with the children, talking, playing and working with them. He can give them a man’s view on Christian living and on life in general which they may miss because their father is gone. He can also help the mother when she needs advice and guidance.

Time management- If her family responsibilities permit her to work, she may want help to find a job. This can help her avoid the danger of idleness.

“And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not.” (1 Timothy 5:13)

When her husband was alive, she used to plan her day around his work. Now she does not have this and may not know what to do with her time. She may find it helpful to identify personal needs interests for which she did not have time before, and plan how to meet these.

Self control- A widow’s sexual desires have been awakened in marriage and will not go away just because her husband is gone. Helpers will do well to consider and affirm these desires. The widow need not feel guilty for having these desires, and having them validated may help to keep her from satisfying them in sinful ways.

The helper can advise the widow on ways of overcoming temptations and on wholesome ways to handle sexual desires. Celibacy is possible, and God can give the strength for it. God’s plan for some people is that they remain celibate, and He has a special ministry and a special reward for them.

Many Christians have found these ways helpful in keeping sexual desires under control.

- Meditation on God’s Word, memorization, praying and singing.
- Fellowship, at least one close friendship with another

Christian (*Hebrews 10:25*).

- Physical exercise, long walks and recreation.
- Staying busy, avoiding boredom and loneliness.
- Discipline other physical desires such as appetite. Submit to the authority of Jesus Christ, just as a well-trained animal is under the authority of its master.
- Avoid situations that stimulate sexual excitement. For example, much TV programming is sexually slanted. Read, listen to and watch only things that are good and wholesome.

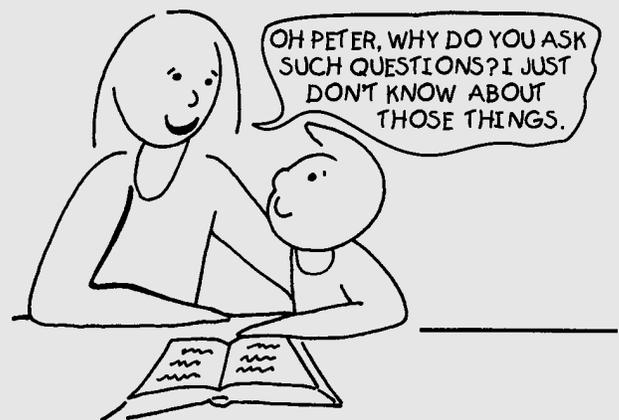
Betty Rogers was a widow with one child, a boy named Peter. Betty’s husband had died in a car accident when Peter was five years old. Betty had chosen not to marry again. With a little help from her parents and part-time jobs while Peter was in school, she made a living for both of them.

Betty was a believer in Jesus Christ, and she worked hard to make a home for Peter and herself. She believed that God would help her, and He did give her much needed wisdom and strength. However, she often wished that she could have the help of a wise and kind man to give training and direction to Peter.

Betty had been an only child in her family. Her father had passed away not many years after she had lost her husband. It also seemed that no one in the church she attended took much interest in helping her.

Peter was a very intelligent child. He did well in school. He was full of curiosity about everything. As he became a teenager, he began to have many questions about the world around him, about himself, about God and about the Bible. Betty tried hard to answer his questions and spent hours trying to help him find answers, but many things were just beyond her.

By the time Peter was 17 years old, his mother was almost at the point of a nervous breakdown. She felt trapped in a box with no way out. There seemed



to be no one to turn to for advice and help with Peter. It wasn't that Peter was disobedient, but he was always full of questions, questions, questions.

When Peter was 18 years old, he went off to university. If that had not happened, Betty feared that she may have had a mental breakdown. How she wished that one of the older men in the church had taken time to be with Peter, listened to his questions and given him some guidance and wisdom from a man's point of view.

After Peter started university, his pastor began to take a special interest in him. As he spent time with Peter, finally Peter was able to discuss his inner struggles with a man.

Later Peter consented to come under the authority of the church for two years. This helped to take some of the pressure off his mother and brought her more happiness and security.

GOD'S WORKER

If an older widow wants to give her time to serving the Lord, members of the church should help her to do this. She can be a prayer warrior and fast and pray for Christian work all over the world.

The early church seems to have had a special position of ministry in the church for widows over 60 years of age.

"Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work." (1 Timothy 5:9-10)

These widows were on a special list in the church. It is possible that they were responsible for certain ministries of the church, perhaps something like deaconesses. They were women who had proven themselves to be hospitable, caring for others and upright in all they did. These widows then were expected to do good works in the name of the church. In return, the church would care for their needs.

One widow who was special in the Bible was Anna. Anna was a prophetess. She lived to a very great age because God had a special reward for her.

Luke 2:36-38 tells about Anna. She had been married for seven years before her husband had died. Now she was 84 years old. She had spent her last years at the temple, fasting and praying to God.

Anna knew all the prophecies in the Old Testament about a Saviour for her people. She knew that the time for God to send Him was near. Jerusalem was waiting for some sign from God that the Saviour had come.

One day as Anna came into the temple, she saw a family, a young man and his wife carrying a new-born

baby. They were talking to Simeon. Anna had often talked to Simeon about the Savior who was to come. Like Anna, he felt sure that the coming was very near.

As soon as Anna saw them standing together, she knew that this was the child. The Savior had come. She went up to this family and started talking with them. Her heart was overflowing with praise and thanksgiving to God for sending His Son.

The rest of that day, Anna greeted everyone who came into the temple and told them that the Savior had come. She just could not stop thanking and praising God for letting her live until she had seen the One who had come to be the Savior of the world.

AN ADOPTED GRANDMOTHER

A widow can be a real help to children by being an adopted grandmother. Children love to have someone spend time with them. An older widow can help children by reading good stories to them or by helping them memorize Bible verses. She can share with the children many things that she has learned from the experiences of her life. She can also teach the children's mother.

"...that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children..." (Titus 2:4)

As they reach out to others, widows can have a full and satisfying life.



Dorcas was a woman who had found joy and satisfaction in serving the Lord. The Bible says that she was full of good works and acts of loving kindness.

Dorcas became sick and died very suddenly. The little group of Christians around her was very sad. When they heard that the Apostle Peter was in a nearby town, they sent word for him to come and speak some words of comfort to them.

Peter came right away. As soon as he got to the

house where they had laid out Dorcas' body, all the believers gathered around. They showed Peter the lovely clothes that Dorcas had made for them. They all had good words and fond memories of Dorcas' friendship.

Peter asked them all to leave the room. When he was alone with the body, he knelt down and prayed. Then, turning to the body, he said, "Dorcas, rise up."

At once she opened her eyes. When she saw Peter, she sat up. He took her hand and helped her to her feet. Then he opened the door and called for the rest to come back into the room.

Soon it was known all over town that God had brought Dorcas back to life. Many people became believers because of this miracle (*Acts 9:36-42*).



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