

CHRISTIAN MONEY \$ENSE

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Help for Widows – Part 3 of 3

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“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress” (James 1:27a, NIV). While God promises to be a “father to the fatherless, a defender of widows” (Ps 68:5, NIV), we must understand that we are God’s instruments in helping these groups. Paul wrote to Timothy that when those who are closest to widows do not take care of them, the action is worse than that of an unbeliever (1 Tim. 5:8). This starts with family and proceeds to the church (1 Tim. 5:3).

Statistically, men die younger than women, so widows are more common than widowers. I have spoken with many widows (both empty nesters and those who raised children by themselves), and they testify that being a widow is very difficult. There is a tremendous sense of loss, not only for the loss of the spouse, but also for the unfortunate loss of her support network. Widows do not seem to fit into the typical church, which often has many ministries for children and couples. The widow often feels isolated at a time when the most pressure is on her. If she has children, she must carry on both parenting roles alone, often with no break or relief. This drains her energy and can cause her to lose hope.

The church is called to help in this situation, and our help revolves around one word: initiative. The past two weeks we have discussed steps that widows can take to help themselves in widowhood. Here are some practical ideas that churches and church members can employ to help widows. These same helps can be applied to widowers with some slight modifications.

- Use Better Phrases – Often we ask, “How are you doing?” Often, we are not looking for an answer to this rhetorical question. Perhaps we would not want the real answer. Take the initiative to say a better phrase: “It is good to see you.” That states the same emotion and can make the person feel better.
- Make Time Out for Mom – Widows with children have dual parenting roles and no backup for twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Take the initiative to take the children for an afternoon or overnight so Mom has time to think and regroup. Mom often feels like she must “be strong” in front of the children. She needs time to unwind just like we do.

- Be a Handyman – Take the initiative to identify projects that need to be done to her house or car. At certain times of the year, there are special things that widows could use help with (raking leaves, shoveling snow).
- Bridge the Gap with Kids – How do boys learn how to become men? By looking at dad. How do girls learn how to become women? By looking at mom. Members of the same sex as the child’s deceased parent need to bridge the gap for the child. Take the initiative to take a boy to a Father-Son banquet or a ball game. Take the initiative to take a girl clothes shopping before school starts in the fall. Over time, you may see them open up to you when they enter the uncertain years of young adult life.
- Have Family Fun Together – A widow often can feel like she is responsible for all of the family activities. Take the initiative to have a family over or out for dinner or for an activity (and pay for it, too). This can be a great help for mom and can help her kids see how a family with two parents operates. This can also be an effective tool to train your own children to minister to others.
- Sit with a Widow in Church – Have you noticed how we often sit in the same place week after week in church? I have heard widows say that after the death of a spouse, they were really not sure where to sit. Depending on the age or makeup of the Sunday school class, a widow may feel like she does not “fit in” anymore. Take the initiative to have a widow and her family sit with yours. This simple act can relieve a lot of emotional uncertainty.

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (Matt 7:12, NIV). How would you want to be treated if you suddenly lost your spouse? Take the initiative to show practical love. Make it a personal and church goal that a widow will not have to ask for help (after much emotional anguish) or be overly concerned about money. Let’s be God’s instruments for showing love to this group that He cares for.

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