



Help! I'm a Widow Workshop Notes

The Need

- Some estimates say that there are nearly 300 million widows globally; 700,000 are being added to that number annually.
- It's estimated that there are more than 17 million widowed individuals in the United States, with nearly 1,200 new ones being added daily.
- 80% of that number are women, and the vast majority live in poverty.
- On the average, women lose approximately 40% of their income upon becoming a widow. In some countries, women are left completely unsupported, destitute, and vulnerable.
- It has been said that 90% of all married women will one day become widows. They will be widows an average of 14 years.
- The average age of widows presently is 55 years. Half of those widowed become so by age 65.
- 70% of widows die within 3 years of losing their spouse.

Now, here are the startling statistics:

- 50% of all widows will leave the church they attended as a couple.
- The average church in America has 40 widows in their circles.
- many of these widows no longer know where they fit within the programs of the traditional church.
- Family programs/activities?
- Couples' programs/activities?
- Singles ministries? (Men typically remarry within a year; women are typically 5 years or more, IF THEY EVER REMARRY. They are not generally looking for husbands!)
- Truly the need for encouraging and bringing hope to this great army of women is significant. The Body of Christ needs their wisdom, maturity, and experience.

What should I understand about Widows?

- **A widow's deepest pain lasts longer than a year.** Immediately after a death, the church community is adept at responding with flowers or food, but far less gifted in maintaining a ministry to her over the long-term. She may be numb for many months.

After the cards and letters stop, the visits drop off and friends return to their normal lives, her hardest work has just begun. She may be learning to live alone for the very first time. **A grieving widow who lives alone may go several days without hearing another human voice, especially**

months after the initial funeral. Emails and text messages are good; however, phone calls and visits may be better.

- **A grieving widow's pain is unique and volatile.** What encourages one woman may be painfully unhelpful to another. Be sensitive, especially if you don't know her well.
- **A grieving widow is often physically and emotionally exhausted.** Don't call her late at night or early in the morning. It may be that she isn't sleeping well or at all!
- **Graciously accept her "no thank you"** when she says she's not up to going to dinner. She isn't refusing help or harboring bitterness. She simply may not have the energy to even figure out what to wear! KEEP ASKING, SHE WILL EVENTUALLY SAY "YES!"
- **A grieving widow loves her children. Watching her children suffer is a misery that compounds grief.** Loving a widow's children is loving the widow.
- **A grieving widow's life is not a tragedy but a gift to the body of Christ.** When she is ready, encourage her to serve. Her ability to give to others is a significant part of how God heals her. Don't see her through the lens of her loss, but rather choose to see what she can still contribute to the body of Christ.
- **A grieving widow's finances may change dramatically after the loss of the primary provider.** More than half of elderly widows now living in poverty were not poor before the death of their husbands. If you are a financial consultant, an accountant, or a bank officer, considering meeting with her to create a strategy regarding her finances.
- **Allow the grieving widow the space to cry, or even to doubt her faith.**
- **Understand that absolutely everything about her life has changed.** Your life goes back to normal after the funeral or memorial service. Hers will never be normal again. A piece of her heart is now missing.

How to Help Someone Who is Grieving

In the Fall of 2022, Refocusing Widows did a survey of approximately 200 widows, asking them to please answer the following questions. We have condensed those responses for your convenience.

1.) What have you found to be the most supportive comments or actions from others as they attempted to comfort and support you following the death of your husband?

- Reach Out to them – Don't let your fear of awkwardness keep you from being there. The "ministry of presence" is one of the most important things you can do.
- Listen – The most helpful thing you can do is invest the time to be there and listen. They won't require you to have any answers, or to say anything wise and wonderful. Just sit beside them and listen.
- Be Practical – Look for ways to take the weight from them....food preparation, running errands, or picking up their children from school.
- Don't wait for them to ask you, as they probably won't. No one really likes to feel like an imposition. Be creative with the small ways you can help.
- Send a card or a note occasionally so that she knows she's not forgotten. If you want to make her feel really special, enclose a gift card for her!

- Don't assume – A smiley face or lack of tears doesn't necessarily mean they're not grieving. Wait for them to express what they're feeling when they're ready, and just give them room to do so.
- Search for Resources – Spend some time looking for various kinds of support for them. When they ask, it's helpful to have the answers at hand!
- Invite her to go for coffee or lunch. She may say "No" for awhile, but keep asking.
- Take her pictures or cards your kids have made.
- Take or send her photos or videos of her husband. Don't be afraid to talk about him!
- Financial gifts are extremely helpful for those who have found themselves in financial distress from illness and medical bills.
- Short notes in the mail, hugs, phone calls, text messages.

2.) What helps you most to be able to process when you are struggling (i.e., triggered, holiday season or anniversary/birthday dates)?

- Not putting myself in stressful, uncomfortable situations or large groups of parties.
- Planning an activity to honor the deceased loved one. Telling funny stories about them, or toasting them.
- Finding supportive spiritual books, devotionals, and groups to strengthen her relationship with God.
- Journaling
- Talking about my loved one to keep their memory alive and make it feel like they are here with us!

As a friend, you may feel uncomfortable with some of these. Know that these are the things that will comfort her most.

3.) What have you found to be hurtful or ineffective that others say or do in their attempt to comfort or support?

- Saying, "Time will pass, and it will get better."
- Friends staying away, not coming over or not calling as they normally did.
- Saying you will find another husband or have another child. This does not replace the loved one and is extremely hurtful!
- Saying, "I know how you feel, I lost my Grandma a couple of years ago." No comparison!!
- Saying, "Just be glad they are in heaven!"
- Saying, "Our days are numbered." (Implies his number came up!)
- Giving lots of Scripture verses and staying a long time is not helpful.

Hopefully, these will give you some ideas of what to say and do when someone you know loses a spouse. Most people want to be of comfort and to help, but just aren't confident that they're doing or saying the right thing. For the most part, we want to talk about them; we want to see photos and hear stories that we haven't heard before; we want to hear about your relationship with him.

It's a comfort to widows to know that their husbands made an impact on their world, and that they will not soon be forgotten....that means to her that she will also not be forgotten.

May God bless you as you reach out to, and care for his precious widows in this time when they are most vulnerable.

Thank-you for being part of this session today.

- **If you'd like to talk further, or are interested in starting a group for widows in your area, contact me at sheryl@freshhope.us or reach us thru our website at www.refocusingwidows.org**