

Caring for One Another

1 Timothy 5:5-8

“David and Robert McCheyne were Scottish brothers. Both had brilliant minds. There the resemblance ended.

“David, the older, was quiet and studious. He spent most of his leisure time at home helping with family chores. David was also a devoted Christian, too much so in the opinion of Robert.

“Once Robert came home from an evening of revelling and found David kneeling in prayer. ‘I heard you call my name, Dave,’ he sneered. ‘Am I really that bad?’

“The sensitive David tried to explain. ‘We’re all sinners who need to trust in Christ.’ Robert shrugged and excused himself from the conversation.

The door of opportunity swung wide for Robert when he enrolled in the University of Edinburgh. His talents for languages, drawing, music, and poetry brought him many awards. His professors predicted greater fame ahead.

“Back home David languished in illness. But he continued to pray for Robert until death silenced his lips.

“And then Robert became a Christian. In the years ahead Robert’s star steadily rose until he became the most beloved Presbyterian minister in Scotland and the British Isles. At twenty-three he became pastor of the 4,000-member St. Peter’s Church of Dundee.

“His ministry lasted only seven years (1836–1843). He became known as ‘the holiest man in Scotland.’ His church was crowded hours ahead of time by people anxious to hear him explain the Scriptures.

“A painful consumptive cough tortured his body during the last months of his life. Throughout his illness, and even in his dying delirium, he talked about the One whom his brother had helped him to love.”¹

We have come across a poem on this same subject that we would also like to read to you.

Those We Love

¹ Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers*. Garland TX : Bible Communications, 1996, c1979

“They say the world is round—and yet
 I often think it’s square,
 So many little hurts we get
 From corners, here and there.
 But there’s one truth in life I’ve found
 While journeying East and West:
 The only folks we really wound
 Are those we love the best.
 We flatter those we scarcely know;
 We please the fleeting guest,
 And deal full many a thoughtless blow
 To those we love the best.”²

1 Timothy 5:5-8 NAS:

⁵ Now **she who is a widow** indeed and who has been left alone, **has fixed her hope on God and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day.**

⁶ But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is **dead even while she lives.**

⁷ Prescribe these things as well, so that they may be above reproach.

⁸ 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.

The *real widow* is one who is left alone with no means of support from family or friends. However, a widow who is also a Christian may turn to the church, turning her situation over to God. The widows that the church should support are those who, since their husbands' deaths, dedicated themselves to God, with a constant attitude of *supplications and prayers* in service to the Lord. Anna, a prophetess at the time of Jesus' birth, satisfied this requirement.

Luke 2:36-38 NAS:

³⁶ And there was a prophetess, Anna [Hannah]³ the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage,

³⁷ and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. **She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers.**

³⁸ At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Widows could have a pretty rough go of it in those days. There was no Social

² Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers*. Garland TX : Bible Communications, 1996, c1979

³ Brackets mine.

Security, nor welfare of any kind. They were often neglected and exploited in spite of what the Law commanded.

Exodus 22:21-24 NAS:

¹ *"You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.*

²² *"You shall not afflict any widow or orphan.*

²³ *"If you afflict him at all, and if he does cry out to Me, I will surely hear his cry;*

²⁴ *and My anger will be kindled, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.*

Deuteronomy 14:28-29 NLT:

²⁸ *"At the end of every third year, bring the entire tithe of that year's harvest and store it in the nearest town.*

²⁹ *Give it to the Levites, who will receive no allotment of land among you, as well as to the foreigners living among you, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, so they can eat and be satisfied. Then the LORD your God will bless you in all your work.*

God had, and still has, a very special watch care over the widow and orphan:

Deuteronomy 10:18 NAS:

¹⁸ *"He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing.*

Psalms 146:9 NAS:

The LORD protects the strangers; He supports the fatherless and the widow, But He thwarts the way of the wicked.

Psalms 68:5 NAS:

A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows, Is God in His holy habitation.

Anna devoted herself to serving God by worship through fasting and prayer. When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple for His dedication ceremony, Anna arrived just as Simeon was delivering his prophecy about Jesus.

Luke 2:38 NLT:

³⁸ *She [Anna]⁴ came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she began praising God. She talked about the child to everyone who had been waiting expectantly for God to rescue Jerusalem.*

Anna was a prophetess, which meant she had a special gift of declaring and interpreting God's message. She spent her day in constant prayer and engaged in fasting in order to

⁴ Brackets mine.

concentrate more fully on her praying. Other prophetesses in Scripture are Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), Hulduh (2 Kings 22:14), Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14), and the wife of Isaiah (Isaiah 8:3).⁵ Paul seems to be encouraging widows in the church to follow in Anna's footsteps.

Philip Ryken comments:

“Every praying widow is Anna’s sister Anna’s sisters prayed all over the Soviet Union during the dark years of communism. When one pastor visited the Ukraine after the fall of that evil empire, he saw ‘how mistaken the Communists were when they allowed the older women to continue worshipping together! It was they who were considered no threat to the new order, but it was they whose prayers and faithfulness over all those barren years held the church together and raised up a generation of men and young people to serve the Lord. Yes, the church we attended was crowded with these older women at the very front, for they had been the stalwart defenders and maintainers of Christ’s Gospel, but behind them and alongside them and in the balcony and outside the windows were the fruit of their faithfulness, men, women, young people, and children. We must never underestimate the place and power of our godly women.’”⁶

1 Timothy 5:5-6 contrasts the two different kinds of widows identified here. The “*real widow*” lives her life in a manner that demonstrates trust in God and a willingness to serve Him by helping others. She is not concerned only about herself and her plight, but rather finds a ministry where she can utilize her spiritual gift in serving and praying for others. The other widow by contrast is so wrapped up in herself that Paul described her condition as death. In today’s terms, she is going to bridge parties, shopping, playing golf, getting her pedicures, sipping her lattes, and talking about all the other women she knows.

The church was and is not to support widows who live only for pleasure or who support themselves by any immoral means such as prostitution. A widow who lived her life in such a manner was “*dead even while she lived.*” People who seek pleasure alone out of life eventually become like an empty shell. They are dead even though they are still living. I once heard someone say that, “If you do not have Jesus, you do not have anything.” Even the wisest man who ever lived had this to say about having everything material one could want in life.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11, 24-26 NLT:

¹ *I said to myself, “Come on, let’s try pleasure. Let’s look for the ‘good things’ in life.” But I found that this, too, was meaningless.*

² *So I said, “Laughter is silly. What good does it do to seek pleasure?”*

³ *After much thought, I decided to cheer myself with wine. And while still*

⁵ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Lk 2:21.

⁶ Ryken, Philip Graham. *1 Timothy*. Phillipsburg NJ: P&R Publishing, ©2007, pp. 203-204.

seeking wisdom, I clutched at foolishness. In this way, I tried to experience the only happiness most people find during their brief life in this world.

⁴ ***I also tried to find meaning by building huge homes for myself and by planting beautiful vineyards.***

⁵ *I made gardens and parks, filling them with all kinds of fruit trees.*

⁶ *I built reservoirs to collect the water to irrigate my many flourishing groves.*

⁷ *I bought slaves, both men and women, and others were born into my household. I also owned large herds and flocks, more than any of the kings who had lived in Jerusalem before me.*

⁸ *I collected great sums of silver and gold, the treasure of many kings and provinces. I hired wonderful singers, both men and women, and had many beautiful concubines. I had everything a man could desire!*

⁹ *So I became greater than all who had lived in Jerusalem before me, and my wisdom never failed me.*

¹⁰ *Anything I wanted, I would take. I denied myself no pleasure. I even found great pleasure in hard work, a reward for all my labors.*

¹¹ *But as I looked at everything I had worked so hard to accomplish, it was all so meaningless—like chasing the wind. There was nothing really worthwhile anywhere.*

²⁴ *So I decided there is nothing better than to enjoy food and drink and to find satisfaction in work. Then I realized that **these pleasures are from the hand of God.***

²⁵ *For who can eat or enjoy anything apart from him?*

²⁶ *God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy to those who please him.*

The widow's choices define the ministry the church can have in her life. Honoring and assisting a widow who lives only to feed her personal desires for pleasure would be equivalent to the church enabling her to sin. Obviously this must not be allowed. But calling her to accountability for her behavior and offering her forgiveness, if she is willing to repent, would be the proper position for the church to take on her behalf.

Warren Wiersbe cautions us, however, to

“be careful not to waste its resources on people who really are not in need. Whether we like to admit it or not, there are individuals and entire families that milk local churches, while they themselves refuse to work or to use their own resources wisely. As long as they can get handouts from the church, why bother to go to work?”⁷

1 Timothy 5:7 NAS:

⁷ *Prescribe these things as well, so that they may be above reproach.*

⁷ Wiersbe, Warren. *Be Faithful*. Wheaton IL: Victor Books, ©1981, p. 68.

This is the same instruction Paul gave Timothy back in 1 Timothy chapter four.

1 Timothy 4:11 NAS:

¹¹ *Prescribe and teach these things.*

This time it pertains to the church's responsibility to widows and family members. If all of Paul's instructions were followed by the church, there would be far less behavior in the church that displeased God. These instructions should be taught to every member of the church and adhered to by the pastor. Each church should be preparing and training people as to how they should provide for the needs of those who are aging as well as for those who lose their husband or wife.

This doctrine needs to be carefully taught and prayerfully practiced. That does not mean the Church is obligated to provide for everyone who asks. Unfortunately, there are those who would try to take advantage of the Church's generosity. So the Church leaders are supposed to investigate the widow's situation: are there relatives, especially children or grandchildren, who should be helping her? Does she lead a godly life? What other resources does she have? What are her necessities? After gathering that information the Church leaders are in a position to make a wise decision, in line with God's guidelines.

How does your church respond to the needs of individuals and families who lose a loved one?

1 Timothy 5:8 NAS:

⁸ *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.*

To ignore the needs of a family member is the same as being openly disobedient to God, which Paul said was even worse than being an unbeliever because even many unbelievers care for their families. The way we care for family members gives us a pretty good window into our relationship with God. Listen to what John had to say to those to ignored the needs of others.

1 John 3:17 NLT:

¹⁷ *If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God's love be in that person?*

Now although the story of Cain and Abel takes not caring for one another to the extreme of murder, the dialogue between God and Abel clearly explains for us what God expects and what the consequences will be if we disobey.

Genesis 4:6-12 NLT:

⁶ *"Why are you so angry?" the LORD asked Cain. "Why do you look so dejected?"*

⁷ *You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you*

refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master.”

⁸ *One day Cain suggested to his brother, “Let’s go out into the fields.” And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother, Abel, and killed him.*

⁹ *Afterward the LORD asked Cain, “Where is your brother? Where is Abel?” “I don’t know,” Cain responded. “Am I my brother’s guardian?”*

¹⁰ *But the LORD said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground!”*

¹¹ *Now you are cursed and banished from the ground, which has swallowed your brother’s blood. ¹² No longer will the ground yield good crops for you, no matter how hard you work! From now on you will be a homeless wanderer on the earth.”*

Obedience is definitely the better choice, is it not?

Let us close with this:

1 John 3:11-24 NLT:

¹¹ *This is the message you have heard from the beginning: We should love one another.*

¹² *We must not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and killed his brother. And why did he kill him? Because Cain had been doing what was evil, and his brother had been doing what was righteous.*

¹³ *So don’t be surprised, dear brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.*

¹⁴ *If we love our Christian brothers and sisters, it proves that we have passed from death to life. But a person who has no love is still dead.*

¹⁵ ***Anyone who hates another brother or sister is really a murderer at heart.** And you know that murderers don’t have eternal life within them.*

¹⁶ *We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters.*

¹⁷ *If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God’s love be in that person?*

¹⁸ *Dear children, let’s not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.*

¹⁹ *Our actions will show that we belong to the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before God.*

²⁰ *Even if we feel guilty, God is greater than our feelings, and he knows everything.*

²¹ *Dear friends, if we don’t feel guilty, we can come to God with bold confidence.*

²² *And we will receive from him whatever we ask because we obey him and do the things that please*

him.

²³ *And this is his commandment: We must believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he commanded us.*

²⁴ *Those who obey God's commandments remain in fellowship with him, and he with them. And we know he lives in us because the Spirit he gave us lives in us.*

Let us close with a vivid illustration of how these concepts worked out practically in one situation to provide for a widow indeed.

“A wonderful story comes from the missionary work of Joanne Shetler. . . . Shetler saw the Balangao tribesmen of the Philippine Islands turn to Jesus Christ in faith and repentance. Tribal life was transformed as a result of biblical teaching. . . . Paul’s first letter to Timothy had particular influence. She tells what happened when the Balangao came to God’s house rules for widows: ‘ We got to the end of the book where it talks about widows in need and the church’s responsibility to take over for widows who have no other source of livelihood. About the same time, Forsan, one of those old women the spirits had earlier tried to kill, lost her husband. And she was a widow indeed. All of her children had long been dead. She had no relatives in Balangao. In fact, she was not even a Balangao. And in Balangao culture there is no mercy if there is no blood connection. She would have been left alone in her house with or without food until she died. One of the men who had helped me in the [Bible] translation Went over and took Forsan by the hand with her one little pot, brought her over and said, “You will be like my mother and you will live with us in our home.” And that old woman is there today, even though she is old and sickly.’”⁸

⁸ Op. cit. Ryken, p. 206. Brackets added.