

**Russell Kelfer**

**A Widow  
Indeed  
(Part 1)**

**# 1226-B**

**Series: I Timothy**

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# A Widow Indeed

## (Part 1)

Could we with ink the ocean fill,  
And were the skies of parchment made,  
Were every stalk on earth a quill,  
And every man a scribe by trade;  
To write the love of God above  
Would drain the ocean dry;  
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,  
Though stretched from sky to sky.

Frederick M. Lehman<sup>1</sup>

I think the songwriter captured the essence of Christianity. The love of God is endless, timeless, fathomless. You can read about it, you can write about it, you can talk about it, you can even appropriate it, but you can't really explain it. I think in all honesty the one time in our existence that we come closest to understanding it is at that priceless moment when we come to the foot of Calvary and recognize we are indeed sinners separated from a holy God and recognize that, apart from something supernatural, we are scheduled to spend eternity apart from God. And then we realize that He loved us so much that the eternal God left heaven, came to earth and died for me, for you. At that instant the meaning of the love of God suddenly begins to make sense.

Unfortunately our memories are not always very long and occasionally we forget how incredible is the love of God. I don't think we'll ever even begin to fathom a fraction of it until that beautiful day when we sit at the feet of Jesus and behold the love of God in all its splendor. The amazing thing about the love of God to me is that, not only is it endless and fathomless, it is impartial, that is God loves everyone the same. There is no one He cannot love, there is no one He does not love, there is no one He will not love ever. But while His love has no limits, it is also true that there are certain groups of people, according to Scripture,

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<sup>1</sup> Verse from "The Love of God" by Frederick M. Lehman 1917.  
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## A Widow Indeed (Part 1)

that God has a special kind of love for. Theologically it's tough to explain but, spiritually speaking, based on Scripture we know it's true. It's one of those questions we are going to have down in our notebook to ask God about when we get to heaven, because up until then we may not totally understand how that works.

But there are at least two or three groups of people for whom God's heart seems to beat a little quicker. It's almost as if the eternal God in heaven has a sensor in His Spirit that the moment one of these people has a need He is there. And Paul is going to write to Timothy and we are going to read his letter today about one of those groups of people.

If you've been around in this class for a week or two or three or five or more, you'll know that we've been looking at the first letter that Paul wrote to Timothy while Tim was in Ephesus. Paul was somewhere in Macedonia, and was writing to Timothy to give him a handle to give to the Ephesians on how the church should work. Last week, you'll recall, we were in chapter four and we read some amazing words. I believe those words were from Paul to Timothy about what he called the "latter times" or the "latter days". He said in the latter times some will depart from the faith. So what we did last week, if you remember, is that we took that phrase "latter days" and then coupled it with the word "last days" or the "end times" and we began to look at the progressive condition the world would be in and the progressive condition the church would be in just before Jesus comes again. And what we decided was that the more we see apostasy and moral decline in our country, the more excited we ought to be. And while that runs cross-grain with the world's philosophy, it is because the gospel runs cross-grain with the world's philosophy. And as we see society reach that state Scripture describes as the end times, you and I ought to get so excited we can't stand it. And the reason is that Jesus is coming again!

Now we don't live that way much of the time and the church doesn't even talk that way much of the time but, Beloved, the Scripture is plain—Jesus is coming again. How many days do you wake up with that consciousness in your mind? Say it with me just one time—I just want to hear you say it, "Jesus is coming again." Good, now say it every morning when you wake up. It'll make a difference in how you live that day. Any morning now, the eastern sky may suddenly become aglow and a trumpet may blast, the voice of the archangel may be heard, and we'll be

## A Widow Indeed (Part 1)

gathered up in the air to spend eternity with the Lord. It will be the beginning of the end for this world, as we know it, and the beginning of the beginning for us. We know that. Jesus is coming again!

Well, after Paul begins to touch on what circumstances would be like about that time, he turns to Timothy and says, “By the way, Tim, how about some practical how tos? How would you like to know how to behave in the church?” Timothy didn’t have a chance to answer, you know, because this was a one-way letter and we’re assuming he said, “Yes, Sir”. And so in the next few verses we’re going to do a little hopscotch through them. Paul began to tell Timothy some very key things about life in the church:

1- Verse 7. He said Timothy I want you to

“...reject [refuse] profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness.”  
(I Timothy 4:7 NKJV)

Now I don’t know if you know what that means but, if you want to capsulize it in a very brief statement he said, “Timothy stop listening to doctrinal fairy tales that tickle your curiosity. Quit running around looking around for something new and, instead, apply the doctrine you know to your life in such a way that you will be changed.” Can you imagine the difference it would make in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ and in our lives if we just stopped trying to run around to get new information, and, decided what we need to do is to take the information we had and exercise it unto godliness (which means allow it to change our lives and the lives of those around us)?

That’s the gospel. In our generation we, who have become so gospel poor and so flooded with information, have made information an end within itself. The purpose of the information is transformation and that’s what Paul was telling Timothy.

2- Then he said in verse 12,

“Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”  
(I Timothy 4:12 NKJV)

Paraphrase: Let no man despise thy youth but be an example to the other Christians by what you say, by how you live, by the kind of love you demonstrate, by the quality of life you live, and by the purity of your heart.

## A Widow Indeed (Part 1)

*(How many of you are 30 or younger? Can I see your hands? How many of you wish you were? How many of you act like you are? Ah, we got most of you. – Russell in his dry humor.)*

What Paul was saying was that the young people in the church had a double responsibility. They were to earn the respect of the rest of the congregation by a kind of behavior that was above reproach. They were never to use their youth as an excuse for weakness, but rather as a springboard for strength. You see, those who come to Christ when they are younger have a head start on those who come as adults. Those who come as young people need never taste the cup of some of the sins that many others have to live with the rest of their lives. I wish the young people could grasp that fact. By remaining pure and faithful as a youth, they not only win the respect of the Body of Christ, but they give God a vessel that is not defiled through which He can pour Himself the rest of their lives.

3- Then Paul goes on in verse 13, Timothy, until I come get your pad and pencil out I'm going to give you three things to do: read, exhort and pay attention to doctrine.

“Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.”  
(I Timothy 4:13 NKJV)

What he was really saying was, “Timothy, until you see me again, submerge yourself in the Book. I want you to become a man of the Word. I want you to take the Word and let it be your only authority.”

Now Paul turns to some more practical advice that might look on the surface like inner church business. And we might think, “Hey, that’s not for us. Let’s go on to something else.” But it is for us. It’s a plan for taking care of a group of people for whom God has a special place in His heart. So Paul stops and devotes an incredible amount of space in this letter to this one bit of information. First he says, “Here’s how I want you to treat each other, Timothy, and you young people in particular.”

1- Don’t rebuke an older man but rather entreat him or exhort him the way you would your father, with that kind of respect. Now in our generation that doesn’t mean as much as when Paul wrote it.

2- Treat the younger men as you would your brothers.

3- Treat the older women as you would you mothers.

## A Widow Indeed (Part 1)

4- Treat the younger women as you would a sister (with nothing but purity of heart.)

Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity. (I Timothy 5:1,2 NKJV)

Here are vital instructions for how to get along in the Body of Christ. Treat the older men in the church the way you treat your father, the younger men the way you would your brother, with a bond between you, the younger women with the same kind of holiness that you would treat a sister, and the older women as if they were your own mother—with love and awe and respect.

Then Paul says, “Now, having said that I want to talk to you about a special group of people. I want to talk to you about what you’re supposed to do for them and what you’re supposed to do in light of their relationship with God.” That is what we’re going to spend the rest of this morning on and all of next week as well. It’s found in I Timothy 5:3-16, and we’ll be doing a lot of reading this morning from the Scriptures. I hope you will follow with me. And then at the end next week we’ll bunch these Scriptures together into their respective categories. For now we’ll read it the way Paul wrote it,

Honor widows who are really widows [or widows indeed as the KJV words it].

But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and [here’s a good word to underline] to repay their parents [requite is the word used in the KJV]; for this is good [Do you remember what that word means? It is in harmony with the Word of God] and acceptable before God [it makes God’s heart beat faster literally]. (I Timothy 5:3,4 NKJV)

Paul defines this group of people that He has a special love for and divides them, for the sake of teaching into two categories. He devotes most of his time to the category called “widows indeed”, those who are really widows in the sense of the church’s care. Now he goes on,

Now she who is [a widow indeed or] really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day.

But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives.

And these things [I] command [in other words whenever you

## A Widow Indeed (Part 1)

see that phrase, and these things I command, that means it is a scriptural absolute, and it'll always be true that I command] that they [the children and grandchildren who have older parents] may be blameless.

But if anyone does not provide for his own [parents or grandparents], and especially for those of his household [those that live near by], he has denied the faith and is worse than an [infidel] unbeliever. (I Timothy 5:5-8 NKJV)

Now the thrust of Paul's opening statements have to do with what makes a "widow indeed", what their responsibilities are spiritually. And we're going to look at that next week. But then he turns to us, to you and to me, and says, "I've got a job for you".

Now let's go on. I'm going to get to that job in a minute. But the next verse talks about the requirements to be a widow indeed. He continues:

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.

But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry,

having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith.

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.

(I Timothy 5:9-13 NKJV)

Then he talks about refusing the younger widows for various reasons and we'll get to that. He concludes:

Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully.

For some have already turned aside after Satan [and caused Satan to be gleeful].

If any believing man or woman has widows [in his family], let them relieve them [care for her, that's what the word means], and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve [bear the burden of] those who are [widows indeed] really widows.

(I Timothy 5:14-16 NKJV)



## A Widow Indeed (Part 1)

Now I know this is a long passage, and you may think that it does not apply to you but, Beloved, it does. It applies to all of us.

I'm going to outline it for you for this week and next:

- I- The Heart of God and Widows
- II- The Responsibility of the Children
- III- The Responsibility of the Widow
- IV- The Responsibility of the Church

### THE HEART OF GOD

This idea of widows needing care did not originate with Paul or Timothy. It goes way back to God's relationship with Israel. Now think about it for a minute and see if you can think in your own minds before I tell you, of three categories of people that God has special love for—widows, orphans, and transients (or foreigners). Now think about why that would be. These are three groups of people who have lost their normal covering of authority. Widows have lost their husbands, orphans have lost their parents, and foreigners have lost the authority of the government that rules over them. Now listen to what God says in the Old Testament first, because this is heavy-duty instruction for the church.

For the LORD your God is a God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe.

He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger [alien], giving him food and clothing.

(Deuteronomy 10:17,18 NKJV)

Sing to God, sing praise to His name; Extol Him who rides on the clouds, By His name YAH, And rejoice before Him.

A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, Is God in His holy habitation [dwelling]. (Psalm 68:4,5 NKJV)

The LORD watches over the strangers; He relieves the fatherless and widow; (Psalm 146:9a NKJV)

“Leave your fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; And let your widows trust in Me.” (Jeremiah 49:11 NKJV)

So you see, the Creator-God knows no partiality, that is true, but He has decided to become the protector and defender of a certain group of people, above and beyond His normal role as our rock and fortress, our shield and our defender. The orphan and the widow are special to God. The question is, are they to

## A Widow Indeed (Part 1)

us? Because their natural umbrellas of protection have been removed, God has taken that responsibility on Himself. He becomes a husband to the widow, and a father to the fatherless. And then He transferred the responsibility to His children, first to Israel and then to the church, to do the same thing. And I'm afraid that many, many, many Christian families do not accept this responsibility the way Scripture intended.

Exodus 22:22 says that this is a serious offense to God,

Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan.

(Exodus 22:22 NIV)

Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge.

(Deuteronomy 24:17 NIV)

Cursed is the man who withholds justice from the alien, the fatherless or the widow. Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"

(Deuteronomy 27:19 NIV)

Deuteronomy 24:19-21 is charity mixed with responsibility,

When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow.

When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow.

(Deuteronomy 24:19-21 NIV)

Throughout all of Scripture God has a place in His heart separated for these three groups of people. So Paul now writes to Timothy and says, "Remember, Tim, the heart of God beats for the widow. He plans for her, He cares for her, He takes care of her. And likewise those He appoints on planet earth as His shepherds must do the same."

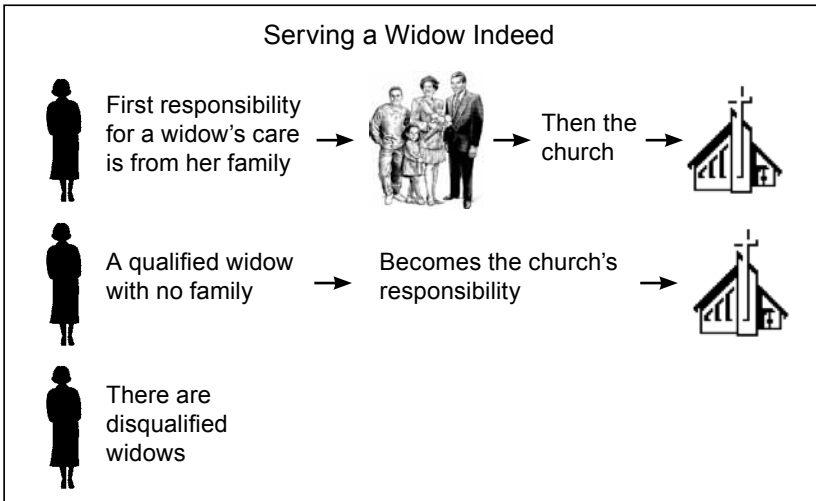
I don't know whom you minister to, Beloved, in addition to your own family, but if there are widows involved, you have a super-extra responsibility. And you and I in a city this size with nursing homes scattered all over this city are filled with widows and widowers who have no one to care for them, no one to love them. I was in one yesterday and it's a horrible sight to watch those of them who never have a visit, never have anyone say, "I

## A Widow Indeed (Part 1)

love you”. God has a special place in His heart for those of them who He says to us, “If you’re My child, you must have as well.”

Now we can’t cover this in one lesson but I want us to get the overview anyway. This is what it looks like. It sounds complex but it isn’t. This is what God says. Okay, we need to take care of the elderly and the widows. So here’s what we’re going to do:

Those who are children or grandchildren are responsible. Only if they don’t do their job or they are not available does the church enter the picture. That’s what it literally says.



### THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CHILDREN

What God is saying is those who received that care now give it. You say, “Wait a minute. You don’t know what a burden that is to take care of people.” Beloved, God it is never to be a burden to do the will of God. And lest we forget, from a human perspective, parenting can be a burden as well. You say, “No, no you don’t know my kids.” You are the exception.

Now how many of you were children at one time? Let me see, I know Ron was, he still is. How many of you were easy to raise? How many of you never needed any care? I got you that time.

You see, now God is saying okay it’s your turn to take just a portion of the love, a portion of the care, and a portion of the responsibility that parents and grandparents gave to you and give it back. That’s the way it works. So the widow’s children are

## A Widow Indeed (Part 1)

responsible for her first; next come the grandchildren. If they are not available or if they're not responsible then the church has certain responsibilities, which we will get to next week. So God assumes the role and He's arranged for either the family or the church to be His vessels.

It's really logical when you think about it. Everything God does is logical. He has a plan and He has a stair-step approach and everything fits into a pattern. It's only man that makes it complicated. Now lest you think this was some new startling principle to take the Ephesians by surprise, let me remind you that the Jew already had a tradition of assuming that responsibility and under the law was required to care for his parents. And the Greek culture of Jesus' day was even much more specific. In fact, it was Greek law that sons and daughters were not only morally, but legally responsible to take care of their parents. It was just accepted.

Aeschines, a famous Greek orator said this:

*"Let there be a scrutiny of public speakers [politicians, now see there was a problem way back then they were under investigation (Russell's humor)], in case there be any speaker in the Assembly of the people who is a striker of his father or mother, or who neglects to maintain them or to give them a home."*

Demosthenes said:

*"I regard the man who neglects his parents as unbelieving in and hateful to the gods, as well as to men."*

Philo wrote:

*"When old storks become unable to fly, they remain in their nests and are fed by their children, who go to endless exertions to provide their food because of their piety."*

To him, even the animal kingdom understood their responsibility to those who brought them into the world.

Aristotle wrote:

*"It would be thought in the matter of food we should help our parents before all others, since we owe our nourishment to them, and it is more honorable to help in this respect the authors of our being, even before ourselves."*

In other words it is better for us to starve to death than to

## A Widow Indeed (Part 1)

have our parents go hungry. That's what he said.

Long before Jesus Christ came and demonstrated commitment to His heavenly Father, God wrote it on the hearts of man, even unbelieving man, that conscience alone required children to care for their elderly parents in their old age. And the concept was multiplied when a widow was involved. So what Paul was telling Timothy was not a new thought. It was just God reminding us of something that had always been true.

Now the question: what's wrong with our society? Why the leper-like approach to the elderly in our generation by comparison? Why the self-centered philosophy of young people who say, "I didn't ask to be brought into this world. I'm not responsible"? Where did today's generation get the idea that either society or their parents owe them a living, but they owe society and their parents nothing?

Answer:

1) In the last days, perilous times will come.

2) Men will be lovers of themselves, Peter said, in love with their money, disobedient, disrespectful to parents, hardhearted, rough, cruel, ungrateful. They will betray even their friends.

As the end approaches, man becomes more and more self-centered. And the last thing on his mind is giving up something he wants for himself to meet the needs of his parents who he thinks are responsible for the mess the world is in anyway. That's the way many of today's youth feel. And I don't believe any time in history has the church of the Lord Jesus Christ needed to hear more of what Timothy was hearing from Paul in chapter 5 of I Timothy.

Think about it. Man has stretched the limits of life through medical technology until the elderly is the fastest-growing segment of society today. But the evidence is that this generation who's responsible for adding years to life just resents the results of their creativity. And the elderly and the widow are looked upon just as necessary evils to be put over in the corner until they die. God help us.

So Paul specifically says in the "latter" days, men would depart from the faith. Then he turns around and says but honor widows, pay proper respect, and fix a value upon them that is above all else. Do we honor the elderly in our society? Do we

## A Widow Indeed (Part 1)

honor the elderly in our church? Do we honor the elderly in our hearts?

Well that is what we will be looking at next week and let me give you some closing thoughts, just in summary, of what Paul was saying. I'd ask you to meditate on them this week and see from your own experience what God might be saying to you.

Here are Paul's specific instructions:

1- Honor widows. You must show them proper respect (verse 1).

2- Children or grandchildren must "repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God" (verse 4). They repay them by caring for them in their old age.

3- If anyone does not provide for his own, "he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever" (verse 8).

4- "If any believing man or woman has widows in his family, and doesn't do anything about it then the church becomes burdened, and cannot meet the needs of those it is supposed to care for (verse 16).

We are going to continue next week with this study. But I really think what God is saying to me and, I hope He is saying to you, is that some of us need to get down on our knees this week and rethink the sense of responsibility and the sense of love that's lacking in our society toward the elderly. Some of us need to look at our calendars and wonder if we don't have a little time we could go to a nursing home and be an encouragement to some elderly folks that have no one to care for them, instead of some other things that we think are so terribly important. Some of us need to learn to pray for the elderly more faithfully. Some of us need to write cards and birthday cards that we never get around to writing. Some of us need to think carefully about those in our own families who are older. For us to pretend to be spiritual spending all of our time in "spiritual pursuits", and ignore our own families, Scripture says, breaks the heart of God. James said in James chapter 1,

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.

(James 1:27 NIV)

So I close with this. The will of God for the child of God is that he or she obeys the Word of God. And the Word of God minces no

A Widow Indeed (Part 1)

words when it comes to the responsibility we have towards the elderly. It is much more than sending checks or paying bills. Just as rearing children involves more than sending those children to a day care center or an orphanage and then agreeing to pay the bill, rearing children involves love. It involves time. It involves respect. It involves sacrifice. It often involves doing without so the child can have what they need. And if you have ever been a parent you can say, “Amen”. It’s worth it. But now God is saying I’m going to turn the tables, I going to flip it over. And there may well come a time when real spirituality will be tested, not by how active you are at church, but by how much you’re concerned for your own, in particular, how you treat your elderly parents.

God help us to pay attention. We’ll continue next week. Let us pray,

*Father,*

*Oh, burden our hearts this Mother’s Day, to think carefully and quietly about the degree of concern and compassion and love and involvement we give those who gave so much to us, those who literally gave their lives to bring us into the world, who gave their lives to keep us alive, who often went without so we might have, who stayed up nights when we were sick, those who prayed for us and those who just cared.*

*Somehow, Father, as we get older we begin to assume that our own responsibility is for ourselves. And we forget that in Your Word You have told us as parents and grandparents become older we have an opportunity and a responsibility in Christ to give back to them a portion of what they have given to us. And as a church we have a responsibility to honor the elderly, to lift them up to a place of respect.*

*O, God, help us to do it. And give us a burden in our daily walk this week, as we go through life—in the grocery store, in the department store, in the neighborhood—as we see those who may be in the sunset years of life and may be struggling to remember or may be struggling just to feel wanted.*

*God, help us to slow down our frantic pace long enough to say, “I love you”.*

*In Jesus’ name,*

*Amen*

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