



"I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand."  
—Confucius

27-Dec-19

## The Widow and the Fatherless (Part Four)

Many mornings of my life have been spent merging from I-20 onto the Downtown Connector in Atlanta, just inching along. Every morning a man stands on the shoulder with a cardboard sign, seeking donations. I have given him money more than once, mainly because I admire his work ethic: Rain, cold, hot—it does not seem to matter—this guy shows up for his "job." Does my charity fulfill [James 1:27](#): "Pure and undefiled religion before [God](#) and the Father is this: to [visit orphans and widows in their trouble](#), and to keep oneself unspotted from [the world](#)"? No, not really. Yes, he is a stranger, but for all I know, he drives to work in a Mercedes and parks it behind the bushes.

What are some more tangible ways to help the widow, the fatherless, and the stranger? These points, which are not in any particular order, would help anyone, but keep in mind those we are focusing on.

1. **Pray.** Use the Church Prayer Requests page on the church website and other sources to compile a personal list of people to pray for. We can bring problems big and small before God to seek His help, guidance, and relief. When a prayer is answered, sometimes through death, I use correction tape to cover that name so I can add a new one. Sometimes I

remove a name, which I hate to do, but we often never get an update on a person's request. So, as an aside, if you send in a request for prayers, please let us know what happens.

However, the day-to-day difficulties of the widows and fatherless many times do not go out as a prayer request. We may need to look deeper—not to the point of prying—but we must keep our eyes open for their needs. Are the single mom and her kids always running close to the edge financially? Is the widow fighting loneliness? Can we include them in our dinner or outing plans at the [Feast of Tabernacles](#)?

2. **Encourage.** We can encourage others with a call or a note, but whatever the case, let the person know you are aware of his or her needs and available to help. Your ability to help might take the form of money. If a small monetary gift is doable and the person's situation is legitimate, do so.

But maybe your ability to help is more along the lines of sending a letter, a card, or an email. Some people dutifully send out cards, and it is always a pleasure to receive one from them. It is uplifting to open your email or your mailbox and see a note from someone letting you know they care. However, if you take this route, do not be too quick to let them know that you have been in a similar situation. Hearing that you have had problems does little to solve their current ones. Every case is unique, and prattling on about your problems can focus the situation on you, not them.

3. **Help Physically.** Years ago, I oversaw a group of men in the [Worldwide Church of God](#) tasked with helping widows move. At the time, the Atlanta church was large and had a lot of single mothers who changed homes or apartments frequently. I had to round up "volunteers" with trucks to go out on Sundays to move these families. For the most part, it was fine. There were times that our efforts were unappreciated or abused, but we could serve in this way. It is not so easy to do now that the church is scattered.

But what about the "stranger," those not in the church? Maybe a neighbor needs help. People get sick and cannot do any shopping or

maintain their home, their car, or their lawn. Perhaps they need a meal delivered to them. Opportunities to serve are abundant if we choose not to ignore them. If a visit is all that we can offer, to a lonely person, it will seem like a wonderful gift.

4. **Be Alert.** We can always use more "lerts," as the saying goes. Many times, we are weighed down with our own troubles and fail to notice what is happening in other people's lives. Jobs are lost, people fall ill, or a loved one dies, and we may initially pray about it or call or write, but for them, the pain lingers for a long time. Even if, for instance, a neighbor gets a new job, it may not solve all his problems immediately. How long was he out of work? How deep a financial hole is he in? If another recovers from an illness, do we know what kind of repairs were skipped while she was down? Does she perhaps need help with bills?

When we help those who are not called, they will sooner or later bring up religion: "Why can't you help us out on Saturday, why only on Sunday?" This is easily answered, but remember, we are not out to proselytize but to help. It is God's job to call and open the minds of those He is choosing. Our job is to live godly lives and be good examples. If, when helping someone in the world, we notice that the situation is headed south, remember that [Satan](#) and his demons are always around and would [love](#) nothing better than to trip us up, cause a rift, or stir things up. It is what they do! So I say, "Be alert!"

The apostle Paul gives specific instructions in [I Timothy 5:3-8](#) about the church's responsibility in caring for widows:

Show respect for widows who really are all alone. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, they should learn first to carry out their religious duties toward their own family and in this way repay their parents and grandparents, because that is what pleases God. A widow who is all alone, with no one to take care of her, has placed her hope in God and continues to pray and ask him for his help night and day. But a widow who gives herself to pleasure has already died, even though she lives. Give them these instructions, so that no one will find fault with them. But if any do not take care of their relatives, especially the members of their own family, they

have denied the [faith](#) and are worse than an unbeliever. (*The Good News Translation*)

He then gives some specifics. The responsibility for the care of the widows goes first to their families. Whenever possible, the children and grandchildren should be taking care of mom and grandma, not the government and not the church. When the family cannot or will not step up, then the church—that's us!—can step in. The ministry oversees third-tithe assistance, but each of us individually also shares in this duty.

The Bible mentions widows more than a hundred times. Paul's writings leave the impression that he is speaking of older women with grown children. The church always seems to have widows in every congregation, but not too many widowers, probably because men typically do not take care of themselves as well and die earlier than their wives.

In earlier years, when giving sermonettes, I would look out on the congregation and see the widows listening with interest. They were always encouraging to me, pulling for me to get the job done. It was my job to take care of them, but I always felt it worked the other way around: They were looking out for me!

That is really what James, [Moses](#), Isaiah, and Jeremiah—under the inspiration of God—were talking about: Obey God and look out for one another. That is pure religion!

- Mike Ford

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## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [Prayer Makes a Difference](#)

by Martin G. Collins

God expects us to intercede in behalf of others, including our brethren, unconverted relatives, neighbors, the world at large, and even enemies — but we must do this with wisdom, sincerity, faithfulness, and humility, invoking

the help of God's Spirit, according to God's perfect will. The smooth functioning of God's work, as well as the physical and spiritual needs of our brethren, depend on the fervent intercessory prayers of His people.

Acknowledgement of God's supreme power, gratitude, thanksgiving, and the willingness to forgive others (rather than self-absorption), must become an integral part of every prayer. Prayer must be according to God's will, in faith, in the name of Christ, in bold confidence, in a motivation of selflessness, putting a higher priority on other peoples' needs than our own.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[Should We Pray for the World?](#)**

by Staff

Some in the church believe that Christians should not pray for those in the world because of a few verses in Jeremiah. However, the bulk of the Bible shows just the opposite! Only when God has determined He will not relent will prayers for them be ineffective.

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