

When a Husband Dies / God, our Provider

Carol: Shirley's husband Bryan died about 15 years ago. She talked to me about it. Shirley is a very thoughtful lady, and her memories and ideas really helped me to understand what it might be like.

Tammy: Hmm, though I guess everyone's experience is different.

Carol: Yes, there are no rules for grieving. What helped Shirley might not suit someone else. She had her own difficulties, and a younger widow with children would have different ones.

Tammy: Yes; my heart goes out to women who are grieving, missing their husbands and feeling very alone...and then they have to take on big responsibilities, just to feed themselves and their families. It must be so hard.

Carol: Every widow's pain is unique, but there will be things they share. I try to understand what it is like, and hearing their stories helps me to do that. It's so important to be there and to listen to widows when they talk. I remember when my father died. Even though there were 6 of us children, my mother lost something that was very much a part of her, and the hurt was deep. Talking about my father and remembering seemed to be a good kind of medicine for my mom.

Tammy: That's true: so let's spend some time today on *Women of Hope* trying to understand what it was like for *Shirley* to find herself alone.

Carol, what did Shirley say about how *she* felt when she became a widow?

Carol: Well, there were some things that she really didn't like! She hated the way some people used vague words like 'he passed away' and 'you lost your loved one'. She made a point of saying 'Bryan died'... I think it helped her face the truth, and it was important that he still had a name. She didn't like other people making personal comments about their life together - as if it was not private any more... And she really didn't like the word 'widow'.

Tammy: I can imagine that. What pictures come into *your* head when you hear that word? Is it a word that has dignity in *your* community? Or does it frighten or depress you?

Often people see a *widow* as helpless, hopeless, and weak... that she wouldn't be able to manage on her own, or make sensible decisions... as though a woman is worthless without a husband. You don't become worthless because you are not married!

Carol: Shirley *did* manage well, in most ways, even though she missed her husband terribly. Though she told me she did some foolish things in the beginning by trying to improve on Bryan's methods. He used to keep records of all the bills he paid and she thought he was just too fussy, so she threw them away. Then some very important bills were due to be paid. Because she hadn't kept the records, she forgot to pay them and that caused all sorts of trouble!

Tammy: That reminds me of how important it is for both husband *and* wife to understand about things like how to pay bills, prepare food, and other responsibilities. *One* of them is going to be alone *one* day, and he or she will need to know those things.

Carol: Shirley talked about some things that made her feel like her husband was still close. She remembered looking at old photos and seeing him laughing with their friends... she enjoyed that! And when she opened the wardrobe, his smell was there, especially in one of his coats. She kept it for years; she said 'it helped me to feel that I was still close to him'...

And then there were funny, unexpected things she missed, such as seeing his friends from the Scouts - the boys' club where he was a leader. She missed hearing and seeing what was going on in *his* world. She was sad when the grandchildren achieved new things and he wasn't there to enjoy them with her.

Tammy: I could imagine missing hugs, eating meals and doing things together, and talking about the children together. But I would also miss having a man who could do some practical things for me.

Carol: Well, she did say that too! Shirley didn't like having to admit there were times when she needed a man's help – because he was stronger than her, and he knew how to do those things. But when she *did* admit her need, she really appreciated the friendship of *other* husbands who helped her in practical ways...and their wives who generously lent them to her! She really valued her friends who visited and supported her - sometimes when she didn't even realize how much she needed their friendship...and someone to talk things over with. She said to me 'I felt blessed.'

I remember one thing particularly. Shirley said 'I didn't realize that I wasn't a whole person until I had been on my own for about 8 years. One day, out of the blue, I suddenly experienced the sense of being a whole person by myself instead of being just the left-over half of a couple...'

Tammy: Wow – yes that makes sense when you've been part of a couple for so long!

Carol: And she said...'then I realized that whatever I wanted to do was up to *me*. I had to make the hard decision about whether I wanted to do something, and then I had to work to make that happen. It can be easy to just sit back and become a hermit...to stay lonely... waiting to be invited out. If I want to go somewhere, then I must decide to do it; hopefully with another friend, otherwise - alone.'

Tammy: Did Shirley work outside her home?

Carol: Yes she did... She took a few weeks off work when Bryan died, and then started work again. But she said life was hard for her for a while. The people at work needed to be considerate, and not put extra pressure on her. But I think it was good for her to get back into a routine of work, to get up in the morning and know what to do. It helped her to feel useful and able to manage. And it was probably good to have familiar faces around.

Tammy: Yes, I can imagine that. Has Shirley ever married again?

Carol: No. She says it would be wonderful to have a partner... for physical closeness... to be able to laugh together... to go out together... to have someone who cares about her as a woman. But she also sees how she has changed and developed as a person since Bryan died. She's more independent... more confident and outspoken... and probably more untidy!

Tammy: Mmmm – she doesn't have to worry about her husband thinking the house is untidy now, does she!

Carol: No... She said she's got used to making her own decisions now. She admitted that she quite likes to be able to plan her days without having to consider another person's needs. She's developed some new interests and skills. She enjoys her grandchildren and her friends - men *and* women. She gives her time to help others. She has grown in her friendship with God. She feels that she is a whole person in her own right... and I could see that in her when I talked with her.

Tammy: Hmm, that's interesting, and good to think about, because many of us will be widows one day, if we are not now. It also made me wonder: am I good at supporting my friends who are alone now? Shirley needed friends to talk to, to take her out, and to help with practical things. Other widows might need a lot more help just to feed and clothe their families. They might need to find work, or make things to sell, and that could be very hard at a time when they are feeling scared and alone. Can you think of someone like this who you could help?

Katharine is with us again today. She talked to us a while ago about how she felt as a widow when she had nothing to give. Do you remember she told us about her house being damaged by a very bad storm – and her family looked after her? We've asked her to share some of her experiences since her husband died. Hello Katharine, it's so nice to have you here today.

Katharine: Hello, my friends, I'm glad to be with you again. I love you women of *hope*! And I have to say I understand how Shirley feels...being a widow is no fun. After the funeral, when the flowers and food are gone, and people stop sending cards, the house seems very big and quiet. All of a sudden, bills have to be paid, repairs need to be made, and decisions require more sense than you have. You are used to your husband taking care of all those things. Now, it's *your* job, and you only want to curl up somewhere and cry. No one seems to understand how much it hurts.

The loneliness is the worst part. I remember a time, a few months after my husband's death that was very painful. I went to a meeting and looked around for a place to sit. Two of my good friends were there and I walked over to one of them and asked if I could sit by her. She shook her head and said, "I'm saving this for my husband."

I went to the other friend, who said the same thing. Their words were like a knife twisting in my heart. If I had a husband I would have a place to sit, but now that I was a widow, there was no place for me. Not even my good friends understood my aching need to be welcomed...to hear a kind word.

I found a seat at the back, by the door. As soon as the meeting was over, I ran out and cried all the way home.

Later that night I opened a book which was lying on a table by my chair. In it I read the words of someone who felt just like I did that night-alone and misunderstood by friends.

I saw the words, "for I am poor and needy . . ." (Psalm 40:17)

Yes, I thought, that's just the way I feel. Poor and needy...I need a husband, someone to love me and care about how I feel. But, I thought sadly, I don't have a husband. Pretty soon I was crying again. I turned a few pages in the book, and found some more words, which said, "A father to the fatherless and a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling." (Psalm 68:5)

That book was God's Word, the Bible. When I was feeling completely alone, poor and needy, the message of this book was the answer to my sad cry for help. My children were suddenly fatherless, and I needed defending. But, where was this holy dwelling?

I kept reading from the Bible every day, and learned more and more about the God who loves me better than any husband ever could. I discovered that God wants to live in my heart... so **that** is His holy dwelling place! (Ephesians 3:17) I learned that God loved me so much he sent his own precious Son to come to the earth and live like me. That Son, Jesus, was willing to die, so he could take away all the sin in my life, and even in the whole world. And now he lives in heaven. The Bible says I will live with Jesus forever, because I believe he died for me. It sounds too simple, but it's the truth.

It's the answer for all the loneliness and sadness, the anger and ugliness, of our lives. Jesus only asks that we trust him to forgive us and then we can live with him forever. (I John 1:9)

The day after that meeting, both my friends called and told me how sorry they were for making me sad. They are still good friends, but they still don't understand how lonely it is without a husband.

However, something amazing has happened to me. Even after many years of living by myself, I never feel alone. I still feel sad, sometimes, because I miss my husband and there's no one to talk to about decisions I have to make, or good things I want to share, but I always remember that God is here with me. His book tells me that he is living in my heart. I know he is there because I feel his love.

Carol: You're listening to *Women of Hope*. Did you notice that both of the widows we've heard from today - Katharine and Shirley - said some of the same things?

Tammy: They both said – they had to learn to pay the bills. It really is important to know how to do that isn't it – in case you need to know one day... And each one came to realize that she needed practical help – with things that she was not sure how to do – fixing things – or someone who was physically strong enough to do a job that she couldn't do by herself.

Carol: If you are alone, maybe you struggle sometimes with needing someone to help you fix things. I'm sure you understand how both these women felt (and I'm sure they still sometimes feel) ...alone, and as if no-one else really understands! I remember an older widow saying to me one day 'there is no-one to just love you for who you are any more... even my grown up children (who love me dearly) don't really understand.'

Tammy: Thank you Katharine for sharing your real feelings with us today... Did you notice what Katharine read from the Bible: 'God is a Father to the fatherless and a defender of widows'. All through God's word we find that he has a special place of love in his heart for widows and orphans. (Deut. 10:18, Psalm 146:9) He does understand, and he does love you for who you are. You know, Jesus treated widows with special kindness. (Luke 21:2, Luke 7:11-15) In the Bible we are often told to make sure that widows are treated fairly and helped. (Ex. 22:22, Deut 14:28, Isaiah 10:2, 1 Tim 5:3, James 1:27)

That reminds me of a story from the Bible. This took place long before Jesus was born, at a time when there was a bad drought, and famine in the land. You may have heard this story a while ago on *Women of Hope*. It's a good story so let's hear it again...(1 Kings 17:8-15)

There was a prophet of God, a holy man named Elijah. God told him to go to a certain town and a widow there would feed him. So Elijah went, and as he came near the town he saw a poor widow gathering firewood outside the town gate. He asked her politely, 'Please bring me a drink of water'... and then, as she was going to get it, he added 'and please bring me some bread too'.

She knew who he was, and she wanted to help him. But she turned around and said, 'I swear by the living Lord, your God, I haven't got even a crust. All I have is a handful of flour in a bowl and a little drop of olive oil left in the jar. I was just gathering a few sticks of wood to make a little fire and cook the last scraps for my son and me, and then we will starve to death.'...

'Don't worry', said Elijah. 'Go ahead and prepare it; but first make a small flat bread for me, and then make the rest for you and your son. Because this is God's promise to you: "the bowl will not run out of flour or the jar run out of oil, until I, the Lord, send rain again."'...

What do *you* think she should do?

Well, she believed God's messenger, and she showed her faith... she made the bread for Elijah first. And each day she went to the cupboard, and there was always enough flour and oil to make bread for them all. This went on until the drought broke.

Carol: So of all the people in the land, God chose to help one of the poorest...

Tammy: ...yes, the one who had no-one else to protect her and provide for her... And what did he ask her to do?

Carol: He asked her to give food to the prophet first... but really, I think that meant he asked her to believe God's word to her. And show it by her action.

Tammy: And God kept his promise - he always does. I hope you are learning to put your trust in him day by day.

Carol: It's been good to be with you today. We will be praying for you, and asking God to show you his love and meet your needs.

Tammy: We so enjoy hearing from you. You can contact us by email. Our address is TWRWomenofHope@TWR.org. You can also visit our website for more helpful programs. Visit us at TWRWomenofHope.org. Or visit our Facebook page.

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