

STAND IN THE GAP FOR WIDOWS
SMALL GROUP
PARTICIPANT GUIDE



STAND in the **GAP**
MINISTRIES
CONNECTING PEOPLE IN NEED
WITH PEOPLE WHO CARE

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Welcome -

Beautiful Sister,

Welcome to the Stand in the Gap Ministries for Widows study guide! We are excited to have you join your leader in going through this study. Each week, your leader will take you through the Biblical study, ask you some discussion questions and also leave you with some things to think about, pray about and journal through between sessions. This study guide was written specifically for you! We care about you and your journey of healing!

We recognize that the word, "widow" is not something that any of us want to be called and this is a journey none of us like to walk. We pray that as you learn, grow and share, you will be provided healing and you will know that you are NOT alone. We hope that as you go through this study, you will grow closer to your small group, your community, your church and most importantly in your relationship with God. You are seen and you are loved, immensely!

Love and prayers,

Stand in the Gap for Widows Team

MONTH 1.1- LONELINESS

ICE-BREAKER: HIGHS, LOWS, & GRATITUDE:

What was your high, low, and gratitude of the week?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; He will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.

Deuteronomy 31:8 (ESV)

TOPIC: LONELINESS

Angela awoke in the middle of the night, jumping at a dream that had her heart racing. She turned over to see if she had awakened Henry, only to be confronted, once again, by a realization more startling than her dream. Henry was not with her anymore. Though she knew in her heart he just went ahead of her to a better place, that thought didn't bring much comfort in the moment. She felt more like she had been left behind. As she lay alone in her bed, her heart aching, she began to meditate on a scripture she had heard at church, repeating it out loud to herself: "It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed."

Deuteronomy 31:8 (ESV)

QUESTIONS:

Have you ever had that moment of waking in the night to the realization that your spouse isn't there? What are some of the feelings or thoughts you had to battle in that moment?

TEACHING ONE:

In Deuteronomy, Joshua finds himself left behind. God had taken his servant, and Israel's leader, Moses, to heaven. Moses had been the one to hear from God for the people, give direction, and seek God's provision. Joshua had followed him closely, depending on him greatly. Suddenly, all the pressure was on Joshua. He had to lead. He had to seek God for provision for the people. He had to make all the decisions. It was a scary place to be. There were probably many nights when he awoke to the overwhelming feeling of having to continue his course without Moses. So, God continued to remind Joshua that even though he seemed alone, he was not alone. God promised Joshua that He would be with him wherever he went. He would not abandon or leave him. God would be a constant source of wisdom, strength, and provision in his life. Though Joshua's earthly leader, friend, and confidant had gone on ahead of him, he was not alone on his journey. In the same way, we are not alone on our journey.

QUESTIONS:

What types of questions or concerns do you think Joshua would have faced after Moses left? What kinds of questions have you had since your spouse left?

SCRIPTURE TWO:

“So be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid and do not panic. For the LORD your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you.”

Deuteronomy 31:6 (NLT)

TEACHING TWO:

There were many times that God had to remind Joshua not to be afraid or panic, which probably means he was prone to being afraid or panicking. In the same way, there will be many times in our own journey when we will feel fear or panic try to creep in. But this scripture reminds us of the truth that we are not left behind to navigate this life on our own. This scripture says God *personally* goes ahead of us to lead the way. He doesn't just give us a map and hope we find our way through the difficult parts. No, He walks before us and shows us the way. We have a God who sees us, loves us, and is for us. He will never abandon us and never fail us. He is WITH us.

NEW REFLECTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today? What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

CHALLENGE:

Pick and memorize one of the scriptures from today. In moments when you begin to feel overwhelmed by fear or anxiety, repeat that scripture out loud. Meditate on it. Focus on the fact that Your Heavenly Father is with you. You are never alone.

COMMUNITY:

God has provided the Family of God for encouragement, support, and strength. How do you plan to engage in your church community this week?

JOURNAL:

Even when we feel at our loneliest place, God says that He will never abandon us. He will be there for us. Write down the moments this week where God shows his faithfulness to you, even if it is in the smallest ways. Pay attention to the ways He reminds you that He is with you. Write a prayer out this week about any loneliness you may be feeling.

MONTH 1.2 - LONELINESS

ICE-BREAKER: HIGHS, LOWS, & GRATITUDE:

What was your high, low, and gratitude of the week?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

"Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. The troubles of my heart are enlarged; bring me out of my distress."

Psalms 25:16-17 (NIV)

TOPIC: LONELINESS

The children's author Dr. Seuss once wrote, "All alone! Whether you like it or not, alone is something you'll be quite a lot!" Leave it to Dr. Seuss to tell it to us straight. From the time we are born, we will all have moments where we are both alone and lonely, though they don't always go hand in hand. We can be alone and not lonely, but we can also be lonely and not alone. Quiet nights at home without our spouse can bring up the same lonely feeling as being the fifth wheel at a dinner party surrounded by people.

QUESTIONS:

Describe a time when you experienced loneliness recently. When you are feeling lonely, do you tend to pull away into further isolation or do you tend to move towards people? Why is that?

TEACHING ONE:

David's life was full of ups and downs. In Psalm 25:16-17, David cries out to God, saying "Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. The troubles of my heart are enlarged; bring me out of my distress." David had gone from someone who was being praised and loved to someone who was deposed and loathed. David's honesty about his struggle with loneliness shows us that no one is beyond that feeling. We all experience it at different times. But here, we see David turn towards God in his moment of distress rather than away from God. David knew where to look for comfort and strength when his heart felt lonely.

QUESTIONS:

In what ways have you seen God show up in lonely times (through a scripture, a friend, a family member, a word, etc.)? When is solitude a blessing, and when does it become unhealthy?

SCRIPTURE TWO:

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Psalms 23:5-6 (NIV)

TEACHING TWO:

This beautiful line of verse, which was penned by the shepherd boy turned King David, comes from Psalm 23. You've probably heard or recited this Psalm many times yourself. It starts with the visual reminder, "The Lord is my shepherd." David spent many nights on the hillside with only the stars and sheep as his companions. The shepherd's life could be a quiet and lonely one, but David saw these times as an invitation to meet with God. It was here that he came to know God as his shepherd and his protector. Could it be that learning to find God in the quiet of the hillside as a shepherd boy gave him the strength to make it through his time in the caves as a fugitive?

David goes on to write, "You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows." In the Bible, we often find oil associated with joy. It's interesting that in the "darkest valley," is where David discovered the true source of joy. Sometimes our greatest revelations happen in our darkest valleys. Many times after this, David wrote of his hardships and struggles only to end it with a line like, "but my hope is in the Lord." Despite the many trials he faced, his hope and strength were anchored in God.

NEW REFLECTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today? What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

CHALLENGE:

One evening this week, spend some quiet time outside under the night sky. Imagine you are like David on the hillside watching the sheep. Allow God to speak to your heart in the quiet. Imagine Him pouring his love, peace, and joy over you.

COMMUNITY:

God has provided the Family of God for encouragement, support, and strength. How do you plan to engage in your church community this week?

JOURNAL:

Write down what you have discovered about God or yourself in some of your moments of solitude. Write a prayer out this week about any loneliness you may be feeling.

MONTH 2.1 VULNERABILITY

ICE-BREAKER: HIGHS, LOWS, & GRATITUDE:

What was your high, low, and gratitude of the week?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. The man's name was Elimelek, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah.

And they went to Moab and lived there.

Now Elimelek, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

Ruth 1:1-5 (NIV)

TOPIC: VULNERABILITY:

Naomi had barely finished grieving the death of her husband when she lost her two sons. In her mind, everything had been taken from her. There was nothing left. All three women were now alone without any husbands to care for them.

Naomi decided the only thing to do was move back to her hometown. Her daughter-in-law Ruth, offered to stay with her, but Naomi tried to persuade her against it. Naomi told her, "Your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. You should go back with her." But Ruth was determined to stay with Naomi: "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me."

QUESTIONS:

Why do you think Naomi tried so hard to persuade her daughter-in-laws not to come with her? In your grief, do you feel like you have ever overlooked, undervalued, or rejected a possible friendship or relationship?

TEACHING ONE:

Upon moving back to Naomi's home country, life wasn't easy for the two widows, but together, they created a home for themselves. Ruth worked hard, gleaning in the fields of a kind relative, Boaz, and Naomi gained a sparkle in her eye as match-maker for her daughter-in-law. Boaz was drawn to Ruth's loyalty and selflessness and eventually married her, giving her a new family and community. Through this union, Ruth gave Naomi a beautiful grandson whom she would help

raise in the ways of God. And though Naomi would not see it in her lifetime, from this grandson would come a shepherd boy named David, who would eventually become the King of Israel! Though losing a loved one can be heartbreaking and devastating, Ruth and Naomi's story teaches us some important lessons on walking through grief and loneliness.

First, it's important to remember that it's ok to go through the grieving process. Everyone grieves differently and in their own time. In fact, at one point, at the height of her grief, Naomi told her friends, "Do not call me Naomi [Sweet]. Call me Mara [Bitter], for the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty" (Ruth 1:20:21). Some might criticize Naomi for her behavior, but that's how she felt in her season of grief. She felt bitter and disappointed.

Naomi and Ruth went through a process of grief, and eventually, like the sun breaking through clouds after a storm, the beautiful sweetness of life returned to Naomi. As she pressed into her faith and the relationships God put around her, she experienced God's comfort and goodness.

Second, in the same way that Ruth and Naomi found comfort in each other, it is important to embrace community. It can be tempting to shut yourself off from others and pretend like you don't need any help. But it is important to reach out to your support system (your friends, family, pastor, small group, or therapist) when you are feeling lonely. Don't try to walk through it alone. Whether you talk about the loss with them, or simply sit with them, community is life-giving.

The other thing to learn from these two women is to lean into faith in the midst of heartache. Ask the questions, pour out your pain to your Heavenly Father, allow Him to comfort and strengthen you in your most vulnerable moments. Losing a loved one is never easy and it can be difficult to cope with, but as the beautiful story of Naomi and Ruth shows us, it is possible to find healing and redemption even after the greatest loss.

QUESTIONS:

What are some practical ways you have found to help with being vulnerable and allowing others to be there for you? What are some things you can do to allow yourself to be more vulnerable?

SCRIPTURE TWO:

Father to the fatherless and defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families; He leads out the prisoners with singing..."

Psalms 68:5-6 (NIV)

TEACHING TWO:

Last month, we discussed the topic of loneliness. Here, God tells us that not only is He here for us in our lonely moments, but he also desires to provide a family for us. This can be a natural family or a family of believers. As a widow, you can often feel left alone to fend for yourselves after the death of a spouse, and it can be difficult to find a sense of community without the support of a partner. But none of us are meant to walk alone. In Proverbs 68, we are told that God sets the lonely in families. God's design is for us to find strength, comfort, and support through each other. This is exemplified throughout scripture. He cares about you and desires that you not stay isolated, but instead, find solace in His beautifully designed family of God.

NEW REFLECTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today? What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

CHALLENGE:

Put 2-3 items on your calendar to do this week that involve reaching out to others from the community. It can be something like a phone call, a lunch date, small group, or volunteering at your church with a friend.

COMMUNITY:

God has provided the Family of God for encouragement, support, and strength. How do you plan to engage in your church community this week?

JOURNAL:

Write down a list of family and friends who have offered help or encouragement to you during this past season. Are there any you have pushed away or undervalued that you should bring close? Write down how you are going to rekindle those relationships (i.e., a text, call, thank-you note, invitation to coffee, etc.). Write out a prayer about vulnerability.

MONTH 2.2 VULNERABILITY

ICE-BREAKER: HIGHS, LOWS, & GRATITUDE:

What was your high, low, and gratitude of the week?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

Jesus and his disciples went to Jericho. And as they were leaving, they were followed by a large crowd. A blind beggar by the name of Bartimaeus son of Timaeus was sitting beside the road. When he heard that it was Jesus from Nazareth, he shouted, "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!" Many people told the man to stop, but he shouted even louder, "Son of David, have pity on me!" Jesus stopped and said, "Call him over!" They called out to the blind man and said, "Don't be afraid! Come on! He is calling for you." The man threw off his coat as he jumped up and ran to Jesus. Jesus asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man answered, "Master, I want to see!" Jesus told him, "Go. Your eyes are healed because of your faith." At once the man could see, and he went down the road with Jesus.

Mark 10:46-52 (CEVDCI)

TOPIC: VULNERABILITY:

Losing a spouse can be an incredibly difficult and painful experience, and as widows, it can leave us feeling vulnerable in a number of ways:

1. **FINANCIAL VULNERABILITY:** Many widows experience financial hardship after the loss of a spouse. This can be due to the loss of our spouse's income, increased medical expenses, and other unexpected costs. Some may also struggle to navigate complex financial decisions.
2. **EMOTIONAL VULNERABILITY:** Grief and loss can take a significant toll on our emotional well-being, and we may sometimes feel vulnerable and alone as we navigate these complex feelings of sadness, anger, and loneliness. Sometimes it feels impossible to understand our emotions ourselves, let alone explain them to others.
3. **SOCIAL VULNERABILITY:** It can feel difficult to navigate the social world without our spouse, especially for the first year or so after the loss. It can feel like something is missing at events and social gatherings.
4. **PHYSICAL VULNERABILITY:** Losing a spouse can also leave us feeling physically vulnerable. We may struggle to manage daily tasks and chores on our own. Some may also feel unsafe or fearful living alone.

QUESTION:

Which of these areas resonated with you the most in this season?

TEACHING ONE:

The story of Bartimaeus is significant because it demonstrates Jesus' compassion for those who were marginalized and vulnerable. Bartimaeus was a blind beggar, apparently on his own, forced to survive day-to-day. But when others passed over him, Jesus did not turn a blind eye to him; instead, He stopped and listened to his cries for help and offered healing and hope. In the same way, God does not turn a blind eye to anyone who calls out to Him for help.

This story is also a reminder that God is moved by our faith. Bartimaeus had faith that Jesus could heal him, and his faith was rewarded. As we face our own struggles and vulnerabilities, we too can have faith that Jesus will take care of us and provide for our needs. The story of Jesus healing Bartimaeus is a powerful reminder of His compassion for the vulnerable and the importance of having faith in God's ability to provide for our needs.

QUESTION:

In what ways have you felt like Bartimaeus?

SCRIPTURE:

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV)

QUESTION:

What stands out to you in this scripture?

TEACHING TWO:

Jesus wants to take our heavy burdens and help carry our loads in life, whether they are our emotions and feelings, our cares and concerns, or our practical needs and challenges. But in order for Him to help us, we first have to do as the scripture says and, "come to Him." Like Bartimaeus, we have to be willing to be vulnerable with God and others about the things we need.

Remember that scripture says when Jesus heard the blind man calling out to Him, He stopped and said, "Call him over!" Then those around Jesus told Bartimeus, "Don't be afraid! Come on! He is calling for you." Jesus used people to bridge the gap between where He was and where Bartameaus was. God will often use people as part of the way He shows up for us.

So don't be afraid to be vulnerable and let your needs be known. It's not weak to speak out; it's bold. Just like with Bartimaeus, Jesus hears and answers the cry of a bold and faith-filled person.

NEW REFLECTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today? What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

CHALLENGE:

Be bold this week and reach out to one person to help you with something you need. It could be taking your car into the shop, changing a lightbulb, figuring out medical bills. Don't let fear or pride stop you from being vulnerable. Ask God to put the right person on your heart to reach out for help, and then do it. Be bold.

COMMUNITY:

God has provided the Family of God for encouragement, support, and strength. How do you plan to engage in your church community this week?

JOURNAL:

Write down a time when you were bold enough to ask God for something and He showed up. (If you can't think of one, maybe now is the time to ask!) Write out a prayer about vulnerability.

MONTH 3.1 - WHY?

ICE-BREAKER: HIGHS, LOWS, & GRATITUDE:

What was your high, low, and gratitude of the week?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

On His arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet Him, but Mary stayed at home. "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

John 11:17-27 (NIV)

TOPIC: WHY?:

In John 11:17-27, we read a story about two women who lost someone they loved. When Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus that their brother Lazarus was sick, Jesus chose to stay where he was for two more days. When he finally arrived, Lazarus had already died. Martha and Mary were devastated and probably overwhelmed with questions. Why hadn't Jesus come? Why didn't he heal Lazarus? Did they do something wrong? Did Lazarus do something wrong? Did Jesus even care? Jesus was not immune to their questions or their pain. In fact, it is the only time in scripture we read, "Jesus wept." He wept with his friends. He wept over death. He wept over the pain they had walked through. Through His tears we see that it is okay to grieve over the loss of a loved one.

QUESTION:

What are some questions you asked after the passing of your husband?

TEACHING ONE:

It's interesting that Martha went to Jesus when he came, but Mary stayed behind. When tragedy happens we have two choices: to run to Jesus and ask our questions or to pull away from him. But it is only in running to him that we find our answers. In moments when we don't see the outcome we hoped for it can be hard to trust God. Martha didn't understand why Jesus hadn't come to heal Lazarus in time, all she could hold onto was what she *did* know: He was still the Son of God. He was still the Savior. He was still the one who did miracles, even if it wasn't in the way she had hoped. Whether Lazarus was raised up from his sick bed, or raised up in the resurrection, she believed that Jesus reigned over sickness and death.

QUESTIONS:

How do you hold on to your faith amidst the questions? What has helped you walk through this season?

SCRIPTURE TWO:

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.”
Proverbs 3:5 (NASB1995)

TEACHING TWO:

Proverbs 3:5 reminds us to trust in the Lord with all our hearts, and not to lean on our own limited understanding. This verse encourages us to put our faith and trust in God, and to rely on His wisdom and ways, rather than our own. It is important to remember that our own knowledge and understanding is limited. We won't always have an answer for every question. But we do serve a God who IS the answer to every question. Let all your questions lead you back to Him. Though we may not understand it all here on earth, one day we will have our questions answered. As the Apostle Paul wrote, “For now we see but a faint reflection of riddles and mysteries as though reflected in a mirror, but one day we will see face-to-face. My understanding is incomplete now, but one day I will understand everything, just as everything about me has been fully understood.”

1 Corinthians 13:12 (TPT)

NEW REFLECTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today? What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

CHALLENGE:

The next time you are struggling with something you don't know, remind yourself what you *do* know. Take some time and thank God for the things you know to be true about Him. Praise Him through the pain and allow Him to weep with you, strengthen you, and remind you of the truth of who He is and what's to come.

COMMUNITY:

God has provided the Family of God for encouragement, support, and strength. How do you plan to engage in your church community this week?

JOURNAL:

Write down the things you have questioned since your husband passed away. Write out a prayer about these questions you have.

MONTH 3.2 - WHY?

ICE-BREAKER: HIGHS, LOWS, & GRATITUDE:

What was your high, low, and gratitude of the week?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

Then Job replied to the Lord: "I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.' You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you."

Job 42:1-5 (NIV)

TOPIC: WHY?

Job was a wealthy and prosperous man who had everything he could ever want, including a loving family and a thriving business. However, in a series of tragic events, Job lost everything he held dear, including his family, his wealth, and his health. If there was ever anyone who could've asked the question, "why?" it was Job.

In the midst of his suffering, Job definitely expressed his questions and despair to God. You can almost hear a tone of angst in his question, "Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb? Why were there knees to receive me and breasts that I might be nursed? For now I would be lying down in peace; I would be asleep and at rest."

Job 3:11-13 (NIV)

QUESTION:

How does this story relate to how you felt after your spouse passed?

TEACHING ONE:

In the midst of his suffering, Job questioned why these things were happening to him. Job's friends even tried to offer him answers, giving up explanations for his suffering. They suggested it was because of something he had done. They speculated that maybe God was punishing him, teaching him a lesson, or just mad at him. But Job remained steadfast in his trust in God even when he didn't have the answers. He refused to turn his back on his faith no matter how much he was in the dark about why he had experienced such a tragedy.

Sometimes, life can be unfair and confusing, and it can be difficult to understand why we are experiencing certain circumstances. Job's vulnerability and willingness to question the situation, while never losing his faith in God, serve as a powerful reminder that it is okay to wonder why something has happened. It's ok to ask questions. God is not afraid of or offended by our questions.

As Job's story also illustrates, in the midst of those questions and those moments of greatest vulnerability and confusion, our faith in God can sustain us. By turning to God and seeking His guidance, we can find comfort and hope even through our suffering.

In the end, though Job never fully got the answer he was seeking, because of his faithfulness to God, God restored and redeemed Job's life. He brought him from the valley of mourning to the mountaintop of rejoicing. This shows us that even in the darkest moments, with God, there is always redemption and renewal.

QUESTIONS:

What do you think the line is between asking questions and questioning God? What is the difference?

SCRIPTURE TWO:

"But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

Jeremiah 17:7-8 (NIV)

TEACHING TWO:

A tree goes through many seasons — the birth of spring, the fullness of summer, the changes of fall, and even the death of winter. But no matter what season the tree experiences, if the roots remain planted deep in its foundation, it can make it through the different storms and seasons of life.

There is a beautiful scripture in Isaiah 61:3 that says God gives, "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, so that His people might be called *trees* of righteousness, the planting of the Lord..."

Like Job, when we stay rooted in our faith, despite the difficult seasons or storms we face, we don't have to fear. We can make it through any adversity. We can experience the joy of spring after the death of winter. We can continue to produce fruit in our lives and be a refuge of shelter and refreshing for others.

Blessed is the one who trusts the Lord, even in the midst of the questions, for those whose confidence is in Him will be like that tree planted by the streams of living water.

NEW REFLECTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today? What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

CHALLENGE:

This week, go outside and find a tree that catches your eye. Notice the season it's in and the strength of its structure. Meditate on Jeremiah 17:7-8. Then tell God your questions, and in faith, ask for the strength to trust Him even if you don't get all the answers you want.

COMMUNITY:

God has provided the Family of God for encouragement, support, and strength. How do you plan to engage in your church community this week?

JOURNAL:

In your journal write down one tree-like attribute you would like to embody more (i.e. strength, refreshing, fruit, endurance, grace). Write out a prayer about any why questions you may have.

MONTH 4.1 - FEELING OVERWHELMED

ICE-BREAKER: Highs, Lows, & Gratitude:

What was your high, low, and gratitude of the week?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

"But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

Isaiah 40:31 (NIV)

TOPIC: FEELING OVERWHELMED:

Feeling overwhelmed is a common experience that can affect anyone at any time. It is characterized by a sense of being inundated with too many responsibilities, tasks, or emotions, and can lead to feelings of anxiety, stress, and exhaustion. When we feel overwhelmed, it can be challenging to know where to start or how to move forward. After losing our spouse, we may feel like we can't make the decisions needed to forge our way ahead. Sometimes even the most simple tasks can feel like too much. This can often lead to further feelings of anger or failure for not being "strong enough" to handle things on our own. But it's important to know you are not alone in your feelings. We all experience the feeling of being overwhelmed at times.

QUESTIONS:

Have you ever been upset with yourself for feeling overwhelmed? Why?

TEACHING ONE:

In Isaiah 40:31, we read, "But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." This verse provides a powerful reminder for those who feel overwhelmed. If we put our hope in the Lord, we can find renewed strength and energy to face our challenges.

This verse compares the hope of those who trust in God to the soaring wings of eagles. Did you know, eagles are the only birds who fly in storms? When all other birds try to hide from the storm, an eagle will actually fly into it and use the wind of the storm to rise high above it. This allows them to get to altitudes they would never have been able to reach on a normal sunny day.

Just as eagles can fly high above the chaos and turmoil of the world below, we who place our hope in the Lord can rise above our seemingly overwhelming circumstances. We can allow God to use those storms to lift us higher and to help us discover a renewed sense of peace and direction.

The second part of this scripture tells us, with God's help, we can run and not grow weary. Sometimes the season of widowhood feels like it will go on forever, or like the challenges and grief will never end. The truth is that widowhood is not a quick sprint; it is a paced marathon. But no matter how far it seems to stretch out in front of us, God promises that we can go the course without growing weary or fainting from exhaustion. We are not in this race alone. When we put our trust in God, we can find renewed strength and energy to face our challenges with resilience and courage.

QUESTIONS:

What areas tend to overwhelm you the most in this season? What part of this scripture (Isaiah 40:31) or teaching stands out to you the most? Why?

SCRIPTURE TWO:

Jesus invites us, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."
Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV)

TEACHING TWO:

When this season of life begins to feel like running a race in the dark, by yourself, while carrying a very heavy backpack—overwhelming and exhausting—Matthew 11:28-30 offers a comforting message. Jesus invites us to come to Him, to find rest from the overwhelming burdens and weariness. He offers to share our load and to guide us, through His teachings, towards a path of rest and comfort. Jesus' burden is easy and light, and He offers us a trade if we are willing to take it. By learning from His teachings and following His example, we can find peace and rest for our souls. We don't have to carry our burdens alone.

NEW REFLECTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today? What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

CHALLENGE:

This week, when you face something that makes you feel overwhelmed, take a moment to ask God for help. Trust that He can and will help lift the burden — whether that is emotionally or physically. And don't be surprised if He puts someone on your heart to ask for help, or if He puts you on someone else's heart to help.

COMMUNITY:

God has provided the Family of God for encouragement, support, and strength. How do you plan to engage in your church community this week?

JOURNAL:

When you feel overwhelmed this week, write down the cause of those feelings. Pray over those items and then choose to trust Him with the outcome. Write down any practical steps He might give you in your time of reflection and prayer. Write out a prayer about any overwhelming feelings you may have or be having.

MONTH 4.2 - FEELING OVERWHELMED

ICE-BREAKER: Highs, Lows, & Gratitude:

What was your high, low, and gratitude of the week?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

Hear my cry, O God;

Listen to my prayer.

From the end of the earth I call to You, when my heart is overwhelmed *and* weak;

Lead me to the rock that is higher than I [a rock that is too high to reach without Your help].

For You have been a shelter *and* a refuge for me,

A strong tower against the enemy.

Let me dwell in Your tent forever;

Let me take refuge in the shelter of Your wings.

Psalm 61: 2-4 (AMP)

TOPIC: FEELING OVERWHELMED:

Psalm 61 is read as a heartfelt cry from King David. It was written when both the kingdom and his family were in division and disarray. David is feeling overwhelmed. He asks God to give him a higher perspective, to see above all the overwhelming problems in front of him. In the midst of the mess, he reminds himself that God is his refuge, his very present help in times of trouble. David knew that no matter how bad things seemed to be, there was a place he could always turn for help.

QUESTION:

What was a time recently when you felt overwhelmed?

TEACHING ONE:

Have you ever been so overwhelmed that you felt paralyzed to move forward, or so emotionally exhausted that you knew if you had to make one more decision you'd end up a puddle on the floor? Maybe the breaking moment came when you were working through all the bills and logistics in the weeks after your husband passed. Maybe it was months later, in the produce section, while shopping for groceries, or when you were stuck in traffic between your son's baseball game and your daughter's dance rehearsal.

The good news is that you are not emotionally unstable, you are not a weak woman, and you are not crazy. Having those moments where you feel overwhelmed is normal. In fact, they will happen to all of us. But we cannot allow those moments to completely paralyze us from moving forward. David prayed, "I call as my heart grows faint; Lead me to the rock that is higher than I." In other words, he's asking God, "Lead me forward; help me see this from a higher perspective, It's too big for me, but I know it's not too big for You!"

QUESTIONS:

Have you ever felt embarrassed about being emotional? What has helped you in those emotional moments?

SCRIPTURE TWO:

“For nothing will be impossible with God.”

Luke 1:37 (ESV)

TEACHING TWO:

Nothing is impossible with God. If we read over these words too fast, we can neglect to recognize the power in this short scripture. *Nothing* is impossible with God. No matter how big the mountain in front of us, no matter how overwhelmed we may feel, no matter the problems we’re facing, *with God*, we can do anything. He is not limited by our current circumstances or the limitations of our own abilities. He is capable of making the impossible possible. Any problem that we can’t figure out on our own, when God is added to the equation, becomes possible to solve.

As a widow who may feel alone and overwhelmed by the challenges that come with this new life, these words can be incredibly empowering and encouraging. God is always with us, even in our darkest times. He understands our pain and sorrow, but also knows what we are capable of achieving through Him. With God’s help, we can have strength to face each day with courage and faith. In Him, we have the ability, wisdom, and resources we need to move forward each day, one step at a time.

NEW REFLECTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today? What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

CHALLENGE:

This week, when you face something that makes you feel overwhelmed, instead of dwelling on those overwhelming feelings, say this out loud: “Nothing is impossible with God. So, with God, this isn’t impossible for me either. I can handle this.” You may not feel it, but keep saying it in faith. Then pray and invite God into the problem. Trust that he is going to show you how to handle what you are facing one step at a time.

COMMUNITY:

God has provided the Family of God for encouragement, support, and strength. How do you plan to engage in your church community this week?

JOURNAL:

Write down one or two times in your past when you faced something seemingly impossible but came through to the other side (a test, a physical challenge, a work project, a season in

parenting or marriage) . How did God show himself faithful? Write out a prayer about any overwhelming feelings you may be having.

MONTH 5.1 - GRIEF

ICE-BREAKER: HIGHS, LOWS, & GRATITUDE:

What was your high, low, and gratitude of the week?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

"The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."
Psalm 34:18 (NASB1995)

TOPIC: GRIEF:

Psalm 34:18 speaks to the heart of grief. The verse says, "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." The words "brokenhearted" and "crushed in spirit" are powerful descriptions of the emotional pain that we experience in grief. When we lose someone we love, we may feel as if our heart has been shattered into pieces, or as if we are weighed down by an overwhelming burden of sadness. This can be a deeply isolating and overwhelming experience.

QUESTION:

Talk about a time after your spouse died when you felt "crushed in spirit."

TEACHING ONE:

Psalm 34:18 offers us a powerful truth: God is close to us in our pain. When we are brokenhearted and crushed in spirit, God is there with us, offering us comfort and strength. The word "near" in this verse is particularly significant, as it reminds us that God is not distant or detached from our pain. He is not "near" in the general sense of the word, as He is to all men, but rather this speaks of a tender, more intimate nearness. God is intimately present with us, offering us His comfort and care in our most difficult moments. This is an important reminder when it comes to grief, as it can be easy to feel like we are alone in our pain. But the truth is that God is always with us, even in the darkest moments of our lives.

QUESTION:

Talk about a moment when you have experienced the "nearness of God" in your grief.

SCRIPTURE TWO:

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds [healing their pain and comforting their sorrow].

Psalm 147:3 (NIV)

TEACHING TWO:

Psalm 147:3 is a beautiful verse that speaks to the compassionate nature of God. This verse reminds us that God is not only powerful and sovereign, but He is also intimately involved in the lives of His people, especially when they are hurting.

Here we see again a reference to “the brokenhearted.” This time we see that God is not only near to the broken hearted, but he desires to *heal* the broken. When we lose someone we love, our hearts may feel shattered and our emotions may be in turmoil. However, this verse tells us that God is in the business of putting the pieces back together. He understands the depth of our pain and is able to bring comfort and peace to our shattered emotions.

The second half of the verse further emphasizes God's compassionate nature. This phrase, “and binds up their wounds,” suggests that God is not only interested in healing our emotional wounds, but also in mending the brokenness we experience in all areas of our lives. Whether we are dealing with physical, emotional, or spiritual wounds, God is able to bring healing and restoration.

But it's important to note, the healing that God offers is not necessarily a quick fix or a one-time event. Healing is often a process over time, and we need to lean on God's grace and mercy as we navigate that process of the ups and downs of grief. The promise of this verse is that God is with us every step of the way, in the highs and the lows. He is near to the brokenhearted and binds up our wounds. As we lean into the nearness of God's presence and allow Him to minister to us, we can find comfort, hope, and healing in the midst of our pain.

NEW REFLECTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today? What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

CHALLENGE:

This week, when you are feeling overwhelmed with grief, take some time to write a letter to God to share with Him your feelings. Be vulnerable. Tell him your hurts, your questions, your fears. Then ask Him to speak back to you. Sit with Him for a while. Wait on Him. Press into his heart for you. Allow His presence to minister peace.

COMMUNITY:

God has provided the Family of God for encouragement, support, and strength. How do you plan to engage in your church community this week?

JOURNAL:

After expressing yourself to God through the letter, write down whatever you hear — a scripture, a word, a phrase, a feeling. What is He saying or ministering to you? Write out a prayer about grief.

MONTH 5.2 - GRIEF

ICE-BREAKER: Highs, Lows, & Gratitude:

What was your high, low, and gratitude of the week?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

TOPIC: GRIEF

As we've all experienced, grief is a complex emotion that occurs as a natural response to the pain and sadness we feel when we experience loss. We are all unique individuals who experience emotions differently, so there is no "right" way to grieve. Grief can manifest in many ways, including sadness, anger, guilt, anxiety, and a sense of emptiness or numbness. It can also involve physical symptoms such as loss of appetite, difficulty sleeping, and fatigue.

How we walk through grief is influenced by our personal beliefs and values, and our support systems. The process of grieving can be challenging and difficult, but it is an important part of the healing process. It can help us to come to terms with our loss, to accept our feelings, and to find meaning and purpose in our lives moving forward. Though the process is often slow, with time and support, most people are able to navigate through the grieving process and find a sense of peace and acceptance.

QUESTIONS:

If you could compare your grief process to something, what would you compare it to? What picture would you paint to describe it? (waves, climbing a mountain, treading water, walking in the dark, sitting under a tree, etc.)

TEACHING ONE:

Jeremiah 29:11 is a popular scripture we often see printed on mugs and wall art, journals and t-shirts, so it may seem an ill fit for the topic of grief. In fact, we may not even want to hear a verse like that, thinking it somehow downplays the loss of our loved one. But what is so interesting about this scripture is that it isn't just some random happy-go-lucky passage in the Bible. It actually comes after several chapters describing the conquest of the Israelites and their coming captivity. It is found in what some people might consider a "doom and gloom" book of the Bible. Yet, even in the midst of a terrible time for the nation, God assures them that He still has good plans for them. He wants them to know that just because they are facing a difficult time, His overall purpose for the nation has not been thwarted or stopped.

We can often forget in the midst of our grief that God still has good plans for us. The loss of our spouse is tragic and the grief is real, but the truth is that even in the midst of our grief, God still has good things in store for us. This is not the end!

QUESTIONS:

Why is it so hard for us to imagine a good future following a tragedy? Do you believe it is possible for good to come after grief? In what times in your life have you seen something good follow something difficult or negative?

SCRIPTURE:

Surely He took on our infirmities and carried our sorrows; yet we considered Him stricken by God, struck down and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.

Isaiah 53:4-5 (BSB)

TEACHING TWO:

Isaiah 53:4-5 was a prophecy about the suffering that the Messiah, Jesus Christ, would endure on behalf of humanity. These verses speak of Him bearing our sorrows and carrying our griefs, a reference to the immense physical and emotional pain He would experience during His crucifixion.

Through His sacrifice, Jesus took upon Himself the weight of our sin, shame, and sorrow, providing a way for us to be reconciled to God. His willingness to bear the weight of our suffering reveals the depth of His love for us, and it provides a powerful reminder that we are never alone in our struggles.

Isaiah 53:4-5 is a profound reminder that our suffering (physical and emotional) has been taken up by Jesus. He "carried our sorrows" and endured the cross to bring us peace. Whatever sorrow we experience in this life, he experienced as he carried the cross. He understands us. He has already walked the path before us. And he is still walking it with us now.

NEW REFLECTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today? What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

CHALLENGE:

This week, call or text someone from the group and encourage them as they are walking through their grief.

COMMUNITY:

God has provided the Family of God for encouragement, support, and strength. How do you plan to engage in your church community this week?

JOURNAL:

Write down anything you've been carrying that you have been unwilling to give over to Jesus (i.e. bitterness of the loss, anger, fear of the future, heartache, need for control, etc.). By faith, give it to Him and allow Him to do the heavy lifting. Allow Him to replace the heavy burden with His peace.

MONTH 6.1 - PROVISION

ICE-BREAKER: HIGHS, LOWS, & GRATITUDE:

What was your high, low, and gratitude of the week?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

Philippians 4:6 (NIV)

TOPIC: PROVISION

Philippians 4:6 says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." As widows, it can be easy to feel anxious about our financial situation. We may be living on a fixed income struggling to make ends meet and wondering how we will pay our bills. It has the potential to cause a lot of stress and anxiety. However, in this verse, Jesus commands us to cast all of our cares about provision on him.

QUESTION:

What are some anxieties you have felt recently?

TEACHING:

When we feel anxious or overwhelmed about our finances, we can take comfort in the fact that we serve a God who cares for us deeply and is always there to help us in our time of need. We can bring our requests to God with prayer and thanksgiving, knowing that He hears our prayers and will provide for our every need.

Jesus reminds us to do three things when we are anxious: Pray, Ask, and Thank.

PRAY: The first thing he tells us to do when we are anxious is to go to Him. Tell Him about it. Let Him know what is causing the stress.

ASK: Then ask for what we need. Often, we have not because we ask not (James 4:3). We must ask our good Father for what we need.

THANK: Finally, thank Him for the answer. Thank Him for the miracles He has done in the past and for His provision in the present (whether you see it yet or not). Something happens when we begin to focus on gratitude. The big mountain we are facing shrinks next to our even bigger God.

As widows, we may face financial stresses, but we can face them with peace by bringing our requests to God with prayer and thanksgiving. When we do this, we can trust that God will provide for our every need and never leave us or forsake us. It's his promise.

QUESTION:

On a scale of 1-10 how much anxiety have you been carrying lately? On a scale from 1-10 how much time have you spent in prayer? On a scale from 1-10 how much time have you spent giving thanks? Do you see any correlation?

SCRIPTURE:

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air: They do not sow or reap or gather into barns—and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

And why do you worry about clothes? Consider how the lilies of the field grow: They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his glory was adorned like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles strive after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.

Matthew 6:25-33 (NIV)

TEACHING TWO:

In this passage, Jesus reminds us that we do not need to worry about our basic needs because God will provide for us. He puts things in perspective, reminding us that God provides for the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, and if He takes care of them, He will certainly take care of us as well.

Jesus offers us a beautiful promise in this passage: "But seek first his kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." He is giving us a promise here. If we will prioritize our relationship with Him above all else, He will take care of our every need. This does not mean that we will never face financial struggles, but it does mean that we can face them with peace, knowing that God is with us and He will provide for us.

When we are in relationship with Him through prayer and the Word, we gain clarity on what really matters, wisdom for difficult decisions, and peace to handle items that might usually stress us. When we seek His kingdom and His righteousness, He will provide for us in every way possible.

NEW REFLECTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today? What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

CHALLENGE:

This week, when anxiety tries to creep in, take a moment to quiet your heart and follow the three steps from today: Pray. (Bring him your care.) Ask. (Ask him for what you need.) Thank. (Focus your heart on Him and thank him for all the ways you know he has come through in the past.) Then take comfort in the fact that you serve a God who cares for you deeply and is always there to help in your time of need.

COMMUNITY:

God has provided the Family of God for encouragement, support, and strength. How do you plan to engage in your church community this week?

JOURNAL:

Write down one way that you can help provide for someone else this week (i.e. making a meal, babysitting, picking up something from the grocery store, making a care basket, etc.) Then act on that idea. Write out a prayer about provision you either need from God or a prayer of thankfulness for provision He has provided.

MONTH 6.2 - PROVISION

ICE-BREAKER: HIGHS, LOWS, & GRATITUDE:

What was your high, low, and gratitude of the week?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

And [Jesus] told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'"

And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Luke 18:1-8 (ESV)

TOPIC: PROVISION:

Often, one of the most daunting areas for widows is finances. Whether we're going from two incomes or pensions to one, encountering a pile of medical and funeral bills we didn't expect, or facing the daunting idea of stepping back into the workforce, it can sometimes be hard to know how to navigate the new financial burden of losing our spouse.

It can also be difficult to ask for help or seek guidance, but it's important to remember that we are not alone. From gaining spiritual to practical help, we as widows can learn to navigate the complexities of managing our finances alone. While the road ahead may seem overwhelming, there is hope in knowing that there are people and resources available to help us get through the financial challenges we may be facing.

QUESTIONS:

What financial challenges did you face after the loss of your spouse? How did you feel during that time?

TEACHING:

The parable above tells the story of a widow who seeks justice but is continually denied by an unjust judge. The judge is indifferent to the widow's plight and refuses to act on her behalf.

Despite this, the widow persists in her plea for justice, continually coming to the judge and asking him to intervene. Eventually, the judge is worn down by the widow's persistence and grants her request.

This was one feisty widow! We can learn a lot from her gumption and fortitude. She knew what she needed and she wouldn't take no for an answer. In the same way, we as believers must learn to persevere in prayer, even when it seems like we're not getting the answers we need. God honors persistent, unrelenting faith in the face of adversity. And the good news is that we don't serve an unjust judge God who turns a deaf ear to our needs. We serve a *just* God, one who looks out for the orphans and widows, for the marginalized and forgotten. Like the widow in this story persisting in her request for help, we can ask for help from our just God and see Him move on our behalf with compassion and strength.

QUESTIONS:

In what areas do you feel like you need to be more like the woman in this story? What are some practical things you need to do in the area of your finances? (or) What practical or spiritual things have you done in the area of your finances that has helped you in this season?

SCRIPTURE:

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19 (NASB1995)

TEACHING TWO:

Philippians 4:19 is a verse that speaks to the abundance and generosity of God. It is a reminder that God sees our needs and meets them according to His infinite riches and glory.

As widows, even just as women, we can often feel anxious and worried about the future, wondering how we will be able to get our financial, emotional, and spiritual needs met. However, Philippians 4:19 reminds us that we do not have to rely on our own strength or resources. Instead, we can trust in the goodness of God and His ability to provide for us.

God's provision is not limited by our circumstances or limitations. And this scripture doesn't say God will meet *some* of our needs; it says He will meet *all* of our needs. He sees every detail of our lives and knows exactly what those needs are. His provision is not just enough to get by, but it is abundant and overflowing. We can trust in His promise to meet our needs, and we can approach Him with confidence and gratitude, knowing that He is faithful to provide for us.

Philippians 4:19 is a powerful reminder that, no matter what challenges we may face, or how big our need may be, we can trust in God's goodness and His ability to meet them. We must stand confident in this truth: He is our provider and He will provide for our needs.

NEW REFLECTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today? What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

CHALLENGE:

This week, when you experience fear creeping in where your finances are concerned, take a lesson from the feisty widow in Luke 18. Let the enemy know you are not going to walk in fear. Remind yourself and him that you are a daughter of God and that He provides for all your needs. Then do something brave — sow a seed or do something for someone else in need. See what God does with that seed.

COMMUNITY:

God has provided the Family of God for encouragement, support, and strength. How do you plan to engage in your church community this week? Write out a prayer about provision in either a way God has provided or a need you may have.

JOURNAL:

Write out Philippians 4:19 at the top of your page. Then, under it, write down a list of the needs you have right now, no matter how big or small. Pray over those needs and thank God for meeting them. Then each time a need is met, check it off the list as you thank God for taking care of you.

MONTH 7.1 - LOVE

ICE-BREAKER: HIGHS, LOWS, & GRATITUDE:

What was your high, low, and gratitude of the week?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Romans 8:38-39 (NIV)

TOPIC: LOVE:

Paul wrote Romans 8:38-39 to assure the believers in Rome of the unfailing and unending nature of God's love for them. In these verses, Paul spoke of the hardships and trials that believers were facing, including persecution, suffering, and loss. He reminded them that no matter what hardships they faced, no matter what loss they endured, there was one thing that remained through it all — the love of God. Nothing could separate them from that. And nothing can separate us from it either... not the present nor the past, not things we go through in this life nor death, not questions nor frustrations, not highs nor lows. Nothing can separate us from His love.

QUESTION:

In what ways have you questioned God's love in the past?

TEACHING:

When we go through a difficult season, whether that's a sickness, the loss of a loved one, or a financial difficulty, we have two choices. We can run *to* God or run *away* from him. The choice we make doesn't change God's stance. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and his love for us is steadfast and unwavering. His arms are always open. But the choice does affect what we experience in that season. The loss of a spouse brings waves of loneliness, but God offers us a safe haven, a place of comfort and strength. As widows, we may face moments of loneliness, grief, and heartache, but when those moments come, we can face them wrapped in our Heavenly Father's love and surrounded by his sweet peace.

QUESTIONS:

In what ways have you experienced God's love pursuing you in a difficult season? How can we be assured of God's love for us?

SCRIPTURE:

"We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them."

1 John 4:16 (NLT)

TEACHING TWO:

Love is not merely one of God's attributes; it is his very makeup. God is the completeness and perfection of love. The love between a husband and wife is a shadow of the love between Christ and the Bride. No matter how beautiful an earthly love may be, it can not measure up to the pure and perfect love God has for us. God's love is a life-giving, healing force. It is unconditional and unwavering. There will be moments after the death of our spouse when we feel the loss of earthly love. We may even wonder if we will ever feel that earthly love again. In those moments, we can press into that feeling of loss or we can press into the love of God. If we will press into God's love for us, it is possible to experience a love deeper and stronger than any earthly love we have experienced.

NEW REFLECTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today? What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

CHALLENGE:

God is constantly sending "love notes" to us. From a beautiful sunset, to a favorite song, to a reminder from a friend, He loves to pour out his love on us in sweet and unique ways. This week, when you are feeling unloved and forgotten, take a moment to press into God's love for you. Take notice of his "love notes" to you — from the gift of sending his Son, to a beautifully painted sunrise in the morning. No matter how big or small, write these little moments down.

COMMUNITY:

God has provided the Family of God for encouragement, support, and strength. How do you plan to engage in your church community this week?

JOURNAL:

Write a love note back to God. Write out a prayer to God about His love (this can be based on your love note).

MONTH 7.2 - LOVE

ICE-BREAKER: HIGHS, LOWS, & GRATITUDE:

What was your high, low, and gratitude of the week?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

“As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Remain in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will remain in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and remain in His love. I have told you these things so that My joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.”

John 15:9-11 (NIV)

TOPIC: LOVE:

The loss of a spouse can bring about a profound sense of the loss of love, which is especially difficult to bear. For many, our spouse was not only our partner but also our soulmate, rock, and source of affirmation. Losing that kind of love can leave a hollow and empty feeling.

For some, the loss of love can manifest as a fear of never being able to experience that kind of love again. We may feel that the person who was once our everything is irreplaceable, and we may struggle to imagine finding love with someone else. This fear can be particularly acute later in life, when we feel that our opportunities for love and companionship are limited.

Others may feel a sense of guilt or shame over their loss of love. They may wonder if they did enough to show their love and appreciation while their spouse was alive. These feelings of guilt can be especially strong if the death was sudden or unexpected. However, it's important to remember that while the loss of our spouse can be overwhelming, we are not disconnected from love. We can still experience a fulfilling and unconditional love from the very Source.

QUESTIONS:

In what ways did you experience those feelings or concerns about love after your spouse passed? What are some of your feelings or concerns now?

TEACHING ONE:

As a widow, it can be easy to feel alone and disconnected from others. But just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own, we as humans cannot thrive without a connection to a greater source of strength, support, and love. Even when we were married, our spouse could never fully fill our love tank, because there is a love that only God can provide.

The scripture above tells us that God is the true source of joy and love. By abiding in our relationship with Jesus, we have the ability to experience this comfort and love on a daily basis. God can provide the emotional and spiritual support we need to navigate the challenges of life without our partner. Just as a branch draws sustenance and strength from its source of life—

the vine— we as widows can draw strength in life from staying connected to the Source of love, God. We can find hope and joy in His presence. It is here, connected to the Source, that we experience love and joy beyond anything this world, or even a spouse, can offer.

QUESTIONS:

What do you think it means to remain or abide in God's love? How is this different from just "experiencing" God's love?

SCRIPTURE TWO:

"And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

Ephesians 3:17-19 (NIV)

TEACHING TWO:

When we invite Christ into our hearts and allow ourselves to be rooted and grounded in His love, we find the strength to face our challenges each day and overcome our deepest struggles. This is especially important for us as widows who may be dealing with grief, financial difficulties, or feelings of social isolation. By focusing on the love of Christ and the power of His presence in our lives, we can find strength to face those moments when we find ourselves feeling overwhelmed, lost, or forgotten. We can be assured that His love and strength will carry us through.

The passage goes on to speak about the "breadth, length, height and depth" of God's love. This suggests that His love is all-encompassing, reaching every corner of our hearts and minds. Though at times, we may feel broken and shattered, we are reminded that God's love can and will put the pieces of our heart back together as we abide in that love.

Finally, Ephesians 3:19 speaks about being "filled with all the fullness of God." God's love is not just a surface-level feeling, but a transformative force that can change us from the inside out. When we feel lost or unsure of our identity in this new and uncertain season of life, we can trust that God is continuing his work in us. As we abide in Christ and become filled to the measure with the fullness of God, we will experience renewed identity and purpose in Him so we can continue to walk out His beautiful plan for our life.

NEW REFLECTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today? What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

CHALLENGE:

Carve out a "meeting place" to spend time with God each morning. It could be a corner of your couch, a chair on your back porch, or a spot in your closet. Take a cup of hot tea or coffee

with you, a blanket and your journal. Make it a point to spend at least 15 minutes there each morning this week and meditate on the scriptures from today's lesson during that time and what they mean to you in this season.

COMMUNITY:

God has provided the Family of God for encouragement, support, and strength. How do you plan to engage in your church community this week?

JOURNAL:

Each morning this week, write down one thing to pray about, one scripture that stands out to you during your reading, and one thing you are grateful for in your journal. Write out a prayer to God about His love.

MONTH 8.1 - RELATIONSHIP CHANGES

ICE-BREAKER: HIGHS, LOWS, & GRATITUDE:

What was your high, low, and gratitude of the week?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

A thief comes to steal and kill and destroy, but I came to give life—life in all its fullness.
John 10:10 (NCV)

TOPIC: CHANGES:

Grace was a bright-eyed, life-of-the-party, social butterfly. She and her husband were always hosting dinners at their home or getting together with friends for summer lake trips and fall BBQ's. But when Grace tragically lost her husband, Mike, she felt as if the light went out. Getting together with their friends wasn't the same without Mike there. Though the couples rallied around her after his death, she began to feel like the fifth wheel at any gathering. She wasn't sure how to navigate her social life without him. Eventually, Grace started excusing herself from the invites, until slowly the invitations seemed to stop coming altogether.

QUESTIONS:

Talk about what the process of friendship has looked like for you since the passing of your spouse. How do you currently find yourself navigating friendships and activities?

TEACHING:

Learning to navigate life solo is challenging, especially when you are used to doing life with other couples. As a widow, it can be easy to feel disconnected from others without your other half. But God never intended you to live a half-life. The scripture above says that Satan comes to kill, steal, and destroy. In this case it might look like killing your future dreams, stealing your joy, and destroying the life you've built. But God came to give us life in its fullness. Full of joy. Full of peace. Full of healthy relationships.

No matter the enemy's plan, God's purpose still prevails. In this case, through His promise of a full life. God desires that we have a life that is overflowing with his joy, his goodness, and his peace. But he doesn't just *want* us to have it; the scripture says he already *gave* it to us. He took all pain, sickness, and sorrow on the cross, so that we could live a full life here and now no matter what we experience or go through.

So when the enemy tells you *your life is over*, or *it will never be as good as... the same as... as happy as...* you have to put a stop to those lies. The truth is that Jesus came to give you a full life and He never goes back on his promises. It may not look like the same life you had several years or several months ago, but that doesn't mean it can't be just as full and just as beautiful in future seasons as it was in past seasons.

QUESTIONS:

Have you experienced the enemy whispering some of those lies to you in this season? How can we believe to see God's promise of a full life? What are some steps we can take to walk that out?

SCRIPTURE TWO:

"You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever!

Psalm 30:11-12 (ESV)

TEACHING TWO:

When we walk through a season of sorrow, it sometimes feels like we will never get our joy back again. In this scripture, "sackcloth" represents the outward appearance of mourning. Sometimes as widows, we can feel like we dampen every conversation, every interaction, with our heaviness. Like walking into a room with a dark cloud over our heads. Have you ever felt that way? But there is a season for mourning and it's ok to wear your emotions for that season. It is not a burden to your friends, even though you may feel that way. They love you. And they may not have all the answers, or know exactly what to say, but let them know that you just appreciate them being there for you.

Though the loss of your life-partner is not something you ever get *over*, God promises that you will get *through* to the other side of the grief. Your life *will* be full again. He will replace your sackcloth with joy. He will turn your mourning into dancing.

This idea of God turning our mourning into dancing is a beautiful thought. It can be hard, after the loss of our life-partner, to see our friends still dancing together to their everyday rhythms. But when we lose our partner on the dance floor of life, the music doesn't stop. And being a widow doesn't mean that we have to sit on the sidelines. Though the rhythm may be new, the Master Dancer invites us to slowly get back into the dance of life.

In Matthew 11:28, Jesus issues us this invitation: "Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace" (MSG). He first offers us an invitation to take a quiet spin around the floor with Him as He teaches us to find our footing. In time, He may ask us to try a solo dance expressing both pain and praise. Eventually, through the many beautiful and difficult lessons, our dance becomes a dynamic masterpiece of His choreography, bringing joy to all who watch and inviting others to join. Like David, you *will* experience the fullness of the music of life once again. You will get your rhythm back. God will turn your mourning into dancing. And in turn, you may even find yourself teaching others how to dance once again.

NEW REFLECTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today? What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

CHALLENGE:

This week find a worship or praise song that ministers to you. When you feel like your rhythm is out of sync with those you used to spend time with, turn on the song and remind yourself that your dancing isn't over. You will get your rhythm back. God promises He will turn your mourning into joy and your sorrow into dancing. Then text a friend and thank them for any support they have shown you in this time, no matter how minimal it may have been.

COMMUNITY:

God has provided the Family of God for encouragement, support, and strength. How do you plan to engage in your church community this week?

JOURNAL:

Write out any relationships that you have in your life that you didn't have before your spouse passed away. Reflect upon how those relationships have brought positive changes to your life. Write a prayer of reflection to God about the changes in your life and the relationships you are struggling with and also that you are thankful for.

MONTH 8.2 - RELATIONSHIP CHANGES

ICE-BREAKER: HIGHS, LOWS, & GRATITUDE:

What was your high, low, and gratitude of the week?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-11 (NIV)

OPENING PRAYER:

This can be used as a template or a prayer you use at the start of each meeting:

God,

Today, we ask that you open our hearts to receive Your love, peace, and healing through the truth of Your Word, through the comfort of your Spirit, and through the strength of your body the Church. As you hear the cries and questions of our heart, come near, Lord. Help us grow more aware of your Presence. Open our eyes to notice all the ways, big and small, you prove your faithfulness to us. Open our ears to receive your Truth, that we would come to know you more deeply, follow you more closely, and serve you more fully.

In Jesus name,

Amen

TOPIC: CHANGES

The Bible tells us that there is a time for everything, including a time for joy and happiness. At the beginning of our grief it seems impossible to imagine we will feel anything but sorrow ever again, but eventually we discover the beautiful truth that joy does indeed come in the morning. It will not be dark forever. At the same time, we may find that even the thought of moving forward comes with a sense of shame or feeling of betrayal towards our spouse. We may feel guilty for experiencing joy, friendship, or companionship again.

QUESTIONS:

Have you experienced guilt at the idea of moving forward? Have you experienced your friends or family being vocal about your grief? Expound on that.

TEACHING:

As widows, we often find ourselves in a confusing season, not sure if we have mourned long enough or, on the other hand, if we have carried our grief too long. We may find that friends and family have strong opinions on this as well. But in Ecclesiastes 3:1-11, we are reminded that there is a time and a season for everything. This passage tells us that there is a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to keep and a time to release. For those of us who have walked through the loss of our spouse, there is a season for mourning, and there is a season for releasing our grief and moving forward. Through God's guidance we can navigate those seasons.

It's also important to remember that our time on this earth is limited. Ecclesiastes 3:2 tells us that there is a time to be born and a time to die. While losing a spouse can be a painful reminder of our mortality, it can also be an opportunity to reflect on the life we have lived and the legacy we want to leave behind. We can cherish the moments we had with our loved one and still make the most of our days here on earth. In fact, it is one of the best ways to honor them — to live a full and happy life. It's hard to imagine they would want anything less for us.

QUESTIONS:

Is there any specific area right now where you feel guilty about moving forward? Why do you think that is?

How could living a full life, or moving into the next season with an open heart, actually honor our spouses?

SCRIPTURE:

"He is a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age..."

Ruth 4:15 (ESV)

TEACHING TWO:

We find this scripture near the end of the Biblical story of Naomi and Ruth. You'll remember that Naomi, after losing her husband and sons, declared that she no longer wanted to be called Naomi, which means pleasant, delightful, and lovely. She preferred to be called Mara, meaning bitter. But Naomi did not stay as "Mara" forever. The season changed, her joy was restored, and once again she walked in the fullness of her identity and purpose.

Seasons do change. This is something we and those around us must embrace. When it comes to family and loved ones we must be honest with ourselves and others about where we are in the process. We can keep the communication open and clear through love and respect as we prayerfully step forward into the new season when the time is right.

NEW REFLECTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today? What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

CHALLENGE:

Have a conversation with a family member or friend this week about where you are in the grieving process. Do you feel like you are still in the mourning phase or are you in a place where you can see yourself moving forward? Why or why not? Though it may be a difficult conversation, it is an important one to have with the people who love and support you.

COMMUNITY:

God has provided the Family of God for encouragement, support, and strength. How do you plan to engage in your church community this week?

JOURNAL:

Spend some time reflecting on your favorite season. What makes it your favorite? How do you see both beauty and pain in that favorite season? Spend some time writing a prayer to God about your favorite season and the beauty of His creation.

MONTH 9.1- FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

ICE-BREAKER: HIGHS, LOWS, & GRATITUDE

What was your high, low, and gratitude of the week?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

"Your Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."

Psalm 119:105 (KJV)

TOPIC: FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

Life's journey often presents us with the uncertainty of the unknown. Though we may have experienced it numerous times throughout our life — a new city, a new school, a new job, adulthood, marriage, being a new parent — as a widow, facing a future without our beloved spouse can be one of the most daunting scenarios. Yet, in the midst of this uncertainty, we can find solace in God's unchanging character and His promises. When we don't know what the future holds, we can trust that God does know.

QUESTION:

What has been the most daunting fear you've faced in this season?

TEACHING:

When we find ourselves standing at the threshold of the unknown, fear can grip our hearts and cast doubt on our steps. In such moments, when the path in front of us seems dark, God promises that He will light the way for us. We can lean on Him and trust in His Word to lead us step by step through the darkest valleys. He will shine His light on our path and make our way straight.

In the book of Exodus, we encounter the story of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt. As they stood at the edge of the Red Sea, their rescue seemed impossible. Behind them, the pursuing Egyptian army approached, and before them lay the vast expanse of water. Fear filled their hearts as they faced the unknown, but God had a miraculous plan in store.

QUESTION:

In what ways have you felt like you were walking in the dark in this season?

SCRIPTURE TWO:

"Moses answered the people, 'Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.'" Exodus 14:13-14 (NIV)

TEACHING:

What a scary moment that must have been for Moses and the Israelites. Not only did their path look bleak, it looked impossible. And yet, God parted the waters, creating a path through the sea for the Israelites to cross on dry ground. He made a way. He fought on their behalf, delivering them from their fears and leading them to safety. In the face of the unknown, God revealed His faithfulness, demonstrating that He is greater than any uncertainty we may encounter.

Just as God led the Israelites through the Red Sea, He promises to guide us through the unknown territory we face as a widow. He invites us to trust Him wholeheartedly, knowing that He sees beyond the present circumstances and holds our future in His hands. No matter how overwhelming the path in front of us seems, we can be still and know that He is leading the way.

NEW REFLECTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today? What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

CHALLENGE:

This week light a candle during your journal time. As you do, be reminded that just as that candle brings light into your home, God desires to bring light to your path and make it straight.

COMMUNITY:

God has provided the Family of God for encouragement, support, and strength. How do you plan to engage in your church community this week?

JOURNAL:

Write down a couple areas that you need God to shine some light. Then bring those prayer requests to God. Trust that as you take each step He shows you, one step at a time, He will shine enough light for the next one.

MONTH 9.2 - FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

ICE-BREAKER: HIGHS, LOWS, & GRATITUDE:

What was your high, low, and gratitude of the week?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

There Elijah went into a cave and spent the night. The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

1 Kings 19:9-13 (NIV)

TOPIC: FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

Life often brings us to crossroads where the future appears uncertain, a place where we long for guidance and reassurance. As widows, the journey of uncertainty can be especially challenging. We may even find that it causes a paralysis of decision making and an inability to move forward. But in moments of doubt and confusion, we can trust in the faithfulness of God's guidance. His wisdom is far above our natural wisdom and His thoughts are higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8-9). Though the future may look bleak, the truth is, God's plan isn't finished. Our story isn't over.

QUESTION:

What issues have come up recently that have caused anxiety or fear?

TEACHING:

In 1 Kings 19, we find Elijah, exhausted, discouraged, and ready to give up. He was fearful for his life and uncertain of his future. It seemed his ministry, God's miracles, and his purpose had come to an end, so he hid himself away from everyone in a cave. But that wasn't the end of his story. It was there, in the quiet of the cave, that God came to Elijah to give him guidance and a fresh vision. It didn't come like a neon sign in the night sky or a booming voice. It came in the form of a comforting and quiet voice, God's voice, and it was just what Elijah needed to take his next step.

God often speaks to us best in the quiet. As we confront the uncertainties of life, God's guidance is ever-present. We can embrace the promise of His guidance and the assurance that we are not alone. He wants to speak to us. If we will get quiet before Him and ask for His help,

it will come. It may not come in the way we think or at the moment we think, but He *will* move on our behalf when we trust Him.

QUESTIONS:

In what ways can we tap into God's strength and direction in our daily lives? Is there a time recently when you felt God's guidance in an area?

SCRIPTURE TWO:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Acts 1:8 (NIV)

TEACHING:

After Jesus' ascension, the disciples faced a profound period of uncertainty. They were tasked with carrying on the mission Jesus had started, but they were unsure of how to proceed. They longed for His physical presence and guidance, yet Jesus had promised them something remarkable—the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 1:8, Jesus assured the disciples that they would receive power through the Holy Spirit. He encouraged them to step out boldly and become His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Though the path before them was unknown, they were not alone. The Holy Spirit would guide and empower them for the task at hand.

The early chapters of the book of Acts bear witness to the disciples' transformation. As they obediently waited in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit descended upon them at Pentecost, filling them with power and boldness. They preached the Gospel fearlessly, performed miracles, and spread the good news of Jesus Christ throughout the known world.

Just as the disciples faced uncertainty, we too may grapple with questions about the future. But we can take heart, for the same Holy Spirit that guided and empowered the disciples is with us today. God's guidance is not limited by our circumstances or our earthly limitations. He has equipped us with His Spirit to navigate the uncharted paths before us.

In times of uncertainty, we can seek the leading of the Holy Spirit through prayer, God's Word, and listening to His gentle voice guiding us. We can trust that He will guide our steps, open doors for us, and provide the strength and wisdom we need for each day.

NEW REFLECTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today? What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

CHALLENGE:

Take time during your Bible and prayer time this week to listen, even if it's just 5-10 minutes of uninterrupted time. Say, "God, would you speak to me? I desire to hear your heart. I'm listening. Fill me with the power of your Holy Spirit."

COMMUNITY:

God has provided the Family of God for encouragement, support, and strength. How do you plan to engage in your church community this week?

JOURNAL:

Write down what you hear God say to you. Maybe it's a few sentences, maybe it is one phrase, but whatever you think you hear God saying in the quiet of your heart, write it down. The more you practice listening and hearing God's voice, the more easily you will learn to recognize when He speaks to you. As you reflect on these things you are hearing, write out a prayer of reflection and request for guidance on how to move forward with the things He is prompting.

MONTH 10.1- SOLO PARENTING

ICE-BREAKER: HIGHS, LOWS, & GRATITUDE:

What was your high, low, and gratitude of the week?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar [the mother of Ishmael]. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the Desert of Beersheba.

When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes.

Then she went off and sat down about a bowshot away, for she thought, "I cannot watch the boy die." And as she sat there, she began to sob.

God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation."

Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.

Genesis 21:14-19 (NIV)

TOPIC: PARENTING:

As a widow, navigating the journey of single parenting can be challenging. It's difficult to imagine going from team to solo in such an important role. As you shoulder the responsibilities of raising children on your own, it's natural to feel overwhelmed at times. Especially if your children are young, not only are you now handling most of their natural needs like feeding and clothing them, providing for them, and running them to activities, but you are shouldering the responsibilities of raising, directing, and correcting them. Though it may feel like a lot to handle, you are not alone. God's Word provides guidance, comfort, and strength for the unique challenges you face as a single-parent..

QUESTIONS:

Are you currently in the position of raising kids on your own? What has been the most challenging aspect of parenting in this season?

TEACHING ONE:

In Genesis 21, Hagar, a maidservant to Sarah, found herself in the wilderness as a single mother, carrying the weight of caring for her son Ishmael. The circumstances were challenging

and uncertain. With limited provisions, Hagar's heart filled with despair, and she believed there was no hope.

But in her darkest moment, God saw her. He heard Ishmael's cry and called out to Hagar, assuring her of His presence and care. God opened her eyes to see a well of water, providing for their immediate need. He also spoke of a future blessing for Ishmael, assuring Hagar that He had a plan and purpose for her son's life.

In the midst of your own journey as a single parent, remember that God sees you and your children. He hears your cries and understands your fears. Just as He guided and provided for Hagar, He will guide and provide for you and your family.

God's faithfulness doesn't waiver based on our circumstances or relationship status. He remains the same, the ultimate source of strength, comfort, and provision. Seek Him in prayer and place your trust in His promises. He will open your eyes to the wells of provision around you and the opportunities that may be hidden along your path.

QUESTION:

In what ways can you relate to Hagar and her situation?

SCRIPTURE TWO:

"For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, 'Do not fear; I will help you.'"

Isaiah 41:13 (NIV)

TEACHING TWO:

In the book of Isaiah, God speaks tenderly to His people, promising His care and guidance:

"For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, 'Do not fear; I will help you.'"

Isaiah 41:13 (NIV)

Taking someone's hand is usually done as a gesture of love, compassion, comfort, help, or guidance. In the role of a single parent, it's easy to become overwhelmed and fearful of the challenges ahead. However, God assures you that He is with you, taking hold of your hand and offering His help. You don't have to carry the weight of parenting alone. God's strength is made perfect in your weakness. He is in this with you. You can lean on Him for support, knowing that He is a faithful Father who cares deeply for you and your children.

NEW REFLECTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today? What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

CHALLENGE:

This week, when you feel overwhelmed as a parent, imagine God taking you by the hand. Feel his comfort and support. He is with you! If you have children, help them imagine the same scenario. He is a good Father and He is with them. They are not alone.

COMMUNITY:

God has provided the Family of God for encouragement, support, and strength. How do you plan to engage in your church community this week?

JOURNAL:

Write down recent moments when you felt God's strength or support. Be reminded that in the same way He has been there for you, He will be there for your children. Write out a prayer for your children.

MONTH 10.2 - SOLO PARENTING

ICE-BREAKER: HIGHS, LOWS, & GRATITUDE:

What was your high, low, and gratitude of the week?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

"A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families."

Psalm 68:5-6 (NIV)

TOPIC: FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN:

Life often brings us to crossroads where the future appears uncertain, and we long for guidance and reassurance. As widows, the journey of uncertainty can be especially challenging. In moments of doubt and confusion, we can trust in the faithfulness of God's guidance. Though the future may look bleak, the truth is, God's plan isn't finished. The story isn't over.

QUESTION:

What issues have come up recently that have caused anxiety or fear?

TEACHING ONE:

In an earlier devotion, we looked at Psalm 68:5-6 through the lens of God being a protector of widows, but this scripture also promises that God will be Father to the fatherless. As a widow and a single parent, we may feel the weight of both roles resting upon our shoulders. Yet, in the midst of this journey, God reassures us that He will be both a defender and protector for us and a father for our children. We are not uncovered or unprotected. We are loved, guarded, and guided by God.

The psalmist also declares that God sets the lonely in families. While the structure of your family may have changed, God's promise remains steadfast. He is the ultimate source of strength and provision for you and your children. Your family may look different from what you imagined, but God is faithful to provide the love, support, and community you need. You are not alone.

QUESTIONS:

In what ways have you experienced God as your Father recently? As your protector?

SCRIPTURE TWO:

"I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will consider all your works and meditate on all your mighty deeds."

Psalm 77:11-12 (NIV)

TEACHING TWO:

In Psalm 77, the psalmist expresses a deep desire to remember and reflect on the mighty works of the Lord. This passage encourages us to intentionally recall the ways God has acted in our lives and the miracles He has performed in the past. Taking time to remember God's faithfulness can serve as an important source of encouragement and help strengthen our faith as we face new challenges.

In the same way, memories play a significant role in honoring and keeping alive the legacy of our loved ones. Memories connect us to cherished moments and remind us of the impact our loved ones had on our lives. They provide comfort, healing, and a sense of connection even in their physical absence. It is possible to keep their memory alive in a healthy way for our children — talking about favorite or funny moments together, keeping out a cherished momento, hanging some favorite pictures. Joy and pain often come in waves as we reminisce about those we have lost, but so does healing. We can embrace the journey of healing together with our children — the tears, the laughs, the stories. And most importantly, remembering that God is with us through it all.

NEW REFLECTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today? What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

CHALLENGE:

This week, take time to reflect with your children on a favorite family memory. Engage them by asking if they remember certain details. By your example, let them know it is okay to smile and laugh when thinking about those who have gone ahead of us.

COMMUNITY:

God has provided the Family of God for encouragement, support, and strength. How do you plan to engage in your church community this week?

JOURNAL:

Do as Psalm 77 tells us and write down some of the mighty works you have seen God do in your life and others. Start a running list. Then whenever you face something that seems insurmountable, go back to that list. It will help stir up your faith. If God did it before, He can do it again! Write out a prayer of thanksgiving to God for how he has helped you parent through grief.

MONTH 11.1 GRATITUDE

ICE-BREAKER: HIGHS, LOWS, & GRATITUDE:

What was your high, low, and gratitude of the week?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

"I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever."

Psalm 86:12 (ESV)

TOPIC: GRATITUDE:

Laura was struggling to cope with all the extra things that she had to do now that her spouse, Larry, was gone. He had always taken care of all her little needs without her even realizing it. It was the moment that the engine light in her car started blinking that she broke down into sobs for the hundredth time that day. She had always been an independent woman before her husband, and had no problem 'fixing' things for herself, but now she was faced with the realization of all the little things he had done to support her throughout the years when they were married. She wished she had thanked him more for being there for her. In that moment, she decided that though her husband wasn't with her anymore, God was. He was taking care of her, and he deserved her praise and gratitude.

QUESTIONS:

Have there been moments where you were overwhelmed with all the tasks that needed to be completed? What are some things you can choose to be grateful for in those moments?

TEACHING ONE:

One of the best ways to relieve our hearts of the overwhelming weight we face on a daily basis is by choosing to be grateful for the little things in our life. Being grateful can be difficult. In the beginning of our grieving stages it is near impossible, but with God ALL THINGS are possible! We can practice the art of gratitude by starting with something small – a pastor who offers a kind word, a loved one who helps with a project, a friend who brings a token of love and support, or a warm memory that the Lord brings back to our remembrance. In our darkest moments, God is with us. He is taking care of us. Gratitude for the little things opens our heart to reveal all the ways God is looking out for us in this season.

QUESTIONS:

Has there been a moment where it felt like there was too much to carry on your own? How has gratitude helped in those moments?

SCRIPTURE TWO:

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

Phillipians 4:8 (KJV)

TEACHING TWO:

How do we praise in the midst of pain? How can we be grateful in the midst of grief? Paul gives us this key in Phillipians 4:8: Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, *think on these things.*” The thoughts we think will determine the life we live.

Though our grief may be strong, gratitude is more powerful. When we turn our thoughts from what we have lost, what we could have done better, or what we don't have, and instead, put them on things that are filled with gratitude and hope, it reframes our entire situation. Though it may be difficult at first, we can find things to be grateful for in even the hardest seasons. In the next scripture, Paul goes on to say that positive thoughts of gratitude are what will allow us to experience the peace of God. So if you are experiencing anxiety, fear, or hopelessness, be encouraged to press into gratitude. If you can't think of anything to be grateful for, ask Him to reveal something to you. He will. Then allow His peace and joy to fill your heart in that place of thanksgiving.

NEW REFLECTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today? What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

CHALLENGE:

Before your feet hit the floor in the morning or your head hits the pillow at night, think about the things you are grateful for.

COMMUNITY:

God has provided the Family of God for encouragement, support, and strength. How do you plan to engage in your church community this week?

JOURNAL:

Write down 2-3 things that you need to release from the load you've been carrying. Pray over them every morning this week, and watch God work on your behalf to make your tasks easy and lighten the weight of your burdens. Write out a prayer that you keep with you and pray everyday to God.

MONTH 11.2- GRATITUDE

ICE-BREAKER: HIGHS, LOWS, & GRATITUDE:

What was your high, low, and gratitude of the week?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

Matthew 26:26-28 (NIV)

TOPIC: GRATITUDE:

Bri walked around the house, closing all the window shades as evening approached. The party had been a success and she had pulled off the surprise triumphantly. But now, once again, she found herself alone in the big house. It felt like too much space for just one person, and when the lights died down, the emptiness felt all-encompassing. Left alone once again, she made her way to the living room and sat in his chair. She hadn't removed it. In fact, she hated that chair when her husband had purchased it, and had threatened him several times to throw it out when he wasn't looking. But now it was the item that made her feel the most connected to his memory. "Lord," she cried, "please take this cup of pain from me," and she wept. After a while, looking up with tear-stained eyes she quoted, "Not my will, but Yours be done. Thank you that no matter what I walk through, You are with me. I'm grateful for the comfort of your Presence." Then she turned on some worship music and began to meditate on God's goodness as she started the party clean-up.

QUESTIONS:

Have you ever had that moment of feeling surrounded with people, but completely alone at the same time? In moments like those, how can we turn our hearts towards gratitude?

TEACHING ONE:

There Jesus was, holding up the bread, waiting for the disciples to quiet down. There was a stillness in the atmosphere that sent a hush over the lingering conversations. On the evening of Passover, Jesus was preparing to give thanks to God. Knowing that he was about to be betrayed by his friends, beaten by his enemies, and abused by those he came to save, Jesus gave thanks. He paused three times during that meal to thank God for all that He had done in the past and everything he was preparing to do for the future of humanity.

This whole story shines a beautiful light on Jesus' sacrifice. With complete abandon of will, Jesus put his life back into the hands of God. He exemplified the culture of thanksgiving by remaining in a state of gratitude for the simple privilege of obeying his Father and fulfilling the mission that he had been given.

QUESTIONS:

What types of questions do you think Jesus would have faced after feeling abandoned by his disciples?

Has there been a moment when you were able to use worship as a source of gratitude in the middle of your battle?

How can you apply more worship and gratitude in your life?

SCRIPTURE TWO:

Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NLT)

TEACHING TWO:

In 1 Thessalonians 5:18 challenges us to have an attitude of gratitude, no matter what circumstances we may find ourselves in. It's easy to give thanks when things are going well and we feel blessed, but it's much harder to give thanks in the midst of trials, hardships, and difficult situations.

However, this verse reminds us that giving thanks is not just a suggestion, but it's actually God's will for us. When we give thanks in all circumstances, we are demonstrating our faith in God's goodness and sovereignty, even when we can't see or understand what's happening around us. We can trust that God is working all things together for our good and His glory.

Furthermore, cultivating an attitude of gratitude helps us to stay grounded in God's love and grace, even in difficult times. It helps us to focus on the positive and see the good in every situation, even if it's just a small glimmer of hope. When we give thanks, we are also reminded of all the ways that God has blessed us, and our hearts are filled with joy and peace.

Let us therefore strive to give thanks in all circumstances, trusting that God is with us and working in our lives, even when things are tough. May our hearts be filled with gratitude and praise, as we seek to live in God's will and honor Him with our lives.

NEW REFLECTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today? What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

CHALLENGE:

Take the cards you have been given and write down some gratitudes ("I am grateful for..."). Place the cards around your house this week. Put them in places where you can see them like your bathroom mirror or the refrigerator. Read them outloud each day to remind yourself that God is taking care of you. Watch the posture of your heart flourish in gratitude.

COMMUNITY:

God has provided the Family of God for encouragement, support, and strength. How do you plan to engage in your church community this week?

JOURNAL:

Start a gratitude section in the back of your journal where you can jot down all the things you are grateful for throughout this year, from a hot shower, to a sweet conversation with a neighbor, to a great podcast. Try to see how long you can get the list. Write out a prayer of gratitude to God (nothing requesting, just things you are thankful for).

MONTH 12.1 GIVING OUT

ICE-BREAKER: HIGHS, LOWS, & GRATITUDE:

What was your high, low, and gratitude of the week?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

Then Hannah prayed and said, "My heart rejoices in the Lord! The Lord has made me strong. Now I have an answer for my enemies; I rejoice because you rescued me. No one is holy like the Lord! There is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.

1 Samuel 2:1-2 (NLT)

TOPIC: GIVING:

Your voice matters. You can help pave the way for understanding and support for yourself and others by sharing your experiences, both through your stories of pain and of praise. Openness to share with others can combat isolation, empower fellow widows to seek help, and foster a sense of unity within the widowed community. Your stories are important.

Your unique gifts and abilities are also important. Have you always been a great cook? A fabulous host? Do you love to garden, sew, or refinish furniture? Do you know how to tell great stories? The gifts that you have are meant to be shared with others. So don't be afraid to share your heart, your stories, your gifts, or your talents. The world needs the uniqueness of you!

QUESTIONS:

When was there a moment you felt impressed to give something that was precious to you? How did you feel when you were asked to give it? What happened after you gave it up?

TEACHING:

Giving over a loved one into the Lord's hands is one of the most difficult sacrifices. Yet, Hannah, not only executed this task given to her, she gave in such a way that it is a beautiful example to us still today.

In this story from 1 Samuel, we find Hannah unable to bear any children of her own. In anguish, she cries out to God to give her the thing she desires most in all the world – a child. The Lord, in his mercy, blesses her womb with a baby boy, Samuel. But when the time comes, she is asked to give her most precious son back to God in order to fulfill her promise and the Lord's will. Hannah could have wept again for the loss of her child, but instead she chose to generously fulfill this task with a heart full of joy! So much so that she cried out once again, but this time, with a sacrifice of praise!

It's possible that this would have been the type of story Mary would have clung to when she had to trust God in giving over her son, Jesus, to the cross. Can't you see her referencing this story to console her burdened heart in those dark days after her son was laid in the tomb?

Yielding over this type of precious gift –a life – with an attitude of praise, and trusting in the plan of the One who has blessed you with it in the first place is a precious thing to the Lord.

QUESTION:

Why is it important to give a sacrifice of praise when you feel like you don't have anything to give? When have you done that recently? What did that do for you?

SCRIPTURE TWO:

Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

2 Corinthians 9:6-8 (NIV)

TEACHING TWO:

2 Corinthians 9:6-8 is the key to having what we need in every season. As Christians, we are not only called to be sacrificial with our praise, but to be generous with our resources whether that be through our time, money, or talents. This passage reminds us that when we give generously, with the right heart, we will also *reap* generous blessings from God.

It's easy to hesitate to give generously out of fear that we won't have enough for ourselves, or fall into the trap of thinking that we need to hold onto our resources tightly in order to ensure our own security and well-being, But when we give freely and generously, we show that our trust is in God, not in our own wealth or resources. It is this trust and generosity that allows God to shower us with his blessings.

So let's be generous with our resources, giving cheerfully and without reservation, trusting that God will provide for our needs and bless us abundantly as we seek to do His will. Not only will we see God's provision in our life, but we will also experience the joy that comes from giving.

QUESTION:

What is the difference in giving because God is leading you to do so, versus giving out of obligation?

NEW REFLECTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today? What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

CHALLENGE:

Find a way to give a sacrifice of praise this week. It may be singing a song out loud, calling up a friend to buy them lunch and chat, making a meal for someone, writing an encouraging note, or giving away something precious to you. Ask the Lord what He would have you do.

COMMUNITY:

God has provided the Family of God for encouragement, support, and strength. How do you plan to engage in your church community this week?

JOURNAL:

Write out a prayer or song of sacrifice and praise.

MONTH 12.2 GIVING OUT

ICE-BREAKER: HIGHS, LOWS, & GRATITUDE:

What was your high, low, and gratitude of the week?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah: "Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food." So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, "Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?" As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread."

"As surely as the Lord your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die."

Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land.'"

She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah.

1 Kings 17:7-16 (NIV)

TOPIC: GIVING OUT:

The act of giving, even in times of lack, is an essential aspect of the Christian life. Jesus Himself taught us the importance of giving when He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). When we give, we create a ripple effect that can positively impact the world around us.

However, the true power of giving is not just in what it does for others, but also what it does for us. It helps to cultivate a sense of gratitude, empathy, and compassion within us. It reminds us of the things that truly matter in life and helps to shift our focus away from our own problems and towards the needs of others.

Giving can also be a transformative experience, especially when we give, even when we are the ones in lack. It can help us to shift our mindset from one of scarcity to one of abundance. It reminds us that even in our times of need, we still have something valuable to offer whether it is our time, our skills, or even just a listening ear to someone in need.

QUESTIONS:

Talk about a time when you gave out to someone else and it brought you energy and joy? Why was that the case?

TEACHING ONE:

Hungry, weary, and scorched from the journey, Elijah had been given specific directions from the Lord to visit a widow in Zarephath. There was a great drought in the land, and when he arrived in the city there she was –hungry, weary, and hard at work collecting sticks for her last meal. Both exhausted from the stresses of life placed upon them, both weary in spirit, both in need. It was like looking in a mirror. And yet, God brought the two of them together.

The widow had nothing but a handful of flour and a bit of oil. Elijah had nothing but a Word from God. However, even in the midst of their exhaustion, they both gave everything they had! In that moment, God used each as a conduit of His provision for the other. Their obedience and sacrifice led to blessing and refreshing.

QUESTIONS:

Have you ever found yourself in a situation like Elijah and the widow of Zarephath? What did the Lord ask you to give, and what was your blessing in return for that obedience?

SCRIPTURE TWO:

He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless. Even youths will become weak and tired, and young men will fall into exhaustion. But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength.

Isaiah 40:29 (NLT)

TEACHING TWO:

When we feel like we're too emotionally exhausted to get up, let alone give out, Isaiah 40:29 reminds us that we can turn to God for strength and renewal. He promises to give strength to the powerless and power to the weak.

We're told in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 that God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. In our struggles and trials, God is able to provide us with the supernatural strength and resources we need to overcome. We can find comfort in knowing that we don't have to rely on our own strength alone, but can lean on God's strength to carry us through. Because He gives his strength to us, we can give to others.

So when you feel like you don't have the emotional capacity to give out, cling to this scripture. It is a promise of divine assistance and empowerment for those who trust in Him. Then step out in faith and see God meet you.

NEW REFLECTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today? What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

CHALLENGE:

What is one way you can give out this week in the midst of your need? If you can't think of anything specific, take a minute to ask God to reveal one thing you can do in order to make room for obedience and blessing.

COMMUNITY:

God has provided the Family of God for encouragement, support, and strength. How do you plan to engage in your church community this week?

JOURNAL:

Write down 2-3 things that are causing you to feel weary in this season. Pray over them each morning, and ask God to help you find a way to begin the process of obedience in the area of giving.