

overflowing *with hope*



**STAND IN THE GAP MINISTRIES**

*WIDOWS SMALL GROUP LEADER GUIDE*



*This study is dedicated to every woman who has faced the unimaginable loss of her husband and found the courage to begin again. May you know that even in the broken places, hope still flows. Your strength matters, your story matters, and you are deeply seen, profoundly loved, and never alone.*

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Dear Beautiful Leader,

Welcome to the second curriculum, Overflowing with Hope. We are so grateful that your group has joined us on this journey of Hope. We have been praying over you, your group, and your study throughout the creation of this curriculum.

Our prayers are many, but can be summed up with one: the prayer for more hope. We want your group members (and yourself) to end this study with more hope and the realization that we all still have a purpose, a passion, and a calling on our lives, even after becoming widows.

We also recognize that this study may not always be easy to lead through. There may be tears, there will be hard topics discussed, and there may be moments of extreme vulnerability. We know that God, His goodness, and His desire to show up in your group and be part of this journey, will be ever-present carrying you and your group.

We also want you to feel equip to lead this study. Many of you have already led through the first curriculum. You will see many things that have a similar format, however, we spent lots of time and lots of prayers deciding what should be changed and altered. We pray these changes will help as you lead.

Please refer to the ministry guide in the small group section for some helpful pointers, tips, and insights. We have provided helpful lightbulb reminders for you in each lesson, but you are always able to reach out to the widows team with any questions or concerns as you lead through this curriculum ([widows@sitgm.org](mailto:widows@sitgm.org)).

Lastly, we want to thank those of you who shared your hearts and stories in this study. They were/are truly the backbone of what God allowed us to create. You are showing others how to journey on with HOPE!

Love and prayers,  
Stand in the Gap for Widows Team

## Hope Score Survey #1:

<https://hopescore.com/hope-score/>



Why in the world are we asking you to do this survey to start a small group Bible study? We want you to see where you are in your hope journey and help get you to a place of overflowing with hope. We hope you will ultimately end this study with a higher hope score.

For now, just plug the above website into your phone, or use the QR code below, answer a few questions and then write your scores below.

Agency Score: \_\_\_\_\_

Pathway Score: \_\_\_\_\_

Total Score: \_\_\_\_\_

"With the Adult Hope Scale, scores of 40 or above put an adult in a hopeful category. Scores above 48 bump you up to a higher level of hope. Scores of 56 or higher make you a high hope person. Scores below 40 put you in a low hope category. Don't panic if you have low hope right now in your life. It just means you have work to do. Our guess is that if you have low hope in your life, it will not surprise you. It might mean you lack willpower, it might mean you lack waypower, or it might mean you lack both. Fret not. There is a pathway to increasing willpower and waypower."

-Hope Rising



*Leader:*

It is important we start in prayer. You can pray, or ask someone in your group to pray, but always open in prayer.



## Lesson 1.1

# *What is Hope?*

### **ICE-BREAKER:**

What was your high, low, and gratitude this week?

### **SCRIPTURE:**

<sup>1</sup>“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup> through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup> Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup> perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup> And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”

Romans 5:1-5 (NIV)

## STORY:

As the primary caregiver to my husband for 35 years, after his diagnosis of early onset Parkinson's Disease, the future at times looked pretty bleak. When his illness first manifested, we had four children ranging in age from 1 to 10. God's hope got me through a lot of tough times. God has provided to me such a sense of peace and joy in the present, and has surrounded me with friends and purpose. My husband had been progressively ill for so long, that I didn't have the shock and numbness that some of my friends have experienced with sudden loss. However, I was actually surprised at how raw I felt. When he passed, I lost my identity as a caregiver and my purpose. Suddenly I didn't know what to do with myself or all my time! But God's peace gave me hope as to what was next in my new phase of life. "Hope" is a word that just says to me there is more joy out there for me, don't give up. Each year I ask the Holy Spirit to give me a word and a verse for the new year. Many years my word was hope, and usually the verse was Romans 15:13, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

-A fellow widow

## LESSON:

### ***Q:What theme(s) do you see interwoven through the above story?***

I see hope. She said that God's hope got her through a terrible diagnosis and years of battling a terrible disease. So, what is hope? Is it just a feeling in our gut? A greeting we say to someone when wishing them well or is it more than that? As we dive into this study, we are going to learn that hope isn't something we feel or believe into existence, we have a lot more to do with having hope than we think. We are going to discuss many aspects of hope, how to get it, and what it is. As people of faith, we understand that our hope is deep and has the power to change our lives and our futures.

Our above story is not unique to a widows group, but what is unique is that as a follower of Christ, we turn to Him with our pain and agony, and then ask him for hope. In our verse today, we learn that our suffering produces perseverance, perseverance produces character, character produces hope, and ultimately a reminder that God loves us and is walking with us, no matter what. He is creating something new in you and through your journey of grief. He is creating hope. In order for us to have hope and understand what it is, we have to put the work in and believe that God will move us through the stages from perseverance, to character, to hope in our grief journeys.

### ***Q: Do you feel like you are hopeful for your future? Why or why not?***

"Hope is the belief that your future can be brighter and better than your past and that you actually have a role to play in it."

-Hope Rising

## FOLLOW - UP QUESTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today?

What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

## CLOSING QUESTIONS:

***"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Romans 12:12 (NIV)***

How have you been joyful in hope?

How have you been patient in affliction?

What have you done to be faithful in prayer?



## *Dear Leader.*

This is your first week, so don't be discouraged if your ladies are slow to open up. Provide examples from your own life and lead through the lesson together.

Close in prayer. If you have time, share prayer requests or use the closing questions, highs, and lows as prayer requests. Remind your ladies to do their journaling that is provided below, this week.

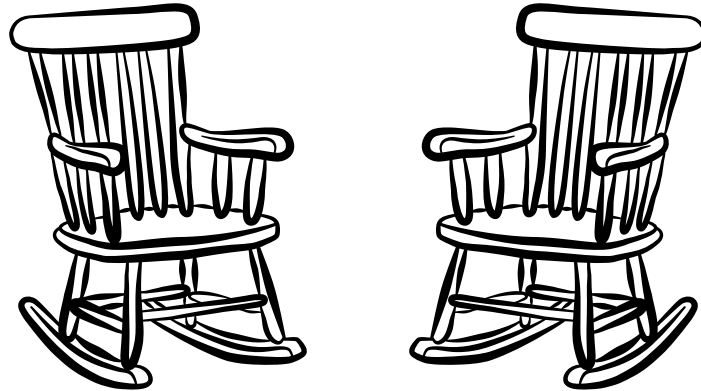
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*Leader:*

It is important we start in prayer. You can pray, or ask someone in your group to pray, but always open in prayer.



## Lesson 1.2

### *What is Hope?*

#### **ICE-BREAKER:**

What was your high, low, and gratitude this week?

#### **SCRIPTURE:**

"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."

Hebrews 11:1 (NIV)

"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)

## STORY:

I think hope is the idea or feeling that your situation is not going to stay the same, that there is something good to come. We just seem to know what hope is. But when asked to tell you what it means - that is harder. For me, at least, it is kind of intertwined with faith. I have faith in my God - He is also my hope. He is who I believe in for my day to day and for my future. Hope was a part of my journey as a widow from the very beginning. Having grown up in a Christian home and having lived my life as Christian - my hope has always been in Jesus. In His return, in knowing that He loves and cares about me, in understanding what He did for me in dying on the cross. So when my husband died, the constant hope that I had in Jesus, did not go anywhere. But it gave me something to stand on and believe in. Of course there were days when I struggled with my faith - and the "why" questions and not understanding why God would allow me to be in that current situation. But even through all of that - my foundation was in Christ and I never quit believing. I somehow knew that if I didn't want to live in a state of grief for the rest of my life - Jesus was the answer. I had to put my hope and trust in Him that he would provide when I needed it and He had something planned for my life. My life was no longer going to look like the plans I had in my mind, plans to grow old with my husband and all of the things we had talked about together. My life was going to look different.

-Deanna at Ron's Way Widows Ministry in Bethany, Oklahoma

Pathways: "The strategies or roadmaps individuals identify to pursue their goals."

-Hope Rising

## LESSON

In our last meeting we introduced hope and had you take the hope survey. We pray you spent some time looking at and thinking about those scores.

***Q: If you are comfortable, share your score with your group. Does your score surprise you? Why or why not?***

As we move forward in this study, we will be continue to talk about what true hope is and how we can do our part to gain hope. On the hope survey, you will see you have a willpower/agency score and a waypower/pathway score. In simple terms, we need both to increase our hope score. We must have our own personal drive, determination and willpower to find hope again, but we also must have ways and paths to get there. We must not only want to have more hope, we also must know how to get more hope. Being in a group like this, and finding community with others who have faced loss, is definitely a pathway towards hope. If your score is lower than expected, don't lose hope! In the above story from Deanna, we see a few important and key things to focus on. First, she associates hope with faith (Romans 11:1). She didn't understand why her husband passed, but she knew that God was with her and had faith in Him. She also focused on the future that God still had for her (Jeremiah 29:11) and that pointed her towards hope. Her situation hadn't changed, but she still had hope, faith, and a belief that she had a future.

Maybe this concept of hope is foreign to you as you sit here thinking about your spouse that died. Maybe you've always just believed you either had hope or you didn't. Maybe you have never realized that you play a part in improving your hope. Maybe you think, I truly don't understand hope or why my score is low, but I have faith that God is going to do something as I start the study. We pray you are ready to gain more hope and increase your faith. God is working in and through your journey and He isn't done with you!

Willpower: "The ability to dedicate mental energy to begin and sustain to complete goals."  
-Hope Rising

### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today?

What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

### CLOSING QUESTIONS:

***"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Romans 12:12 (NIV)***

How have you been joyful in hope?

How have you been patient in affliction?

What have you done to be faithful in prayer?



## *Dear Leader.*

Going into this second week, try to listen to the hope scores that are shared. You might mentally make note of who has a low score. Try to be very aware of them through this study.

Close in prayer. If you have time, share prayer requests or use the closing questions, highs, and lows as prayer requests. Remind your ladies to do their journaling that is provided below, this week.





## Lesson 2.1

### *Hope to Cope*

#### **ICE-BREAKER:**

What was your high, low, and gratitude this week?

#### **SCRIPTURE:**

"And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast."

I Peter 5:10 (NIV)



*Leader:*

It is important we start in prayer. You can pray, or ask someone in your group to pray, but always open in prayer.

## STORY:

My husband was not what you would call a sickly person but he did have some health issues that made some things not always easy sailing. We were not just a couple, we were best friends and did everything together. That meant not just vacationing together, it meant we did yard work together, we attended functions together, and attended church together. When one of us would be leading a project, the other was the right-hand person and we supported each other in everything. I knew that because of my husband's health and his family background that it may be very likely that he would pass before me. We didn't discuss this much, nor really have a definite plan, but my husband was a type of planner and organized so whether we really realized it at the time or not, we did have a plan. Our faith was strong in the Lord and I knew that when that day came I had the one who would guide me. My husband did pass away very unexpectedly so there was no asking him what his wishes were or what I should do....I had to jump in and move forward. Starting that early morning in the ER hallway my first reaction was just to call on the name of "Jesus". I used my hope and faith that had proved earlier it was dependable. I realize now looking back on those days, which could have been really emotional and stressful, that God had already put in place a Christian nurse that was there and prayed with my husband in the hospital, a hospital Chaplain that was right by my side at the hospital, a great home, car, and job, along with the best family and friends to support me. I never doubted that God would provide daily for me. I took the attitude and mantra of "one day at a time". My hope and confidence was that God would lead me through and He has. God and my faith and hope continues to carry me from one day to the next. I plan ahead for some things, but I certainly do not become stressed out over what my future will be. I lean on my hope and faith.

-Jean at Life.Church in Springfield, Missouri

"Hope is a choice every day."

-Hope Rising

Stress, a word that most of us don't like or even truly understand. Do you realize that stress causes us to react in some very expected ways, no matter what the situation is that causes our stress? We are wired to fight or flight, freeze, fawn, sweat, yell, or pick up a habit that helps us "cope."

***Q: How do you react when you are stressed?***

You know what a better reaction to stress is? More hope! That may sound laughable, especially for those of us that have faced awful loss and death head-on. How can having hope counteract the effects of stress? It all goes back to the way our amazing God created us. When we are stressed, we may be wired to react with fight or flight, or other physical reactions, but we are also wired to be able to start focusing on positive outcomes and beliefs that things will get better.

When we are able to start believing and having hope again, it can actually help us cope with whatever we are facing.

***Q: How does the idea that hope can counteract and help you cope with stressors make you feel?***

Our verse today is a true roadmap to show us that God may allow us to suffer, but He also has plans to restore us. This is what hope means. No one wants to go through suffering, stress and pain, but if we have hope that things will improve, we can get through it. No one wants to suffer. No one wants to go through the losses we've been through, but just like Jean shares above, each day is a new day and if we take each one as they come, and believe that God is going to restore us, we can learn to have hope and handle the stresses that come our way.

Fight: "Responding to threat by aggressively confronting or standing up to it."

Flight: "Escaping or avoiding danger by physically removing yourself from the situation."

Freeze: "Becoming immobile or unable to act when faced with a threat."

Fawn: "Trying to please or appease the threat to avoid conflict or harm."

-Simply Psychology

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today?

What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

CLOSING QUESTIONS:

***"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Romans 12:12 (NIV)***

How have you been joyful in hope?

How have you been patient in affliction?

What have you done to be faithful in prayer?



## *Dear Leader.*

This lesson may bring to light some tough things. You are not a counselor, but if someone is not okay, use the resources we've provided to get them help or reach out to the widows team.

Close in prayer. If you have time, share prayer requests or use the closing questions, highs, and lows as prayer requests. Remind your ladies to do their journaling that is provided below, this week.



# Lesson 2.2

## *Hope to Cope*

### **ICE-BREAKER:**

What was your high, low, and gratitude this week?

### **SCRIPTURE:**

- <sup>1</sup> "I lift up my eyes to the mountains—  
where does my help come from?  
<sup>2</sup> My help comes from the Lord,  
the Maker of heaven and earth.  
<sup>3</sup> He will not let your foot slip—  
he who watches over you will not slumber;  
<sup>4</sup> indeed, he who watches over Israel  
will neither slumber nor sleep.  
<sup>5</sup> The Lord watches over you—  
the Lord is your shade at your right hand;  
<sup>6</sup> the sun will not harm you by day,  
nor the moon by night.  
<sup>7</sup> The Lord will keep you from all harm—  
he will watch over your life;  
<sup>8</sup> the Lord will watch over your coming and going  
both now and forevermore."

Psalm 121: 1 - 8 (NIV)



*Leader:*

It is important we start in prayer. You can pray, or ask someone in your group to pray, but always open in prayer.

## STORY:

The word "hope" can mean a lot of things; however, considering my perspective (a grieving heart) whether it's spiritual, emotional or intellectual, I sense all the above from time to time, but primarily I act on the spiritual perspective when I think of hope. I know I hold onto hope through my relationship with Jesus Christ, who works all things together for my good and is the author & finisher of my faith. Hope for me, from this perspective, gives me the anticipation I'm not in this emotional battle of loneliness, loss, and disconnection by myself with no hope of my emotional state improving or even recovering (like from an injury). Hope shows up daily for me and I have come to realize hope and help have a mutual relationship. My husband and I went annually to the National Parks just to recharge and recover from life's drag on our own lives. I came across this passage one year in Psalm 121: "I will lift up my eyes unto the hills; Where does my help come from? It comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven & earth". I've never felt so much hope in my life as from this passage and I have stood on this ever since, in every circumstance.

- Debby at South Tulsa Baptist Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma

## LESSON:

During our last session, we discussed how hope and looking to the future can help us cope with stress. We all will face stressors in this journey, so knowing how to cope with them, can be beneficial.

**Q: *How did you implement what we learned about stress from our last session? When you were stressed, were you able to start thinking about hope and God's plan for you and your future?***

Another vital aspect of hope and its impact on the stress we face, is knowing that we have pathways to get through the stress. We know that you will face stress each and everyday, we all will, but knowing how to get through that stress, with hope, is important. Debby shares in her story that when she learned to use the verse from Psalm 121 to look up and find help from God and through that, she was able to find hope. God's help in this journey is one of the most important pathways to providing hope and healing. We must learn to trust in Him daily and ask Him for the help only He can provide.

**Q: *When you are stressed, feeling lonely or hopeless, do you turn to God? Why or why not?***

"Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all the darkness."

-Bishop Desmond Tutu

So, if God is our Helper and we know that having hope will help us through stress, why do we still struggle in this journey? It all goes back to week one where we talked about perseverance, character, and hope. I often use the phrase, "you have to get through the pain, to get through the pain." This can be a hard reality to face, but for those of us that have lost a spouse, it is the reality. This is why it is important to have hope in the face of stress. This is why it is also so important to turn to God as our helper in our stress and pain. He has promised us a hope and future, walking the journey is part of that path towards hope.

## FOLLOW - UP QUESTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today?

What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

## CLOSING QUESTIONS:

***"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Romans 12:12 (NIV)***

How have you been joyful in hope?

How have you been patient in affliction?

What have you done to be faithful in prayer?



## *Dear Leader.*

Keep pressing on, being vulnerable, and sharing your heart. Don't be discouraged if some people are still not opening up.

Close in prayer. If you have time, share prayer requests or use the closing questions, highs, and lows as prayer requests. Remind your ladies to do their journaling that is provided below, this week.

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*Leader:*

It is important we start in prayer. You can pray, or ask someone in your group to pray, but always open in prayer.

## Lesson 3.1

# *How does Trauma Influence our Hope?*

### **ICE-BREAKER:**

What was your high, low, and gratitude this week?

### **SCRIPTURE:**

<sup>1</sup> "As the deer pants for streams of water,  
so my soul pants for you, my God.  
<sup>2</sup> My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.  
When can I go and meet with God?  
<sup>3</sup> My tears have been my food  
day and night,  
while people say to me all day long,  
"Where is your God?"  
<sup>4</sup> These things I remember  
as I pour out my soul:  
*how I used to go to the house of God  
under the protection of the Mighty One  
with shouts of joy and praise  
among the festive throng.*  
<sup>5</sup> *Why, my soul, are you downcast?  
Why so disturbed within me?  
Put your hope in God,  
for I will yet praise him,  
my Savior and my God."*

Psalm 42:1-5 (NIV)

## STORY:

I know what it is like to have your world fall apart in front of you yet have to keep getting up and going throughout the day because your kids need you to do it. I know how it feels to just want to call life off and just lay in bed or say, "Who cares? It doesn't change things if I don't do anything. It doesn't matter. I don't matter." I know what it is like to believe the lies that satan is telling you. More importantly, I know the love of our Father in heaven. I know that HE wants me to love others as He does. I know that His word says to "Care for the widows and orphans."

-Cindy at Life.Church in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

## LESSON:

Take a second to look at the definition of trauma below. Sometimes when we face the loss of a spouse, we don't classify it as trauma. Maybe the loss was expected or maybe there weren't necessarily "traumatic" circumstances. I think it is important to understand that this type of loss is indeed a trauma. I say all that, because many times we want to compare our suffering and believe it isn't that bad. To truly find healing, you cannot compare and fall into that trap. We are all on different journeys of grief.

***Q: Do you believe what you went through with the loss of your spouse was "trauma?" Why or why not?***

In the above story from Cindy, we see her facing the pain and trauma the way many of us do. Thinking about giving up, giving in, and not moving forward towards hope. Many of you may have had the exact same thoughts today. I think it is important to recognize that those thoughts and feelings are perfectly normal. Whenever we face trauma, we can have a desire to want to give up, give in, and not move forward. This is where hope becomes instrumental in healing. When we can find hope again, we can start to find healing from our trauma.

***Q: Do you have days like Cindy's? What do you do when you want to just to say, who cares? How can your group help you when you have those days?***

"Trauma results from an event, series of events or set of circumstances that are experienced by an individual as physically and emotionally harmful or threatening."

-Hope Rising

Today's scripture is one of my favorites, and so applicable for trauma and finding hope. I love the imagery of the deer panting for water, just like my soul pants for God. When you are in a place of loss and trauma, it is hard to have any hope. It literally feels like every breath is like running a marathon.

These verses remind us to cry out to God, to thirst for Him, to go to His place for worship and strength. And finally to remember that He is our hope. Walking through trauma is a process. Hope doesn't come immediately and you will have those days where you think nothing you do will matter and you want to give up. That's your trauma speaking. Hold on, dig in, and move towards hope.

\*\*It is important to recognize you have faced a trauma. It is also important to recognize that trauma impacts your ability to have hope and it is vital to not just skip over this part. If you feel your soul staying in that place of hopelessness, we want you to get the help you need and it may be more than a small group. Seek help, to find hope. (Reach out to your leader(s) for resources. We have provided some resources at the end of this study and at the end of this lesson).\*\*

### FOLLOW - UP QUESTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today?

What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

### CLOSING QUESTIONS:

***"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Romans 12:12 (NIV)***

How have you been joyful in hope?

How have you been patient in affliction?

What have you done to be faithful in prayer?



## *Dear Leader.*

This week we are talking about trauma. It can be a hard and triggering topic. Listen to the ladies and make sure they get the resources they need to deal with their trauma.

Close in prayer. If you have time, share prayer requests or use the closing questions, highs, and lows as prayer requests. Remind your ladies to do their journaling that is provided below, this week.

# Find a Grief Therapist



Scan the QR code, or type this link  
into your search bar.

<https://bit.ly/GriefSITG>

We recommend...

- Search "EMDR certified"
- Search "Christian"
- Try out different therapists until you find the right fit.
- Therapy will only get you as far as you allow it to. Be vulnerable and open.





*Leader:*

It is important we start in prayer. You can pray, or ask someone in your group to pray, but always open in prayer.

## Lesson 3.2

# *How Does Trauma Impact Our Hope?*

### **ICE-BREAKER:**

What was your high, low, and gratitude this week?

### **SCRIPTURE:**

<sup>35</sup> *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."*

<sup>37</sup> *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*

<sup>38</sup> *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup> 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 8:35-39 (NIV)

## STORY:

My philosophy is that hope is a decision a person makes toward a desired outcome. Hope is not passive. A person must decide to employ hope, and that is the first domino that sets everything in motion. When a widow decides FOR hope, she decides FOR her future, and she's deciding not to let life happen TO her.

-Alette at Lake Mary Church in Lake Mary, Florida

## LESSON:

In the last session, we talked about the fact that the losses we have faced are indeed traumas. Another thing we know about trauma and the obstacles it puts in place is that trauma can cause avoidant goals. Avoidant goals are simply goals that are made to avoid negative outcomes. After the loss of a spouse, these are typical and quite normal. We are afraid. Life is in chaos and everyday we have to make hard decisions, so we may make goals, but often these goals avoid things, especially the tough things related to our trauma. The avoidant goals are also obstacles for us to be able to increase our hope.

As I said, these type of goals are normal in trauma, but at some point, you must move forward from avoidant goals. You must start to make approach goals. Approach goals are made to achieve positive outcomes and achieve something desired.

***Q: Do you tend to set avoidant goals or approach goals? If you are unsure, think about the last goal you set, was it made to simply avoid a bad situation or to achieve a positive outcome?***

Examples: Avoidant goal - "I won't go the grocery store, I will just order food or go through a drive thru, because the grocery store makes me break down and cry. I guess this will just be my new normal, at least I'm eating again."

Approach goal - "I struggle with going to the grocery store, but I want to be able to go and get the things I need and not get overwhelmed with emotions and all the people who are there. I also want to start making nutritious meals again. I will go once a week, at lower crowd times, and not allow myself to leave until I've gotten everything I need."

Why do we discuss setting goals and the importance of those in regards to hope? Because as we mentioned early on, hope involves not just wanting to have it, but actually taking steps to get there. When faced with a trauma, your ability to make decisions and set goals is impacted and in order to move forward in this journey, we need to learn how to make goals and develop those pathways towards hope. Hope is possible again, in spite of the trauma and tragedy you have faced.

***Q: What is one approach goal you can set this week? How will you make sure you follow through? Do you need accountability from your group? If so, who will you ask to hold you accountable?***

"Hope has two beautiful daughters; their names are Anger and Courage. Anger at the way things are, and Courage to see that they do not remain as they are."

-Augustine of Hippo

#### FOLLOW - UP QUESTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today?

What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

#### CLOSING QUESTIONS:

***"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Romans 12:12 (NIV)***

How have you been joyful in hope?

How have you been patient in affliction?

What have you done to be faithful in prayer?



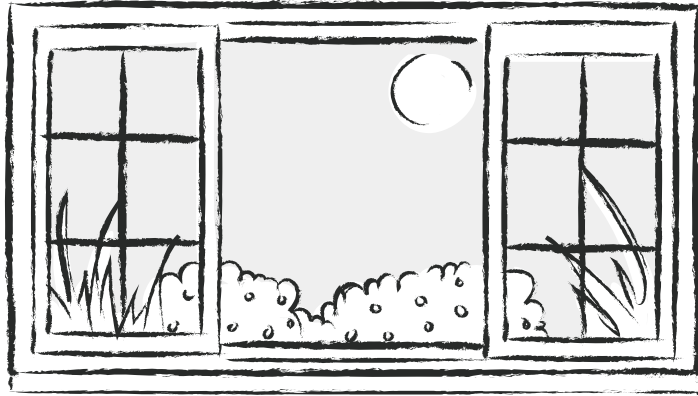
## *Dear Leader.*

If you have an example of how you made goals and understand the different types of goals, please share. This concept and the importance of it, may be hard for some to grasp.

Close in prayer. If you have time, share prayer requests or use the closing questions, highs, and lows as prayer requests. Remind your ladies to do their journaling that is provided below, this week.

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## Lesson 4.1

### *Survival Window*

#### **ICE-BREAKER:**

What was your high, low, and gratitude this week?

#### **SCRIPTURE:**

<sup>2</sup> "Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup> Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

Hebrews 12:2-3 (NIV)



*Leader:*

It is important we start in prayer. You can pray, or ask someone in your group to pray, but always open in prayer.

## STORY:

Hope is knowing that God is walking with me each step of the way. It is a quiet confidence that even when life is hard, I can make it through because of God's promises to me. I know He is not done with my story and I know he is turning my ashes to beauty.

-Cindy at Life.Church in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

## LESSON:

Everyone who has navigated the path of grief, regardless of where we find ourselves in the process, understands that many individuals shy away from the complexities and sorrow associated with death and the grieving individuals left behind.

A lot of people may anticipate that we will have moved on well before we feel prepared to do so, and they often do not realize that we may still be facing challenges. Many are unsure of how to assist us, what words to offer, or that our need for ongoing support persists long after they have moved forward in their lives. This is often where our pain and struggles in widowhood manifest.

***Q: Did you experience people expecting you to move on long before you were ready? How did this impact your grief journey?***

In regards to hope, the season of grieving is actually scientific. We know the stages of grief are part of the journey, but have you heard of the survival window? This is the actual time where we will not feel hopeful. It is a time where we are supposed to grieve and allow our pain to be there. It is a time where our focus isn't on hope, but instead on working through our pain and grief and allowing ourselves to simply feel the feelings and pain that come.

***Q: Did you know that the survival window is part of the grieving?***

The survival window is an important part of this journey, but it is not one we stay in. In the next lesson, we will talk more about moving forward from the survival window and how important that step is. Cindy talks above about making it through because of God's promises to her. She was reminding herself that even in her survival window, God was still working to bring her hope.

"To be fully human, we need to experience the vast range of human emotions in our life."

-Hope Rising

***Q: Do you feel like in your survival window you still were able to find hope in God's promises? Why or why not?***

Our verses today, talk about us fixing our eyes on Jesus, who is the author and perfecter of our faith. When we think about Jesus and the pain he endured, it can give us hope to know that nothing we face is not something He can't understand, including our grief.

"Hope is a bridge between the impossible and the possible."

-Joseph Bellezzo, M.D.

#### FOLLOW - UP QUESTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today?

What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

#### CLOSING QUESTIONS:

***"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Romans 12:12 (NIV)***

How have you been joyful in hope?

How have you been patient in affliction?

What have you done to be faithful in prayer?



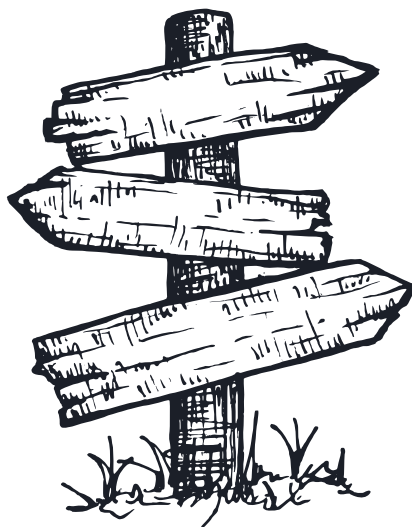
## *Dear Leader.*

Be vulnerable and open about your survival window and what you learned during that time.

Close in prayer. If you have time, share prayer requests or use the closing questions, highs, and lows as prayer requests. Remind your ladies to do their journaling that is provided below, this week.

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## Lesson 4.2

### *Survival Window*

#### **ICE-BREAKER:**

What was your high, low, and gratitude this week?

#### **SCRIPTURE:**

"But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me."

Micah 7:7 (NIV)



*Leader:*

It is important we start in prayer. You can pray, or ask someone in your group to pray, but always open in prayer.

## STORY:

Since I lost Greg, hope has looked different than I ever imagined it would. It didn't show up all at once. If it had, that would have overwhelmed me. It was subtle and quiet, moving me forward as I could handle it.

It showed up in the early days, when it felt like getting out of bed was going to be impossible for that day. Yet, I knew that God was with me and that His plan for me may look different than I thought it would, but HE was going on my journey with me.

It was a daily thing that moved me forward.

-Cindy at Life.Church in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

## LESSON:

In our last lesson, we focused on the survival window and the important part of the grief journey that it plays. This week, we will expand on that idea, but also talk about the very important next step ahead past the survival window.

In order to move forward in our journeys and past the survival window, we must learn how to cope and move towards hope. The reason we believe so strongly in widows ministry, is this concept. The groups we lead, the ministry our church provides, and all the things that are done to support those going through loss, are ways for us to find hope again. It is the core of why we are meeting here in this small group today.

"Hope is the belief that a thriving future is possible and you have the power to make it so."

-Hope Rising

***Q: Share how the widows ministry or this group has impacted your hope.***

The ability to cope, find hope, and move forward in this journey, depends a great deal on you and your hope as well. Let's think back to week one and our hope survey. Are your scores low? If so, this concept of you playing a huge part in your own hope, maybe a hard pill for you to swallow. Are your scores high? Then you may already understand this concept. No matter where you are in your hope journey, I want to remind you that you do play a part in bringing hope into your life.

***Q: Do you believe you play a part in how hopeful you are?***

Cindy talks in her story today about hope showing up slowly to not overwhelm her. She talks about listening to God and His plans for her. She talks about her future looking different than she thought it would. And she talks about it being a daily journey. All of her words are so true when we are moving in this journey. It is a daily struggle. It is a choice and it is a reality that your life will look different. Our verse today, reminds us that we put our hope in God and we wait for Him.

No matter where you are in this journey or in moving forward past the survival window, you have a God that loves you, cares for you, and is working to provide you hope. Do your part, trust in Him and take small steps everyday.

**Q: Share one way you saw God provide you hope this week.**

"We want to give every person hope. We must give hope, always hope."  
-Mother Theresa

### FOLLOW - UP QUESTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today?

What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

### CLOSING QUESTIONS:

***"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Romans 12:12 (NIV)***

How have you been joyful in hope?

How have you been patient in affliction?

What have you done to be faithful in prayer?



## *Dear Leader.*

This lesson is about moving past the survival window. Make sure you share the hope you have found and what God has done in your life.

Close in prayer. If you have time, share prayer requests or use the closing questions, highs, and lows as prayer requests. Remind your ladies to do their journaling that is provided below, this week.

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# Lesson 5.1

## *Community and Hope*

### **ICE-BREAKER:**

What was your high, low, and gratitude this week?

### **SCRIPTURE:**

<sup>9</sup> "Two are better than one,  
because they have a good return for their labor:  
<sup>10</sup> If either of them falls down,  
one can help the other up.  
But pity anyone who falls  
and has no one to help them up.  
<sup>11</sup> Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.  
But how can one keep warm alone?  
<sup>12</sup> Though one may be overpowered,  
two can defend themselves.  
A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."  
Ecclesiastes 4:9 - 12 (NIV)



*Leader:*

It is important we start in prayer. You can pray, or ask someone in your group to pray, but always open in prayer.

## STORY:

I knew I was to start a Widows Ministry the first day I went to church without my husband. I got to the curb of the sidewalk on the front of our church and froze. I truly didn't think I could go in alone. I didn't want to go alone. Thankfully, our host team is trained to watch for those struggling to enter, and a very kind woman gently took my arm and helped me step up onto the sidewalk, got me some tea, and found me a seat. I wasn't crying, or sad, or upset...I was just frozen. She didn't ask why, didn't ask my name, but just said "Let me help you." She was such a good example of how to help widows. We don't need questions, we don't need to identify the problem, we just need someone to give us a helping hand in the hard moments without having to explain. As I sat through the church service alone, I chatted with God and told Him I never wanted a woman alone, regardless of why she is alone, to sit in a pew by herself. From that little chat, the ministry grew into the widows program.

-Neta at Life.Church South Broken Arrow in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma

## LESSON:

This story by Neta and how she decided to move into helping others and build a widow community is the key to all of our studies of hope. In all the studies of hope, you will hear again and again how important community is to hope. Hope doesn't happen in isolation, it needs others to encourage, push us, and move us from our pain into hope.

***Q: Who has helped you the most in your journey of grief?***

As we talked about during the survival window sections, we must personally take the steps towards our own healing, but our healing starts to truly begin in community. Community is biblical. Community is core to who we are created to be as human beings. Think back to the year 2020 and Covid-19. Think about how that effected our society and world. Why was it so impactful? Because we lost community. Because hope and healing don't happen in isolation, we all need community. You are part of this group because someone recognized your group needed to exist because widows need community.

***Q: What does this widows community mean to you?***

In our verse today, we read that two are better than one, because when one falls down, the other is there to pick them up. I don't believe there are many places that this idea holds more true than in a widows group. When we have that bad day, we can be there to pick each other up and carry each other's burden.

I pray that the group you are sitting in provides that type of community for you. This community exists to provide that place of growth and ultimately lead you to hope. You have taken the most important steps in your hope journey, by allowing yourself to be a part of a community.

## FOLLOW - UP QUESTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today?

What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

## CLOSING QUESTIONS:

***"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Romans 12:12 (NIV)***

How have you been joyful in hope?

How have you been patient in affliction?

What have you done to be faithful in prayer?

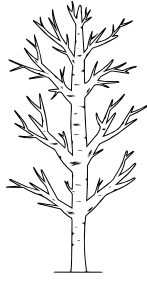


## *Dear Leader.*

Share with your group what this community means to you , and how it has impacted your journey. Or share a story of another community God brought into your life.

Close in prayer. If you have time, share prayer requests or use the closing questions, highs, and lows as prayer requests. Remind your ladies to do their journaling that is provided below, this week.





## Lesson 5.2

# *Community and Hope*

### **ICE-BREAKER:**

What was your high, low, and gratitude this week?

*“Connectedness is the single best predictor of hope.”*

**-Hope Rising**

### **SCRIPTURE:**

<sup>24</sup> “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Hebrews 10:24 - 25 (NIV)



*Leader:*

It is important we start in prayer. You can pray, or ask someone in your group to pray, but always open in prayer.

## STORY:

When my husband passed, I had no widowed friends at all. All my closest friends and family were married. I was seeking relationships with others who were where I was and who had been on this journey. Off topic, but related: when I had a newborn later in life, my first born was already in school and all my closest friends had their kids in school, too. It was lonely being home again alone with an infant when no one else I knew was in that place, so I joined a play group of infants with the hope of finding another older mom with whom I could relate. I did. She too had older school age kids and suddenly found herself home again with an infant. We became good friends. It just helps to have others who are in the same place as we are. It's someone to understand.

-Jan at West Side Church in Yakima, Washington

## LESSON:

Take a moment to read the the quote at the top of the last page. Spend some time thinking about what it truly means. Being connected and in community give us the best chance at moving forward towards hope. What an astonishing perspective.

***Q: What do you think about the importance of connectedness from the above quote?***

Last session we talked about two being better than one, and the importance of having community to help us get to a place of healing. Community helps us in so many more ways. It provides a gateway towards hope and in the verse from Hebrews we see that community spurs us on towards growth, and how we love others and do good. When we have the right people surrounding us, they encourage us to be the best version of ourselves, and we do the same for them.

***Q: Reflect on the closest friend you have. Share with others in your group how important that friendship has been for spurring you on towards love and good deeds. If that person is in this group, share that with others, if you are comfortable.***

I mentioned that community plays a part in our healing and the quote we read shares that community is a key factor in finding hope. An important part of this widow community is being vulnerable with the people God has placed in our community. We have to be honest about our struggles. We have to ask for accountability when we are struggling, and as the verse in Hebrews says, we must spur each other on and not quit meeting together. We need each other in this journey and for each of us that has faced loss, we know that having others makes all the difference, but we must show up for each other. We must be there when we are having bad days. It is a relationship that requires continuous honesty and support. If we can provide that to each other, we can have healing, hope, and be blessed to move forward in this journey towards all God wants us to be.

Jan needed people that understood her journey and she found those people, and through those relationships, she has allowed God to use her to lead a group and help other widows. That is how you advance through the journey, and it shows the vital role community plays in our journey to hope.

#### FOLLOW - UP QUESTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today?

What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

#### CLOSING QUESTIONS:

***"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Romans 12:12 (NIV)***

How have you been joyful in hope?

How have you been patient in affliction?

What have you done to be faithful in prayer?



## *Dear Leader,*

What you are doing here by creating a community is providing hope. Be open today, with your group, and remind them how thankful you are for this community of hope.

Close in prayer. If you have time, share prayer requests or use the closing questions, highs, and lows as prayer requests. Remind your ladies to do their journaling that is provided below, this week.

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# Lesson 6.1

## *Hope and Grief*

### **ICE-BREAKER:**

What was your high, low, and gratitude this week?

### **SCRIPTURE:**

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you."

Deuteronomy 31:6 (NIV)



*Leader:*

It is important we start in prayer. You can pray, or ask someone in your group to pray, but always open in prayer.

## STORY:

I know grief. I know my glass wall moments where grief blindsides me and immobilizes me momentarily. I also know to walk through those moments with my Heavenly Father who is proving so, so good to me! I love the opportunity to share this with others as they experience widowhood in their own lives. Even when the circumstances seem dire and the pain of loss is overwhelming, God is faithful. He will see me THROUGH, if not shield me from the pain. It is the knowing I am not alone in the journey that fills me with hope. The Lord has promised He will never leave me or forsake me.

Therein is my trust, my hope!

-Robyn at Christ Church on Harvard in Tulsa, Oklahoma

## LESSON:

When we walk through the grief journey, it is definitely a journey that seems full of pain, sadness, tears, new fears, old fears, and an unknown future. It doesn't seem to be filled with hope. As we learned previously, when we are in our survival window, the focus may not be hope, but the goal is to eventually get to a place of hope.

Our other goal, like Robyn shares, is to get through those grief moments, knowing that God is walking alongside us. The art of grieving, is the grieving part. The working through from the beginning moments of trauma and shock. The survival window where you face each day as it comes, and then eventually allowing yourself to learn to make goals again and take steps forward. Grief and hope can co-exist. There can be moments where you hit the wall of grief, cry the tears, take a moment to be sad, and allow the emotions to come, and then move forward.

***Q: What do you do when you have those moments that grief hits you? Do you allow the grief to come or try to push it away?***

Our verse today is that great reminder of how God is walking with you. He was walking with Joshua into the unknown, and I'm sure Joshua was afraid and leery of what the future would hold. However, God gave Joshua hope, just like He gives you and I hope in our grief. We have to put our trust in God, allow Him to lead us through our grief, and move us towards hope. We are never, ever alone in this journey, and that gives us the hope that we can take the next step towards God's new plans for our uncertain futures.

## FOLLOW - UP QUESTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today?

What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

## CLOSING QUESTIONS:

***"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Romans 12:12 (NIV)***

How have you been joyful in hope?

How have you been patient in affliction?

What have you done to be faithful in prayer?



## *Dear Leader.*

If you are a widow, share today, how you handle those hard moments when grief hits you. Be open with your group, to provide a safe space for them to share.

Close in prayer. If you have time, share prayer requests or use the closing questions, highs, and lows as prayer requests. Remind your ladies to do their journaling that is provided below, this week.

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## Lesson 6.2

# *Hope and Grief*

### **ICE-BREAKER:**

What was your high, low, and gratitude this week?

### **SCRIPTURE:**

*<sup>23</sup> "Yet I still belong to you;  
you hold my right hand.*

*<sup>24</sup> You guide me with your counsel,  
leading me to a glorious destiny.*

*<sup>25</sup> Whom have I in heaven but you?*

*I desire you more than anything on earth.*

*<sup>26</sup> My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak,  
but God remains the strength of my heart;  
he is mine forever."*

Psalm 73:23-26 (NLT)



*Leader:*

It is important we start in prayer. You can pray, or ask someone in your group to pray, but always open in prayer.

## STORY:

It took me a long time to see that life could be good without him. That my life could have meaning and the world would begin to turn again. But again my hope isn't in people or things. My hope comes from a place that is so hard for those who don't have it to understand. I have been diagnosed with a tumor in my ear/brain, and while I don't want this, I have a calm about it. I also think about how much different things would be if Albert were here and we would be fighting this together. And just as I am feeling so alone in my "mess," my phone rings or I get a text or I read a scripture that settles me back down and focuses me on Jesus and not this "mess" I find myself in. And the times I feel so alone and I think, poor pitiful me, that God took Albert and now what else does He want to take I remember He wants it all. All of me. So I breathe deep and wait for the next time He will send me a message. Because He will, and I'm listening.

-Jo at Trinity Worship Center in Burlington, North Carolina

## LESSON:

Last session we discussed how hope and grief can coexist. This week we heard a beautiful story from Jo about not only how she has faced the loss of her husband, but also how she has faced additional health challenges. I personally know Jo and when she walks into the room, she brings an immediate smile to your face and she is one of the kindest, most tenderhearted people I've ever met. She walks this journey with grace and dignity and challenges me to be the best version of myself that I can be, and she leans into God and His strength.

***Q: Who are the Jo's in your life who you have seen walk through hardships and still point others to Jesus? Have you told them how grateful you are for them? If not, do that this week.***

Jo's story is truly not about Jo, but instead it is about our lovely and generous Heavenly Father. It is about the hope we have in Him. You see when we face grief, pain and loss, we can lean out or lean into our hope. We can choose to allow Him to have all of us, some of us, or none of us. We can desire Him more than anything else like our verse says, and allow Him to work in our lives no matter what grief or pain we face. Or we can just give a little part of ourselves and hide the rest away from Him.

We can pretend to be okay around others. We can decide to not pour our pain and heart out to God and those He puts in our life. We can choose to not grieve and work through our grief. I hope that isn't what you want, and it may sound extreme, but many of us do that. Many of us don't work through our grief. We are ashamed of our tears and our pain, and so we never move towards hope.

What I want you to know, is that is NOT what God wants for you. He wants your pain. He wants your hurts. He wants your heart and most importantly He wants ALL of you. The good, the bad, and the ugly. Our grief can move us towards hope and even coexist with our grief, but we must do the work, and we must trust that God has the best plans for us.

*Q: Do you feel like you've allowed God and others into your journey of grief? Where are you in the process of allowing hope into your grief journey?*

FOLLOW - UP QUESTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today?

What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

CLOSING QUESTIONS:

***"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Romans 12:12 (NIV)***

How have you been joyful in hope?

How have you been patient in affliction?

What have you done to be faithful in prayer?



## *Dear Leader.*

If you have a Jo in your life, share about that person, with your group. Continue to encourage your ladies to open up and share.

Close in prayer. If you have time, share prayer requests or use the closing questions, highs, and lows as prayer requests. Remind your ladies to do their journaling that is provided below, this week.

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## Lesson 7.1

### *Faith, Grief, and Hope?*

#### **ICE-BREAKER:**

What was your high, low, and gratitude this week?

#### **SCRIPTURE:**

<sup>6</sup> "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in Him, <sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."

Colossians 2:6 - 7 (NIV)



*Leader:*

It is important we start in prayer. You can pray, or ask someone in your group to pray, but always open in prayer.

## STORY:

To me, hope is EXPECTANCY - that I will see Jesus, that I will be with my Ron in heaven, that my life here going forward will be fulfilling and enjoyable, with friends and travel and adventures, that I will grow more like Jesus with each hour of Bible study and sharing in which I participate. Even immediately after losing Ron I was not ever hopeless, because I knew that I was being held by God, seen by God, and was known by God. Lonely, definitely, but never hopeless. This journey we take after the loss of a spouse is difficult, but it is normal, natural, and necessary - if we don't face and endure the loss, we will never get past the loss, and that would be like another death of a life waiting to be lived.

-Leslee at Life.Church in Ft.Worth, Texas

## LESSON:

We recently did a widows retreat focused around these verses in Colossians. It was a vital passage for the leaders, like Leslee, who attended, because when we are faced with loss, our faith can and will be impacted. Our roots and how deep our faith is, will be an integral part of how we move forward towards hope. Leslee sums this all up so well in her idea of hope because she knows and believes God's plan is greater than hers, and she expectantly has the hope and faith that she will see her husband again. If you are rooted in Christ and believe in what He is doing in your life, you can face all of the challenges of the grief journey with hope, but it isn't always easy.

Faith often requires pruning to build our roots, and lead us back to hope. It requires going through seasons of questions, doubts, whys, and ultimate trust that God knows what is best. Just like a gardener taking care of a beautiful flower, God knows exactly what we need to grow our roots deep and be firmly planted in Him and sometimes (often!) the pruning is painful.

***Q: How has your faith been impacted since the loss of your husband? Do you feel like you have deeper roots, or do you still feel like they need to grow?***

Every single person who has faced pain, will say their faith has been impacted by the pain. If they don't, they are either lying to themselves or you. Faith is believing in what we cannot see, and when we don't have our husbands walking beside us, we must have faith to know where they are, but also faith to know that God is the one carrying us now. Each day is a journey of faith. Each day is a new commitment to live in and through God and allow Him to carry you, when you feel alone, scared, or faced with the many, many unknowns of widowhood. If we allow Him to do so, God will grow our roots deeper, our faith stronger, and will give us hope for a future and all He has in store for us.

***Q: What is one way you have seen God carry you this last week?***

***Q: Do you feel like you've allowed God and others into your journey of grief? Where are you in the process of allowing hope into your grief journey?***

## FOLLOW - UP QUESTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today?

What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

## CLOSING QUESTIONS:

***"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Romans 12:12 (NIV)***

How have you been joyful in hope?

How have you been patient in affliction?

What have you done to be faithful in prayer?



## *Dear Leader.*

As you talk about having roots, in Christ, you may have ladies who recognize they aren't growing deeper. You may want to spend some time talking with them and seeing how you can support their growth.

Close in prayer. If you have time, share prayer requests or use the closing questions, highs, and lows as prayer requests. Remind your ladies to do their journaling that is provided below, this week.

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## Lesson 7.2

### *Faith, Grief, and Hope?*

#### **ICE-BREAKER:**

What was your high, low, and gratitude this week?

#### **SCRIPTURE:**

*<sup>3</sup>Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup>perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup>And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.*

Romans 5:3-5 (NIV)



*Leader:*

It is important we start in prayer. You can pray, or ask someone in your group to pray, but always open in prayer.

## STORY:

Hope is the essence of my relationship with Jesus. No matter how dark, impossible, sad, gut wrenching, hopeless, and lonely a season is, I know that Jesus is with me, and He can do what man cannot. With our wonderful Creator, there's always an answer when we don't know it, provision when we can't see it, comfort when we can't feel it, and joy even in the midst of pain. He is our hope and our rock and I believe He is the only Truth. So every new day is a new beginning in which I see the potential for His hand to make everything new and turn the the impossible to possible! Jesus is my hope and my future as well as the one who intercedes for me now as He washes me clean with His blood. He opens up doors I didn't even see and gives me the strength and grace to walk through them covered with His favor not because of who I am but because of who He is. Hope in Him is what gives me the courage to seek His will without fear.

-Neta at Life.Church in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma

## LESSON:

In the first week, we brought up this scripture from Romans. Since it's such a key verse for our grief journey, we thought it was worth sharing again. It really captures what faith looks like during tough times. We can grow and deepen our understanding through our struggles, as long as we let ourselves experience the process. As we talked about in the last lesson, God wants to strengthen your roots and enhance your faith in Him. The next crucial step in nurturing those roots is to let God guide us, and help us grow on this journey. That's what our verses today are all about. To deepen our relationship with God, we need to take it step-by-step.

A lot of you might look at Neta's story and think, I wish I had a relationship with Jesus like that, but I'm not there yet. Don't lose hope; Neta didn't reach that point overnight, and neither do we. It's through suffering that we move from perseverance to character to hope. This journey culminates in hope, which is what we hear from Neta, but getting there is a process.

When you reflect on your own journey, you might notice that your faith hasn't yet reached that hopeful stage, but I'm sure you can recall times when you persevered. When you felt like giving up and succumbing to the pain, yet through your faith in God, you pushed through. I'm also sure you can see the character that God has shaped in you throughout this journey. Grief inevitably transforms us, and the qualities God is refining in you are now a part of how you live and how you love.

Maybe you haven't reached the hope stage that we talk about in the verse or encourage you to aim for in each study, but you are making progress. Grief is a distinct journey that can change us, as long as we let our faith in our Heavenly Father and the path toward hope unfold.

***Q: What are one or two new character qualities that God has developed in you since your spouse's passing?***

**FOLLOW - UP QUESTIONS:**

What new perspective did you gain today?

What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

**CLOSING QUESTIONS:**

***"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Romans 12:12 (NIV)***

How have you been joyful in hope?

How have you been patient in affliction?

What have you done to be faithful in prayer?



## *Dear Leader.*

We know God has developed character in you because you are leading this group. Don't be afraid to share those characteristics with your group and share your journey.

Close in prayer. If you have time, share prayer requests or use the closing questions, highs, and lows as prayer requests. Remind your ladies to do their journaling that is provided below, this week.

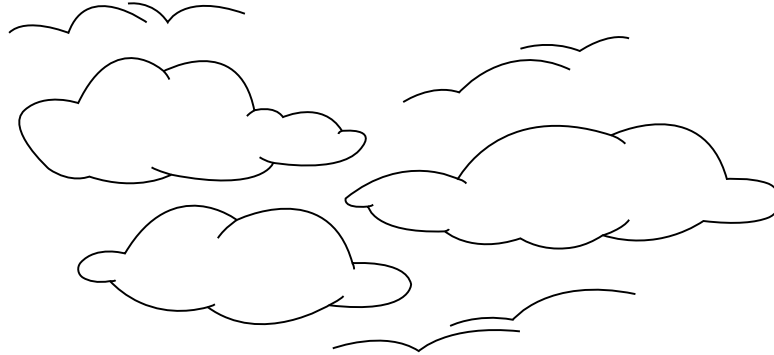
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*Leader:*

It is important we start in prayer. You can pray, or ask someone in your group to pray, but always open in prayer.



## Lesson 8.1

# *What Happens When You Get Stuck?*

### **ICE-BREAKER:**

What was your high, low, and gratitude this week?

### **SCRIPTURE:**

*<sup>1</sup> "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, <sup>2</sup> fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

*Hebrews 12:1-2 (NIV)*

## STORY:

The hope He gave during my mourning and the hope He continues to give, gives me a life with a different purpose than I had. The hope and strength of pulling me out of the murky swamp I would fall into often with my grief. Without hope, I would not be where I am now with my grief. I have learned I cannot live in the past if I desire God to move me forward. Only Jesus gives this kind of hope.

-Debbie at Life.Church in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

## LESSON:

You may have been going through this small group Bible study and like most people, comparing your journeys to those in your group or the stories from other widows that we've been reading. You may be thinking, I'm never going to feel hopeful again. I know I'm responsible for taking steps towards hope, but I just feel stuck. Unfortunately, being stuck is something that most of us on this journey will face at some point. You see grief is a sneaky thing. Just when you think you've gotten past something, you see it in your path again, and you feel like you are frozen in that space, and that you will always be battling that one part of your journey.

As Debbie shares today, she struggles to not allow herself to fall into the murkiness of grief and that is an everyday step you have to take. Each morning, reminding yourself that today is a new day and you will press in and push forward. Debbie also offers us insight into the importance of not living in the past. We can't go back to our old lives and we can't stay in our pain and grief forever. We have a Heavenly Father who is cheering us on, while walking beside us, and often carrying us. He does not want us to get stuck in the same cycle of grief, over and over again.

He also is a compassionate Father who knows that some days, the tears will come and the pain will be too much. When you face your husband's death date, birthday, wedding anniversary, Father's Day etc., the pain will most likely come and sometimes it will overwhelm you, but the important thing is taking the next step.

In the journey of widowhood, many people get stuck because they want to look backwards and stay in their past life, but have you ever tried to go on a walk looking behind you and walking backwards the whole way? If you have, you know how impossible it is. Our verse today, tells us to run the race marked out before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus. If you choose to run this journey with your eyes fixed on Jesus, you will not be able to stay stuck.

***Q: What areas of your life do you feel stuck in right now? Are there areas you feel that you are looking backwards in when you instead need to be fixing your eyes on Jesus?***

## FOLLOW - UP QUESTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today?

What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

## CLOSING QUESTIONS:

***"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Romans 12:12 (NIV)***

How have you been joyful in hope?

How have you been patient in affliction?

What have you done to be faithful in prayer?



## *Dear Leader.*

Be mindful of people comparing where they are, in their journeys, with where others are. We don't want anyone to feel discouraged or like they aren't moving towards hope.

Close in prayer. If you have time, share prayer requests or use the closing questions, highs, and lows as prayer requests. Remind your ladies to do their journaling that is provided below, this week.

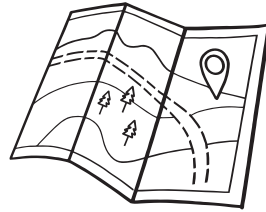
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*Leader:*

It is important we start in prayer. You can pray, or ask someone in your group to pray, but always open in prayer.



## Lesson 8.2

# *What Happens When You Get Stuck?*

### **ICE-BREAKER:**

What was your high, low, and gratitude this week?

*“Like any journey, your goal requires a map that can provide the detailed pathways of the many different roads that lead to your goals.”*

**-Hope Rising**

### **SCRIPTURE:**

<sup>7</sup> “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

John 15: 7 - 8 (NIV)

## STORY:

Hope does not just spontaneously "show up" in grief. Hope must be invited in despite the grief. I decided to employ hope almost from the beginning because I am not good at being stuck. Employing hope, in grief, is not synonymous with feeling happiness. It means refusing to focus on REMAINING a victim who stays sad and lonely. I equate that to being bullied by grief, and I don't like to be bullied. I refused to let the bully, grief, claim my territory, my life.

-Alette at Lake Mary Church in Lake Mary, Florida

## LESSON:

In our last lesson, we talked about fixing our eyes on Jesus and moving forward, while not staying in the past. You may want to implement these things, but you don't know how. Remember when we first introduced hope, we talked about pathways to hope? These are so very important when it comes to the topic of getting stuck. We must know how to get unstuck, and move towards hope.

I love how Alette talks about hope in our story today. She said that we must invite hope into our journey. You are such a vital part of inviting this hope in. You must take steps to move yourself out of the stuck. Fixing your eyes on Jesus is the first step, but as we move forward there are other pathways you need to make. These pathways truly depends on you and your journey. Everyone is at a different stage of their grief journey and everyone is going to face different moments when the road ahead seems to be unclear and they feel stuck. Because of this, we can give you helpful suggestions of pathways, but finding those pathways, setting your goals, and taking the necessary steps will fall on you.

I want you to truly understand what pathways are, so you can find those and move forward. Hope rising defines pathways as, "the strategies or roadmaps individuals identify to pursue their goals." I like to think of it like a beautiful path that is easily identified when you are on a walk, and it is easy to see and follow. The important thing to remember about these pathways, is that we have to put the work in to make them clear, easily identified paths. At some point, someone cleared the path at your favorite park or hiking spot and made a beautiful path. The same is true of us having the pathways we need to get unstuck. We must put in the work, and clear the way for our future.

So, for you, what are those things that you need to clear off your path, so you can create a pathway forward? Maybe it is making a hard decision, making a move from your current home, changing towns, changing jobs, changing friendships, or speaking to that estranged family member who didn't support you after your loss. No matter what your next steps are to get you unstuck, the important thing is to take those steps and clear the path ahead, so you can move forward towards hope.

***Q: If you are feeling stuck, are you putting in the steps and clearing the path forward? If not, what steps do you need to take to make that happen?***

I love our verse today because it reminds us of the importance of remaining in Christ, so we can bear fruit. Bearing fruit is how we see growth after being pruned.

***Q: Do you feel like you are bearing fruit?***

"You have brains in your head you have feet in your shoes. You can  
steer yourself any direction you choose."

-Dr. Seuss

#### FOLLOW - UP QUESTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today?

What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

#### CLOSING QUESTIONS:

***"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Romans 12:12 (NIV)***

How have you been joyful in hope?

How have you been patient in affliction?

What have you done to be faithful in prayer?



## *Dear Leader.*

Help your group think about pathways today. Maybe you share something personal or maybe you have a group member discuss how they have made pathways in their life. This is such a vital step.

Close in prayer. If you have time, share prayer requests or use the closing questions, highs, and lows as prayer requests. Remind your ladies to do their journaling that is provided below, this week.

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## Lesson 9.1

### *Re-Goal*

#### **ICE-BREAKER:**

What was your high, low, and gratitude this week?

*“Hopeful people learn how to ‘re-goal’  
or adjust their goals when they  
come up against unachievable goals.”*

**-Hope Rising**

#### **SCRIPTURE:**

“For we are God’s handiwork, created in  
Christ Jesus to do good works, which God  
prepared in advance for us to do.”

Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)



*Leader:*

It is important we start in prayer. You can pray, or ask someone in your group to pray, but always open in prayer.

## STORY:

A few months after my husband passed I started searching for a community where I could do fellowship with those who understood what widowhood was like and to do life with. I was not finding what I felt I needed or was looking for, and had discussed it with my friends and also my pastors. Our church did not have any type of group for widows. My pastor suggested I lead such a group...to which I said, "no I don't think I am the person"...he told me he would pray about it and for me to do the same. Well...you know how God works...! It just kept coming back to me. Yes, it was something I could do. So my friend and I, along with much encouragement and support from our Pastors, decided we could start a group of our own. Here I am "leading" a group of consistently 10 ladies who also have experienced the loss of their spouse.

-Jean at Life.Church in Springfield, Missouri

## LESSON:

When we face the loss of a spouse, in that moment every aspect of our life has changed. From the first moment of our day to the end of our day, it is all different. All the plans, hopes, future, and goals you had for your marriage and family are gone. It is one of the things that I hear again and again from widows that we work with. You don't know what your life will look like going forward, or how to even get there. In our next study on this, we will talk about what this re-goaling is developing in you and how to make deeper and longer plans, but this lesson, we are going to focus on the word re-goal, what that means, and how to get there.

As we all know, this is one of the hardest parts of this journey because for years, we were part of a team, part of a couple. We most likely made decisions together, attended activities together, raised our families together, parented together, and the list goes on and on. Whether you are a type A or type B personality, you had goals and plans together. Whether they were concrete, written out plans or passing conversations, you had goals and expectations of what your future would look like.

"Recognize that life circumstances, priorities or personal growth may necessitate adjustments to your ongoing goals."

- Unknown

So, after you get through the shock, the survival window, and get unstuck and are moving forward, what happens if you don't learn to re-goal? If you can't find ways to re-goal, you will not be able to adjust to your new "normal," or truly learn how to move forward in this journey.

Re-goaling is such an important part of this journey towards hope, because those that are able to do this part, are less likely to be depressed, and they are truly able to adapt to what life throws out them, allowing them to adjust, readjust and re-goal. This is a very important part of your journey towards hope.

***Q: How well do you do with adjusting your goals when things don't go as planned? Have you been able to set new goals since your husband passed?***

Most of those that lead our groups here at Stand In The Gap Ministries, have learned this quality of re-goaling, and used it to start a widows program. Just like Jean shares above, this is something that has not only helped her, but has now helped the fellow widows that God has brought across her path. Maybe your re-goaling isn't starting a group, but re-aligning and changing some things you had planned for your future.

As our verse reminds us, we are God's handiwork and He has good things planned for you. No matter what your new goals look like, lean into God, and allow Him to teach you how to re-goal.

#### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today?

What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

"Carve your name on hearts, not on tombstones."

- Shannon L. Alder

#### CLOSING QUESTIONS:

***"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Romans 12:12 (NIV)***

How have you been joyful in hope?

How have you been patient in affliction?

What have you done to be faithful in prayer?



## *Dear Leader,*

Most of us recognize we don't re-goal well. Share how you have been able to do this or if this is something you've struggled with.

Close in prayer. If you have time, share prayer requests or use the closing questions, highs, and lows as prayer requests. Remind your ladies to do their journaling that is provided below, this week.





*Leader:*

It is important we start in prayer. You can pray, or ask someone in your group to pray, but always open in prayer.



## Lesson 9.2

### *Re-Goal*

#### **ICE-BREAKER:**

What was your high, low, and gratitude this week?

#### **SCRIPTURE:**

*"In their hearts humans plan their course,  
but the Lord establishes their steps."*

*Proverbs 16:9 (NIV)*

## STORY:

Somewhere in my past, I remember hearing that if you are looking for a solution but find none, then perhaps you are the one to create it. For a long time, I have believed that you need to be only half of a step ahead of someone to be qualified to help them along the path. So, here I am -- teaching and helping other widows as I learn to help myself along this widow's journey. God called, and I answered.

-Alette at Lake Mary Church in Lake Mary, Florida

## LESSON:

In our last lesson, we learned about re-goaling and how important it is to make new plans and have new goals after the loss of our spouse. This is an important and vital step to allow us to not get stuck and to move forward in this journey. I hope you spent some time thinking through the goals that you have created, and how you can re-goal for the future and towards hope.

As our verse mentions, we can make our plans, but God establishes our paths ahead. This is an important reminder, because we all had plans with our husbands before they passed and now they are different. As Alette reminds us in her story, we can be part of the solution in our own stories and in helping others. With re-goaling, both of these are important reminders, because you can be the solution in the life of another widow and this is definitely a way you re-goal. How many of us have helped a widow because we understand the pain of what they are going through? And for most of us, we would not have known how to help or even stopped to help before our loss, that is why we are re-goaling. We re-goal by realizing we have a new purpose and calling in our life. We also re-goal by allowing God's path to be revealed even when we never expected this path.

***Q: How has God placed other widows in your life since the loss? Have you been able to support them? Was this something you did before your husband passed?***

One last thing that we hear from many widows again and again is they had a bucket list of things they had planned to do with their husband before he died, and now that list is null and void. When we think about re-goaling, it is important to remember your life IS NOT over yet, and you can create a new bucket list. The list may look different or you may take some of those things that you wanted to do with your husband, and do them with new friends or your family. You may even make a very different looking list because you have changed since your husband passed. We want you to remember that your life is still full of purpose and God isn't done with you!

***Q: What items can you add to your new or revised bucket list?***

## FOLLOW - UP QUESTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today?

What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

## CLOSING QUESTIONS:

***"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Romans 12:12 (NIV)***

How have you been joyful in hope?

How have you been patient in affliction?

What have you done to be faithful in prayer?



## *Dear Leader,*

If you have currently or have had a bucket list, share it with your group. If you are thinking about or working on a new one, share that as well.

Close in prayer. If you have time, share prayer requests or use the closing questions, highs, and lows as prayer requests. Remind your ladies to do their journaling that is provided below, this week.

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## Lesson 10.1

### *Lending Hope*

#### **ICE-BREAKER:**

What was your high, low, and gratitude this week?

#### **SCRIPTURE:**

<sup>10</sup> *"Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves."*

<sup>15</sup> *"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn."*

*Romans 12:10, Romans 12:15 (NIV)*



*Leader:*

It is important we start in prayer. You can pray, or ask someone in your group to pray, but always open in prayer.

## STORY:

The love and support that Jon and Tammy Dupin gave me and my family when my husband died showed me how loving a person through grieving may be the one thing that tethers them back to God. I was so close to walking away from God, I was angry that my husband died and had all the usual questions, like "Why God?" The only thing I wanted was my husband back. The one thing that could never happen. So I was angry.

Jon and Tammy kept showing up in so many ways just simply listening and crying with me. They spent time and they sacrificed their time for me and my family. I did not abandon God because I saw the love of Christ through actions. It is so important and I would say vital to a grieving widow's heart. I want to provide those same opportunities for widows who need what I received. I am forever grateful to the Dupins. And thankful that God is a God who knows the deep sorrow and will send exactly what we need, when we need it.

-Kimberly at Waymaker Church in Lynchburg, Virginia

## LESSON:

***Q: Spend some time reading Kimberly's story on your own for a few more moments. Reflect on her story for a bit. Share what stands out to you from her story with your group.***

Kimberly's story is powerful for so many reasons, but today we are going to focus on how the Dupins showed up for Tammy and lended her the hope she didn't yet possess, and how vital that was in her journey. She mentions how close to walking away from God she was.

I'm sure many of you can relate to that. The most powerful part is that she DID NOT walk away because the right people showed up, at the right time. God brought people into her life that lended the hope she needed until she could get back to a place of healing, and have her own hope, and now Kimberly lends hope to others.

***Q: Who showed up for you in your loss? (Maybe you had people like the Dupins in your life and maybe you didn't, but share those that helped you.) What did these people do that help lend you hope?***

Our verses today remind us to be devoted to one another and mourn with one another. We are each called to do exactly those things, but the way we do those, may differ and that is because we are all gifted differently. God has given each of you a special gifting and calling. I'm sure most of you have heard of spiritual gifting. We will dive into this more over the next couple of lessons and we pray this will help you know how to use what you've been through to help others.

We are going to ask you to take your spiritual gifting test and we are providing a link in the journaling section below. We are excited for you to think more about this and how God can use these gifts He has given you to not only provide you hope, but to allow you to lend hope to others.

"You get the best effort from others not by lighting a fire beneath them,  
but by building a fire within them."

-Bob Nelson

#### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today?

What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

#### CLOSING QUESTIONS:

***"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Romans 12:12 (NIV)***

How have you been joyful in hope?

How have you been patient in affliction?

What have you done to be faithful in prayer?



## *Dear Leader,*

You have done so well with being vulnerable and sharing! Now, share about those that showed up for you and how you can now lend hope to others.

Close in prayer. If you have time, share prayer requests or use the closing questions, highs, and lows as prayer requests. Remind your ladies to do their journaling that is provided below, this week.

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## Lesson 10.2

# *Lending Hope*

### **ICE-BREAKER:**

What was your high, low, and gratitude this week?

### **SCRIPTURE:**

*<sup>4</sup>There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. <sup>5</sup>There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. <sup>6</sup>There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work."*

*1 Corinthians 12:4-6 (NIV)*

*<sup>3</sup>Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup>who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God."*

*2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NIV)*



*Leader:*

It is important we start in prayer. You can pray, or ask someone in your group to pray, but always open in prayer.

## STORY:

I started my ministry from blending my new situation in life and honoring my husband by doing things the way I think he might have done them. One year after my husband died, I saw the news about a young woman and her daughter losing her husband/father. When I saw this, my heart broke for her, because I realized that she was about to face all of the things I had just gone through that year. I decided I wanted to do something for her. I wanted to let her know that I understood so much of what she was going through and about to go through and I wanted her to know that she was not alone.

-Deanna at Ron's Way in Bethany, Oklahoma

## LESSON:

***Q: How do you see Deanna lending hope in the above story?***

In our last lesson, we spoke about how important lending hope is to those that are hurting. We also started down the journey of our spiritual gifting. Deanna's story shows us how she started to initiate using what she had been through, and her spiritual gifting to help others and lend hope. Deanna used her past in ministry, and the gifting of hospitality to love someone else that was hurting. She learned to lend hope and provide love and support to someone else because she knew how important it was. She personified 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. She comforted from the compassion she was given by our Heavenly Father, who gives us the perfect example of how to lend hope.

Maybe you are sitting in this group thinking, "I am not ready to lend hope." Maybe you are sitting here thinking, "I do not have the spiritual gifting, resources, or connections to help others and lend hope to anyone. I barely have any hope myself." Please don't give into those lies. If you allow God to, He will put people in your path daily that you can help and lend hope to. Whether you have been a widow 1 month, 1 year or 10 years, you have a special ability to lend hope because you know what it is like to lose the person you love the most and have to continue on. You can definitely make a difference in the lives of the people God puts in your path. You are an important part in the process of lending hope.

Watch Deanna's Story Here:  
<https://vimeo.com/853687218>



***Q: Who do you see God putting in your path that you need to lend hope to? If you aren't seeing anyone, are you being open to lending hope to others?***

I want to implore you in one final thing. You may have read the last section, brushed it off and said, "that's not for me! I'm not ready or able to lend hope." I'm not equipped to do that, but as a person of faith, called by God, we are each asked to help others, love them in their pain, and comfort them. If you are struggling to know how to lend hope, please spend some time praying about this, and seeking our Heavenly Father for wisdom and guidance.

#### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today?

What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

#### CLOSING QUESTIONS:

***"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Romans 12:12 (NIV)***

How have you been joyful in hope?

How have you been patient in affliction?

What have you done to be faithful in prayer?



## *Dear Leader.*

Share again from your heart. Maybe you share your story of starting this group, just lead and share.

Close in prayer. If you have time, share prayer requests or use the closing questions, highs, and lows as prayer requests. Remind your ladies to do their journaling that is provided below, this week.

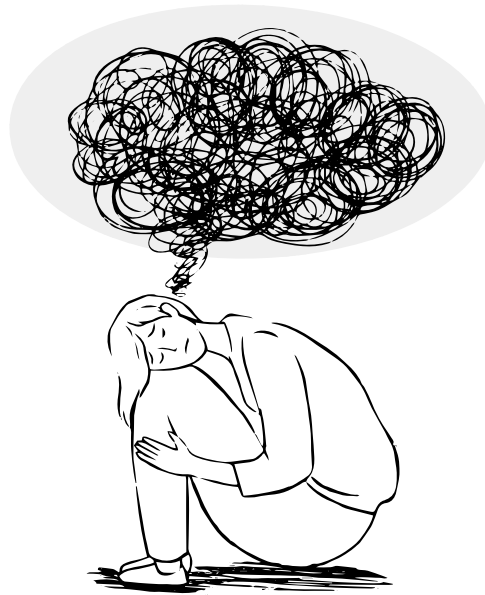
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*Leader:*

It is important we start in prayer. You can pray, or ask someone in your group to pray, but always open in prayer.



## Lesson 11.1

### *Purpose and Passion*

#### **ICE-BREAKER:**

What was your high, low, and gratitude this week?

#### **SCRIPTURE:**

*"My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart  
you, God, will not despise."*

*Psalm 51:17 (NIV)*

## STORY:

Hope. My hope is in the Lord. I used to see hope as wavering, as nothing more than a wish, such as, "I hope it doesn't rain today." But God does not waver. He is steadfast and sure, and I can trust His promises. He says in Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." This was true when my husband was here with me, and it is true now that he has gone on ahead of me. Where I place my attention, my trust, determines whether I live in hope or fear of my circumstances. God has been faithful. My journey toward widowhood was long. Bud suffered from Parkinson's and Parkinson's dementia and our lives were turned upside down and inside out over the course of 15+ years. I lost him and mourned him by increments. God proved Himself faithful through that time. I have trusted that His faithfulness will continue since He has chosen to leave me here. Before Bud passed I felt the Lord witness to my spirit that He still had purpose for me. I am standing in that. I am both a participant and a spectator as I watch what God is doing to fulfill that promise of a future, a hope, and a purpose. I have had opportunity to, very quickly, be involved in my new home church. (We moved from Dallas to Tulsa during Covid and because of 24/7 caregiving I was not able to find a church until Bud passed.) God introduced me to Walk to Emmaus, a marvelous discipleship community, and He led me to begin GLOW - God Loves Our Widows - through my church. I needed income, and He has led me to a job at another local church where I am very happy. He has given me friends, so many friends! The strange part is, except for family, no one I know now has ever met my Bud. What a privilege it has been to watch GLOW bloom! We provide a place where widows can join together and talk and laugh, and recently, work on projects for others!

-Robyn at Christ Church on Harvard in Tulsa, Oklahoma

## LESSON:

Robyn's story is beautiful because she not only understands what true hope is, but more importantly she understands that God still has a purpose, passion, and calling for her life, and He is making a way for those plans to happen even in her loss and grief.

Just because we've lost our husbands, doesn't mean that we don't still have meaning and more than that, it doesn't mean that you no longer have something that will give you purpose and passion. I've frequently heard that the things that break your heart might be the very areas where God is calling you to serve, assist, or engage in.

***Q: What breaks your heart in our world?***

Today's verse from Psalms, reminds us that we can have a broken heart and even ask God for that breaking. After the loss of a spouse, you may feel that you are always broken and brokenhearted, but this may be where your deeper purpose and passion are coming from. When we are broken, we aren't broken without purpose, but instead in our pain, we can turn to God, and believe that He has plans and a purpose in our pain. Have you ever seen a broken vessel be put back together? It never looks quite the same (does that sound familiar?), but it is nonetheless still beautiful. We can allow God to use our broken hearts to help us find our purpose, calling, and passion.

Today, as you are thinking about your purpose and passion, truly contemplate not only how God may be using your pain for a greater purpose, but also think about those things that break your heart when you see them. Maybe those things are the reminders that God is putting in your path to help you in finding your purpose. Also, never, ever let your brokenness and loss define you, but instead allow the healing of your broken heart to give you new meaning and purpose.

### FOLLOW - UP QUESTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today?

What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

### CLOSING QUESTIONS:

***"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Romans 12:12 (NIV)***

How have you been joyful in hope?

How have you been patient in affliction?

What have you done to be faithful in prayer?



## *Dear Leader,*

Share what breaks your heart. Or share how God has provided wisdom for your purpose and passion. Be vulnerable about how you still have a purpose.

Close in prayer. If you have time, share prayer requests or use the closing questions, highs, and lows as prayer requests. Remind your ladies to do their journaling that is provided below, this week.

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## Lesson 11.2

### *Purpose and Passion*

#### **ICE-BREAKER:**

What was your high, low, and gratitude this week?

#### **SCRIPTURE:**

*<sup>4</sup>For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup>so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. <sup>6</sup>We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; <sup>7</sup>if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; <sup>8</sup>if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully."*

*Romans 12:4-8 (NIV)*



*Leader:*

It is important we start in prayer. You can pray, or ask someone in your group to pray, but always open in prayer.

## STORY:

I did not realize how much sharing my story of loss could help another widow. It took a couple of years to get serious about starting a group. I did not think I was qualified to lead a group. After talking to a couple of widows I thought that we needed a group at church where widows could talk freely about their feelings and process the loss of their husband. We also want to have fun together, and build relationships with people that understand that all the feelings a widow is going through, and thinks she is the only one to feel that way. I had to grow my relationship with God, to fulfill my purpose. God is graceful in letting us grow in our own time. God is faithful to put the people in my life that have helped me see myself the way that God does.

-Bette at Church on The Move West in Tulsa, Oklahoma

Last session, we talked about what breaks our heart and encouraged you to think about that question and take a step towards doing something with that purpose and passion. For many of you, that may be terrifying, and you may be stuck and feeling like you can never do that.

***Q: Did you do anything with what breaks your heart after the last lesson?***

Bette shares how she never expected to be leading a group, and didn't even realize the impact she could make. Most of the leaders we get to work with feel much the same way. They just stepped into what they feel called to do and were passionate about. Many of them also said they don't feel equipped to do a ministry, but somehow God called them and brought them into this ministry.

That is how our incredible Heavenly Father works, He gives us all gifting and the passion to do something with that gifting. As our scripture talks about, we are not all equipped with the same gifting, but we are all needed. You may not be called and passionate about sharing about your journey as a widow or starting a widows ministry, but there is something else you've been thinking about and praying over. I implore you to take those steps. I also want you to take a look at your spiritual gifting testing from a couple of sessions ago. I know we had you think about that, but now I want you to spend some time with your group discussing your gifting and making steps together for how you can use your gifting.

If you are already using your gifting, share with your group how you took steps to use your spiritual gifting and the blessing it has brought to your life, and the hope it has given. If you are not using your gifting, spend some time sharing some ways you are hoping to use your gifting or ask for ideas from your group, if you aren't sure.

***Q: Use the prompts in the above paragraph to talk with your group about spiritual gifting.***

## FOLLOW - UP QUESTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today?

What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

## CLOSING QUESTIONS:

***"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Romans 12:12 (NIV)***

How have you been joyful in hope?

How have you been patient in affliction?

What have you done to be faithful in prayer?



## *Dear Leader,*

Share your spiritual gifting with your group. Ask them if it surprises them what you are gifted in. If your gifting isn't necessarily a leadership gifting, remind them, God still called you into this role and He can do that with anyone.

Close in prayer. If you have time, share prayer requests or use the closing questions, highs, and lows as prayer requests. Remind your ladies to do their journaling that is provided below, this week.

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*Leader:*

It is important we start in prayer. You can pray, or ask someone in your group to pray, but always open in prayer.



## Lesson 12.1

# *Overflowing with Hope/Bold Hope*

### **ICE-BREAKER:**

What was your high, low, and gratitude this week?

### **SCRIPTURE:**

*"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."*

*Romans 15:13 (NIV)*

*Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold.*

*2 Corinthians 3:12 (NIV)*

## STORY:

What started with three people has grown into a ministry that serves widows but many others also. It even includes a prison ministry, Bible studies, support programs, restoration programs, and much more. Incredible friendships have been formed, house repairs made, food supplied, home visits made, and lots of hugs, encouragement, fun, and joy for all.

The smallest hope can grow, in the hands of Jesus, into something far greater than ever imagined. Never give up; no matter what comes against your hope!  
-Neta at Life.Church in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma

## LESSON:

The verses above, give us what we hope you have learned and taken with you through this study. It is truly about being filled with hope and knowing that you can now be bold because of this hope overflowing in your life.

Throughout this Bible Study, our true hope has been that you would come to the realization that God has a true purpose and plan for your brokenness and for your beautiful story. We've heard from widows that are now using their pain to serve others through widows ministry, and in Neta's story above, we see how God started with something that might have seemed small, but has turned into something beautiful. Do you see how Neta's story is a reflection of having bold faith? It is taking steps when we feel frightened and can't see the path ahead, but we still know that God is telling us to walk ahead.

***Q: How do you face taking steps forward when you are afraid?***

The definition of bold is "(of a person, action, or idea) showing an ability to take risks; confident and courageous." That definition has the word courageous in it. I think that being a widow and moving forward after such a great loss is one of the boldest and most courageous things. I talk with and meet widows daily, and I can tell you they are some of the most courageous and boldest people I've ever met. They have faced the 'valley of the shadow' and they have walked through it, with God on their side.

In our next session, we want you to start thinking about how hopeful you are and how that has changed since week one. We also want you to think about and contemplate on whether you are feeling bold and courageous. We want you to start thinking about what having a bold hope would look like in your life.

As you end this week's study, start focusing on what your life looks like, and how it looks different than it did when you started this study.

**Q: Do you feel bolder now than when you started this study? What are you going to do with that boldness?**

\*\*Take the Hope Survey before the last lesson. It is located on the next page. Bring your two sets of scores with you to the next meeting.\*\*

### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today?

What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

### CLOSING QUESTIONS:

***"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Romans 12:12 (NIV)***

How have you been joyful in hope?

How have you been patient in affliction?

What have you done to be faithful in prayer?



## *Dear Leader.*

You are almost to the end of this, you've made it, and led well! We hope you celebrate and enjoy these last two studies and grow even more hopeful.

Close in prayer. If you have time, share prayer requests or use the closing questions, highs, and lows as prayer requests. Remind your ladies to do their journaling that is provided below, this week.

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## Hope Score Survey #2:

<https://hopescore.com/hope-score/>



We want to end this study the same way we started it, taking a Hope Survey. We will be discussing these scores in our final week, so please take the survey again and bring the score from your first week and the score from this week with you to the last meeting.

Agency Score: -----

Pathway Score: -----

Total Score: -----

"With the Adult Hope Scale, scores of 40 or above put an adult in a hopeful category. Scores above 48 bump you up to a higher level of hope. Scores of 56 or higher make you a high hope person. Scores below 40 put you in a low hope category. Don't panic if you have low hope right now in your life. It just means you have work to do. Our guess is that if you have low hope in your life, it will not surprise you. It might mean you lack willpower, it might mean you lack waypower, or it might mean you lack both. Fret not. There is a pathway to increasing willpower and waypower." -

Hope Rising





*Leader:*

It is important we start in prayer. You can pray, or ask someone in your group to pray, but always open in prayer.

## Lesson 12.2

# *Overflowing with Hope/Bold Hope*

### **ICE-BREAKER:**

What was your high, low, and gratitude this week?

### **SCRIPTURE:**

*8 "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 9 Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. 10 Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. 11 If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen."*

*I Peter 4:8-11 (NIV)*

*"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."*

*Romans 15:13 (NIV)*

*"Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold."*

*2 Corinthians 3:12 (NIV)*

## STORY:

We love having a community of ladies who we can call at a moment's notice to either pray with us, go have coffee, go to the theater, or just have a visit on the deck. We have hosted much larger events having special music groups or speakers. I love that I have this group and feel a responsibility to them, and it's my daily mission to introduce others that I meet who do not have such a community. I have developed some great friendships through it. Most of all, it gives me a purpose and I know my husband would be proud that I am leading and not being lonely and withdrawn in my own home. I am thankful that my hope and confidence in hope has brought me through, and continues to provide for me.

-Jean at Life.Church in Springfield, Missouri

## LESSON:

There are a few key things I see Jean say above that I want to leave you with in this last lesson. She has made hope and helping others a daily mission in her life. She feels a sense of responsibility to those that God has put in her path. She is not lonely, but instead thankful and she feels that her hope and confidence brought her to this point. Wow, all of those are powerful insights to think about as we close this study.

Whenever we finish a study there can be a sense of sadness, but I hope instead when you hear Jean's story and read our scriptures from today, that you will be excited about what the future holds for you, and for the hope you have for that future. We pray that you will start thinking about how your spiritual gifts, passions, and God's calling in your life are playing out in how you serve and love others. We also pray you can look back on your hope survey and how the community of this group, the studies about hope, and the time you've spent with God has increased your hope.

***Q: Did your hope score change since the first week? If so, share why you think it did? If not, what do you think you need to do to make that change?***

Some of you may be ending this study thinking I could never start a widows ministry, or be truly bold and courageous. First of all, you are already bold and courageous. You have gone through this study, you have faced the death of your spouse, and you are still standing, that in and of itself is pretty bold and courageous. Also, not everyone will start a widows group. Like the scriptures we have studied throughout this study, we all have different equipping and spiritual gifting. You do NOT have to start a group to be bold (unless that is what is God is calling you to do), instead, you just need to take your next step. You may know what that is, or you may still be trying to identify that step, but wherever you are; lean into God, lean into this group, and find that next step and then BOLDLY take it. God has a purpose and a plan for your life and we want you to find that purpose and plan.

***Q: Do you know what your next BOLD step is? If so, share it with the group. If you don't, spend some time sharing where you are and how others can pray for you to have direction and wisdom.***

At the end of this study, we have shared some resources. If you are still struggling to find your hope, we would love for you to read Hope Rising and spend time seeking people in your life who can continue to push you towards our Heavenly Father and hope.

"Most of our obstacles would melt away if, instead of cowering before them, we should make up our minds to walk boldly through them."  
- Orison Swett Marden

#### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS:

What new perspective did you gain today?

What is something that you will take with you into this next week?

#### CLOSING QUESTIONS:

***"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Romans 12:12 (NIV)***

How have you been joyful in hope?

How have you been patient in affliction?

What have you done to be faithful in prayer?



## *Dear Leader.*

End strong! Talk about next steps. Make sure everyone gets the resources they need, and pray about your next BOLD and HOPEFUL step in your group and your journey.

Close in prayer. If you have time, share prayer requests or use the closing questions, highs, and lows as prayer requests. Remind your ladies to do their journaling that is provided below, this week.

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# Resources



*Find a grief therapist*

<https://bit.ly/GriefSITG>

We recommend..

- Search "EMDR certified"
- Search "Christian"
- Try out different therapists until you find the right fit.
- Therapy will only get you as far as you allow it to. Be vulnerable and open.



*Read Hope Rising*

<https://shorturl.at/Sbj6L>



*Worship as a reminder of  
the hope found with God*

<https://bit.ly/HopePlaylistSITG>

# Spiritually giving back

We spent a great deal of this study encouraging you to find your hope again. Part of that is doing things to love, support, and grow others out of the pain you've experienced. We provided these Giving Back ideas, as examples for small (and large) things you can do to live out your gifting, passion, and purpose.

## ***Pray: Who can you pray for?***

- Pray for your widows ministry.
- Pray for your pastors.
- Pray for your city, state, country, and the world.

## ***Join: What already exists that you can join?***

- Serve as a small group or Bible study leader with your church.
- Serve in youth ministry.
- Serve at a local mission/nonprofit.
- Join the prayer team.
- Filling a need in the widows ministries - first response team, card and book team, planning committee, etc - see ministry structure for a breakdown of all of the possible roles.
- Prison ministry.
- Be on a committee at your church or a local mission/nonprofit.
- Serve as a Family Friend through Widowed Parent Relief Project (currently local).
- Scan the QR code or type this link into your search bar to find organizations who are actively looking for your help:

<https://shorturl.at/SVuBj>



## ***Start: What do you feel called to start to meet the needs in your community and our world?***

- Mentor a new widow.
- Mentor a woman.
- Start a widows ministry at your church.
- Start a small group or additional small group in your widows ministry.

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