

STORYTELLERS
The Widow's Husband
1 Kings 17:8-24

My father was a mostly non-practicing Catholic, my mother a non-practicing Methodist. She later converted to Catholicism.

As a child, I was exposed to the Catholic Church for brief periods of time to accomplish specific tasks: baptism, confession and confirmation; however, my family and I were not regular, on-going church attendees.

I was also briefly exposed to the Baptist Church through peers as a teenager, and I experienced much hypocrisy among them.

I didn't feel a sense of belonging in the Baptist or the Catholic Church cultures, nor did I feel any authenticity to religion.

I began to turn against all religion, specifically Christianity, and all religious people; I completely turned against God.

I strongly believed religion was phony, and I relied heavily on science as my cornerstone of understanding.

In 2004, I married my high school sweetheart, Jerry; we were so young. He was only 20, and I was just 21 when we married. He was a believer, and I was not.

We did not talk about religion in our home because I would argue with him about his beliefs. Engaging me in a conversation about God or religion was a fruitless task.

From 2004-2005, Jerry served in an Army National Guard Unit in Iraq while I started nursing school.

After his return, Jerry was very hard-hearted towards others, including me.

He asked for a divorce, and we lived apart for nearly a year.

He seemed to have PTSD but refused help when his mother and I pleaded with him to seek counseling.

At the beginning of 2007, Jerry decided he wanted to reconcile with me. He wanted to save our marriage and I desired the same.

His heart had softened.

He joined the local police force, a life long dream for him, and we moved back in together. Life was finally as it should be.

In 2008, we had our first child. Jerry adored her! He was a very protective, attentive, and proud father.

We attended a small church for a few weeks because Jerry wanted our daughter to be dedicated to the Lord. While I didn't believe this was significant for her, I conceded to respect his beliefs.

Once that was finished, I insisted we not go back to church.

From 2008-2011 - Life was good!

We paid off our debt and bought our first home.

We planned our second child.

Jerry was promoted to the position of a "detective" at the police department, the youngest one on staff.

Although life had settled into a routine, God and church were never in the picture or even discussed.

In 2011, we had our second daughter.

This was a very happy and satisfying time in my life. I was in a state of bliss! I had a wonderful husband, two gorgeous little girls, and a beautiful house. I had a great job and my husband was successful as well. It seemed like life could not get any sweeter.

"Suddenly" I got the strong urge to find a church. It was a strange idea that came out of nowhere, but I rationalized that it would be the perfect social outlet for our young family. I envisioned many church activities, retreats, and social events in my children's futures. They would have the sense of belonging that had escaped me. What did it matter that God didn't exist?

For this reason, I needed to find a church... **a BIG church.**

I needed the biggest church I could find.

On Wednesday, March 23, 2011, we attend Wednesday night service at Colonial Hills Church in Southaven. Pastor Rick preached a message that included a warning about *"being critical of your spouse."*

After church, I was surprisingly impressed by the worship music and the children's opportunities.

For the first time in my life, I actually understood a sermon and I felt it was personal and applicable in my daily life.

Jerry was quiet that night.

He didn't seem to enjoy it. He almost seemed angry.

At my request, he said we could try it again on Sunday.

We never made it to church that Sunday.

On Saturday, March 26, 2011, 3 short weeks after our second daughter was born and 3 days after we attended that church service, Jerry and I got into an argument. It was a silly squabble over a camera battery and an oil change that was overdue. I blamed him for breaking the camera and for not taking care of the car. Regretfully, I was very critical of him on this day in my post-partum state.

We spent most of the day not speaking, and when we did our conversations were riddled with bickering.

That evening, he asked me to talk to him, to reconcile, but my heart was hard and I was stubborn.

I spoke the last words I would ever say to him: *"Not right now."*

He went to our bedroom and shut himself in the closet. He would sometimes retreat here for "quiet time." Suddenly, I heard a loud noise echo through the house from our bedroom.

I realized the sound was that of a gunshot. Jerry ended his life that night without warning or discussion.

Our two little girls were sitting with me in the living room just two rooms away when it happened.

I raced to him as I realized the horror of what had just happened.

I heard someone scream; it was my three-year-old daughter.

She was screaming because I was screaming.

The sound of her running to me jolted me out of shock enough to intercept her and run to the kitchen to call 911.

As I dialed, the only words out of my unbelieving mouth were: ***"Oh God! Oh God! Oh God!"***

The Police arrived first. EMS arrived next. It seemed like an eternity before help was there.

The responders placed us in my 3-year-old's bedroom to wait while they attempted to resuscitate my husband.

I was in the darkest moment of my entire life; I was in a pit: the pit of hell and darkness.

I knew there was no power on earth that could help me in that moment. Nothing could reverse what had just happened.

My life, as I knew it, was over. There was no way Jerry would survive this. I was a nurse...I knew. My children would no longer have their father. My daughters' lives would be changed forever.

Our future would never be the same; it had been utterly destroyed in one fatal second.

For the first time in my life, I pray.

I pray to a God I do not know, and I do not think exists.

I ask only one thing: ***"Help."***

From the depths of my soul, I cry out for help.

Of course, I never expected an answer.

Jerry was taken to the local hospital and pronounced deceased.

I cannot return home, my house is a crime scene.

At the hospital, I am questioned by police, according to protocol, and I go home with my parents. My children are already there and asleep.

My best friend arrives to comfort me.

I am a breastfeeding mom. In my shock and through all the tears I cry, I cannot produce milk for my baby.

She is asleep for now, but when she awakens I will not have a way to feed her.

This is my only silent worry that night.

This worry becomes my focus, my obsession, for the night. It is the only thing I can control or provide for her and I feel completely helpless and inadequate.

I worry all night about how I will feed her.

The very next morning, there are cans and cans of infant formula and bottles waiting for me in my parents' kitchen. I don't ask where they came from and I don't care. All that matters is they are there and I can feed my baby.

That worry is gone.

My next silent worry is money.

I am on maternity leave and we had only saved enough to replace my income for that time.

Otherwise, we have no savings and now there is not income.

How will I pay my bills?

How will I keep from losing the house?

My stomach is sick with the thought that I will have to return to work and my children need me now more than ever!

The anxiety and worry are immobilizing.

Then, somehow the money starts immediately flowing in.

From the police stations, from the community, from my co-workers...the list goes on and on.

It satisfies each and every need.

No bill goes unpaid.

The worry about money is gone.

The funeral planning begins.

The funeral director gently approaches me with the sad fact that the funeral parlor is too small to host a funeral service for my husband.

Jerry was a well known, well respected man.

The funeral director expects a large turn out to his funeral.

He tells me that I need a **BIG church**.

We don't belong to a church.

I silently worry about where we will have his service and think over how ironic it is that I was in search of a **BIG church** just days ago, but with a different purpose in mind.

I mention that we attended Colonial Hills Church just a few days ago and the police chaplain tells me he is familiar with staff there. He speaks privately with them about our need.

Colonial Hills Southaven agrees we can have the funeral in their church.

That worry is gone.

I plan the funeral. I want to bury my husband with the honor that is fit for the way he lived his life. I pick out the necessities and make plans according to what he would want. Nothing is lavish, but everything is in perfect honor of his memory.

The bill comes to \$12,000.

It is due now.

My heart sinks...I don't have \$12,000, not even on credit, nor does anyone around me.

I silently worry that I am letting down Jerry and disgracing the honor of his memory by being unable to pay for his service.

It's the last thing I will ever be able to do for him. It's important to me to take care of this last thing for the one I loved so deeply.

I call my credit card company, choking back tears, from the parlor of the funeral home.

I beg them to increase my credit line and briefly explain my situation.

The lady on the phone has mercy on me.

She requests an immediate approval to the exact amount needed, and I pay for the services minutes later.

That worry is gone.

After the calm settles in the wake of the funeral, I look at my 3-year-old and silently worry about how in the world she is processing all that has happened and changed.

I am still unable to take her home. The house needs repair and the memories are too painful.

Her father is gone and she cries for him sometimes on an hourly basis, with bedtime being the worst.

Her toys and clothes are in bags in my parents' guest room.

Strange relatives she has never met want to hold and comfort her.

Everyone is sad and red-eyed.

She is absolutely terrified to let me out of her sight so she follows me even into the restroom.

Everything that she has ever known is changed and unfamiliar.

I silently worry and worry and worry about her and know she needs someone she can talk to...a professional.

Within 30 minutes I get a text message.

It's a referral from a friend of a friend who recommends a child psychologist who specializes in traumatic grief in children ages birth through 6 years old. This professional trained with child victims who survived the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. She knows

how to deal with loss and grief in children. She is exactly who I need!

They give me her personal cell phone number.

That worry is gone.

These are only a few of the major needs and provisions that I remember.

These were big, however, even the smallest and seemingly insignificant worries were being taken care of during this time.

All I had to be was a mom.

I didn't have to worry about where we would sleep, what we would eat, how we would pay, or what would happen tomorrow...all I had to do was be a mother, right here, right now.

That is a blessing that I cannot fully express in words.

Through all this I did not believe in God.

I was not praying.

I would just worry.

I would worry about something sincerely in my heart, and then an amazing provision would come, almost immediately.

It was so surreal that I began to joke with my best friend, a believer, that it was another daily dose of "*divine intervention*." Coincidence could not explain it! Something else was happening. It was as if someone could hear my very heart!

Finally, I realized that I needed to talk to someone who knew about God.

I went back to Colonial Hills Church and made an appointment with the first available pastor: Pastor Jack Bailey, the children's pastor.

We met, and I talked with him for nearly an hour telling him all the things that it seemed like God was doing.

Even now, I didn't believe in God.

I was looking for some sort of confirmation that what I was experiencing was real.

I don't remember what Pastor Bailey told me or even what we discussed.

The only thing I remember was something he said during his prayer at the end of the meeting. He said, *"God, in your Word you say you are the husband to the widow..."*

Widow. I despised that word.

I left, somewhat angry but mostly curious...did the Bible really say that?

Surely not!

How could an invisible being be a husband to me, or any widow for that matter?

The idea seemed so ridiculous I had to look into it for myself.

I went home and Googled *"what does the bible say about God being the husband to the widow."*

I found this verse, which I first read in the NIV:

*"Do not be afraid; you will not be put to shame.
Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated.
You will forget the shame of your youth
and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood.
For your Maker is your husband—
the Lord Almighty is his name—
the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer;
he is called the God of all the earth.
The Lord will call you back
as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit—
a wife who married young,
only to be rejected," says your God.
"For a brief moment I abandoned you,
but with deep compassion I will bring you back.
In a surge of anger
I hid my face from you for a moment,
but with everlasting kindness
I will have compassion on you,"
says the Lord your Redeemer.*

The verse cut me to my heart and sent chills down my spine.

It spoke to my situation directly.

It spoke to ME directly, in my mental and emotional state.

The Lord was revealing himself to me as my God and my Redeemer.

He was making me a promise of restoration.

In that moment, after reading that verse, in light of all that had occurred in my life over the past week or so...I knew there was a God. That was the confirmation I was seeking.

He existed!

My heart was convicted and all doubt was removed.

This moment I refer to as my "*Oh, crap!*" moment.

That's because I lived 28 years of my life as an enemy of God and a mocker of His church and His people.

After reading this verse and through my experience, I realized that I was wrong all along. There was no way God could *not* exist!

I was really, really humbled by this knowledge.

But more than that, I was scared!

An all-powerful, all-knowing God who can hear the very whispers of my heart has existed all along.

He has known my every action, my every thought...things about me no one would ever know because I would never reveal them.

All the good, bad and ugly lay bare before Him.

I wanted to crawl under a rock and hide from Him, but even that would be futile.

All I could do was ask for forgiveness: sincere repentance for my ignorance and blasphemy.

Then I wanted to know more about Him.

Who was God?

Who was Jesus?

What was a "*Redeemer*" anyway?

What did God mean by everlasting kindness and compassion?

The desire to read the Bible became my most intense passion.

I wanted to know exactly who God was and I wanted to know the truth for myself, not something someone told me to believe.

I wanted to read it and make my own judgment call.

I started in the Gospel of Matthew.

This is where I met Jesus.

Every word I read was like it was leaping off the page.

This was my answer to "*What is a Redeemer?*"

Every night I read, it was the only thing that brought me peace of mind and comfort, amid the threat of nightmares and flashbacks.

When I finished Matthew, I moved forward to the next book and the next.

Every word made sense! The scriptures were dripping with truth. Jesus was revealing himself to me in **complete accuracy** with the way in which I was **experiencing** His presence in my life.

Every truth was being **confirmed** in my daily walk.

I began to pray.

I would pray to the Lord every night.

I would cast every worry on him.

I would question him.

I would thank him.

I would ask him to reveal more about himself to me.

I attended two Sunday services after the burial of my husband.

On the second Sunday, I approached the altar in such tearfulness and brokenness...

I had accepted Jesus as the Son of God, just as his Word says.

I had accepted him as Lord and Savior, as my Redeemer, just as I was experiencing.

I had accepted his offer of salvation and I wanted an everlasting relationship with him.

I didn't know what to expect from the service invitation, but my salvation had little to do with that moment and everything to do with the events that had led up to it. I was ready to publicly profess that I belonged to Jesus Christ!

I gave my life to Christ in April 2011 and I was baptized shortly thereafter!

This is the true account of my salvation testimony, but my testimony is not complete. Jesus is at work in me daily. He is my peace, my joy, and my salvation! The Lord Jesus is my redeemer.

*Brittney's story just blows me away! God PROVED just how faithful he is in her story! He CONTINUES to work in her life. She is now the WIFE of Chris Gunter, and they have ___ beautiful children. They are active members at CHC Hernando, and God is continuing to do great things in their home.

*I could not just move on from her story to an unrelated story this morning! (I will not always preach a message that is related to the story – I think!) Anyway, the way that God TRANSFORMED her understanding of the word WIDOW just grips my heart! I want to pursue that a bit this morning in my brief message because it is such a powerful picture for ALL of us!

*All of us either have been or have felt abandoned/forsaken at some point in our life. WIDOW – One forsaken (helpless, exposed to oppression)

-YET, God has done some of his greatest miracles for widows!

*At CHC, we have the memory of a GREAT MIRACLE of PROVISION that came from the most unlikely source for the poorest of people: JAMAICA.

*Some of the greatest stories in the Bible revolve around widows:

*Ruth and Naomi – The Book of Ruth

*The widow's oil – 2 Kings 4

*The widow's mite – Luke 21

Amazingly, God does not often deal with us in our poverty in the way we would expect! He has HIGH EXPECTATIONS for his children (the already and the not yet!)

God wants to do MORE than just SUSTAIN your life.

*How many people have more than enough, and are still EMPTY?

-Even in their prosperity, they are UNABLE to see God!

-Some who cannot see God in their prosperity find him in poverty.

*Every sovereign action and command of God is intended to DRAW you to himself!

-God desires ONE THING with you: RELATIONSHIP.

HOW DOES GOD DRAW US TO HIMSELF WHEN WE CANNOT SEE HIM?

He allows you to experience some form of poverty.

***Briefly tell the story of Elijah and the Famine.**

-Remember, we can read the story in a few minutes. She LIVED it!

He sends one of his servants NEAR to demonstrate his intimate love.

Luke 4:25-26 NLT

25 "Certainly there were many needy widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the heavens were closed for three and a half years, and a severe famine devastated the land. 26 Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them. He was sent instead to a foreigner--a widow of Zarephath in the land of Sidon.

-This may be the most TERRIFYING moment of your life! [Set up why!]

He leads you to take an initial step of FAITH! 1 Kings 17:9 NLT

9 "Go and live in the village of Zarephath, near the city of Sidon. I have instructed a widow there to feed you."

-Every step of faith is intended to lead us directly into sweeter RELATIONSHIP with God! You may not even know it is God leading you! [Brittney]

-That initial step of faith will be MORE than you bargained for!

*Elijah probably thought she was a rich widow. Wrong!

*The widow may have thought that God would do an instant miracle without requiring ANYTHING FROM HER. Wrong! **1 Kings 17:10-12**

1 Kings 17:13-14 NASB

Then Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go, do as you have said, but make me a little bread cake from it first and bring *it* out to me, and afterward you may make *one* for yourself and for your son. "For thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'The fnbowl of flour shall not be exhausted, nor shall the jar of oil fnbe empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain on the face of the earth.'"

Now, think about how SHE may FEEL about this request at this time:

*God sent this FAMINE.

*The widow was already extremely POOR!

-The famine was not her whole problem. She had some water.
Her poverty simply added to the misery of the famine.

*God sent the prophet directly to this widow FOR HIS SUPPORT!

-Even though he also gave the PROMISE, she had to OBEY to SEE it!

*JOKE: I bet there ain't gonna be no trucks down there neither!

*This may make God look like a THIEF: The Benevolent Thief

God made good on his promise: 1 Kings 17:15-16 NLT

-Every provision is meant to allow you to FEEL his PRESENCE!

-Sometimes even outright provision is still DOUBTED! [Brittney's story]

*The widow still did not fully trust God! **(Vs. 24)**

-God is not only INTIMATELY PRESENT for us in our poverty; he is also AMAZINGLY PATIENT with us in our unbelief.

He may allow you to experience further LOSS in order to bring you the greatest GAIN! 1 Kings 17:17-18 NASB

-That loss is meant to expose your twisted PERSPECTIVE. [God=Enemy]

-That loss is meant to remove your hidden SHAME. **(Vs. 18)**

What will it take for you to SEE and CONFESS GOD as your SOURCE?

-Your ETERNAL DESTINY is riding upon your response to his actions!

1 Kings 17:24 NLT

24 Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth."

Please BOW YOUR HEADS AND LISTEN AS I READ BRITTNEY'S PASSAGE AGAIN:

ISAIAH 54:4-8; 11-15, 17 NKJV

4 "Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed; Neither be disgraced, for you will not be put to shame; For you will forget the shame of your youth, And will not remember the reproach of your widowhood anymore. 5 For your Maker [is] your husband, The LORD of hosts [is] His name; And your Redeemer [is] the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth. 6 For the LORD has called you Like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, Like a youthful wife when you were refused," Says your God. 7 "For a mere moment I have forsaken you, But with great mercies I will gather you. 8 With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; But with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you," Says the LORD, your Redeemer. 11 "O you afflicted one, Tossed with tempest, [and] not comforted, Behold, I will lay your stones with colorful gems, And lay your foundations with sapphires. 12 I will make your pinnacles of rubies, Your gates of crystal, And all your walls of precious stones. 13 All your children [shall be] taught by the LORD, And great [shall be] the peace of your children. 14 In righteousness you shall be established; You shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear; And from terror, for it shall not come near you. 17 No weapon formed against you shall prosper, And every tongue [which] rises against you in judgment You shall condemn. This [is] the heritage of the servants of the LORD, And their righteousness [is] from Me," Says the LORD.

Is this YOUR need? God wants to meet you here today!

Let's pray.