



Widows Harvest MINISTRIES

In All Things Give Thanks to Our Heavenly Father In Christ Jesus Name | Spring Update 2020

Dear Friends and Supporters:



This is a picture of a widow in Kenya that has just received provisions from Abigail Atieno, wife of Joshua, Director of Widows Harvest Africa. Abigail has organized some of her widow's prayer team to take provisions to widows living out in more rural areas who literally have nothing.



Abigail calls her team the "Widows Harvest Ministries Antivirus Prayer Team," which is printed on the backs of their t-shirts.

Here At Home

Locally, in Chattanooga, our widows have been prepared for days like the ones we are in. They are staying home, which is where they were already staying most of the time anyway. Since we canceled the weekly prayer time with widows they have continued to pray. In fact, they are now stepping up their prayer times to praying every day from 10am to noon as well as connecting, via telephone conference call once a week on Tuesdays at 11 a.m., to share, sing and pray together. This was all their idea.

And yes, widows still have needs that need to be met in all of the areas we typically help them out with. But many of the widows have told us that they are holding off on putting in requests for help until the risks for volunteer's is not as great. Our staff, though, is still responding to smaller needs on the outside of widow's houses, but it is far less than what we have typically done because of the cancelation of all of our volunteer groups up until now as well as most of the mission groups that had been scheduled to serve with us over the summer.

Like all non-profits, faith based and otherwise, we are hanging on financially. In general, support drastically drops off this time of the year anyway, but many of the mission teams we work with during the summer help to offset payroll and other expenses, like construction costs for meeting needs of widows. So, not only will we not have that infusion from mission teams, but the drastic drop in support that generally happens this time of year is, understandably, even more drastic now.

Treasure & Faith

Yet, look at the widow Jesus pointed out who gave all that she had because of her faith and trust that God would meet her needs. I know I have shared this before, but it has been so much on my heart since we entered the days of this pandemic. Back when I left my position at Inner City Ministries in 1987, I initially was only able to raise \$25 a month in committed support. It would take me a while to realize this, but what God showed me, as our family had to depend on him for our daily bread as well as all other basic needs for living, was that this was the way that most of the widows I was serving with had lived much of their lives. Which then helped me to understand why their prayers are so powerful. They have trusted God for so long and seen him come to their rescue again and again to meet their needs that when they pray, their relationship has become so intimate with Jesus as husband, that they have no doubts about whether he is listening or not and that the answers to their prayers are already on the way.

Prayer Focus

Every day our widows here, as well as in Africa, have been and are continuing to pray for the Church "to be the pure and undefiled bride that God desires her to be lest she be deceived as Eve was by the serpent and our minds may be led astray from our pure and sincere devotion to Christ" (II Cor. 11:1-3).

Citizenship

Paul tells us in Philippians 3:20-21 "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."

Seated With Him

Then in Ephesians 2:4-7 Paul tells us that "Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus."

Things Above

And finally, Colossians 3:1-3, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God."

Praying For The Church

Whether these passages speak to anyone else in these times, I find them to be a comforting reminder that many of the widows we serve live their lives in the belief that they are strangers and aliens on this earth for as long as it pleases God to keep them here. And that praying for the nation(s) and its leaders, although mandated in scripture, is not the same as praying for the Church. In the same way we cannot serve both mammon and God, we, likewise, cannot equally serve both our heavenly citizenship and our earthly citizenships. Whereas, we have wrongly come to believe that the church will be brought down by a nation's sin, and therefore, praying for a nation becomes our most pressing priority, in reality, I have been long convinced that it is the Church's sin that is far more likely to bring down a nation. History certainly seems to bear out this position. And unless we are willing to stop pointing a finger, first at each other, and then, especially at all others outside the church (I Cor. 5:12-13) that we have judged to be impure and defiled, we will never be able to see and admit our own sin, or have any objective perspective for assessing our own condition.

Widow's Passion

As many of you know, James 1:27 is the passage that WHM was founded on. As you may also know, it is the passage that drives the widow's passion to pray for the church to be the pure and undefiled bride that God desires her to be. They, perhaps more than anyone else, have come to understand that the almost universal neglect of widows by the church may be one of the greatest factors for being able to measure the degree to which deception has overtaken much of the church today.

All Or Nothing

In the same way that we know that "where our treasure is so will our hearts be," it might be inferred that those things that preoccupy our thoughts, our attention, our time and energy and especially our words, whether spoken, written or posted online, also reveals where our hearts really are. In Mark 12:40, when Jesus condemns the religious leaders for "devouring the houses of the widows" just before pointing out the faith of the widow at the altar giving all that she had, what Jesus reveals to us is the heart condition of 2 distinct groups of people based on where their treasure is, those who give out of the surplus of their wealth and those who give it all. And quite profoundly, in the case of the religious leaders it is not clear whether they are giving or not, but what is clear is that they are devouring the houses of the widows, perhaps, including the very widow who is giving all the treasure she has. 90% or more of the widows I have known and served with over the years have been faithful members of their churches, both in their attendance as well as their giving, and yet in their times of need no provisions were made for them. How is this any different from those religious leaders that Jesus pointed out for "devouring the houses of the widows?"

Deception

In reading James 1:27, the last verse in this chapter, it is essential that it be understood not only in the context of the preceding verse, but in the context of the entire chapter. In doing so, we will hopefully realize that deception, both for being deceived by outside influences as well as self-deception is clearly one of the central messages of this chapter. James actually issues 3 warnings about being deceived, with the first one appearing in verse 16, the next in verse 22, and finally concluding these warnings with verse 26, writing that "Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless."

Worth Vs. Worthless

James is not talking about gossip when he warns us about not keeping a tight rein on our tongues, and we know this because of what he ends with, seemingly God's standard for determining either the worthlessness, or the impurity and defilement of our religion or the worthfulness, or the purity and undefiledness of our religion. Which, the religion James speaks of here, is really about the expressions of our faith through acts of worship, especially those acts being carried out for the benefit of the widows and the fatherless. In other words, James is saying don't boast and make claims about your faith and how immovable you are in it when there is no evidence that your worship is in anyway pure and undefiled.

Deadly Poison

This is not the last time, though, that James has something to say about taming our tongues either. In James 3:5-18

“Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 6.) The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one’s life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. 7.) All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, 8.) but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

“9.) With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness.”

10.) Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. 11.) Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? 12.) My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water. 13.) Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

14.) But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15.) Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16.) For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. 17.) But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. 18.) Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.”

Grace Not The Law

Isn’t what James said here really addressing what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount (Mat. 5:1-11) and who would be blessed by God, Blessed are:

“the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those persecuted because of righteousness, and those who are insulted, persecuted falsely accused of all kinds of evil.”

The Sermon on the Mount is not only a picture of Jesus, but it is also meant to be a picture of our new character under grace as citizens of heaven living as ambassadors representing the kingdom of God: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done...” Yet, it seems that many of us have now become far more driven by the letter of the law, forgetting what Christ has done for us resulting in the covenant of grace we are now under. We are quick to cry persecution when the 10 commandments cannot be publically posted on the grounds of government buildings, but take no notice, or express any outrage, when Jesus’ own words he expressed in his Sermon on the mount are not posted anywhere, including many of our churches, much less lived out by us.

Minding Our Own Business

A number of months ago I was teaching the widow’s Bible study out of I Thessalonians 4 when I experienced a piercing in my heart, not only for the way that Paul was describing the Christ-like character of this body of believer, but also for the instructions he gave to them for conducting their daily lives and why. I Thessalonians 4:9-12 *“Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught to love each other. And in fact, you do love all of God’s family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more,*

11.) ‘and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, 12.) so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.”

Modeling Love

Jesus didn't just teach a message for loving one another to those that followed him, he also modeled it for them. Likewise, when Paul points out to the body of believers in Thessalonica that they have already been taught to love one another, it would not be unreasonable to believe that this spoken message was also modeled by those who were teaching them.

Conspiracies, Fear And Love

Finally, let me end first with this quote from Isaiah 8, that I have continuously had to remind myself of when I have found myself being tempted away from the message of love that Jesus modeled for us towards that of fear because of my own lack of faith. Beginning with verse 11 and ending with verse 13,

“This is what the Lord says to me with his strong hand upon me, warning me not to follow the way of this people:

‘Do not call conspiracy everything this people calls a conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it.’

The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread.”

And lastly, from I John 4:17-21, where John speaks of God's love for us and in turn desiring that our love for others be a reflection of Jesus in our lives. And in this discourse on love, John dispels the most commonly held belief that the opposite of love is hate, for the more accurate truth that the opposite of love is actually fear. That it is fear that gives rise to hate, and not the other way around.

17.) “This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgement: In this world we are like Jesus.

18.) There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

19.) We love because he first loved us.

20.) Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.

21.) And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God Must also love their brother and sister.

Amen,


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