

# Caring for the Needy

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[ 0 : 00 ] The Bible is filled with memorable short summary statements that communicate volumes about what God expects of us.

! We see many many statements that are memorable throughout Scripture and they tell us in encapsulated forms what God requires of us.

One of these statements is found in Micah chapter 6 verse 8 and it reads, He has told you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?

And these are the words that the Lord spoke through the prophet Micah to the nation of Israel who were oppressing the weak and they were neglecting the poor.

And they somehow felt that all they needed to do was give greater sacrifices, more bulls and more burnt offerings to the Lord. And the Lord says, No. I require more than that. I've shown you what I require.

[ 1 : 11 ] I require that you would do justice, that you would love kindness and that you would walk humbly before me. There's another summary statement that we find. This one is in the New Testament and it's in the letter of James.

James chapter 1 verse 27 and it reads, Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

When we read James' statement concerning the pure and undefiled religion that includes caring for widows, I think it's easy to see why the Apostle Paul takes so much time in his letter to Timothy, his first letter to Timothy in chapter 5, he dedicates a lot of time talking about the care for widows.

Because when James was summarizing what true and pure religion is, he included that it includes visiting the widows.

So significant that that would be a part of what he describes as true and pure religion. And so again, it is no surprise that the Apostle Paul emphasizes the care that is to be extended to widows in this letter to Timothy.

[ 2 : 40 ] And last week, if you were here, you would recall that we considered as part of the rules of God's house, how those who are truly widows, and by extension those who are truly needy, are to be cared for.

And this morning we have come to another section that Paul addresses this concern, and it is in verses 9 through 16 of chapter 5.

And if you're not there yet, would you please turn to 1 Timothy chapter 5. We'll be reading verses 9 through 16. And here now what we see Apostle Paul doing is, he focuses on some of the criteria that should be considered in extending care to widows.

But Paul's approach to determining which widows should be cared for by the church provides us with general guidelines about caring for the truly needy in our midst, whether they are widows or not.

And I think since every true church is made up of all kinds of people, every true church will have the truly needy among them, even if they're not widows.

[ 3 : 56 ] And these words that we've come to this morning can be especially important in guiding us in terms of how we administer care to them.

So let's consider this morning 1 Timothy chapter 5 verses 9 through 16. Please follow along as I read. Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than 60 years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works.

If she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work, but refused to enroll younger widows, for when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry, and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith.

Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not.

So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander.

[ 5 : 37 ] For some have already strayed after Satan. If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them.

Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows. Let's pray together. Father, we have already heard this morning how much we are dependent on you for everything.

Lord, this is especially true when we come to sit under the authority of your word. Lord, we are dependent upon you to grant us illumination.

We are dependent upon you to quicken our minds and give us fertile hearts for the word of God to be planted. Lord, we acknowledge in this moment our great need for you.

Would you come by your spirit? Would you quicken our minds and cause us to be alert and cause us to hear your word as we ought and then to obey it as we should?

[ 6 : 43 ] Lord, I ask that you would grant me much grace for the task of bringing your word to your people. Lord, no one is sufficient for this task. Lord, I ask that by your grace you make your ministers able servants.

And I ask that you would do this for me this morning. Lord, care for these who are assembled, who are gathered in this place. You know the varied needs that are represented.

Lord, we thank you that we can pray to you because your hand isn't short and your heirs are not deaf and you will both help us and hear us in our various points of need.

So we trust that you would do that now, Lord. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, here in these verses, the Apostle Paul is keeping with the practice of the early church in ensuring that true widows are cared for.

But even for churches where there are not those who are truly widows, there are those who are truly needy. And his words provide helpful instructions for how churches can go about caring for these needy ones in their midst.

[ 8 : 07 ] And as I consider these eight verses that we have just read, here's the larger point that can be made about caring for the needy and not just widows.

This is the larger point that I think can be made from these eight verses. In order to care effectively for those who are truly needy, churches must establish clear criteria to determine who is truly needy.

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And that is what we see the Apostle Paul doing. Last week we considered how he said that the truly widows needed to be cared for, but now he goes a step further and he begins to lay out the criteria that should be considered in determining these widows who are going to receive care.

So here's what I'd like us to do in our remaining time this morning. I'd like us to consider what the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul says about caring for those who are truly widows and further consider how it applies to caring for those who are truly needy.

[ 9 : 27 ] And I believe that Paul's instructions to Timothy and the church at Ephesus can be summarized in just two statements that I want to use to work through this text this morning.

And the first one is, number one, establish criteria for providing help. Establish criteria for providing help. Now as it relates to helping widows, the Apostle Paul establishes the criteria in verses 9 and 10.

Look again at what he says. Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than 60 years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works.

If she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work.

That's what he says the criteria are for caring for widows. Now this act of being enrolled that Paul refers to speaks to an official list of widows.

[10:41] And evidently, the church had this list. The way Paul introduces it, he assumes that the list exists, and he says to Timothy, he says, Timothy, only enroll these particular widows on the list.

But what seems to also be clear is that Timothy did not have criteria, at least not well-formed criteria, and so Paul begins to establish them to help Timothy to determine the priorities of who was going to get care.

And the first thing he says the criterion is, the first criterion is maturity. He says, it is an issue of age, Timothy.

Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than 60 years of age. So 60 and older might be enrolled on this list. Now while this seems arbitrary, while it seems like, okay, why 60?

Why not 65, or 62, 63, as we would consider the age of retirement or something today? The reason that Paul uses 60 is because in that culture, 60 was the perspective on the age after which it was unlikely that a widow would remarry.

[12:04] It was kind of like, you know, when you turn 60, the prospects of marriage weren't that great, the likelihood of you wanting to remarry was also not that great. So from a cultural perspective, this was the reason that Paul established it at age 60.

60 was understood to be the age that a woman would not remarry if she was a widow. The second aspect that he covers is fidelity.

He says, in addition to being at least 60 years old, this woman must be a one man woman. She must be the wife of one husband.

Now, the language that Paul uses here is very similar to the language that he uses over in chapter 3, verse 2, when he talks about the elders. And he says that the elder must be the husband of one wife.

In other words, he must be a one woman man. He must be a man who is committed to one woman at a time and not multiple women all at the same time.

[13:17] So what Paul is addressing here is the issue of fidelity in marriage. He's not addressing saying that if you had a biblical divorce and you marry and your husband dies that you can't be enrolled on the list if you are 60 and you meet these other criteria.

He's not saying that at all. He's talking about the issue of fidelity. That you are a woman, a widow, who you are faithful to your husband.

There is no ground to point a finger that in some way you were unfaithful. He says, Timothy, not only is maturity important, but also fidelity in marriage is also important.

And then he also addresses the aspect of charity. That's the third criterion that we find Paul laying down, the aspect of charity.

And he says that she had to have a reputation for good works. And it would seem like maybe people gave words of recommendation or letters of recommendation they had those, just to say this is the kind of person that this woman is.

[14:27] We think of Dorcas who had such a reputation in the community of being a woman of good works. So he says that she must be a woman who is marked by charity.

And he begins to list some of the good works. It's not an exhaustive list, and I think we see that when he gets to the end, but he lists some of the good works. One is bringing up children. Not necessarily her own children, because in those days there would have been many opportunities to care for orphans and for abandoned children, but he lists bringing up children.

And I think we should consider what Paul says here beyond just words to qualify these widows. If you are a mother, and you are raising your children, and you are faithfully giving yourself to that task, or you have given yourself to that task, you have performed good work.

You have performed the kind of good work that scripture says should mark our lives. And it's so easy to just relegate that to the side of something you do, and we then do it haphazardly, but scripture says this is a good work.

And I think this is especially important for mothers to hear who are in the throes of caring for young children right now. What you're doing is a good work.

[15:52] What you're doing is a work that God has his eyes on. And it is a good thing that you're doing. And you should not in any way minimize that and consider that what you're doing doesn't matter.

What you're doing does matter. It is a good work to be raising children, raising them in the fear and in the admonition of the Lord. So the first example of good works that the Apostle Paul mentions is bringing up children.

I also think that there speaks in that a kind of priority as well. It speaks this importance to a woman who is married, who has a family.

It communicates this important responsibility of caring for children. And how easily we can let it again just fall to the wayside and not see it as an important task.

But it is very important. And the Apostle Paul in these criteria that he gives us, he brings it to the fore. That bringing up children is a godly good work.

[17:05] The second he mentions is hospitality. Another good work is showing hospitality, opening up home and heart. to others.

And when we think of hospitality today, it's very different from the way they would have thought of hospitality in Paul and Timothy's day. Hospitality was not only important, it was absolutely necessary.

People would travel long distances. They didn't have the conveniences of cars and hotels everywhere. They had maybe little shady inns in some places.

but the norm was that they would walk while there was sun and when the sun set, they resorted to some home. They resorted to someone who would show kindness to them and who would open their homes to them.

And believers were expected to show charity. They were expected to show charity not only to fellow believers but to total strangers. And I think some of us are old enough, old enough, young enough, one of those, to remember that hospitality was very important in this country.

[18:17] When people from the family islands would come and they just couldn't go to a hotel and you had to open the home and there were always people in the home and hospitality was extended and they shared with whatever you had even if it was not a whole lot.

And you can imagine the sacrifice that hospitality would have been in those days to open your home, at a moment's notice. Maybe we got a phone call or we got some advance notice, I'm coming in town, could you put me up for the night or something?

But many times somebody just walked to the door and just knocked and said, can I stay here tonight or can I stay here for the next several days? So Paul says one of the marks of good works or an example of good works that you should consider Timothy is how hospitable was this woman. The next one that he raises is washing the saints' feet. This is another example of charity but it also communicates humility. It communicates humility because connected to this way of life that they had where they walked everywhere and the streets were dusty and they wore sandals and their feet would get dirty.

a custom was when you got into a house or you got into a room, kind of like remember when Jesus was with his disciples in the upper room, they were going to have the Passover, they came in, everyone's feet was dirty, but nobody wanted to wash the other person's feet because there was no slave to do it.

[19:54] Normally that's what the servant would do and Jesus himself washed their feet. But a common courtesy that would be extended to people who came into a home was their feet would be washed when they came in.

And normally a servant would do it. But what we see is that following the Lord's example, saints began to do this. Saints began to not see this as such a menial task that it was relegated only to the servants.

They themselves began to wash the feet of each other. And so Paul says an example of good works is washing the saints' feet.

Now, I know that some of you may have come from a background where this was practiced in your church. I know the church I grew up in every New Year's Eve night we would gather for what they call a watch night service.

And we would have communion just one time of year that time and they'd also wash people's feet. And I used to think about that because if there was ever a time you were going to church with your feet clean it was that night.

[21:10] And people still washed one another's feet. Make sure their socks have no holes and make sure everything is proper and they just sat around and washed one another's clean feet. I don't think that's what the Lord intended.

I think that's what the Lord was saying to us. When the disciples washed each other's feet, when the saints in Paul and Timothy's day washed each other's feet, they were performing a real need. They were performing something that was beneficial to the other person. It was not ceremonial. It was actually beneficial. And it wasn't once a year.

It was all the time that you walked into a and they say let me wash your feet. It's almost like give me a coat, let me hang it up for you.

This person would say come let me wash your feet. And Paul says essentially if this widow has a reputation that she has washed the saints feet, she is showing her humility.

[ 22 : 15 ] She is showing the good work. And that's an example of the kind of widow that you should admit based on good works.

The next example that he lists is caring for the afflicted. And here this is a broad word for affliction. It speaks about any kind of distress.

It could range from debilitating illness to a person who is undergoing persecution or a person who's just going through incredible distress and difficulty in life.

people are needed to come alongside and to be patient and to sympathize and some can even empathize because they've been there and they administer care to those who are afflicted.

Well, Paul stops there and he simply ends it by saying and devoted herself to every good work showing that it's not exhaustive there would be other examples of good works in this widow's life who's being considered for enrollment on the list of widows.

[ 23 : 32 ] So the summary of it is she needs to be 60 years old at least she needs to have been faithful to her husband and she needs to have a reputation for good works.

Now when you consider this list it seems pretty interesting and some theologians say that just based on the qualifications it seems that this list that Paul is referring to is more than just the list for widows to receive financial care that it speaks to something more than that deceased British pastor John Stott he wonders whether this register was not for meeting the needs of widows or not for supporting widows but actually for widows capable of offering service so John Stott thought that when he considered the list maybe what this list is is it's not so much a list of women who need support but a list of women who are capable of offering and rendering service to the church on the other hand

John Calvin argued that the role of widows was for both support and for service so he argued that these widows they were put on the list for support but by their character and by their experience these were also women who were able to render service and they would give that service and it seems to make sense what Calvin says because if these women were truly devoted to good works when they came to a place where the church is caring for them the good works will hopefully increase because now they can give themselves more fully to the good works and not be as concerned about where the next meal is coming from if they're all alone and they have no one to care for widows who were both needy they had no one else to care for them but they were also women who were able to serve and minister in the church because of that season of life that they were in and because of the experience they already had in giving themselves over to good works now the criteria for being enrolled on the widows list raises an important point what happened to the widow who was truly a widow she was all alone she had no help but she didn't qualify to be on the list maybe she was 55 maybe she was 61 she was older than the age the minimum age to be on the list but she came to

Christ late and so she didn't develop a long track record of good works how should she be cared for what is the church going to do in that particular situation well it would be great to have Timothy here to find out what they did!

but we don't have Timothy but I'd like to think that there was some leeway I'd like to think that somehow I mean if you consider the list that Paul gives the only one that is purely objective is the age but even then I imagine that that could not be totally objective because it was not like you could go to the birth registry and check to see and check to see if Anna was really born on the 1st of December and she's really 60 at this particular point or Anna could produce a birth certificate it wasn't like that I think generally they had an idea of the age of a person so I don't think this was an exact number that a person could only be enrolled after their 60th birthday I don't think Paul was giving so much a rigid rule concerning these particular things but we can be sure how on the ground these particular issues were worked out but here's what I think it's safe to say

[ 28 : 03 ] I think it's safe to say that though these widows may not be enrolled on the list they would be cared for perhaps not in an ongoing way as the widows enrolled on the list perhaps not with the same priority as the widows on the list but I believe that taking into account the general admonition to Timothy that he needed to care for those who are truly widows if a widow didn't make the list if she was truly alone had no one else to care for her I believe that the church was still going to come alongside and to help even though not to the same level of priority as the women on the list now as I said last week in our particular context we have one widow in the person of my mother and you can tell by the way she dresses that she's not truly a needy widow I've

I've I've told my mother many many times I sometimes I wonder why she's dressing so much you know whether she is you know scouting or looking or whatever and I would give her away I would I would I would give her away although it's not my duty to do it my brother BJ would probably give her away as well would you give her would you give her away he wouldn't oh mommy you have to come to me BJ won't give you away I'll give you away to a good man though not to not to fly by night you're good you're a good man that wouldn't be good but even if my mother was not supporting herself she has seven children and as John Calvin puts it here's what he says he says before the church has to carry the burden let the children do their duty that's what it is not doing a favor it is a duty to care for parents it's a duty to do that and by God's grace it should be a delightful duty as hard as it can be to care for parents as they're aging as health is failing and they're more dependent on us brothers and sisters that is a joy to be able to serve in that way and I pray that for those of us for whom God and His providence allows that for us may we do that with great joy and give back to our parents and to our mothers in particular so our context our situation is that we don't have widows in the sense that Paul describes here true widows but we have those who are truly needy and we will have them from time to time they will they will be and I mean it's one of the things the Lord said when they were complaining about how the ointment was wasted on him

Jesus said the poor you'll always have with you meaning there will always be those who are truly needy but since we have needy people and we will continue to have needy people these are good reasons for us to establish formal criteria for helping the needy and let me just offer three reasons why it makes sense for us to do this the first is it will better ensure fair treatment of those who seek help and you establish criteria as Paul sought to do for Timothy to say Timothy here are the criteria that you need to follow and you establish these criteria you better ensure that those seeking help are treated fairly you don't make it up as you go you don't change the rules by the day you establish them and then you make decisions in accordance with them the second reason is it makes the job easier and the duty is clearer for those administering the help it makes the job easier it makes the duties clearer when they have criteria that they are to consider and they are to follow

I see Zinovia this morning and I imagine she would be saying yes because in the Department of Social Services they need criteria and I could only imagine how difficult it must be dealing with thousands of people needing help and sometimes maybe falling in between particular criteria but how easy it is in the sense to say this is the criteria and we know our boundaries and we know where we need to refer and to go up higher and so forth but it makes the job easier it makes the duties clearer and the third reason is it helps to manage limited resources because the resources are limited you need rules and you need criteria to help you in managing them so that you're able to really care for those who truly have needs if you don't have the standards to manage it then when the needs come there's nothing to be able to meet those needs now there is an obvious reality that comes up in the midst of all that we're talking about and the obvious reality is that sometimes people who request help will be refused and this brings me to my second and final point number two establish criteria for refusing help first establish the criteria for providing help and second establish criteria for refusing help and that's what the apostle Paul does in verses 11 through 16 in verses 11 through 16 he lays down the criteria for refusing help to particular widows and he lists two grounds for receiving sorry for refusing help and refusing to enroll particular widows on the list and the first ground is an age factor he says if they are young widows again let's look at what he says in verse 11 but refuse to enroll younger widows for when their passions draw them away from Christ they desire to marry and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith besides that they learn to be idlers going about from house to house and not only idlers but also gossips and busy bodies saying what they should not so I would have younger widows marry their children manage their households and give the adversary no occasion for slander so Paul says to Timothy says Timothy refuse to enroll the younger widows now here again when we consider what

he says to Timothy I don't believe that he is describing all widows below the age of 60 because what's the difference between a widow who is 59 and one who is 60 really they have the same age range and they have the same kind of maturity it seems like he is really addressing the very young widows the ones who clearly would have the prospects to be married and clearly would have the desire to be married as well

[ 36 : 30 ] Paul says Timothy don't enroll them on the list and here again I believe that we were able to see that this list was some list of commitment because he goes on to talk about what would happen when they have to drop off the list and look at what he says in the latter part of verse 11 and then into verse 12 he says for when their passions draw them away from Christ they desire to marry and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith so he says Timothy just put the women on the list who you pretty much know based on 60 they're not going to get married not likely they'll be married but avoid putting the younger ones on because they're going to get married Timothy most likely they'll get married they will desire companionship they've been married before and they will abandon their former faith now what do these words mean exactly because on the face of it it could sound like Paul is saying something pretty negative concerning marriage or remarriage and here

I found that Dr. Phil Rikens explanation of Paul's words in verses 11 and 12 to be very helpful here's what he says as difficult as these verses are it is important to realize that Paul was not opposed to marriage or sex in the English language passion and desire almost make it sound as if wanting to get married or share sexual intercourse is immoral but these terms simply refer to a woman's natural sexual desire which is given by God and finds its proper fulfillment in marital intercourse nor is Paul opposed to remarriage people in the ancient world commonly believed that it was disloyal for widows to remarry obviously this is not the biblical view since verse 14 explicitly gives permission for young widows to remarry

I think that's helpful to see that he's not in any way belittling the God given gift of marriage and sexual relations in marriage but more so speaking to a reality that these younger women would desire this God given experience in marriage so he says to Timothy don't put them on because they're going to be on one day and off the next and also when he talks about abandoning their form of faith it's pretty clear that Paul is not saying that they've just turned away from Christ at least not at this point he goes on to talk about some who apparently did do that but it seems!

away from their form of vow the vow or the commitment that they made to be on this list that they would not be looking to remarry and so forth so not so much that they turned from the faith but they would go on the list and come off of the list because they didn't keep their vow to not remarry but that's not all that Paul says he goes on to paint a picture and are getting themselves in trouble look at what he says in verse 13 he says besides that they learn to be idlers going about from house to house and not only idlers but gossips and busy bodies saying what they should not and Paul's point is that these young widows typically will not give themselves to mature conduct and they will not dedicate themselves to good works he's giving Timothy his wise and practical advice about how these young women generally would conduct themselves obviously not all of them that way but this seems to be the particular pattern now while the apostle

Paul is certainly not primarily addressing the issues of being idle and gossiping and being busy bodies getting in other people's businesses he is addressing it in a somewhat secondary way as he passes to say that this is not acceptable for those who profess Christ and I think for all of us this morning although that's not the direct primary focus of the text this morning as we hear these words I think we should hear these words and allow them to convict us where they need to convict us because these sins idleness and gossip and being busy bodies these are sins that Jerry Bridges refers to as respectable sins these are sins that we tend to easily tolerate in our lives and we tend to accommodate in our lives and we tend to overlook in our lives and they are sins that we don't fight as much as we fight what we would say are the bigger sins and they are bigger sins they are more weightier sins and don't let anyone fool you to think that all sins are equal all sins are not equal and we see we see that in scripture from the old testament the whole idea of punishing sins and crimes with different degrees of punishment behind that is the thinking that they are not all equal and that's why some people were more severely dealt with under the law other people but what happens is because we recognize these radio sins we will fight with more of the fortitude that is within us to resist adultery and resist stealing and to resist lying but often times we don't have the same fortitude when it comes to idleness and gossip and being busy bodies and so these sins need to be resisted

as well and we need to be careful to avoid what Jerry

[ 43 : 05 ] Bridges says this accommodating of these respectable sins and ask the Lord to convict us and give us grace that we will be aware when we're doing that and we can repent of it so Paul expresses his desire for the younger widows look at what he says in verses 14 and 15 he says so I would have younger widows marry their children manage their households and give the adversary no occasion for slander for some have already strayed after Satan clearly the apostle Paul is not giving a command how do we know he's not giving a command he's not giving a command because these things are within the providence of God you cannot command a person to marry you cannot command a person to have children marriage is in God's providence and the bearing of children is within God's providence but Paul is expressing his desire believing that as these younger widows become busy busy at home doing good work caring for their children caring for their families that they would not have the time to be getting off into mischief and into conduct that would bring a reproach on the name of Christ and on his church that's what

Paul means when he says and give no occasion for slander give the adversary no occasion for slander as he talks about some who have strayed after Satan no doubt these are those who fell prey to the false doctrine that was pervasive in the church and maybe because of the time they had giving these people an heir some went off after them and they abandoned the faith that they had formerly professed I think as we consider again these words of the apostle Paul it does seem like what is in view is that these widows on the list were performing ministry as well as getting support and this lifestyle standard that the younger women were not likely to be able to live up to even communicates more strongly this idea that they were both being supported but they were also serving so that's the that's the first ground the second is the support factor the support factor so the first ground was the age factor if they were too young they couldn't be enrolled but the second is the support factor he says in verse 16 if any believing woman has relatives who are widows let her care for them let the church not be burdened so that it may care for those who are really widows so a woman might be 60 or older she might have been faithful to her husband she might have a good reputation for good works but she too

Paul says should not be enrolled on the list if she has relatives who can care for her he says to the believing woman if you have relatives who are widows then you are to care for them so if you have this believing woman and she has relatives who are widows and the 60 and older been faithful to their husband until death and what's the third one what's the third one I'm forgetting what's that that's right gave themselves to good deeds good works they may have those but as long as there's someone in the family to care for them then they are to not be enrolled on the list now does it strike you as strange that

Paul lays this burden only on the believing woman and not on the believing man as well in verse 16 he says if any believing woman has relatives who are widows let her care for them let the church not be burdened so that it may care for those who are truly widows that same bit odd that he lays the burden on the women alone but when we think about it as J.

D. Kelly in his pastoral epistles! helpfully says here's what he wrote the reason why Paul does not impose the same obligation on a Christian man of similar position should be obvious if such a man were unmarried or a widower it would be almost unsuitable for him to take over responsibility for a group of widows whereas if he were married the responsibility in all its practical aspects would naturally devolve upon his wife so he's saying that's the reason that he doesn't give that responsibility to a man to care for the widows because it's not appropriate if he's a single man if he's a married man it would fall to his wife so what's the application for us this morning in a context where we we don't have younger widows to whom we can deny ongoing care and encourage to get married and to be busy housewives what is the application point for us well I

[ 48 : 55 ] I think the application point for us is somewhat simple although we have no young widows to deny from time to time we do have to say no to those who present needs and really when you consider what Paul is saying here it is not no because we don't have the resources although sometimes that is the case it is no because the need is not a true need that we as a church should be meeting and that's a sobering thought it's a sobering thought to to hear that that it's not necessarily no because we don't have it it's no because a decision has been made criteria have been established that say no we won't meet that particular need and I think you all know that no is never easy and even when it's well thought out no is not easy but I think getting a no answer is easier to give or giving a no answer is easier to give when it's been thought through and receiving a

no answer is also easier to give when it is thought through and the person understands the reason that they are caring no

I think one of the lessons that should be clear to all of us this morning is that caring for the needy is not an exact science it's not exact yet in order to effectively care for the needy those who are truly needy we need to establish criteria for providing the help and for refusing the help and this time of the year is very difficult for a lot of parents many are emotionally stressed many are financially stretched as they prepare children to return to school some churches are fielding many requests for help with school fees and school uniforms and shoes and school supplies and at the same time there are other demands that come for other kinds of assistance medical expenses and burying loved ones and paying rent and mortgages and even consumer debt and in some churches these demands come on top of existing demands that they already have commitments to as we have seen

Paul talk about careful widows who are true widows careful orphans and careful others in the church who are truly destitute and all of these needs they converge and they by far exceed what the resources are the reality is they can't all be met and so they have to be prioritized and in the midst of setting these priorities some will be helped and some will be refused as I thought about this in our own context while over the years we have not established criteria we have been guided by principles and I'm seeing as I study Paul as I study his wisdom in saying to Timothy Timothy you need criteria you need to establish them they need to be communicated they need to be known I recognize that we need to move from just guiding principles to establishing criteria criteria and we will be calling on some of you to help us to establish these criteria and others of you to administer these criteria so that we can truly care for the needy among us and this will especially include true widows should we ever have them and in time I imagine as our church matures we will indeed have them

I want to close this morning and remind you why thinking through these issues are important here's why it's important it is important because it's all a part of the reason the apostle Paul wrote this letter and he tells us why he wrote the letter in verse 15 of chapter 2 so that we may know how we ought to behave ourselves in the household of God which is the church of the living God a pillar and buttress of the truth and see what Paul is saying here reminds us that we're not just a group of people who decided to form a religious club and call it a church no we are the church of the living God and we are the church because Jesus Christ shed his blood to purchase us and to redeem us and to ransom us as we sang about this morning and he reconciled us to himself and he joined us to one another and he put us in a spiritual family and he calls us to care for one another this is why this is important because when we are caring for one another we are caring for God's purchased possession and when we establish these criteria what we are doing is we are honoring Christ and honoring his sacrifice in his church and I pray that God would help us to do this more and more as we live life together in this local church let's pray God