

January 2015



Dear friend,

“The moment my husband died, his family took my home and everything I own. I managed to escape before they took my kids away from me because I was not the ‘owner’ [of the home or children] anymore.” That’s what an African widow told me. Unfortunately, she is not alone. In many cultures widows suffer all kinds of indignities –homelessness, widow cleansing (rape), widow burning, and abandonment.

God loves widows and orphans! Thank you for praying with us this month for the 200 million widows of this world.

William Carey, the 18th-century British missionary to India, was deeply disturbed seeing widows being thrown onto their husbands’ funeral pyres in hopes of a better chance in the next life. Carey started a movement that, in time, outlawed “suttee” – this terrible practice – in 1834. However, culture speaks louder than the law. One hundred eighty years later, India’s widows are still considered a curse that brings bad luck. Ostracized, thousands of them live as beggars, working as slaves, hidden away. Varanasi is a city on the banks of the Ganges River that is a huge cremation site and a “city of widows.” I was told that they pray daily for death to come swiftly.

Some months ago, my sister-in-law, Ursula, lost her husband of four decades. The sudden shock and pain were deep; but so is her faith. She believes the God who the Bible says is “the Father of the fatherless and the husband of the widows.” That’s the hope that we share. Please pray for grace and wisdom for Project Hannah’s teams as they comfort widows and those whose husbands have abandoned them.

It takes time to feel “normal again” after a husband dies, says Miriam Neff, another widow who is using her pain and grief to help others. She writes: “The glove of grief is as unique as the fingerprint inside. Don’t compare yourself to others and their timeline. ... Time is simply a tool. Remember that God is a specialist in granting grace and mercy and is the Great Physician. Healing is His specialty.”

If you are a widow, my friend, I pray that this exercise of praying for others will start a healing process in your life. May you sense the powerful reality that “God is our refuge and strength – a very present help in times of trouble.”

Believing with you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marli Spieker". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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Testimonies

The **Ivory Coast** ladies visited a widow who lives with her four children in a tiny room. Since her husband died, she struggles every day to survive, often having to miss meals. Because there is no money for uniforms, the children do not go to school. Being able to give this family the means to be able to eat for the day was good, but we thank God for the love and hope in Jesus that we could share beyond the tears shed. The daughter said, "Since our father passed away, life has become hard for us. To find enough to eat is a real problem for us. What you did moves us."

Tanzania: A widow called Nembris, who is 53, invited us to her hut. The hut is home to herself, two of her five children and three grandchildren; her daughter passed away, and her son-in-law remarried. She herself built a (215 to 270 square feet) hut of a mixture of cow dung and clay. The roof is thatched and has to be rebuilt every year. The hut was very dim inside as the walls were dark and there were only two small air vents serving as "windows." They all sleep on a raised bed in front of a room that is also used for cooking. With a torch we could see the letters of the alphabet written on the yellow-painted part of the wall. She put the letters there for the children to learn and rehearse.

Mona from Albania: "I am a widow. My husband passed away 10 years ago. I have two daughters. It has not been easy for me, but praise the Lord that He has found me. I want to thank you for *Women of Hope* in Albanian. This program has helped me many times, especially to understand my daughters. The topics are very good and genuine. May God bless you!"

Flora, 46 years old, from Albania: "I am a divorced woman. I have two adult children. Since the time of my divorce, my two children have stayed with my ex-husband. I returned to my father's house. While doing daily housework, I used to listen a lot to the music on the radio. While listening to music one day, I listened to a program called "the prayer calendar of Project Hannah," on which I heard the speaker praying about women in general. I was touched because I never thought that someone could pray for me. I began listening every day to that program, and I really liked it. Today, seven years after I first heard that program, I still listen to it and pray according to the prayer requests. Thank you for what you are doing. May the Lord bless you!"

Mozambique: "I am a Christian and a member of a Project Hannah prayer group. For a long time, I attended the Project Hannah prayer meetings and I asked for many things from God, and God answered my prayers. I went back home thinking that it was all that I needed because when I was there, I felt well spiritually and I had peace in my life. My husband passed away, and I went back to the meetings tearful and hopeless. My fellow sisters from Project Hannah came and prayed with me to restore hope and peace. They counseled me to go to church and to trust God inside and outside the church. Now I realize that God must be in our lives all the time. When I approached my church all the people there were happy to receive me and my family. My sisters, if you are in the Project Hannah group, don't forget to go to your church. Trust in God. He will give you peace, even when you have problems."