

# Widows and Widowers

By Kersten Campbell

## Moving Forward with Faith

Many widows and widowers wonder if they will ever feel alive again after the death of their beloved companions. But surviving spouses from around the world bear witness that there is life after the death of a loved one and that a loving Father in Heaven will help provide the way to move forward.

### Forward with Faith

One difficulty widows and widowers face after the death of a spouse is the challenge of moving on with their temporal lives. Some find it hard to make important decisions alone or to assume responsibilities formerly shouldered by a spouse. In addition, the financial situation of a widow or widower may be dire, especially if the spouse accrued medical bills as the result of a long illness, or if the widow or widower is left with no means to support the family.

Helen Thompson, a 64-year-old widow from Australia, was facing many of these temporal challenges after her husband passed away. Three of her seven children still lived at home, and to add to the complications, one of Sister Thompson's older daughters had also become a widow at the same time.



The ride to the hospital . . . seemed to take forever. As I walked in the doors, one of the emergency room attendants came to meet me, to tell me what I already knew: my husband was dead. A part of me died too, that misty November morning.”

Sue Fullmer of Utah, from an essay she wrote on becoming a widow.

“I was facing some major financial difficulties,” she remembers. “It was a very tight situation.”

But Sister Thompson found that the answer to her temporal problems came from living gospel principles and relying on the Lord.

One of the greatest blessings came from paying tithing. “I’ve always paid my tithing,” she says. “I felt I couldn’t afford not to.”

Sister Thompson trusted in the principle of tithing, and the Lord showed her how to find the answers she so desperately sought. “I was reading in the Book of Mormon,” she recalls, “where the brother of Jared was asked to build some boats (see Ether 2). As I was reading, I noticed the steps the brother of Jared took when he was facing a serious problem. I thought since my problems were serious too, that I could follow his example.”

Sister Thompson did some research, gathered ideas, and presented them to the Lord. She received guidance as a result of her prayer.

“I followed the same steps as the brother of Jared,” she said. “The plan allowed me to catch up on my house payments and other obligations.”



*Help from family and friends, hope through service, and concerted efforts to feel happiness can fill widows and widowers with the faith needed to move forward.*

### **Forward with Comfort**

Like Sister Thompson, others have found peace in the principles of the gospel as they have pondered the Atonement and sought the companionship of the Holy Ghost in their daily lives. In England, 33-year-old Andrea Fahey's husband died suddenly following surgery. Sister Fahey felt an overwhelming sadness and wondered how she could raise her three young children alone. She found that daily prayer and scripture study brought the Holy Ghost, which gave her comfort and the strength to move forward.

She says, "When I pray for the Holy Ghost to be with me, I am more calm and controlled. I am able to think about the different path that my life is now to follow."

LaRae S. Blake of Texas, a mother of eight, also relies upon the Holy Ghost. After she lost her husband to cancer, she found peace in contemplating the blessings of the Atonement.

"I had such an increased appreciation of the Atonement of the Savior," she says, "My faith in His love for me and my family, and my knowledge that He understands the heartache I was going through, helped me to see things



*Pondering the Atonement of Jesus Christ and seeking the companionship of the Holy Ghost have helped many widows and widowers manage their grief.*

contemplated. People have cooked and cleaned. A family in my student ward asked their family to give them money instead of presents for Christmas and

with an eternal perspective. I knew my Heavenly Father had given me the gift of the Holy Ghost, who has the role, among others, of a comforter.”

### **Forward with Help**

Sister Blake also attests that the service she received from people who desired to reach out was instrumental in helping her move forward.

She remembers, “I had so many people reach out to me in love and kindness. The Relief Society and Young Women came and cleaned my house. A friend helped me figure out the medical bills, the insurance, and the paperwork that had to be done to change the accounts over to my name. People brought over food and paper goods and called me on special occasions that were hard to get through, such as the first Christmas after his death.”

Sister Blake says she especially appreciated her home and visiting teachers. “I had an excellent home teacher who helped me learn how to care for the house. He taught me how to light a water heater and fix an old door. He also gave my children blessings at the beginning of the school year.

“My visiting teacher helped me to learn to use the computer, which had always been my husband’s job.”

Jason Morris, a 29-year-old widower from Nevada, says he appreciated those who simply came over and served without asking permission. When his wife, who suffered from leukemia, passed away just five months after giving birth to their daughter, Brother Morris felt like he was in a fog for weeks. He says people who offered specific acts of service were the most helpful.

“I have been served in ways I would never have

then gave the money to us. This same family watched my daughter for free while I completed my last year of law school. They even threw a surprise birthday party for me and have included us in many activities.”

Widows and widowers say inclusion in family activities is important. Many face crushing loneliness they find hard to bear, and some feel ostracized when old friends who are couples no longer feel comfortable associating with them. Much appreciated are the families who reach out and continually invite them places and include them in their family gatherings, even long after the painful loss.

Also pressing is the need to talk about what happened, even if it results in tears. After a three-year battle with cancer took her husband, Diana Redfern of England was devastated and frightened at the prospect of being alone. She relates how people in her ward helped her adjust to her new situation.

“At the time of Bob’s death, people were very kind to me. They reached out. I was listened to, and that is what I needed. What was not helpful was when people avoided talking about my husband because they thought it would upset me. I *wanted* to talk about him. It helped ease the loss over time.”

### **Forward with Hope**

Another thing that helps, says Debbie Ryals, a 55-year-old widow from South Carolina, is the strength and peace that come from serving in the house of the Lord. She finds comfort in the doctrine of eternal families made possible through the ordinances of the temple. She lost her husband suddenly and unexpectedly when he was taken by a rare blood disorder. At the time, she was not a member of the Church, but she says that in spite of being taught



otherwise, she always knew that families were eternal. That is why when the missionaries knocked on her door soon after her husband's death and taught her about eternal families, she believed them. She was baptized within six months. Since then, the doctrine of eternal marriage has given her hope and helped her to get through the lonely days and nights when she misses her beloved companion.

"I love the temple," she says, "I find it very peaceful, and I come away with a sense of renewal. It's like I've been rededicated, and I can face the world once more."

Sue Fullmer agrees. Sister Fullmer, of Utah, lost her husband to a sudden, unexplained illness. She says, "When you are a single parent, you have that burden to shoulder all alone, day and night. But all that weight is lifted away from you when you walk through the doors of the temple. The temple is a place where I can feel my husband near to me. It is another witness that this life is part of eternity."

### Forward with Joy

Most widows and widowers say that despite feelings of despair and loneliness, it is possible to have joy again. Trisha Grant-Call, a 38-year-old widow from Utah, says widows and widowers need to allow themselves to have joy.

"It takes awhile to find happiness after a loss," she says, "but I like to try to realize what I do have. I still find joy through my children. I still have an amazing part of my husband in my girls and me. I still find joy in being around my horses and animals. Striving to live the life that Heavenly Father wants for me gives me happiness."

Many widows and widowers say that they find happiness in keeping busy, focusing on family, improving themselves, magnifying callings, and becoming involved in things they care about. But all of them testify that much of their happiness comes from serving others. Kevin Campbell, a 50-year-old widower from Washington, lost his wife after her three-year battle with cancer. He says he found healing as he attended the single-adult ward and reached out to those who were in as much need of comfort as he was.

He recalls, "The Lord put many in my path to serve, touch, and care for. It healed me, and at the same time it gave me much strength. I reached out to many in my local singles ward and made my house a meeting place where all were welcome. I learned that so many single members are hurting in so many ways, and all it takes is for someone to care, reach out, and serve."

### Forward with the Love of God

Whether it be through service, personal revelation, the comfort of the Holy Ghost, or earthly angels sent to ease their burdens, these widows and widowers bear testimony that the blessings and miracles in their time of grief have been rich and abundant. Through their struggle and example of enduring to the end, they bear strong witness that no matter how great the loss or how deep the sorrow, there can be happiness and healing through the gospel of Jesus Christ. ■



### PURE RELIGION

I express my sincere appreciation to one and all who are mindful of the widow [and widower]. To the thoughtful neighbors who invite a widow to dinner and to . . . the visiting teachers of the Relief Society, I add, may God

bless you for your kindness and your love unfeigned toward her who reaches out and touches vanished hands and listens to voices forever stilled. . . .

"Thank you to thoughtful and caring bishops who ensure that no widow's cupboard is empty, no house unwarmed, no life unblest. I admire the ward leaders who invite the widows to all social activities, often providing a young Aaronic Priesthood lad to be a special escort for the occasion. . . .

"'Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world' (James 1:27)."

President Thomas S. Monson, "The Fatherless and the Widows: Beloved of God," *Ensign*, Aug. 2003, 6–7.