

# Visiting Orphans and Widows

By Amy L. Sherman

Religion that God our Father considers pure and faultless is this: that you visit orphans and widows in their distress and keep yourself unstained by the world (James 1:27)

This familiar verse shows up often on the letterhead of Christian mercy ministries or as the theme verse of conferences on social ministry. In its familiarity, it can lose its punch. But the injunction to “visit” the needy is rich and challenging, considering other uses of the word “visit” in Scripture.

For example, “visit” connotes the idea of imparting life. In 1 Samuel 2:21, God “visits” barren Hannah -- and the result is that she is enabled to have five children. You’ll recall that God had graciously given Hannah the gift of a son, Samuel, whom she dedicated back to the Lord. God has more that he wants to do for barren Hannah, and so He “visits” her and she conceives new life. The visitation of God imparts life! In Luke 7:16, Jesus and the disciples have entered the town of Nain. A funeral procession is coming out of Nain -- a young man has died, and is mourned by his widowed mother. Jesus looks upon this, and, moved with compassion, tells the woman not to cry. Then He put His hands on the coffin, and commands, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” And sure enough -- the coffin opens, the dead boy sits up, and the crowds “are filled with awe.” Then, Luke tells us, the crowd began shouting and praising God. And what did they say? “Surely God has visited us! Surely God has visited us!” They knew God had visited them because life was imparted to the dead.

This suggests that our “visiting” of orphans and widows in their distress involves a ministry among them that imparts life. It mustn’t be limited to providing them merely with commodities. We are to share our own lives, and invite them to taste of Christ’s life. We are to pray for fullness in the places where they are empty. Where they experience deadness, our ministry aims to quicken. Where they experience barrenness, our ministry helps them connect to Jesus and experience fruitfulness. He is the life-giver to all who are destitute, empty, dead, and barren.



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## FOR FURTHER THOUGHT:

1) When was the last time you visited a widow or an orphan?

2) Pray today for Christ, the “life-imparting,” to quicken the parts of your heart that feel dull and deadened.

3) Often poor people are “barren of hope” because of the overwhelming challenges and financial stress they experience. Do you know of at least one Christian ministry that you can pray for that is imparting life to the poor by giving them new hope? Pray for this organization, that it would remain faithful in sharing Christ who is the author of life and hope.

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