

**THE KINGDOM OF GOD FOR CHILDREN-LIKE MINDS: AN IN-DEPTH
EXEGESIS OF MATTHEW 19:14, MATTHEW 18:3, AND MARK 10:15**

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Abstract

Jesus' teachings revolve around the idea of the Kingdom of God, and in verses like Matthew 19:14, Matthew 18:3, and Mark 10:15, He highlights the need for a childlike mentality in order to enter this celestial kingdom. This essay offers a thorough interpretation of these texts, examining their grammatical, contextual, and theological relevance. Jesus invites children to come to Him in Matthew 19:14, indicating their intrinsic value in God's kingdom. Matthew 18:3 exhorts believers to embrace a childlike mentality in order to reach paradise, emphasizing the need for humility and conversion. This is further supported by Mark 10:15, which states that in order to enter the Kingdom of God, one must have a childlike attitude of trust, dependency, and simplicity. In order to comprehend the deeper meanings of childlike faith, this study looks at the Greek terms employed in these lines, especially the phrases (παῖδεία) paidia (children) and (δέχομαι) dechomai (to receive). Furthermore, it reveals the radical nature of Christ's teachings by placing Jesus' words within the framework of first-century Jewish culture, where children were frequently viewed as socially irrelevant. Theological viewpoints on childlikeness in connection to faith, humility, and spiritual dependency are also covered in the article. It compares these attributes with the arrogance and independence that frequently prevent adults from completely embracing God's Kingdom. In the end, this study contends that Jesus' exhortation to emulate children is a call to openness, trust, and complete dependence on God rather than immaturity. This study emphasizes the significance of developing a childlike heart in order to fully experience the Kingdom of God as Jesus meant by combining biblical interpretation, historical context, and theological thought. For the study this is what is needed around the world today.

Keywords: Kingdom of God, Children-like Minds, Exegesis, Matthew 19:14, Matthew 18:3, Mark 10:15

Introduction

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus frequently uses children as examples of the values that are prized in God's Kingdom. Jesus' anti-cultural stance highlighted the importance of children by welcoming them and urging adults to emulate their qualities, suggesting that being like a child is the path to spiritual grandeur in a society where children were seen as unimportant (Miller-McLemore, 2019). This lesson refocuses attention on humility, innocence, and genuine faith while challenging conventional notions of position and authority.

Children held a subordinate place in the social structure during the time of the Bible. They had no real rights or influence because they were viewed as dependents. Jesus' deeds and teachings about children are all the more revolutionary in light of this social context. Jesus challenged social conventions by putting children at the center of His teachings, uplifting the downtrodden and highlighting how the Kingdom of God functions on different principles from those of the material world (Kambey, 2021). Throughout Jesus' mission, this reversal of social norms—where the lowly are elevated and the last are made first—occurs frequently. Theologically, children stand for innocence, faith, and openness—elements that are necessary for anybody wishing to enter God's Kingdom. Jesus' identification of these virtues with children highlights a spiritual paradigm in which the people who are viewed as the least valuable by society are actually the most valuable in God's eyes. This viewpoint encourages a return to the simplicity and sincerity that characterize childlike faith and challenges believers to reevaluate their beliefs. This kind of perspective pushes believers to develop the qualities of humility and openness, which are essential for a sincere relationship with God.

In the context of this paper, just as it is stated, the children stand for purity, innocence and humility. The children of these days are different from the children of the time of Jesus Christ and the New Testament writing (Betsworth, 2015), in the contemporary society, maladaptive behavior, indecency, immorality and social vice have taken over our children (Olorunda, 2022) bringing the biblical concept of “like a child to null”. To this, the church has a great work to do to bring back these qualities of children back to our children, through doctrinal positive activity, these vices can be corrected. Parents, priests, church workers and everyone, including the children ministry leaders and teachers should go back to duty. St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) said “give me a child before he is seven and I will make him a Catholic forever”. We can actually bring them back if we are dedicated to doing the real work of mentoring, role playing, teaching, modeling and

parenting. The church should go back to Sunday school for children, catechism, and bible study should be re-inculcated to the children ministry in the church, as such the children ministry in the church should be intensified so as to save our children and draw them back to the “child” as reflected in research (Olson and David, 2016). Examining Matthew 19:14, Matthew 18:3, and Mark 10:15 exegetically, this study seeks to understand the deeper significance of Jesus' teachings on childlikeness. The study wants to comprehend the particular attributes Jesus emphasized and their applicability to modern Christian practice by looking at the original language, cultural background, and theological ramifications. In order to ensure that the timeless wisdom of Jesus' teachings continues to inspire and lead contemporary faith groups, this research offers a basis for implementing these truths.

Jesus calls believers to be a sincere, forgiving, loving, and resilient faith, challenging adults to let go of cynicism and adopt a more authentic and wholehearted approach to their spiritual journey (Beall, 2023). Children are born with virtues like purity of heart (Guroian, 2023), an innate capacity to forgive and forget wrongs, a natural tendency towards unity and love, closeness in relationships, resilience in the face of adversity, and genuine patterns of friendship which not only define their interactions but also serve as a model for the qualities valued in the Kingdom of God.

Both the Church and individual Christians can undergo significant change by comprehending and embracing infantile traits (Rohr, (2020). Christians may cultivate communities that are marked by true love, togetherness, and resilience by incorporating these virtues into their daily lives. Such a setting is a testament to the transformational potential of embodying these childlike qualities, as well as reflecting the core of God's Kingdom. This real-world implementation guarantees that Jesus' teachings actually influence believers' life experiences rather than being purely theoretical (NDERITU, 2023; Engle, 2021).

Exegetical Analysis of Key Scriptures

Matthew 19:14 – "Let the little children come to me..."

People brought children to Jesus in this text in order to ask for His blessing. Perhaps sensing that this was a disruption, the disciples chastised them. But Jesus reprimanded His followers, stressing the value of letting kids come to Him. Jesus' understanding of children's intrinsic worth and how they embody traits necessary for the Kingdom of Heaven is demonstrated by this episode. Jesus emphasizes the need for accepting humility and openness in one's spiritual journey by inviting children. Welcoming children into the Kingdom signifies embracing qualities such as innocence, trust, and humility (Swanson,

2024; Davoudpour, 2024). Jesus' appeal to the kids is a broad call to everyone who exemplifies these qualities, regardless of age. By doing this, the vulnerable are elevated to prominent positions in the spiritual sphere, challenging social conventions that frequently marginalize them. It acts as a reminder that everyone who approaches with a pure and humble heart can enter the Kingdom of God.

This verse encourages believers to embrace their faith with receptivity and openness. It urges a return to the core values that children embody, calling for a break from arrogance and independence. A deeper, more genuine relationship with God that is marked by humility and trust is fostered by such an approach.

Matthew 18:3 – "Unless you change and become like little children..."

Jesus emphasizes to His disciples in this chapter that in order to join the Kingdom of Heaven, they must undergo transformation. He emphasizes that one cannot enter the holy realm without taking on the traits of young infants. The disciples' ideas of greatness are called into question by this lesson, which instead encourages humility and simplicity. Jesus speaks of a fundamental change in perspective and attitude as part of this transformation. It urges giving up pride and embracing humility, which is similar to children's innate tendencies. This shift necessitates a profound internal realignment with the Kingdom's values and is not only surface-level. Children's natural dependence and confidence in their caregivers is a manifestation of their unadulterated faith. Jesus emphasizes this trust as an example for believers, showing that complete and unconditional reliance on God is necessary. A true relationship with the divine is built on this innocent faith.

Mark 10:15 – "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will never enter it"

Jesus highlights the need to embrace the Kingdom of God like a child in this passage. This claim emphasizes how crucial it is for believers to approach their faith with a certain mindset. It implies that the Kingdom is a present to be accepted rather than a prize to be merited. Getting the Kingdom "like a child" means accepting it with humility, openness, and innocence. Children exhibit a sincere receptivity that Jesus praises, accepting gifts without pretense or suspicion. This stance runs counter to adult inclinations toward independence and cynicism. This lesson emphasizes the importance of openness and humility for discipleship. It is necessary for believers to abandon pretenses and adopt an honest, unguarded faith. This promotes a closer relationship with God and is consistent with the Kingdom's basic principles.

The Qualities of Children in the Context of the Kingdom

The principles of the Kingdom of God are strongly aligned with the virtues that children naturally display. These attributes consist of:

Pure-heartedness

Scripture highlights the importance of having a pure heart. For example, Psalm 24:3–4 says, "Who can climb the Lord's mountain? Who could occupy his sacred space? The person with a pure heart and clean hands. Matthew 5:8 goes on to say, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." These passages emphasize that in order to have communication with God, one must be pure. Children's innocence and lack of cunning serve as excellent examples of this purity (Laing, 2016; Ticktin, 2020). They have no hidden agenda and live their lives honestly. This purity is a reflection of a healthy and truthful heart. For Christians, developing sincerity and integrity is necessary to emulate this pure-heartedness. It requires a deliberate effort to keep one's heart pure and to connect one's goals and deeds with heavenly precepts.

Forgiveness and Forgetfulness of Wrong

Children have an innate ability to forgive swiftly and move beyond grievances. They do not dwell on wrongs, embodying a forgiving spirit that restores relationships effortlessly. Biblical teachings strongly advocate for forgiveness. Matthew 6:14-15 emphasizes, "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." Ephesians 4:32 further instructs, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." These passages underscore that forgiveness is both a divine expectation and a pathway to personal liberation. Christians are called to emulate this childlike forgiveness, releasing grudges and extending grace. This practice not only aligns with divine will but also fosters inner peace and communal harmony.

Unity and Love

Children have an innate oneness and affection that allows them to build ties without regard to social boundaries. They engage in nondiscriminatory interactions, embodying the concept of complete acceptance. Jesus demands this kind of love from His disciples. In John 13:34-35, He states, "A new command I give you: Love one another. You must love each other as much as I have loved you. If you love one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples. This directive positions love as the defining characteristic of Christian identity. The Church, envisioned as a family, is called to embody this unity and love. By encouraging inclusive and loving communities, believers reflect the relational nature of the Kingdom of God.

Closeness and Openness

Little children have an amazing capacity for openness and trust (Schein & Schein, 2018). They freely express their emotions and ideas, creating sincere bonds. The Bible exhorts Christians to support one another through difficult times. According to Galatians 6:2, "Carry each other's burden."

Resilience and Faith

Children are incredibly resilient (Konnikova, 2016); they bounce back from disappointments fast and keep a trustworthy attitude. A strong belief that everything will work out is seen in their perseverance as well as their everlasting faith in their caregivers. In the Christian journey, where believers frequently encounter difficulties, such attributes are priceless. Christians are encouraged by Christian teachings to see obstacles as chances for personal development. Adopting this viewpoint increases resilience and empowers people to face life's challenges with grace and steadfast trust. Resilience in the Christian life means believing in God's plan despite difficult situations. This trust, which embodies the conviction that a higher purpose is at work despite adversity, is comparable to children's faith in their parents. A stronger spiritual path and a closer relationship with God are fostered by such resilience.

Friendship Patterns of Children

Children make friends in an honest, selfless manner without any hidden agenda (Talwar, 2022). Mutual satisfaction, trust, and a sincere desire for companionship are the foundations of their relationships. The Church can use this relationship authenticity as a model to help its people form sincere and solid bonds with one another. In order to create a society where interactions are sincere, encouraging, and devoid of pretense, it is necessary to embrace these childhood friendship patterns. The true spirit of God's Kingdom, where love and harmony rule, is reflected in such a setting.

Theological and Practical Lessons for the Church and Christians

Adopting virtues like humility, trust, and openness can help Christians develop a faith experience that is both liberating and enriching (Kirkpatrick, 2021). These qualities foster a deeper reliance on God, creating a spiritual environment where believers are free from the burdens of pride and self-reliance. In practice, incorporating these virtues into daily life can change the Church community by encouraging members to approach their faith with the simplicity and sincerity of a child, which can lead to more genuine worship experiences and stronger communal bonds. This shift can also foster a culture of forgiveness and acceptance, reflecting the unconditional love that is at the heart of Christian teaching.

Living in Freedom like Children

Without the complications and worries that frequently weigh on adults, children live simply, allowing them to completely experience life (Winnicott, 2021). This simplicity is typified by an absence of pretense and an authentic interaction with their surroundings. A stiff and unenjoyable religious experience might result from overcomplicating faith and adding needless spiritual obligations (Lovasz, 2023 ;). By eschewing superfluous rituals or doctrines that could impede true spiritual development, adopting a childish simplicity in faith allows believers to concentrate on the essential elements of their relationship with God. Jesus encourages believers to live burden-free lives by asking them to put their anxieties aside and find solace in Him. This invitation is consistent with a childlike outlook on life, in which self-reliance and anxiety are replaced with confidence and reliance on God.

Fostering a Childlike Community in the Church

Children's innate tendencies are reflected in the Church community's encouragement of love, trust, and forgiveness (Miller-McLemore, 2019). If the church cultivates these attributes in truth, the Church may establish a setting where participants feel appreciated and encouraged, which will strengthen cooperation and unity. Building a child-like community requires tearing down barriers of pride and division (Higgins, 2019). Children engage with one another without bias, and the Church is obligated to model this inclusion by making sure that every member, irrespective of origin or status, is valued and accepted. The Church's witness to the world is strengthened when it emphasizes humility and solidarity among believers (Kraybill, 2023). A community that exemplifies these basic qualities such as genuinely expressing love and unity serves as a testimonial to the Gospel's transformative power and draws others to the faith.

Developing a Kingdom Mindset

Reorienting one's values and viewpoints to conform to Jesus' teachings is necessary to make the transition from worldly wisdom to divine simplicity. This change inspires believers to put spiritual truths ahead of social norms and adopt a worldview that honors service, love, and humility (Hossain, 2023). A child's reliance on its parents is comparable to a daily practice of submission and faith in God (Bornstein, et al, 2022; Crompton, 2017). Through consistently depending on God's direction and provision, this practice cultivates a closer relationship with the divine. The community as a whole is transformed as believers live out infantile qualities in their daily lives. Such a way of living reflects the Kingdom of God in the present and fosters resilience, compassion, and sincerity.

Conclusion

Adopting infantile traits is a transforming approach to Christian living that brings believers into line with the core of the gospel, not just an idealistic one. Without the weight of pride and independence, people might have a deeper relationship with God by embracing qualities like humility, trust, and openness. More genuine worship experiences and closer ties to the community result from this change, which encourages believers to approach their faith with the innocence and simplicity of a child. By doing this, Christians embody the real spirit of God's Kingdom, which is characterized by love and harmony.

Furthermore, fostering a childlike community within the Church has the potential to transform relationships among its members. Encouraging qualities such as love, trust, and forgiveness mirrors the natural inclinations of children and creates an environment where members feel valued and supported. This unity not only strengthens the internal fabric of the Church but also enhances its witness to the world. A community that embodies these virtues stands as a testament to the transformative power of the Gospel, attracting others to the faith through its genuine expression of love and togetherness. Adopting childlike traits is essentially an invitation to rediscover the essence of Christian discipleship. It pushes believers to return to a condition of spiritual purity and reliance on God by letting go of the complications and pretenses that frequently come with age. By doing this, Christians not only deepen their own spiritual development but also help to create a Church that genuinely embodies the compassionate and inclusive character of God's Kingdom. A shared commitment to exhibiting these values in daily life is necessary for this transformation, which is both a personal and a collective activity.

Recommendations

1. Encourage believers to adopt a humble attitude, recognizing their dependence on God and others, fostering a community of mutual respect and support.
2. Implement teachings and practices that emphasize the importance of forgiving others, mirroring the natural inclination of children to forgive and move forward.
3. Create programs and initiatives that bring diverse groups within the Church together, promoting unity and unconditional love among members.
4. Develop small groups or forums where individuals can share their struggles and successes openly, building trust and deepening relationships within the Church.
5. Offer support systems such as counseling and mentorship programs to help members navigate personal challenges, strengthening their faith and resilience.

6. Leaders should exemplify authentic relationships, encouraging the congregation to form sincere bonds that reflect the selflessness seen in children's friendships.
7. Reevaluate Church traditions and rituals to ensure they are accessible and meaningful, allowing members to engage with their faith in a straightforward and profound manner.

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WIDOWHOOD IN YORUBA CULTURE: A CHALLENGE FOR PASTORAL CARE IN IFE – OLUWA BAPTIST CHURCH, OKE-OLOLA

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Abstract

Is widowhood necessarily an admission into another level or stage of oppression, affliction, maltreatment cruelty, dishumanization, starvation and untimely death, as the case has turned out to be for some widows? Does the Yoruba cultural practice allow thorough pastoral care and attention to widows? These and other concerns informed the interest of this researcher on the topic “widowhood in Yoruba culture: A challenge for pastoral care in Ife-Oluwa Baptist Church, Oke-Olola, Oyo”. Scholars have not delved into the discourse on widowhood and pastoral care in Ife Oluwa Baptist Church Oke Olola, Oyo. The researcher employs both primary and secondary methods of research inquiry, an objective critique of the responses from his based well on structured interviews and objectively critiqued library information and discovers that in Yoruba culture widows are subjected to forced marriages to relatives of their late husband against their desire and happiness and where they refused, they are abdicated and labeled as outcast in the community. Research also shows that widows and their children are often left uncatered for and made to go through horrendous standard of living inspite their husbands father’s wealth and properties. The researcher thus recommended that instead of confining the widows and their children to the mercy of their unsympathetic and callous in-laws, the church would do their best with the application of pastoral care strategies to give the widows and her children a new care of life. Young widows can be counseled to remarry instead of engaging in illicit sexual affairs and their children helped to weather the storm fatherlessness.

Keyword: Widowhood, Yoruba culture, pastoral care, baptist church

Introduction

Death is a phenomenon which rudely stares everyone in the face. It breaks marriage by taking one of the partners away. A male survivor of such tragedy is called a widower while the female survivor is called a widow. The crisis of widowhood has a prolonged effect on the life of the survivors (widower/widow and the children). Mathew Olusina

stresses that “the society we live in today is very delicate and unpredictable”¹. He notes further that the society, pastors inclusive, no longer want to be their brother or sister's keeper in time of despair and grief, thus causing the termination of many lives at their prime. He explains that, this is why the Yoruba people of Nigeria make their presence felt to condole with the bereaved in order to provide support which relieves them of their grief and sorrow.

The Yoruba people know that the crisis of widowhood is strong enough to affect and disrupt the feelings and thinking of the spouses making the affected persons feel hurt, disappointed and frustrated. This experience is not peculiar to the Yoruba alone; it is common to every race of mankind. The issue of widowhood needs to be explored with care and concern because of the emotional turmoil widows/widowers go through. This writer believes strongly that this stage of widowhood is one of gone uncertainties and the survivors should be assured of continuous safety, support, provision and fellowship. Widowhood is unpalatable anywhere it exists, be it in the society or in the church. They should not be left unministered to, drawing from the example of the early church (Acts 6:1-2 RSV). The disciples led the early church to resolve the administrative crisis that almost rocked the beat of the Jerusalem church to its real foundation by quickly leading the church to choose seven Deacons who would be in charge of “serving the table”. A strong motivation is drawn from this biblical example which indicates that there should be effective pastoral responsibility towards continuous witness and ministry to the widows and widowers for their physical, materials and spiritual well beings. It is in this regards that this research work sets out to examine the extent of pastoral care received by widows/widowers in Ife-Oluwa Baptist Church, Oke-Olola, Oyo.

Biblical Perspective of Widowhood: Old Testament Perspective

There are records of death of men and women who died in the Old Testament leaving their wives or husband to mourn their demise. Wright said that 'in the Old Testament, among the oriented, when a person dies, a wail is raised to announce to the neighborhood of what has happened'². This draws the attention of relatives and friends to lament the deceases until the dead man was buried. The widows or widowers mourned their loved ones bearing in mind the kind of relationship that existed between them. Wright pointed out that the record of the mourning in the Bible began with Abraham when he mourned

¹M.F. Langer "How to live as a widow", A Pastoral psychology. Vol. if No. 179. Del 1956.582.

²N.H. Wright, Before you Remarry. A guide to successful Remarriage (USA) harvest House Publishers, 1988).142-143.

and wept for the loss of his wife Sarah and Abraham's action was described as the custom that is observed in all ages during the period of bereavement.

In the Old Testament, there were notable widows who mourned the death of their spouses. Such widows include Tamar, Judah's daughter in law, she married Ev, one of the sons of Judah. However, when Ev died prematurely Tamar mourned him (Gen. 38:6-11). Naomi, Ruth and the widow of Zarephat were also notable example of widows in the Old Testament (Ruth 4, 5 and Kin 17:8t). In the Old Testament, during the wailing and mourning period of a dead man, the family of the deceased would send for the professional mourners (Jeremiah 9:17-18). They would be paid in order to mourn at funeral and other sorrowful occasions. Their functions as professional mourners, was to arouse the bereaved to weep and lament for the dead. Wright affirmed that "the professional mourner, would put on sack cloths and rend their garments to convince others of their sincerity and profoundness of their grief.

The statement of Judah to Tamar "live as a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up" so Tamar went to live in her father's house (Gen. 38:11). A widow in the Old Testament was expected to wail and mourn the death of her husband as part of the widowhood cultural practices. She was given as garb which she would wear to show that she was a widow (Gen. 38:14). Poll further said that. "It is a taboo for a widow to get pregnant during the widowhood period; therefore, sexual intercourse is forbidden or prohibited during the regimented time of widowhood. This agrees with Olubayo's opinion who says that "women are regarded as inferior of man in status; she is regarded as fickle unreliable with no chain to culture"¹⁵. No wonder Dempster observed that "the loss of a husband in ancient Israel was a social and economic tragedy"³, He meant that widow faced unpleasant situation in the Bible. God knows that widowhood is a state of helplessness. This made God to command the children of Israel concerning how widows should be regarded and treated.

The bible said in Psalm 68:5, that "father of fatherless and judge of the widows is God in his holy habitation: The word of God reveals that God cares for the widows and widowers. According to Lauger, the pronouncement that "God cares for widows is engrained in the scripture and culture"⁴. These includes widows' garment not taken in pledge (Deut. 24:1), the process of gathering grain and grape taken into consideration the hunger of the widow and leaves some of the harvest for gleaning purpose (Deut. 26:12) it is taken as ungodly and wicked to send widows away empty-handed without making a provision for their immediate needs (Job 24:3). The law of levirate as expressed in the Bible expressly makes considerable provisions and security for the widow, for instance. "If brother, are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill

the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that the name will not be blotted out from Israel (Deut. 25:5-6).

The objective as to raise seed for the departed brother (Ruth 3:4-10), Boaz marriage with Ruth was an example where a son was raised for the dead husband through (Boaz) in the Old Testament Judah said to Onan to perform the duty of brother-in-law, though Onan did otherwise and was smitten to death by God (Gen 38:8-10). In the Old Testament also, God is seen as ultimate provider for the need of widows just as H provides for the ants, he allowed Ruth to pick some corns on his farm and he instructed his laborer to harvest everything on the farm but it has some behind for Ruth: S. William, a Jewish Biblical historian and commendation states that. Let not those that reap and gather in the corn that is reaped, gather in the gleaning also, but let them rather leave some handful for those that are in want of necessities of life, that it may be a support and a supply to them in order to meet their subsistence. In like manner, when they gather their grapes, let them leave some smaller bunches for the poor and let them Passover some of the fruits of the Olive tree when they gather them".³

New Testament Perspective of Widowhood

In the New Testament it is believed that after the burial of a loved one, survivors face different problems. If the survivor is a woman, she faces the crisis of unemployment and social insecurity because her support has gone and she may resort to begging for survival. An example is the widow of Nain whose son was raised from death. The son was her only hope for comfort, support and survival when the husband died. He was her consolation within the deceased's family (Luke 7:11-17).⁷ Widowhood is a condition wherein the woman remains married. It is evident from Luke's record that Anna became a widow after seven years of marriage and remained in her widowhood for the rest of her life. The unique thing about her is that she engaged in supplicating and worshipping God in the temple (Luke 2:36-37). Edith Dean described her as one who was "dwelling in an ivory tower of the spirit aloof from worldly preoccupations."¹

Jesus cited a widow in a parable to teach his disciples about being persistent in seeking (Luke 18:1-8). This shows that Jesus recognized widows' life which apparently belittled

⁶Robert B. Laurin, "Widow," Baker's Dictionary of Theology, edited by Everett F. Harrison and others (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960). P.551

⁷Thompson I, Handbook of life in Bible Times, P.94. Edith Dean, All of the women of the Bible (New York. Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1955), P.173.

⁸William Weinrich, "Women in the history of the Church: Learned and Holy. But Not Pastors," Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism, ed by John Piper and Wayne Cruden (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), P.264.

as dedicated and devout in seeking the Lord. In another context Jesus warned devourers of widows' house to decline from such acts because it can attract God's anger or condemnation. When Jesus refers to scribes "who devour(ed) widows' houses." (Luke 20:47), he warned his disciples against them.

In the early Church widows were recognized as a distinct group of women who dedicated their lives to prayer and intercession. The Church sometimes appointed some widows for prayer assignment as a primary duty. People saw the privileged ones as people who are honored and dignified because of the opportunity of being enrolled with church ministers and workers. Widows can be classified into two groups. The first group is those who can be helped by their relatives, while the second group comprises those to be helped by the church community. Paul gave a guideline that is helpful in the classification in I Timothy 5. The widows who can be cared for by their relatives are young widows who can remarry while those that can be assisted and enlisted for church work are widows with acceptable conduct in their private and communal life. Widows who are eligible for church support are those who have no husband to depend on for livelihood and other basic needs of life. The families of such widows need support to prevent them from encountering starvation and discomfort. P. Y. Otijele opined that any widow that falls within the classification of church support should be considered as "really needy, deprived and lacking of the basic necessities of life. She is a widow indeed with no inheritance to live on, no relations to take care of;"⁸ such ones deserve proper treatment by an individual and/or as a community of faith (I Timothy 5:4). The church's support to widows is supposed to be limited to those who are destitute having no dowry or relatives that can care for them.⁹

In giving support and care to widows, the early church faced the problem of neglect on daily distribution of alms and food (Acts 6:1). To correct the anomaly, seven able men were elected to see to the distribution and supplies. The care of widows and orphans is said to be an act of religion that is pure and true (James 1:27).⁴ The New Testament is silent about the practice of widowhood and the crisis face by widows. However, Acts 9:39 presents a group of widows weeping and mourning the death of another woman who is generous to them.¹¹ This shows that there are traditions and norms people follow and observe during the New Testament times. Two things are obvious from the fact. The first is that care of widows is taken as a task that must be done amongst believers to fulfill the Lord's injunction. Moreso, the compassion which an individual or community expresses serves as protection to them. The second thing is that the Old Testament is used as a

⁹Shirley Stephens, A New Testament View of Women (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1980), P.123.

¹⁰P. Y. Otijele, Fighting the Good Fight: A Pattern for the Christian Ministry in First Timothy Ibadan: Baptist Press (Nig.) Ltd., 1986), P.33.

¹¹John R. W. Stott, The Message of Timothy and Titus (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1973), pp. 130-131.

source of reference to people of Jesus' time and the Apostolic period. Therefore, one can say that the traditions and norms about widowhood observed in the ancient times is also upheld during the New Testament period.

At this juncture, it is necessary to mention that some cultural norms are not bad in amplifying human conduct, but the principles and standards of the scriptures have to transcend cultural practices. Some cultures have no much regard for human life hence they maltreat whereas the Bible emphasizes sanctity of life and have principles and rule that safe-guard human life from cultural oppression and mal-treatment. That is why culture is regarded as "mixture of both good and bad elements."¹² Moreover, one may ask: what is the moral justification of causing suffering on people's life to fulfill cultural norms? The non-availability of moral authority has caused moral malaise affecting modern society. (its degeneration has spurred) twentieth-century humanity (to lose) confidence in the social, cultural and religious authorities which have traditionally provided moral guidance."⁵ What is lacking in the area mentioned is available in the Bible. That makes the bible a dependable source of authority in moral issues.

Expository Teaching of Acts 6:1-7: The Problem of the Neglected Widow

As it has been established from the earlier statements in Acts, the church continued to grow, in spite of opposition and persecution. Here, the researcher believes that Luke calls our attention to the growth of the church because it was part of the problem the apostles must deal with. Church growth was a factor in the friction that was surfacing in the church due to discrepancies in the care of its widows.⁶ Growth has its benefits but it also has its pitfalls. In order to understand the problem that had arisen in the growing church in Jerusalem, we must be aware of the differences between "Greek-Speaking Jews" and "Native Hebraic Jews" (Acts 6:1). A "Native Hebraic Jew" was most likely born and raised in Israel⁷. "Greek-Speaking Jews" were most likely born and raised in one of the Greek-speaking countries outside of Israel.⁸ It was not just a matter of the place of one's birth, but of one's native language. "Native Hebraic Jews" would have spoken Aramaic (closely related to Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament). "Greek-Speaking Jews" would have spoken Greek and also the native tongue of their country. These would be the languages in which those gathered at Pentecost heard the praises of God:

⁵¹²Thompson, *Handbook of Life in Bible Times*,p.96

¹³Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982),P.103.

Deen, *All of the Women of the Bible*,p.174.

The Reason 1-2, 4

Widows have always received particular attention from God in the legislation of the Old Testament. Many of them had believed in Christ and became then the responsibility of the new church. Some were Hellenistic Jews (that is, they had originally come from countries outside of Palestine and spoke Greek, and others were Palestinian Jews (who spoke Hebrew and observed all the customs of Judaism). The former group charged that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of the relief money. Legitimate or not, the charge was one of the reasons for needing additional workers. Coupled with that was the increasing burden of the work which had fallen on the apostles. They could not continue to minister the word and minister relief to the widows, so, they suggested the appointment of new workers to assume helping the apostles carry some of the load.

Duties of the Pastor of Widows

A. Advocacy: The pastor should be a voice to the oppressed and the voiceless. The church's prophetic role should be that of words and deeds. The pastor should speak against individuals and laws or customs that encourage molestation of widows and women in general. The pastor should be bold enough to address the position of women and inheritance matters as a whole, since the hardship of widows results from the position of women as determined by culture. They are denied possessions and right to anything in the house and not assigned any part of their parent's wealth as inheritance like the men. In many instances, parents relinquish to their son's land, money and animals. Destitution therefore sets in when the women become widowed. Relatives make every effort to clear the house of valuables as soon as the husband dies. All this is done under the claim that "this is our custom- this is the way things were done in the olden days and that is how they must continue". The crux of the matter is that women are not only deprived of their parental heritage, but do the brothers of their dead husbands under duress inherit themselves.¹⁵ It is unfortunate that the traditional stand concerning women and possessions as in some cases been accepted in principle by the church. It is such a view on women that affects the widow.

The pastor should rescue the voiceless Christian widow and her children. It is not out of place to suggest that those who oppress widows should be placed under church discipline because many who profess to be Christians and are even communicant members of church leaders are deeply involved in oppressing widows. The church should come out with a by-law that protects widows against their oppressors. Members should be encouraged to include their daughters in the sharing of assets. Pastors are respected even in non-Christian communities, so, they should use their influence to rebuke families that persecute widows. The entire church should take a stand to deliver widows from the

bondage of in-laws, traditional practices and continues lament. The widow has found herself in shame, grief, sorrow and pain and the church should be her voice. Theologians must arise and assist the church with a well-balanced theology that will protect widows and women in general.⁶

Counseling

Why is counseling necessary for widows? Let me mention some of the problems and feelings widows undergo, and this could help the pastor know that there is need for a counseling ministry to widows. The grieving period of a widow is characterized by varied traumatic feelings, conditions and treatments which may include the following:

i. Frustration: This feeling comes in the absence of love, companionship and support, which she had hitherto enjoyed and shared with her spouse. She is now lonely as the one with whom she had shared her deepest feelings, successes, failures, expectations, hopes, plans and daily schedules is no more. The one who has stood by her in adversity and in peace is deceased. Nothing seems to work well anymore. It is a time of crisis and a shattering one for that matter. The widow is left at a crossroad. In times like this, counseling is important to reassure her that someone cares.

ii. Anger: Anger over the loss of their spouses is another feeling many widows have. Some are angry with God, with themselves, the family of the deceased, the doctor or nurses for not responding quickly and caring adequately. They may blame one or all of these categories of people for failure to do one thing or the other which could have guaranteed the survival of the spouse. Most widows ask questions such as: why me? Why has this happened to me? What have I done to God? Couldn't God have intervened since? He has the power to do so? Why has He chosen not to do anything? Have I sinned? These and many more questions suddenly pop up in the mind of the widow. And there may be no answers coming immediately. All the same, the sovereignty of the Lord should be acknowledged. The sovereignty of God means that He is ruling and is in control of everything. He is ruling and is in control of everything. He is still in control of the situation even though he has allowed the death to occur. The reason why he has allowed the death may come with time, and it may not come at all. It is therefore, an exercise in futility if the widow continues to question the death of her husband. There is need for counseling so that the widow will know that anger and frustration over bereavement does not bring about any improved. The dead do not usually come back to us, we are the ones

⁶Keith Eitel, Transforming Culture: Developing a Biblical Ethics in an African Context (Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1986), p.87.

⁸All 1997, p.42.

who would ultimately join them. David expressed this when he lost his son (2 Samuel 21). Jesus asked, "How many of you by being anxious can add a cubit span to your lives? (Matt.6). This was a rhetorical question and "none" would be the obvious answer.

No improvement on the situation of the widow will come by her much worrying, anger and frustration. Instead, they will add to her already tensed and hopeless situation. There is need for counseling by the church so that the widow does not ruin her life in her anger.

iii. *Fear*: Some widows live in constant fear. It is not just fear of death but also fear of life itself. They may be afraid that they too would die and leave the children to suffer. The fear of life arises from the uncertainty of the present and the future. This includes her safety and that of her children. Widows should understand that their future and that of their children is in the hands of God even in a world of uncertainty. It has been said that "we live in a world of uncertainty" no one knows tomorrow. Again, Jesus said, "Give us this day our daily bread". Widows should not be anxious about life or tomorrow. The day's trouble is sufficient for the day. It means that when we combine the troubles of tomorrow and today, they will be too heavy for us to carry. Instead, Jesus advises us to live a day at a time. He has promised to be with us and that is the meaning of Emmanuel. Widows need to be counseled on the above way so that they are not destroyed by fear.

Other feelings that need counseling include inferiority complex, guilt and shame. Every widow is a total person, created in the image of God. She is a woman of worth and dignity. The church needs to take counseling ministry to widows seriously.

Counseling Centre: The pastor should organize a counseling and prayer centre for widows. Those who have burden for widows and are called to serve should be placed in these areas. Mere volunteers should not be part of this scheme. In the early church, only people full of the Holy Spirit were allowed to work with widows. Today such workers should be duly chosen by the church and personally convinced that they are called to do the work. Such centers should serve as target centers for widows. Every widow needs counseling and prayer no matter how spiritually high she is. Healing for a widow is a gradual process that needs series of counseling and prayer by the pastor. The church needs to send counselors and prayer groups to comfort and encourage widows in order to arrest their fears and frustration.

Teaching/Seminars: Seminars could be organized for widows to avail them of the opportunity to freely discuss their problems and share their feelings. This will increase knowledge as well as bring comfort. Solutions to problems could emerge as they are shared and discussed. The widows will appreciate the programme because it will give them the opportunity to share their situations, joy and sorrows; when such is done, they will discover common problems among them. Older widows will use their experience to

counsel younger ones. Widow to widow counseling is effective because one can give examples from personal experience. However, this does not mean non-widows cannot counsel widows. After all, those that have encouraged me in this widowhood journey are mostly non-widows.

The need for the spiritual well-being of the widow is very important. Widows need to know what the bible says concerning their problems. They should be properly taught. They are a special and delicate part of the congregation. Thus, there is need for the pastor to meet them as a group and teach them based on the areas of their needs. This will help them know how to handle grief, give them hope and help them cope with contemporary challenges associated with widowhood

Economics Empowerment: The pastor must give more than bread and fish. The saying “give someone a fish, and he will be hungry again, but teach him how to fish and he will fish all his life and feed himself is though provoking. This calls for the church to empower the widow either through skill acquisition or micro credit loan in order to sell products and make gain. Some churches which have a craft center, train widows, their children and even those that are not widows in skill such tailoring, weaving sweaters and so on. The church could also give interest-free loans to widows to start small scale businesses. This will help widows not to depend entirely on church offerings and the world, which is always ready to take advantage of the poor economic situation of the widow. The church can assist widows with cash but such provision cannot sustain them forever and they will soon return for assistance. Since death is inevitable, people will continue to die and the population of widows will continue to increase.

The pastor cannot cope with their financial upkeep. It should help them to acquire skills which will give them business opportunities like in agriculture (poultry, piggery and farming) or investment in shares. Advice should be given depending on the level of exposure and the position or level of the widow.

Visitation: Visitation is very important for widows. Since loneliness is one of the greatest weapons used by Satan to attack widows, the pastor can delegate the women's fellowship to assigned some women to visit widows. This can be done immediately after the shock stage. Subsequent visit can follow. If the church does not visit the widow, the world will visit her and influence her negatively. This does not mean the widow should depend on the crowd but they should also play their role. It is possible for the widow to die prematurely as a result of loneliness. Indeed, widows can be organized into a group and the ministers' wives in a particular assembly assigned as their patrons. They in turn will give report of the activities, needs and plans of the widows to the church council for

consideration and action. Widows should also be included in the visitation programme of church leaders and sub-groups.

Challenges and Limits to Pastoral Care to Widows

1. The thought of financial assistance even when the pastor himself is facing a financial constraint; he still needs to give a helping hand.
2. Visitation: fear of temptation can come in and at the same time the pastor's wife may not want to allow his husband as she can see this as a means of protecting him.
3. Jealousy from some members of the congregation who might be saying that the pastor is not treating his church members equally.
4. Lack of trust- some church members may be thinking and saying that the pastor is having a secret affair with the widow.
5. Hatred from the deceased family especially from the one who has the motion of inheriting the widow and property left behind by the deceased.

Limitations

1. Counseling must not be done in private place
2. He must not discuss any member of the congregation with the widow even if she is the one who introduced the discussion.
3. He must not travel alone with a widow even on church programmes
4. If possible, he must not visit the widow without somebody by his side.
5. He must not demand from the widow and at the same time he must be watchful and prayerful to avoid being trapped.

Yoruba Cultural Practice and Pastoral Care to Widows

This area of research deals with pastoral care and counseling approaches that are helpful towards minimizing some human principles and norms that compound widowhood crisis. The approaches will look into some potentialities in some culture norms that are in conflict with scriptural teachings and those that harmonize Christian teaching. Also, it will seek to address the sufferings and afflictions of widows from the pastoral care perspective. For effective pastoral care within and without the church setting, Carroll Wise opined that the living model of pastoral care for ordained pastors and unordained pastors is the person and work of Jesus Christ. Christ is the perfect example to follow in providing adequate care to the widows. Wise explains further than, "a Christian pastor is one who

is a person and in his living sufferers. Wise explains further than, "a Christian pastor is one who is a person and in his living relationships with people mediates something of the quality of being which is found in a large measure in the revelation of Christ".⁷ This is to say that when a pastor across essential remedies found in Christ Jesus that are capable of relieving and solving crises and problems in the life and family of widows and every other church member alike.

Furthermore, the figure of the pastor as shepherd who is "to feed or tend the flock"¹⁸ enables him with the dynamism to intervene on some issues of life for a positive change. Wayne Oates also said, "the pastor symbolizes the presence of God as a loving father and as the center of all moral rightness; people of every condition turn to the minister because he represents, he universal gospel of the eternal God". Because of what he represents in the community, the pastoral care giver is expected to be a mediator unto widows who are encountering variety of crises. As a matter of fact, the traditional worldview of many tribes informed their cultural practices which teachings and evaluation in the light of Christian scriptural teaching and pastoral theology. In the light of the scriptural teaching and pastoral theology, some of their cultural principles and norms are outdated. If these principles and norms are evaluated by modern development and the standards of advancement among the contemporary society, one would advocate a transformation. For example, widows wearing a garb for one year, staying indoors for three months, sleeping on the deceased husband's grave for a designated period and living an unhygienic life are few to be mentioned. Therefore, before any meaningful pastoral care will be administered to widows, the care giver, according to Irvin D. Yalom, "must approach the patient (the widow) phenomenological: that is he or she must enter the patient's (the widow's) experiential world and listen to the phenomena of that world without the presuppositions that distort understanding".¹⁹

In substantiating the above statement, he gave a working suggestion as a rule that, "so far as possible one must 'bracket' one's own world perspective and enter the experiential world of the other."²⁰ when the care giver understands the root cause of the crisis encountered by widows, to apply his principles and methodologies if the pastoral care profession will be to the right target.' This fact led Oates to say that, "Pastoral care consist of a durable relationship inasmuch as in us (pastors) is possible, to the persons to whom we have the unspeakable joy of faithfully and affectionately introducing Jesus Christ is their Deliverer and Redeemer",²¹ In spite of the cultural practices that serve as a compendium to other cognitive problems encountered by widows, in some African tribes,

⁷MacDonald, Carol B. "Loss and Bereavement." *Clinical Handbook of Pastoral Counseling*. Ed. By Robert J. Wicks, Richard D. Parsons and Donald E. Capps, New York: Paulist Press. 1985.

the approach to be employed for widowhood crisis consist of “healing, sustaining, guiding”²², and educating. This is a pastoral theological approach of Seward Hiltner. The approach is justified because it springs from the shepherding perspective.⁸

Healing Approach

A widow is a wounded being. The wound and hurt are sustained from the initial time of her husband's death. She undergoes psychological and emotional pain with some traumatic and tragic experiences that may cause impairment. The truth is, no one can understand what such a person is going through. The pastoral care giver possesses some qualities that can promote healing and bring about positive changes for healing and growth. This is necessary for restoring a person (a widow) to wholeness. The pastoral care giver is not equated with a medical practitioner or a doctor who deals with physical and anatomical ailment. However, his own function is to restore affected persons into normal way of living and to build such ones from the state of brokenness into a stabilized condition. In his way the troubled person will become integrated on a physical and emotional level than previously experienced.

One of the crises of widowhood that can lead to pathological problems is shock and disorganization during the period of bereavement. The psychological, emotional and physiological stability of widows are thrown off the balance, and this can lead to pathological problems. It is evident that, traumatic crisis is always attended by shock which is a psychological experience. It paralyses thinking and can be a life-threatening psychological event because it affects the cardiovascular system, causing an acute circulatory failure. Traumatic crisis may be the beginning of a chronic sorrow because the shock is deep and the reality of the shock is not acceptable.²⁴ since the crisis affects the inner mechanism of the widows, and if effective support is not provided to cope with her grief and anger, depression may result.

1. Care for Grief:

Grief should not be likened with disease that is taken to the hospital for cure. That is why Carol MacDonald said, “Grief is a part of life in a way that measles is not; to be wounded is not to be sick.”²⁵ for this reason, grief should not be seen as a problem to be cured, but rather it is a component of life to be 'lived through'. For an individual to live through grief, assistance of a professional care giver is needed in order to provide support and care.

⁸ester, Andrew G. Coping with your Anger: A Christian Guide. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983.

A pastoral care giver who ministers to the bereaved persons is intimated with the fact that people grieve because of the concern they have for their loved ones and if they are separated or deprived of such a person, they become *sad and grieved*. *Not that alone, the fear of the unknown* causes anxiety and panic that can lead to grief in a bereaved person. Also, the feeling of insecurity sometimes generates grief in people's life. That is in the lives of people dies, survivors may think that without that person everything is shattered and may feel insecure and fearful.⁹ The pastoral care giver needs to stand beside widows during their loneliness and painful experiences. This serves as succor for their grieving. It is a ministry of presence which gives the widows an assurance of not being alone in their struggles. Seeing the care giver around gives an inner strength and comfort over the hurt and grief. Peter L. Vankatuyk has rightly said: The ministry of presence is one of "being with" in empathic solidarity and understanding. Pastoral presence goes beyond empathy in pointing to the God who remembers us. In the Christian tradition, the ministry of presence is incarnational presence, modeled after the image of the Christ who identified himself with our sufferings unto death.²⁷

Furthermore, the minister can earn the trust of his members by "offering thoughtful, caring ministry to bereaved families."²⁸ Neglecting this may damage the minister's reputation and effectiveness. The pastoral care giver's roles include making provision for grieving widows to ventilate emotions; creating opportunity for such ones to share feelings and application of the technical know-how of the care giver's professionalism.

Moreover, pastoral visit is demanded more by woman than men at the initial stage of loss in terms of death. The early visit is expected by most of the affected widows because they feel the presence of God's representative in time of grief. Both men and women want the pastoral care giver to pray for them than any other lay person. The pastor is considered as an appropriate person to pray and his presence by them is more meaningful at such a time than 'any word of wisdom'.²⁹ As a matter of fact, Carroll Wise opined that "when a survivor expressed protest by raising questions of why and hostility to God, the pastoral care giver should allow the bereaved widows to express feelings so that they can walk through such feelings with a formidable insight that resolves queries. The pastor should avoid "structuralizing grief in religious ideas,"¹⁰ that means development of religious ideas which crystallize and intensify the pain and grief. The pastor's responsibility is to guide the grieved (widow's) to work through the pain and suffering involved in the bereavement."³¹ To achieve the aforementioned goals, the pastoral care giver needs to establish a good rapport in his relationship with the bereaved widows. It is evident that

⁹Wight, Fred H. Manner and Customs of Bible Lands. Chicago: Moody Press, 1953.

¹⁰Wise, Carroll A. The Meaning of Pastoral Care. New York: Harper and Row, 1966.

through relationship people can be rescued from ‘cute emotional pain’.³² In the light of this, comfort helps the bereaved to look at their grief constructively.

Conclusively, the statement of Robert Kavanaugh needs to be considered by pastoral care givers. He said: Now is an appropriate hour for all of us who try to prize honesty and openness to join hands on a new frontier where the mystery of God and the mystery of humanity are joined full scale in that mystery the sorely puzzles us all, the mystery of mortality.³³ The issues of death is God's story that puzzles humanity and causes grief but the pastoral care giver needs to utilize the tools in his profession to care for bereaved ones who are grieving. If this goal is achieved, a broken widow may be restored and sustained.

2. *Care of Anger*

There are different kinds of feelings and emotions which are natural to human life. For example, fear, hunger, joy, grief and anger are some feelings that are human. How these feelings and emotions are expressed differ from one person to the other. When feelings or emotions are allowed as leave or have a serious effect such can be considered as destructive when it is handled or expressed in a manner that produces no violence.

A widow is a bereaved person who has the tendency of apportioning blame on himself for the death of her spouse. Such feeling of guilty may arouse “an emotion or passion to a real or perceived wrongdoing,”³⁴ this kind of emotion in a person is known as anger. It needs to be tamed and controlled or else if it goes out of control, it can be destructive. Anger is not bad in itself because it is an innate tendency which every person is endowed with. It is an ‘emotional energy’ which is useful if properly utilized. But if it is let loose, the outcome is an ‘aggression as its physical expression... either in covert and subtle or in overt and confrontive forms.’¹¹ The inward struggling of a person during the time of loss may not be fully understood in the Yoruba culture; that is why such activities are not addressed. For example, a widow feels threatened about the future and the care of the children. The threat then triggers some metabolic reactions which lead to anger either against God or man; at the period of anger, the body temperament changes. The affected person feels a rapid heart-beat which intensifies a rise in blood pressure; the body muscles might become tense while the person undergoes perspiration. That indicates an adrenaline content shot unto the bloodstream to affect an emotional reaction.³⁶ Andrew Lester posits the fact that an adverse effect of anger is the disorder it generates in an angry person. That disorder comprises “cardiovascular problems. (such as headaches and high blood pressure), gastrointestinal disorder such as ulcers and colitis), and many disorders of the skin.”³⁷ In actual fact the pastor is to guide the widow to know that it is not wrong

¹¹Minirth, Frank B. and Walter Byrd. *Christian Psychiatry* Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1977.

to feel angry but anger should not be exercised or utilized negatively. In the process of expressing emotional catharsis, the tension of anger may be deflated. The bereaved widow is to be made to realize the necessity of overcoming anger because its impact can weight a person down and damage the health.

A pastor can lead an angry widow out of anger through setive and reflective listening.³⁸ When the pastoral care giver grants audience to the widow, the pains and fear of her mind are expressed, and this brings about healing. The Bible clearly affirms that angry people get themselves into trouble (cf. Prov. 19:19). When anger is not expressed, such is turned inward and its resultant effects is depression.³⁹ For example, the case study shows that Lola became angry towards the family since necessary support to the children from the in-laws was not given. She was angry towards herself and towards God because she struggled alone to fend for the family, while the Church's failure to understand her plight and God allowing the circumstances that brought her grief and pain are the root cause. To avert any complication in the life of widows the pastor's presence and relational discussion will spur healing that has a lasting effect on the widow's lives.

3. *Care of Depression*

Depression is one of the inner crisis widows suffer from. Sometimes it starts at the initial stage of bereavement, while it occurs as days of mourning advance among different individuals. Depression is among a cluster of psychological disorders known as effective or mood disorders because it "involves serious disturbances of feeling, mood or emotion that may lead to behavioural thought abnormalities,"⁴⁰ This is so because it goes along with sadness that inhibits a normal functioning in people's life. It has been established by Paul D. Meier and his colleagues that females are more prone to depression than males, especially those who are in higher socio-economic groups. Also, people whose age ranges from forties and fifties sometimes encounter with depression which usually occurs in the stressful period of their lives.⁴¹ that means widows are not exempted from being depressed, because the bereavement period they pass through is stressful. In the light of this, the pastoral care giver should not distance himself from offering help to reinstate the widows from offering help to reinstate the widows through positive thinking (see Phil. 4:8) that will lift them from such situation of depression. It is worth nothing here that reference will be made in this section to Lola's case story.

A depressed widow experiences an inward dejection which is portrayed through hopelessness, helplessness and the feeling of isolation. For example, in the case study, Lola has no hope of who will shoulder her breadwinner's responsibility in the home and was helpless when her husband's relatives came and carted away the property belonging to her family. This actually affected her morale and made her dejected. Any affected

widow keeps a distance from other persons because of her despair and the domination of the illness; most of the time she cannot take decision on her own because of being occupied with anxiety, and also overwhelmed with the sense of being worthless. That is why W. R. Spence said "depression steals the joy from life, chilling the hear and sapping the will to even get out of the bed in the mornings. Severally depressed people don't enjoy people around them and have lost the will to seek pleasure in life. Most disturbingly, they may even lose the will to live."⁴²

What can be deduced from his statement is that a depressed person is not healthy either in mind or in body. Although depression may be mild, moderate or severe as it affects different individuals, this makes it imperative for a pastor to sustain the widows as they live through the problem brought about by the loss of their loved ones so that their problems do not lead to a depression. Because Lola could not cope with her problem she was destabilized psychologically. Moreso, the attitude of the church and that of the in-laws who distanced themselves from Lola are causative factors of her depression. The pastor's responsibility is to intimate depressed widows with the word of God which gives joy to counteract depression (see Jeremiah 15:16) ^{NKJV}. God's word is "quick and powerful" (see Hebrew NKJV4:12); to transform a moody condition in a person to delightfulness. From the case study, it is evident that Lola developed painful thinking which made her feel guilty when no offence had been committed. She felt responsible for the death of her husband and had other imagined wrongs. Minirth and Byrd described that as being self-possessed which in Lola's case, led her to be introspective or introverted and also occupied with melancholic and pessimistic thoughts. Sometimes such persons live in disguise by wearing smiles in their faces as if everything is well with them.⁴³

The pastoral care in that context calls for enlightening the widows to accept God's forgiveness that has been given through Christ (cf. Romans 5:8). That they should not judge or set such blame on themselves but face their situation with courage and accept the state of depression as an issue to be gotten rid off. Lola is often found weeping or feeling like weeping, as a result her countenance turned dull with a wrinkled forehead. She looked tired and discouraged without interest in being tidy or adorning herself especially on severe cases.⁴⁴ The existence of aforementioned symptoms in the life of anyone indicates that such a person is suffering from depression. When depression is discovered or becomes evident in the life of a widow the pastoral care giver should confront her to realize what she is passing through especially the moodiness which may disrupt the relationship with others and even affect her health. The attitude of self-lame and he feelings of unimportance and unpopularity among others⁴⁵ manifested in Lola and made her depressed. In her case, Lola developed dysfunctional or imbalanced eating and sleeping habits, going to be late and waking between one or two hours with difficulty to

sleep again. However, Minirth and Byrd said inversion is the outcome in some cases whereby widows sleep too much, eat too much, or too little: as a result, they develop increase or decrease in weight. They added that depression causes imbalance and irregularity in women's menstrual cycle. Sometimes it causes decrease or extinction of their sexual urge.⁴⁶

The pastor can advise such widows experiencing these disorders to meet with a medical practitioner who can recommend 'anti-depressive medication' that will regulate the disorders in mood, sleep and appetite. When the chemical abnormality in their body system is corrected, their physiologic state would become normal and function rightly.⁴⁷ The status of widowhood breeds a sense of low self-worth of self-esteem in widows. For example, in the case study Lola saw the garb prevented to her as a symbol that degrades her status in the community. Also, she felt men have equated her with debased women, hence they want to take advantage of her when looking for funds. It triggers a reaction of insecurity, and self – doubt which may lead to unexpressed anger with an aftermath of being depressed.⁴⁸ The pastoral care giver is to get close to the depressed. This will help to instill in them the sense of being loved, accepted and being valuable. Also, he can get them involved in meaningful activities that would occupy their minds productively and give relief and satisfaction to depressed individuals. The word of God (Scriptures) can prep up the hope, aspiration and confidence of depressed widows if shared with them. They will also derive assurance to overcome and be achievers who can sail through odd circumstances of life. For example, Paul said, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (cf. Philippians' 4:17).

In another context he said, "for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (cf. Phil 2:13).⁴⁹ Having examined the healing approach with focus on some particular areas which widows need healing to ensure their restoration, the research now looks into the next area of concern. This deals with how widows can be uplifted or put on a right footing so that they can be on their own without being a parasite or burden to any person.

In conclusion, widows in the modern period have come to understand that, they are better treated unlike the experience their mothers had in the past. It is common among the Yoruba that widows must go through some traditional and rituals rites before and after the burial of their husbands. In fact, it has been discovered that some women cry endlessly because they already know what they would face in the hands of the family of their husbands. Some of them are not allowed to sleep for seven days. The belief is that, the spirit of their husbands would chase them in the dream. In fact, in some quarters, it is believed that, the woman who sleeps during the period of mourning is believed to have killed the husband hence she deserves to be tortured. Thankfully, some churches have

come to rescue the widows from this psychological trauma, using the church welfare unit to cater for the widows .The Ife Oluwa Baptist church,Oyo has demonstrated sufficient love and has continued to put smiles in the faces of the widows .The church has successfully abolished some cultural practices that could undermine the personality and personalism of the women who lost their husbands .The argument, succinctly put, is that:the woman can not loose her husband and still being subjected to vile cultural setting.

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