

# The Widows Auxiliary

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Well, grab your Bibles and let's go back to 1 Timothy 5. I may have missed God on this but I'm just taking the next text. Our first Sunday back we're gonna preach about widows again, okay? And, um, how interesting it is that this section of Scripture is so descriptive and specific and, ah, there's just list after list here and, ah, I'm not gonna put all of them on the screen but there's a lot of it here so it's just a unique passage of Scripture. I call this actually and this is our series, "Beautifying the Bride," as we're going through 1 Timothy, as Paul is writing to Timothy who's overseeing the church in Ephesus, he's, he's actually in a sense pastoring the church through Timothy. Um, and he's getting things in order and the issue or the, ah, ministry to and ministry by widows was a very large ministry in the early church because there were a lot of widows. The mortality rate among men was great and, um, ah, there was just a lot of dependent and needful ladies, ah, elderly ladies in the church in this day so it was incumbent upon the church to do practical things to organize and care for this ministry and so that's what Paul is laying out here.

Now in, in the earlier verses here, verses 3 through 8, we have one group of widows referred to and this is the group that is just centered on those who need material support of the church and, um, they have no family to care for them so the church takes them in, if you will, but when you come to our text today, you have a completely different group. Ah, verse 9, 1 Timothy 5, we'll go down through the end of verse 16.

9 A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, having been the wife of one man, 10 having a reputation for good works; and if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress, and if she has devoted herself to every good work. 11 But refuse to put younger widows on the list, for when they feel sensual desires in disregard of Christ, they want to get married, 12 thus incurring condemnation, because they have set aside their previous pledge. 13 At the same time they also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention. 14 Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach; 15 for some have already turned aside to follow Satan. 16 If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, she must assist them and

the church must not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed.

Again I call this "The Widows Auxiliary." I use the word "auxiliary" because it means additional or supplemental, ah, something of a back-up. This is not a permanent ministry for the church in every age but it may be necessary to have something like this from time to time.

Now he says in verse 9, "I want widows to be put on the list." Now what is "the list"? Well, there's some scholars who say this is an ecclesiastical order of widowhood or something of a female presbytery, and I certainly don't go that far but here are some observations. When you look at the qualifications for widow ladies to be on this list in verses 9 and 10, it goes way beyond any qualification that would have been needed if these widows are only going to be cared for by the church. This is a, this is a different group, a different purpose, if you will. Ah, so starting in verse 9, we have this different group that's differ, that differs rather from those in verses 3 through 8. For example, he says these widows have to be 60 years of age. Now certainly Paul's not implying to get the support of the church if a widow needs it, she has to wait until she's 60. I don't think he's gonna send a lady who's 59 ½ out into the streets to starve. So we, we obviously are into a different group here of, ah, contrasting with those ladies who only needed the care and support of the church.

Now again I'm calling them the widows auxiliary. These are ladies who came together in an organized fashion, organized by the church leadership, they were both acknowledged by the church to be the objects of the church benevolence and they're publicly dedicating themselves to give the rest of their lives in special consecrated service to the church. That's important. That's the difference in this group than the previous group. The previous group had no real, ah, public, um, ah, setting aside, if you will, to be special servants in the church. So they're the objects of the church's mercy but also they are the servants to the church's ministry. They are the objects of the church's benevolence and they are to be faithful full-time laborers for the rest of their life for the end or for the church's benefit.

Now perhaps we get a little insight on this early church widow organization from Acts 9:39 and a widow lady named Dorcas who has passed away and the Bible says here, "So Peter arose and went with them. When he arrived, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood beside him," it, it seemed to be implying this was a group, a fellowship group, "weeping and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them." So perhaps that is alluding to that there was a forming of an, ah, an official organization of widowhood, if you will, or what I would call the widows auxiliary in the early church. And again, I'm convinced it was a pragmatic type thing. Now usually when I use the word "pragmatic," I use it in a negative way because we have so much in the church today where folks are leaving the Canon of Scripture to do pragmatic things because "they work" in church life, but there is a spiritual and good pragmatism. If you're in a setting that has a unique and particular demographic like in the early church, a large percentage of widows, it's proper to structure and organize yourself so that these ladies can be useful to the church and they can be cared for by the church.

Sometimes folks want to call these a, a deaconess group. I don't see that because deaconesses would not have to necessarily be 60 years of age, wouldn't have to be widows, etc.

Now I., as we look at this widows auxiliary, I might even amplify that out to say the women's auxiliary ministry team in the local church. First of all, he says they have to be of a mature age, 60 years of age. Now this is not an absolute age for all churches of all times that have an organized widows ministry, but it is a guiding principle. It's evident from the text and we'll see this more and more as we go along, that Paul had seen that younger widows often were a problem when they were added to this group, and so he thought an age restriction was prudent, 60 years of age.

Alright, secondly, she has to be notable for good works. Good works. In verse 10 it simply says she has to have a reputation for good works. Now I organize it this way from our text. First of all, good works in the home. She has to be known to be faithful in her Christian duties in the home. Verse 9 says she has to be the wife of one man. Now this is the mirror opposite or the mirror image of the qualification for an elder over in chapter 3, verse 2 where he says an elder has to be the husband of one wife. What it means is that she has a long-standing reputation of marital fidelity. She's never been known to be unfaithful to her husband or her marital vows. She was a good, true, devoted, Christian wife to her husband. Also concerning the home it talks about her being, having good works as a mother. Verse 10 says she brought up children. Obviously this emphasizes that she brought them up in the discipline and, and in the instruction of the Lord. She sacrificed for them. She labored for them and her diligence to be a good mother is a mark of her life.

So we see this very clearly in our text that this woman has to be a woman of good works in her home. Actually the phrase "brought up," when it says she has to, she has brought up children, it comes from a root word that means to nourish and you can see the picture here that this is a woman who nourished her children both physically, physical nourishment, but spiritual nourishment also. She was looking after their eternal souls.

So in the home she has to be known for her good works but, secondly, the Bible says in the church. To be on this widows auxiliary she had to be known for her good works. I see this, first of all, in verse 10 where it says she has shown hospitality to strangers. In this day, um, it was very common for Christians to be under such persecution they were literally without house and home, sometimes without necessary food and clothing, so it was essential that local churches have their doors open to these Christians who may come through just looking for a place to sleep and looking for a meal to feed them. She was known to take care of this. Ah, if you read this phrase "hospitality to strangers," it doesn't mean she went out to the marketplace every day and found somebody that no one knew and brought them home for a week. That would be unwise and be dangerous. That's not the context of what's going on here.

The Bible also says in verse 10 that she washed the saints' feet, both literally because that was a common practice in the early church, and figuratively. She had a faithfulness in her

service to the local church and this washing of feet emphasizes that she served in the church with humility and with industry. In other words, she was not a diva who had to have things her way and was full of self-importance. This is further expressed in verse 10 where it says she assisted those in distress. Quite a list Paul's put, putting together here, isn't it, of qualifications to be on the widows auxiliary ministry team.

Well, thirdly, good works in the community at large. Ah, verse 10 continues on and says devoted to every good work. I think this includes her, her activities in the community at large. She's a kind, thoughtful and good person to the best of her abilities to all of those in her circle of influence. Proverbs 16:7 reminds us of a person that even his enemies are caused to be at peace with him. She's the kind of person that even those who might reject her God and her faith, when they watch her long enough they begin to respect her and appreciate her for her consistency and her faithfulness. Ladies, is this not the kind of person you want to strive to be? Do we qualify? Ladies, do you qualify to be on the Apostle Paul's widows auxiliary ministry team? Quite a list.

Now let's remind ourselves, though, this is not a law as such, it's not a standard of perfection, what Paul wants to point out is what was the pattern of her life. Sure, she sinned, she failed, she had some weaknesses. I like to think about it this way, there are times when she failed but when she had fallen she didn't fall away. Now think about that. Falling away is the, the, the idea behind the word "apostate." It means to completely divorce yourself and separate yourself off from the faith. Christians can never truly apostasize. We may fall but we never fall away and so it is true of her.

So Paul gives quite a stringent list of qualifications if a widowed woman is going to be on this particular list. Now again, I can see no way that Paul would say this is necessary before you feed and care for a, a hurting senior adult lady, but for this group who often were cared for but were also something of a servant ministry team, he had high standards and high qualifications.

Now II., he says to exclude younger widows. Younger widows were not allowed to be on this list and we see this primarily in verses 11 through 15, and he outlines some really pointed and specific things and here's where we pick up that the Apostle Paul obviously had been or had seen some really bad examples in some of the churches, and so he's laying out some dictates here to keep this from being the case in the church at Ephesus where Timothy is working.

Well, exclude younger widows, first of all, because they have unique temptations. They have unique temptations. What I think the point we're making, temptations unique to them that are not so common among the more elderly widows. Now one of the ones I would list is a failure in following through. That's one temptation they have, a failure in following through. In verse 12 he says don't put a younger widow on there because they're, they're, they're likely to get other interests going and they will "set aside their previous pledge." They didn't follow through. Set aside their previous pledge. I think this makes it clear that there was a, a formal setting aside where these widows pledged themselves before God and the church to give themselves wholly to the Lord's work and

to his local church without ever again a thought of marriage. In other words, God and the church becomes their husband. They're setting that aside, they're going forward with a new devotion of ministry but, Paul is saying, being young often the desire for marriage returns and they break the pledge. So one unique temptation is a failure to follow through.

Well, he picks on this and elaborates a little bit more in verse 11 and says they fail to follow through because they feel sensual desires and the phrase "sensual desires" means just what you think it means, it means sexual desires. In other words, they're too young to fully comprehend, comprehend rather the pledge of celibacy and the devotion to Christ they're making. They may have been very genuine and very enthusiastic but they just were not mature enough to make that kind of commitment that I'll never again consider marriage, I'll devote my life wholly to serving God.

Now just as a side note here because it came to my mind, the Roman Catholic Church takes this text and some others and runs off to the edge of the solar system and back with it to try to establish, ah, the, the doctrine of celibacy among all of those who serve in the church. John Calvin points out in his commentary he'd bet there's not 1 in 10 among church leaders, nuns included, that stay chaste in their sexual relationships about after making those pledges, he says but they have too much pride to admit they're wrong and go back and fix the problem.

Well, Paul is here saying that young women shouldn't make this pledge of never getting married and totally devoting themselves to church because they'll, they'll have the sensual desires stir up and they'll fail to follow through. He adds something else to this failing to follow through, he, he says in verse 11 "in disregard of Christ." Paul's pointing out this is a serious thing. You don't dedicate yourself to God and before his church and take it lightly. They do it in disregard to, to Christ. They break the pledge to both Christ and to the church.

Now let's remind ourselves, don't be, ah, out of balance here. As uncomfortable as it may be, it's necessary to say it is not wrong for a widow lady to have sensual desires. He's gonna tell them what to do in a moment. It's wrong for them to pledge themselves to singleness, though, and devotion to the Lord if they're not ready to live that out. That's the point Paul is making.

Well, not only a failure to follow through on this pledge but another aspect of the unique temptation is laziness or what he uses here they learn to be idle, verse 13. He said, "I've just seen it, younger widows are, have a tendency for, for idleness. They're too young, too immature and lack the discipline needed of one who, ah, has no longer the obligations of husband and home." So they, they tend to be slack in their lives and he's including here slack in their spiritual duties and in this particular spiritual plague.

Now he continues on, this idleness leads to something else and I call this ministry manipulation. That's a temptation. My goodness, in our day today and in our age there's a lots of ministry manipulation going on, that is, improper, improperly using your office or

your role in ministry for your own selfish ends and not for the good of God and the glory of God. Well, he said these widow ladies have this special pledge of ministry, they're a ministry servant team to the church but when younger widows are put on there, there's a proneness for those ladies to begin to kind of scheme and to manipulate this role they have of ministry for their own carnal ends.

Here's the way he words it in verse 13, they go around from house to house. Well, they visited homes and were welcome in the homes because they were official servant ministers of the church, but the point here as they get into these homes, they're up to carnality and no good. They use this position on the widows auxiliary ministry team to get into people's lives and learn all of their information. They like sticking their noses in and their ears in places they do not belong. Is this not getting down to brass tacks? Is Paul not getting down to where the rubber meets the road? Now we're talking about widows but what about the rest of us this morning? Are there not great lessons here for all of us?

Well, Paul doesn't stop there, also he says they, they become gossips. Did they become gossips, verse 13. The word "gossip" has the idea of throwing up bubbles. I like that visual picture, just, just, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Just, they just bubbling all the time about something. So they use the veil of their spiritual service to make these visits and they spread gossip from house to house to house. "Oh, do you know where I was this morning? Do you know da, da, da, da, and da, da, da," just bubble, bubble, bubble. Then they go to the next house and bubble over on them. And they go to the next house and bubble. And they think, the last house thinks they're just getting what the other houses bubbled about but actually she's gonna go to another house and tell them what the last house bubbled about and they're just blabbering everywhere. I like the way Paul gives us these graphic terms, you can just see it in your mind, in your mind's eye.

Then he says also they're tempted to be busybodies. These are all the unique temptations he says of young widows when they have this position on the widows auxiliary. Busybodies is the word in verse 13. Busybody is the idea of sinful curiosity. "I'm just curious. I just want to know. I just, I want to learn. Now what? What? Now who's doing this? And what's going on there?" And they're just curious but not for the glory of God. It's a carnal and sinful curiosity. They want to know all about your business, of course to minister to you. The truth is they want to know all the juicy details of things that they have no business knowing anything about.

Verse 13, he continues on and says they're, they're talking about things not proper to mention. Brothers and sisters, do you understand there's a lot of things that aren't proper to mention? They just don't need to be talked about. They may be true but they don't need to be talked about. Have you ever heard someone say when they'll say something, "Oh, you shouldn't say that"? "Well, it's true." Well, Paul says, "Well, it doesn't matter if it's true." Some things shouldn't be talked about but these young widows seem to be prone to this instead of being faithful in their ministry duties. The idea of the text here that these ladies are talking about things that both the subject matter itself is wrong to be talked about and their motive for talking about it house to house is impure and not right before God.

So Paul is basically saying generally speaking that younger widows do not need this much time on their hands. They don't need to be set apart, supported by the church and have this ministry responsibility because they're too immature to handle it. Interesting. Now does this not parallel for all of us in a lot of ways? Church elders, first of all, should, the church shouldn't put men in the office of elder who are too immature to handle it. They may be good men but just not ready for it yet. Where there's a small group leader or an outreach leader or a deacon in the church, or in whatever position of influence, are we sure they are old enough and mature enough to handle it. Paul says these widows are not old enough to stay out of trouble. That's basically what he's saying. You, you just don't come to many texts as practical and specific as this. Too much time is often the devil's workshop.

Well, we saw the unique temptations that, ah, young widows have, next let's talk about the tragic implications. When these widows get in this ministry and they fail the way Paul is describing they sometimes fail, maybe often fail, there is serious implications here.

1. The first one is a public reproach. Public reproach. In verse 14 he says, "I don't want widows to do this because they'll give an occasion for the enemy to bring reproach." Now the enemy he talks about in verse 14 that will bring, that will begin to put reproach on the church is not Satan in this context. Satan is mentioned specifically in verse 15, the enemy here are those people who are outside of the, the covenant, ah, fellowship of God's people, people who do not like our Christ, people who resent our doctrines and our teaching, same thing, people who look for any reason whatsoever that they might discredit Christ and discredit his church. So when this widow lady becomes idle and a gossip and a busybody and then decides, "Oh, I decided I'm gonna get married. I'm gonna set aside that pledge I made. I'm not gonna do that, I'm gonna marry this man I found." He says, "You just allow the community to bring disdain on God and his name in the community." It's a serious, it's a, it's a serious and tragic implication.

So public reproach is one thing, secondly, public condemnation. Public condemnation. In verse 12 the text says thus incurring condemnation. The specific context here is they made the pledge to be on the widows auxiliary ministry team and then they decided they wanted to get married and they pulled back. What Paul is saying is they stand condemned before the church because in effect by pulling back and not following through with their vow, they're saying Christ is insufficient to meet my needs and Christ is unworthy of my whole devotion and service. Ecclesiastes 5:4 and 5 says, "When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay."

So that's an important truth to remember, these ladies falling back on their commitment or misusing their ministry role bring public reproach and public condemnation. Thirdly, they make an enemy affiliation. They make an enemy affiliation. It's interesting how he words it here in verse 15, "for some have already turned aside to follow Satan." Strong statement there. I think what he's saying there is they've begun to act like they're in league with Satan. They've become, ah, one who contributes to Satan's cause instead of God's

cause. This is the same thing that was happening in the Gospels when Peter began to rebuke the Lord when the Lord said he was gonna go die on the cross, and Peter rebuked Jesus and said, "God forbid it, Lord! This will never happen to You!" Jesus turned at Peter after he said that and looked and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan." Interesting. He said, "You're not setting your mind on God's interests but man's. You're, you're, you're now acting like you're in the league of fallen men and in the, in the kingdom of Satan and doing his bidding." That's what happens to these ladies. They make an enemy affiliation when they fail to follow through with these vows or misuse this widows ministry auxiliary ministry team role improperly.

Then fourthly, it's not spelled out specifically in our text but it's certainly implicitly taught here, evil leaven. You become a part of evil leaven. I mean, if folks in the church begin to misuse the church, I mean, if you take a ministry role and you use it to be a busybody gossip, then that kind of spirit multiplies in the church like yeast multiplies in dough. I mean, it's very, it's very, it's amazing what a magnet that is for carnal and the unregenerate to run to the church and just jump on the bandwagon of misusing Christian ministry for carnal ends. That's why Paul wrote to the church at Corinth and said a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.

Well, finally concerning these younger widows are, that are to be excluded Paul says, "I've got a remedy for their situation." I call this the divine rectification. Let's rectify this. Let's cure this. Let's remedy this. Look at what he says in verse 14, "Therefore, I want younger widows," here's how you fix it Paul says, "let them get married, bear children, and keep house." Interesting. Very specific. In other words, as a younger widow instead of making a show of spirituality, presuming you're ready and able to make this commitment before the church, don't do that. Back up. Look at getting married again, having children and keeping your house. Now once again, this is not a law but Paul is writing now on a practical level, bringing a solution to what he saw as a common problem. He's challenging these younger widows to reassume the great and powerful ministry that God has given women.

What is the great and powerful ministry that God has given women? Well, I preached it to you, 1 Timothy 2, and specifically verse 15 of 1 Timothy 2, "But women will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint." Now that word there "preserved," I agree with the scholars who believe that that means they will have a preserving influence, a saving influence in the world. How can a woman have the most powerful, good and godly influence in the world? Of being the best she can in her home. By being all she can be in her home. Now does this mean it's always sin for a woman to have any employment outside the home? The Bible doesn't teach that. I've never put that burden on you, but you should always turn your hearts toward home. It should be the center of your life and the center of your interests, and I believe there are too many ladies in the church who take jobs out in the world without praying it through, without seeking the Lord is, is this the right thing for us?

So Paul says get married, bear children and keep house. There's an interesting idea in, in these two words "keep house." The scholars tell us the word "keep" means "to rule," rule your own house is what it means. The idea here is if you keep busy in an excellent way where you're supposed to be, it's gonna keep you out of trouble. Rule your house. The idea is don't rule over something out in the world when you ought to be ruling your house. Don't rule over your husband, rule your house. Don't rule over the busybody gossip club, pour yourself into your home. Rule in your appointed place. Paul says this will keep a lot of younger ladies out of trouble. You want an important place to feel accomplished, to feel satisfied? Then love your husband, raise godly children, and keep your home in an orderly fashion and make it a welcoming environment for all.

Ladies, do you want to grow old with sweetness? Do you want to grow old joyful, contented, and attractive? Then devote yourself to what God's called you to be and to do. I've been watching this a long time now, and you know, I've, I've never seen a sweet, joyful, contented, attractive, elderly feminist. Can I go, can I go there and say that? They're just ugly. But you show me a lady that's learned to be content in God's will and in God's word, they just seem to grow older better. They don't seem to, they do. Now we all, we all get older in appearance, of course. As I've said before, it begins to sag, drag and bag. But I'm telling you, there is a sweetness and a beauty to a woman's countenance who grows old trusting in the Lord.

Well, finally he says here in verse 16, now he's talking about the younger widows staying out of trouble, that's the context here, he said, "Here's something also that'll keep you busy and keep you out of this trouble of busybody and being idle and being talkative and talking about things you shouldn't talk about and being a gossip," verse 16, "If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, she must assist them and the church must not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed." He said, "By the way, don't you have somebody in your family you could be caring for even though you, your husband may be gone and your children may be raised? There may be older ladies in your family who need your care and your assistance."

Well, let me close, um, with three conclusions for practical application, probably could get 13 but just three thoughts that jumped out to me and we'll, we'll be done with this and these certainly apply to all of us.

1. We're reminded again how all of life centers in the local church. God has intended all of our life centered, I mean, when you're a child in the nursery, your parents bring you to a local church. When you're in childhood, you can have a connection to the local church. When you're a, a teenager or a, or a young single adult, you can serve and honor God in the local church. When you're married and raising your children and, and you're, you're newly married and you've got maybe small babies, you can raise them in the context of the local church. When you get older and if your spouse dies, you can still serve in the local church and the church may help and support you like this text teaches. It's, I mean the church is always there. Your husband may die but the church is still there. Your wife may depart but the church is still there. For these widows, their husbands are gone, their children are grown, what does Paul say? Pour yourself into ministry in the local church.

That's what the widows auxiliary, ah, ministry was here, and if you have needs as a widow but you have no family, then look to the local church. It's all centered there, and in this day when we have to redefine everything, everything has to be redefined because it's been dumbed down to the most carnal denominator, remind ourselves, haven't even looked at you folks in the balcony, y'all okay up there? Remind yourselves that church is not an event you attend occasionally on Sunday, church is not an event you attend occasionally on Sunday, church is a family you belong to for eternity and that's the picture you get here. These widows, no matter what place they're in, the church is the center of it. I love that and the church should be the center of all of our lives. It doesn't mean you don't do other things, of course you do, but you always do them as an extension of your body, the body of Christ you belong to.

2. We're reminded in this text of the essential value of work. The essential value of work. Even these widows, the reason they were organized in this ministry team was so they could make a pledge of spending the rest of their lives expending the totality of their energies serving their God in this local church. Working. Now, now on one hand there's a part of us that says, "These dear ladies, they're honorable ladies, they have been devoted to their husbands, they've raised those children, they've done all of this work, they've labored so hard, if they do nothing else we're gonna take care of them." And I would say, I would say amen to that, but Paul says, "No, they should do what they can do. They should still work in the local church." Now they may not can do much and we certainly wouldn't ask them to do anything that in their elderly state they couldn't perform, that's not what we're saying, it's the principle that work is good. We never stop working for the Lord, brothers and sisters, and of course, this parallels over to our secular work. That's good too. It's all given of God.

So Paul says we've got this organized ministry where widows themselves even in their old and to whatever degree infirm condition can do what they can in service to the church. I'm reminded of 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12, "For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either." That'll help guys work if they get hungry. Verse 11, "For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life," here it is again, "doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies." This includes the men, by the way. Remember he said the widows could be busybodies, men can too. Verse 12, "Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread."

I saw the other day that in this present distress our country's going through with this virus, that the government has given such benefits to the unemployed that 60% of those unemployed are making more money than they made working. Now on one hand I'm grateful for that, on the other hand, I disagree with that. When you give a man something he hasn't worked for, you're doing a disservice to him. Now folks, look, there's always, there's always a room to give somebody grace, amen? Sometimes and I, I try some of these boys work for me occasionally at my place, I, I love working these young boys and I try at the end of the day to pay a little more than I agreed because then I can tell them about grace. I said, "You didn't work for this part. I gave you that, it's just grace." But the point is this whole thing that there's this, ah, mandate of hand-out mentality and free stuff

just because you're living and breathing is not biblical. It's a disservice to the person. You diminish their worthiness. It's the be, it's beneath rather the dignity of humankind to say you should get without work.

Well, even here these elderly widows are to do what they can do, pledging themselves to spend the rest of their lives in devotion to God for the church. Well, number 3, I'm reminded of the power of prayer. In verse 5 is listed the only specific ministry these widows might be doing. It says in verse 5, "Now she who is a widow indeed and who has been left alone, has fixed her hope on God and continues," here it is, "in entreaties and prayers night and day." So there are many of these in this widow state who are of such an infirm condition that all they can do is intercede for the work of the church and Paul says that's a lot. That's a lot. While it is all they can do, it's actually the most anyone can do. Sometimes folks say pray for the work, they mean the church but really prayer is the work. It's common for us to say, "Well, all she can do or the least she can do is pray." We all often overlook or even dismiss the weak, infirm, elderly among us who give themselves to the ministry of entreaties and prayers for God's church yet the truth be known, it is their prayers that are the key to the church's success. It is their prayer that touches the heart of God and moves the hand of omnipotence. And the day will come for all of us, every single one of us when perhaps all we have left to perform for God's church is to pray for it. We're bedridden, we're weak, we're sick, all we have left is prayer and it will be true then as it always has been true that when prayer is all we can do, we want to again we'll be doing the most we could have ever done. Do you understand that? It's the greatest thing we have. Is that not amazing that at the end of our lives like these dear widow ladies, all they have left is to pray and entreat God to bless the work and God says, "No, but your ending was the most powerful thing you could have ever done." Their role is not diminished, their role is not insignificant, their role is not weak, their role is essential.

Every now and then, God just pierces through my mind and my heart when I hear about some senior saying in the church and they're imploring God for their pastor, for their small group, for our mission work. I've used illustrations before, true illustrations of folks who've told me they've prayed for me and I believe when we get to heaven those of us who had public profiles will not be the ones with the greatest gifts, it will be those who faithfully labored in prayer for God's work which is where these widows pray. Prayer at any age is the most important work of all.