



8 Ideas for Loving Single Moms from the Book of Ruth

Dawn Walker

One of the greatest unmet ministry needs in our country today is that of widows. Not the traditional widow, but single moms. Nearly 40 percent of all American families are now headed by a single parent, mostly mothers, and the majority live below the poverty level. Even more concerning is the spiritual poverty these families experience, yet less than one percent of churches in America have a single parent ministry initiative in place.

For the Church to be relevant to our culture, we can't continue to overlook this widow epidemic. Tragically, the American church fails to see single moms as widows for several reasons. First, because our definition of widow has evolved to mean only a woman whose husband has died. However, in biblical Greek the word for widow, *chera*, was a much broader term meaning "bereft of a husband," indicating that the woman could have been left alone for any number of reasons, including divorce or desertion, which were common problems even in Old and New Testament times. Second, there is the issue of single moms who have never been married. In 2013, half of all babies born in America will be born to unmarried single moms. Do these women count as widows too? Is the Church required to care for women who have been sexually promiscuous or irresponsible in the same way they would care for a woman who was faithfully married for many years and whose husband died?

While these are questions that a discerning church must examine, I think it ultimately comes down to an issue of compassion. If it was your daughter who got pregnant out of wedlock and chose to preserve the life of her child, or if she had left an abusive relationship seeking a safer, healthier environment for her kids to grow up in, how would you want a church to receive and care for her?

Having stepped into the lives and listened to the stories of countless single parents, and being 'widowed' myself due to my spouse's addiction and violence, I can say that a single mom's common experience with the Church is that they feel invisible, marginalized and neglected. They don't fit in [marriage](#) ministries or singles ministries and usually their time and financial restrictions prevent them and their kids from participating in retreats, camps, lifegroups and other events that would involve them in the community they long for. When they get desperate enough to finally approach a church for help with an unexpected expense, a childcare need, or a housing crisis, they find that the church mostly has no vision and no plan for how to care for them, so they just get redirected to a state agency. Is it any surprise that most single parents do not attend church after being told by the church to go find their hope somewhere else?

Today's widows don't want handouts. What they want is protection, supportive community, mentorship and redemption for themselves and their children. Is your church fulfilling God's call to meet these needs? To answer that let's look at the model set forth in the book of Ruth, where Boaz, the kinsman-redeemer representing Christ, ministers to Ruth, a widow.

1. Ruth comes to Boaz's land, seeking refuge. Is your church a refuge for single parent families? When desperate single moms show up at your church hoping it's a safe place to rest and be protected are they embraced or left wondering if anyone is going to help them? Ideally, the church should respond like Boaz: *"Stay right here with us when you gather grain; don't go to any other fields...May the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge, reward you fully for what you have done."* —[Ruth 2:8, 12](#)

2. Boaz shows Ruth kindness and favor. Do single parents who come through the doors of your church get recognized or ignored? Is God's heart and vision for widows and orphans spoken of in weekend services or is their plight "invisible" to the church at large? Boaz does not let Ruth remain on the fringes, but approaches and speaks to her face to face, lets her know she is welcome in his field and that his intention is to make sure she is cared for properly. *"Ruth fell at his feet and thanked him warmly, 'What have I done to deserve such kindness?' She asked. 'I am only a foreigner.'"* —[Ruth 2:10](#)

3. Ruth comes to Boaz's field seeking supply. Have you ever had single parents call or drop in at your church needing immediate help? When single parents ask for food, housing or financial assistance from the church, should they be redirected to state agencies or taken in by church families? Biblically, the church is called to demonstrate 'Good Samaritan' sacrifice in loving others and offering charity. *"My daughter, it's time that I found a permanent home for you, so that you will be provided for."* —[Ruth 3:1](#)

4. Boaz never sends Ruth away empty-handed. Has your church ever sent a single parent family out the doors with nothing to eat (most won't ask for food even when they need it)? Or do you make sure every Sunday, every Wednesday night and all the days in between that they are adequately provided for? Boaz demonstrates the intentional generosity of Christ by arranging for Ruth to gather grain with his harvesters, instructs his men to pull extra grain out and drop it on purpose for her, and even invites her to eat and drink at his table. Each time he makes sure she has more than enough. *"He gave me these six scoops of barley and said, 'Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty handed.'"* —[Ruth 3:17](#)

5. Ruth comes to Boaz's feet seeking relationship and redemption. How many single parents has your church led to Christ in the past year? When single parents are lovingly received, supported and discipled by the church, they get to know the real character of Jesus and are drawn to the foot of [the cross](#), entering into a personal, intimate relationship with him. Their response is one of humility and gratitude. *"I am your servant Ruth," she replied, "Spread the corner of your covering over me, for you are my family redeemer."* —[Ruth 3:9](#)

6. Ruth stays close to Boaz and obeys what he tells her to do. Are you aware that single parents are more ready than most to accept leadership and instruction? Single moms who are well-loved and cared for also tend to stay close to the church, eager to serve and willing to do whatever God and their leaders ask of them. *"So Ruth lay at Boaz's feet until the morning..."* —[Ruth 3:14](#)

7. Ruth experiences restoration and transformation through marriage to Boaz. Are you seeing transformation in the lives of single parent families in your church? God never intends for them to remain in a state of scarcity and loss, He has a greater inheritance in store for them. Single parent families who are nurtured by the church grow in their faith and are transformed, experiencing new life, new hope and new legacy. *"And with the land I have acquired Ruth, the Moabite widow of Mahlon, to be my wife. This way she can have a son to carry on the family name of her dead husband and to inherit the family property here in his hometown."* —[Ruth 4:10](#)

8. Ruth is given unmerited honor as an outsider who is grafted into the lineage of Christ. Do you

consider the single moms in your church to be just as qualified as married people for leadership and ministry influence? Redeemed single parents who have experienced the unmerited love and grace of Christ through His church are prime candidates to have great influence for the Kingdom. *“We are witnesses! May the Lord make this woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, from whom all the nation of Israel descended!”*—[Ruth 4:11](#)

A church that intentionally reaches out to single parent families with kindness, encouragement and understanding is a rare and precious thing. Churches that are reflecting God’s heart by being ‘a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows’ ([Psalms 68:5](#)) are finding this ministry is bringing great vibrance and causing generosity to explode in their communities. Instead of seeing the epidemic of widows today as an overwhelming social problem, they see what a great blessing and resource they can be to the Body of Christ.

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