



1 Timothy 5:1-16
House Rules: 1 Timothy
“Caring Rules”

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As 2022 has begun, we've been in a series called “House Rules” where we've going through the New Testament book we know as “First Timothy.” And in this letter from Paul to Timothy, he lays out principals and rules for churches. A variety of topics are covered in this letter, including church leadership, worship, relationships in the church body, and more. **Read/Pray.**

So, in their day, when a woman became a widow, it put her in a particularly vulnerable place – more so than today as there just weren't the societal guardrails and support services available then that there are today. Caring for them was important, and it is today as well. As we think about this passage and what we learn from it and how to apply it to the 21st Century we find ourselves in, I think it's entirely appropriate to broaden the scope and see this passage as a word of instruction on how to care for the vulnerable in our society. Women in general, and widows in particular, were vulnerable in their day. But even though Paul highlights them here Scripture elsewhere commands us to care for all who are vulnerable, down and out, and on the margins of society.

For instance, in Matthew 25, Jesus tells a parable about caring for others, and in the story is this line, **“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me”** (Jesus, in Matthew 25:35-36).

Through this parable, we see that there are people who are in a variety of vulnerable situations who need care extended to them. That's why people were gathered here yesterday assembling these Blessing Bags, and why we are all encouraged to pick up a bag or two and distribute them as we have the opportunity. At the heart of this is compassion. Jesus' statement there is clearly designed to engender compassion. And caring for others can be challenging, which sometimes leads us to pray for patience as we care for others. But what we really need to pray for is compassion. Compassion leads

to caring for others. Compassion looks deeper than the surface, gets past the assumptions and judgments we're tempted to make, and gives us the heart to help people in their time of need.

So essentially there are three groups of people addressed in this passage with words of wisdom given in how they are to care for widows: the church and its care of widows, children and grandchildren of widows, and lastly, widows themselves. Let's start with the Church. This whole section that we read is essentially bookended by instructions for the church. After an introduction that covers some general statements about how to treat men and women of different age groups: **Verse 3 dives into more detail, and verse 16 closes it out: and both are about how the church is to care for widows.** So clearly, that is a point of emphasis that Paul wants to make. This is part of what it means to be in the body of Christ: to care for those who genuinely need help. Paul is clear in verse 3 that the "recognition" the church gives is to those widows who "really are in need."

That might sound cold and harsh or judgmental. But the reality is, sometimes people say they have great need, or we assume they have great need, but really, they don't. Some people just want attention. Some don't realize the resources they already have and how "ok" they really are. Or we presume someone needs us to care for them when it turns out they've got family or financial means to do so themselves. But where there are people who really need the help of the church, then the church ought to step in and do what it can, because the compassion in the church that leads us to care. We'll come back to this at the end, so let's leave it there for now, and go on to the second point.

Secondly, Paul addresses children and grandchildren and their care of widows. In other words: there's a family connection to the widow. This really is the first line of caring for people: family takes care of family. We see that in verses 4 and 8. Now, there is a loss of this "family caring for family" in our world today. Quite frankly, some of that is just because things are different. In their day, when you lived long enough that your body just couldn't handle the rigors of work, and you couldn't financially support yourself, you had to count on family. And for a woman, if her husband died,

she suddenly found herself in that situation. There wasn't Social Security, IRA's and 401K's. You didn't downsize your home or move to a less expensive place to live – like Eastern Washington from the Seattle area – and use the leftover money to live on. Financial planning for retirement wasn't a thing then. So, you had to have support from someone else. These are just some basic differences between their culture and ours. So: In their time, family was vital to caring for the older generation.

I oftentimes also hear people nowadays criticizing how we take our elderly and put them into retirement homes or if needed, a skilled nursing facility, or some other kind of institution, rather than caring for them in our own homes. And to a certain degree I think there's some truth to that criticism: there's a cultural mentality that the elderly are set aside (“discarded” is the word I've heard, actually). That is a tragedy. I also know, however, that for most of us, the medical care offered in those places is far greater than what could be offered in our own homes. **When someone is in a place like that, the key is that the family doesn't just abandon them. Care can still be given, even if it's not under the same roof.**

Last spring, when Gwen's mom was first recovering from when she got hit by a drunk driver while she was walking her dog, she was in the hospital and then a skilled nursing home. She was in much better hands there than she would have been at our house or either of Gwen's sister's homes. But we visited regularly at both locations: We cared for her by visiting her in the hospital and the skilled nursing center several times a week, and on the phone whenever we couldn't. There was daily contact, fueled by compassionate care. When she was healthy enough to leave the skilled nursing place, but really was not quite ready to be on her own, family came in from out of town and stayed for a couple months to help her in her own home. Then, she stayed with us for a time in our home as well.

Now, longer term help for people with memory issues, or other long-term and sometimes progressively more difficult challenges, is not easy. There's no single right answer for all of those. Some people can handle those situations, at least for a time, and others can't.

One man who cared for his wife writes (true story), “My wife has Alzheimer’s and I put some jewelry on her for a Christmas party one year. While waiting to leave, she took one of her bracelets off. I put it on again, and she took it back off—neither of us saying much to one another as we went back and forth. The next time she took it off, I picked up the bracelet, set it on the table and said, ‘Okay, maybe you should not wear this tonight.’ All was silent until she quietly said (without looking at me), ‘You have got some attitude.’ I had to LOL!”¹ Whether it’s your spouse, a parent, or a grandparent that you are caring for, this serves as a reminder that it can be challenging; but with compassion and a bit of a sense of humor, we can care for the vulnerable in our families.

If we don’t care for them, Paul says we’re denying the faith and worse than an unbeliever (verse 8). It seems like a harsh judgment, but the fact is: it isn’t a very good witness to anyone if we just refuse to help our own parents or grandparents...if we refuse to care for them in ways appropriate to the situation: visiting them in skilled nursing or retirement homes or their own places even if they’re living independently and on their own just fine, or having them live in our own homes if that’s needed...whatever the care looks like that we could do and is appropriate: if we don’t, it’s not a good witness to the world around us. It’s not caring.

Lastly, Paul addresses widows directly. For younger widows, the counsel essentially is that they should re-marry. There seems to be some contextual things that they were all familiar with that we aren’t – particularly when speaking of them breaking a pledge, as he mentions in verse 12. We don’t know exactly what that’s referring to, but it seems to be some pledge of service to Jesus in the church that some were then having a hard time living up to. So, Paul’s counsel is to get married.

Then: **In verse 16 he writes of widows caring for other widows.** And actually, before that, in verses 9 and 10 he writes about older widows ought to be helping those in need as well. But as far as widows helping widows in verse 16: so often, the person who can care best for someone else who’s going through a difficult time, is the person who’s been through that same situation themselves. I’m a better pastor when it comes to congregational

care and visiting people in their time of illness and being close to death because I've faced that in my own family in ways I hadn't when I first became a pastor. I've now lost all four of my grandparents and my father-in-law. And though I still have room for growth, my experiences help me care for others in their seasons of loss.

Someone who's lost a spouse is a great person to relate to those who have also lost a spouse or to even facilitate a ministry that is geared toward those who have also lost their spouse. It can actually be healing for the one who leads it – that's true in a lot of ministries that are born out of pain and suffering: They bring healing. (A certain degree of healing needs to happen first before stepping into leadership or else the group will just become a therapy team for the leader...but these are the kinds of ministries where fruit is born out of difficult situations). *(And, though I completely spaced out saying this in the delivery of the sermon, we have a ministry to widows and single women called "Teacup Ministry." It is led by women who, for the most part, are widows or have experienced being widows. Normally this ministry has quarterly or so gatherings...and there's a good sense of support and friendship in the group outside of their formal gatherings...but those gatherings have been on hold due to Covid).*

Paul's counsel, led by the Holy Spirit, is wise (imagine that!). Especially in their culture where women did not work outside the home, these women had time to give to minister to others in the same situation. It would give them a sense of place and purpose and mission, which is something we all need in life, no matter our personal situation.

So, this is his counsel on how to take care of widows, who were the vulnerable ones in their culture: It starts with family, and the church steps in as needed, with widows themselves actually taking the lead, or at least filling a significant role, in that ministry.

But as I said, this need for compassionate care goes beyond widows or the older generation regardless of marital status. And the need is great, not just in our church, not just here on the Eastside, but around the globe. **There are lots of hurting people who just want to know that someone cares.** Here at

Rose Hill, I would say to you that this is one of our strengths. And I say that not just because *I* believe that to be true, but because I hear it from you all as well. I frequently hear of how the people of Rose Hill care for another – regardless of marital status, life situation, and so forth, RH cares well for anyone who is in a vulnerable and difficult place in life: loss of a loved one, battling cancer, struggling to make ends meet, overwhelmed with a new baby...I mean the life situations that can push us to the edge of what we can handle are numerous. And in many instances, family is there to help us out. And that's great when that is true for someone.

But there are a lot of people here on the Eastside who have moved here from somewhere else, and their family *isn't* here to help them. They're on their own. And the Rose Hill family steps up and helps in a variety of different ways and through different avenues. As a church, we help the vulnerable throughout the Eastside in different ways. Again, the blessing bags are one way Caring within the Rose Hill family happens through our Deacons, and our parish ministry, and everyone who calls Rose Hill "home" has access to those ministries. Many of you are in small groups, and there's a huge amount of care that happens within those. There's so much "care" that happens in all of these ministries. Are we perfect? No.

But: We serve a perfect savior who cares for us more deeply and more completely than we ever will: His name is Jesus. He invites all who are weary and heavy laden to come to him and find rest. With a heart that was filled to the brim with compassion for people like you and me, he reached out his hands from one side of the cross to the other, where he died for you and me, all because he cares. With his arms wide open, and a heart full of compassion, he welcomes in any and all who will come to him. Because of this care we have experienced through the cross of Christ, we care for others.

And when we do that, we offer a glimpse of the care that God gives. **When someone is in a place where they just want to know that someone cares, and we do that: we point them to the God of the universe who cares for them.** We may let them down in some way – Lord knows I've let people down. We all have. But God never fails to show his care. His care never ends, and it know no bounds...it stretches from the East to the West, and he

invites you to receive his compassionate care today, and then to care for others. Let's pray...Amen.

¹ <https://www.agingcare.com/articles/funny-caregiver-stories-143989.htm>