

## **EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF GENESIS 2:18: A CASE STUDY OF THE PLIGHT OF WIDOWERS IN NIGERIAN SOCIETY**

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### **Abstract**

It has been shown that widowhood has a more adverse effect on men than women. Among the travails and challenges the widowers go through, loneliness is the most dangerous. Yet God has given a clear instruction that it is not a good state. The objective of this paper, therefore, is to highlight the effects of loneliness on the widower and debunk the concept of the lack of specific teaching on the treatment of widower in the Christian scriptures by expositing Genesis 2:18. Exegetical and phenomenological analyses reveal that the widower indeed endures a great deal of challenges and loneliness happens to be the greatest predicament and it is mainly responsible for the many other challenges like stress, frustration and ill health. The paper concludes that the assumption of lack of specific scriptural teaching on the treatment of widower by the Christian scriptures is not enough excuse for what the widowers is made to go through and went on to show that God has clearly defined how the widower's man should be cared for. The paper, therefore recommends that the church and society should see the issue of loneliness as seriously as God sees it; help the widowed men, early enough, to be part of societal activities; enable him to find meaningful things to do; and encouraged him to remarry as soon as possible.

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**Key Words:** Widower, widowhood, widowers, Loneliness, Not-good.

### **Introduction**

For the man (אָדָם) to be alone was said to be טוֹב לֹא "not good" (Genesis 2:18). Not just that the state does not promote his fullest life, or his best service, but that God did not design man to live in solitude. Yet this is, most times, the consigned state of every widowed man.

Meanwhile, studies have shown that widowhood have a more adverse effect on men than women (Bowling, 1988; Lee *et al.*, 1998; Onimhawo & Adamu, 2017;

Peters & Liefbroer, 1997; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1983; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1987). Among other issues, widowhood is more problematic for men because they have more to lose (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1993). Bernard (1973) suggested that marriage is more beneficial for men than women, at least in psychological terms. Although wives benefit more from marriage, financially, husbands receive more emotional support from their spouses (Lieberman, 1996). In other words, if men benefit emotionally from marriage more than do women, then men have more to lose by its accidental cessation.

One of the main challenges of widowers have to contend with is loneliness (Peters & Liefbroer, 1997). According to Walker (2017), it is a complex set of feelings encompassing reactions to unfulfilled intimate and social needs and is a crucial marker of social relationship deficits. Though Gove (1984) believes that widowhood is associated with subsequent declines in health more strongly for men than for women, the actual cause of such health challenges is loneliness (Arber & Ginn, 1991; Gove & Shin, 1989).

This implies that further subsequent reasons for the declines in health can all be traced to loneliness. They include poorer nutrition for widowed men (Gove, 1984) and higher frequencies of unhealthy behaviours such as smoking and drinking among men in challenging situations (Lopata, 1996; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1987). Some authors have also suggested that widowers are distressed by the need to assume domestic tasks (Mendes de Leon *et al.*, 1994). It has actually been observed that, after widowhood, women's hours of domestic labour decrease while men's hours increase (Umberson, 1992). All these can be traced directly or remotely to the consequences of loneliness.

The objective of this paper, therefore, is to highlight the effects of loneliness on the widower and debunk the notion of the lack of specific teaching on the treatment of widower in the Christian scripture by exegetically analyzing Genesis 2:18, where the scripture clearly defined how best a widower should be treated.

### **Conceptual clarification**

A widower is a man who has lost his wife by death and has not remarried. Old English had the term “*widowa*” as masculine and “*widowe*” as the feminine, which eventually converge as “*widow*” in Early Modern English, and was used for both genders by authors until the 19th century. The term “*Widower*” first occurs in the 14th century as a way of disambiguating “*widow*”. Generally, the state of having lost one's spouse to death is called widowhood, which is also called viduity (Onimhawo & Adamu, 2017).

Rehl (2019) classified widowhood into three distinct stages she termed “Grief, Growth and Grace”. She referred to the “Grief,” period as the widow’s greatest time of needs, especially the need to be heard and understood because it’s such a very vulnerable time when she cannot think out what her life is going to look like. She referred to the period of growth as when the widower’s cognitive functioning is normalizing and he’s able to think right again. The widower is said to be finishing up, probably, with those things he started at the end of the “Grief” period. The grace period, also called “transformation” period is when the widower is able to start “redesigning life” or repurposing it. The widower is able to make new friends; and maybe starting up a business. Perhaps, a new romance could happen in such period. For the widowed person who makes it into that third stage, life can be beautiful again. Indeed, widowhood is a very difficult period of life that is associated with hardship; feeling of abandonment, loneliness and depression; difficulty in social interaction; etc.

Loneliness has been defined in different ways. A common definition is a state of solitude or being alone (Hornby, 2000). It is a universal human experience recognized since the dawn of human history, yet it is unique for every individual (McGraw, 2010). According to Carter (2003), it is a complex set of feelings encompassing reactions to unfulfilled intimate and social needs and is a crucial marker of social relationship deficits.

Loneliness is an unpleasant emotional response to perceived isolation and has also been described as social pain or a psychological mechanism which may motivate some persons to seek social connections (McGraw, 2010). Yet, it is often associated with an unwanted lack of connection and intimacy. Loneliness is closely related to, yet distinct from solitude. Solitude is a condition of being apart from others, but not everyone who experiences solitude feels lonely (Lund *et al.*, 1989). As a subjective emotion, therefore, loneliness can be felt even when surrounded by other people.

The causes of loneliness are varied. They include social, mental, emotional, and environmental factors (Carter, 2003). Though not a defined ailment, but, as Gove (1984) puts it, loneliness is a significant health issue. It entails suffering that is possibly so intolerable that it may turn towards becoming an illness.

### **Exegetical analysis of Genesis 2:18**

a.) The verse reads thus:

זָר כְּנִגְדּוֹ; וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לֹא-טוֹב הֵיئֶתֶל הָאָדָם לִבְדּוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה-לּוֹ עַ  
“Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him’.” (RSV)

b.) Textual Analysis:

וַיֹּאמֶר (way·yō·mar), meaning “And he said”. It is a Conjunctive waw / Verb - Qal - Consecutive imperfect - third person masculine singular. It can also be translated as “Then he said” or “he also said”. In other words, it is to utter, say something.

יְהוָה (Yah·weh), the Hebrew unpronounceable tetra grammaton, Meaning “The LORD”. It is a noun - proper - masculine singular and is the proper name of the God of Israel.

אֱלֹהִים (’ē·lō·hîm), meaning “God”. It is a noun - masculine plural and represents the supreme God, magistrates or a superlative term.

לֹא- (lō-), meaning “Not” or “[It is] not”. It is an adverb - negative particle. It renders any word it affixed into negative. In this case, the word “good”, to which it was affixed in this sentence, has turned to “not good” or “bad”. In its true sense, the Hebrew has no word for bad.

טוֹב (tō·wb), meaning “Good”. It is an adjective - masculine singular, which can rightly be interpreted as “pleasant”, “agreeable” or “good”.

הָאָדָם (hā·’ā·dām), meaning “for the man”. It is an article / noun - masculine singular. It can be translated as “a human being”.

הֵיֶתֶל (hē·yō·wt), meaning “to be”. It is a verb - qal - Infinitive construct, and can also be translated as “To fall out”, “come to pass”, “become” or “be”.

לְבִדּוֹ (lə·bīd·dōw), meaning “alone”. It is a preposition / noun - masculine singular construct / third person masculine singular. It can rightly be interpreted as “a separation”.

אֶעֱשֶׂה- (’e·’ē·śeh-), meaning “I will make”. It is a verb - qal - Imperfect - first person common singular, which can be translated as “To do” or “make”.

לּוֹ (lōw), meaning “for him”. It is a preposition / third person masculine singular.

כְּנִגְדּוֹ: (kə·neḡ·dōw), meaning “suitable”. It is a preposition / third person masculine singular. It can also be interpreted as “a counterpart”, “mate”, etc.

עֲזָר (’ê·zer), meaning “helper”. It is a noun - masculine singular, and can be interpreted also as “help” (Strong, 1995; Dotan, 2003).

In all of the various translations and interpretations, it is clear that something was seriously wrong with the state of **הָאָדָם** (the man) that prompted the declaration of **טוֹב לֹא־** (not good or bad) by God. This was the first time in the Bible, we hear God describe something as "not good." Until this point, God has seen everything he had made as good or very good, including the first man (Keil & Delitzch, 1996). According to Carter (2003), the entire created world was perfect in form, function, and potential until this point. This time, something was not right and not good. What is especially interesting about this statement is that, at this point, God is wholly responsible for the state of the world. This is not after the fall of man, but before it. Why, then, is something God created being called **טוֹב לֹא־** (not good)? And this declaration was made by God, himself. What, exactly, is the problem which God intends to correct?

According to Keil and Delitzch (1996), man was created a social animal. What God saw, therefore, was man in the state of loneliness. In that state, his full powers cannot be developed by physical and mental work. In such a state, his moral being, by self-discipline in solitude, was not achievable. In such state, his faculties and character required to expand and stay beautified by the duties of domestic and social life, as a member of a family, as a friend, as a fellow-worker, as a citizen was not yet there (Itebiye, 2016). Keil and Delitzch (1996) observes that the Divine appointment of marriage is found in these words.

Carter (2003) believes that the state of loneliness was not just bad because of its effect on the comfort of the man, who was formed for society and not for solitude, but for the accomplishment of God's purpose in the increase of mankind. Therefore, in order to make perfect the **טוֹב לֹא־** "not good" or bad situation, **כְּנֶגְדּוֹ**, "*chenegdo*," or "*a helper fit for him*" was required. This was a most significant phrase (Keil & Delitzch, 1996). It means: one, as before him or correspondent to him; his counterpart; suitable to his nature and his need; one like himself in shape, constitution and disposition; a second self; one to be at hand or near to him; one to converse familiarly with him, to be always ready to succour and comfort him; and one, whose care and business it should be to please and help him.

### **The Danger of Loneliness and the Plight of Widower in Nigerian society**

In addition to the “challenges and travails” of the widower, which include: isolation, stressful life due to absence, challenges of remarriage, etc. (Onimhawo & Adamu, 2017), loneliness, occasioned by abandonment is the major issue the widower may need to contend with. Loneliness, the researchers agree, is a universal human experience recognized since the dawn of human history. It can lead to both depression and low self-esteem. The widower’s sorrow of losing his best friend and companion is, most times, compounded by the reaction of others around him who quickly abandon him to his fate. On some occasions, his friends, believing that he is cursed, feared that even getting close to him could bring them bad luck. Not surprisingly, many widowers easily fall into emotional despair. Still, he had to uphold his new duties of being the father and mother of the home.

Researches have shown that social loneliness significantly increases the risk of premature mortality, and the magnitude of the risk exceeds that of many leading health indicators (Clogg, *et al*, 1996). According to Gallagher, *et al*, (1983), loneliness can wreak havoc on an individual’s physical, mental and cognitive health. He points to evidence linking perceived social isolation with adverse health consequences including depression, poor sleep quality, impaired executive function, accelerated cognitive decline, poor cardiovascular function and impaired immunity at every stage of life.

Some places in Nigerian societies (and other places in Africa, Middle East and Asia), the tradition allows the family of the late husband to recommend and approach the widow to marry a sibling of the late husband, commonly called Levirate marriage. Levirate marriage serves, not just as protection for the widow and her children, ensuring that they have a male provider and protector (Umberson, 1992), but is also biblical (Deuteronomy 25:5). It demonstrates the level of care for the widow and how much she can be helped in other to avoid the dangerous state of loneliness. In the widower’s case, he is not only left to care for himself, the relatives of the late wife, at times, constitute a challenge to the widower’s recovering process.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This paper has examined the challenges of the widower and finds that his main challenge is loneliness, which in turn leads to many other challenges, including health

issues. The exegetical and phenomenological presentation of the problem reveals that the presumed lack of specific scriptural teaching on the treatment of widowers by the Bible is not enough excuse for what the widower is made to go through at that painful stage in his life. The challenges facing the Church today is not just to read the Bible, but follow its teachings. Despite the obviously known challenges of the widower and the inherent danger that loneliness, occasioned by the demise of his wife presents, the society seems to have failed to comply with the important directive by God in Genesis 2:18.

This paper has shown that God has clearly defined how a widower should be cared for: it is not good to allow him to be lonely. Abandoning him, therefore, is not only dangerous but ungodly and a sin against God given biblical injunction. Therefore, the Church and the Nigerian society need to do the following:

- a. They should see the issue of loneliness as seriously as God sees it. It is not only bad but dangerous for man to be alone. Obeying God's command to take care of widows, as contained in the scriptures, is good. But the command that it is not good for man to be alone should be strictly obeyed too.
- b. They should help the widowers, early enough, to be part of activities they enjoy with social contacts. The widowers should be encouraged to join relevant groups whose members do things they like to do, instead of being left alone and excused from group activities.
- c. They should help the widower to find meaningful things to do. This may include things that matter to him and match his values
- d. They should help the widowers to develop new relations and be encouraged not be too choosy about new friends.
- e. The widowed men should be encouraged to be helpful to someone else in need. This can include others who may be having the same challenge of loneliness.
- f. He should be encouraged to remarry as soon as he is ready and finds someone who meets his desire.

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