

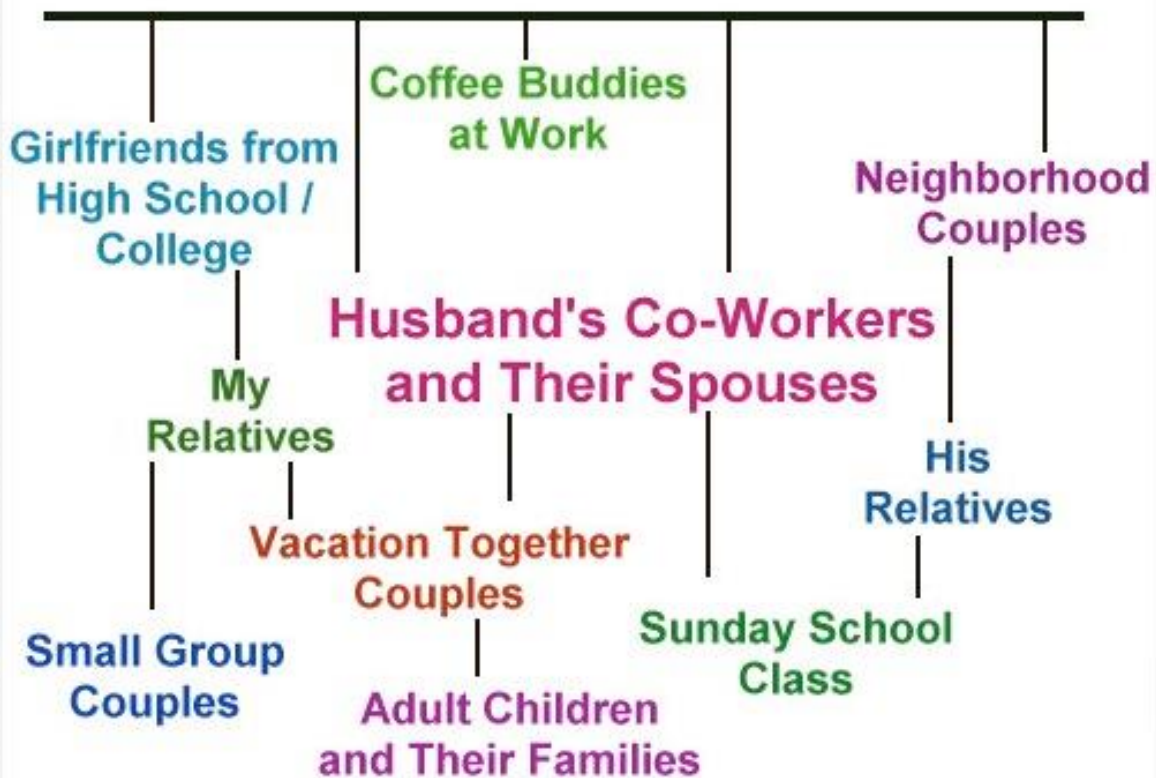
Journal # 4 Relationships Friends, Family FOWTA # 6, 7

Friends and family are usually expected to be our sources of support in hard times. We picture Hallmark Card moments. You and I have discovered that times of great loss can be full of surprises. We learn we have fewer friends and our family tree shakes. Many surprises are unwelcome at best and sometimes even harsh. Many people don't understand this. But in this setting, I hope you can take a realistic look at changes in relationships. Reality is a good place for healthy healing to begin.

Let's start with friends. Can you picture a mobile dancing in the breeze? This is an example of our married life friendship mobile.

## Our Friendship Mobile

Can you picture a mobile with its delicately balanced pieces fluttering in the breeze? This represents our friendships in our married life. Your friendship mobile might look something like this:



Before our loss we often believed these four myths about friendship

1. Friends understand.
2. Past friendships will be future friends.
3. Everyone has our best interests at heart.
4. Quantity is better than quality.

## Shannon Broling's story

The Bible gives examples of three kinds of friends. In times of great loss, our friends' behavior shows us which type of friend they were/are.

Type 1. Philos one who loves/cares about us

Type 2. Hetairos a comrade/companion/partner

Type 3. Peitho to persuade, influence/cares about themselves

This is a good time to be as real as possible, even though what we discover may not be good news. It is tempting to categorize past friendships as superficial (those that don't exist anymore) and real (those who remain). Examining reality, it is possible and probably likely that some of the perceived couple friendships we experienced existed because a coworker did truly care deeply about our mate. However, their connection with us was secondary and convenient. We know that behavior never lies. Admitting this, while painful, is necessary in order to heal from that hurt and move forward.

Crisis creates permanent changes in our mobile. The beauty of our new life will appear in time.

## Family

Whether small or large, rejecting or supportive, absent or present, most of us have at least some adventures with family after we become widows. Family relationships change when we lose our husbands. This is reality. We would be naïve not to expect that children, cousins, grandparents, brothers, and sisters will not be impacted by our mutual loss. This change becomes messy because we all make assumptions about each others feelings. And often we are wrong.

Your relatives' loss is not the same as ours. They cannot understand our 24/7 emptiness. Even if they say they understand, remember that they cannot. This recognition gives us freedom to forgive and overlook comments we hear. It's not unusual for some family relationships to be temporarily, or

even permanently severed by the trauma of losing a very important person. Remember, initial reactions may not be permanent. Temporary? Permanent? Time will tell.

Typical stress points include

- differences in care and attention through illness
- interest in financial matters above emotional support
- differences in how to publicly acknowledge, memorialize, or celebrate the event
- blaming, especially if death was unexpected and unexplainable
- blaming if death was due to suicide
- past issues with loss that surface unexpectedly
- rivalry or competition unresolved from the past

Stories: LaTanya Law

LaTanya Law quote "If you doubt, stay out!"

Sample drawing of a family tree. Can you use Justin's?

## New Relationships

When you think the family tree is finally 'settling' after the severe shakeup, another wind may be on the way. How will family members respond to new people in your life? Little notice, positive or negative, happens if new friends are women if you are a widow, or men if you are a widower. These do happen as we take up new hobbies, join new groups, travel, exercise, or whatever our new interests are. The picture is quite different especially if the new person is a potential mate. Friends and family may react in surprising ways to new people in our lives.

## Facts for Thought

Widows are vulnerable. New people may appear to be friends interested in our well being (type 1) and really be users (type 3).

Children matter. Think carefully, communicate clearly, and listen attentively. These simple actions will help your children in this new adventure both for them and for you.

Money talks. Total disclosure is the only option before commitments are made.

Statistics indicate that most widows remarry. (Remember, our average age is 52.) Widowers are more likely to remarry than widows and do so more quickly. Do these statistics matter? No. Your wish, your decision, God's call on your life, are uniquely yours. If grafting a different branch in a tree takes careful selection and care, imagine how much more important is the decision to embark on a new relationship? Take your time, proceed with caution, and pray much.

Good guidelines in new relationships.

Healed and whole as a single person  
Financially grounded and living within my income  
Similar foundations of faith  
Wise input from my Board of Directors

Often we realize that we will want new people in our lives to fill the void. Given our vulnerability, especially in the early months and years, picking wisely is important. It is a wise policy in the early weeks and months to let time sort out behavior. We may assume the worst because we are grieving and our whole world looks grey. Checking in with our Board of Directors for feedback may prevent us from confronting when everyone's nerves are stretched.

For many, helpful relationships can be based on relationships in their church. Bruce McLane, leader in Harvest Bible Chapel on how churches can help.

Brief summary of Bruce's comments and his role.

Table talk

What changes have you experienced in your friendship mobile?

What new mobile pieces would you like to add? What ideas can you share in the group to help each other?

What changes have you experienced in your family tree?

Pray that you each have discernment related to the people in your life. Pray for strength to put healthy boundaries on relationships in your new life.

Personal reflection

Draw your friendship mobile when you were a couple.

Amy, maybe we should provide one that they could fill in the blanks/pieces.

Which pieces have shrunk or disappeared upon your husband's death? While this is a difficult exercise, it is valuable in facing reality in our new life. We gain perspective by asking ourselves these questions:

- Why were they in my mobile to begin with?
- Why should they remain from my perspective?
- Why should they remain from *their* perspective?
- What mutual benefit is to be gained by them in a continued friendship?
- What mutual benefit is to be gained by me in a continued friendship?

Draw your family tree. While this next step is hard, I encourage you to do this. This can be one of the most helpful exercises, and the beginning of a new understanding of changing family relationships.

Erase the branch that was your husband. This exercise helps us understand why all other relationships must change in some way to accommodate the new reality.

What positive changes might occur in your family tree given the reality of being a widow? I realize this is a tough question in your time of loss. Looking for positives will help you discover them more quickly and rebuild your new life.

Are there any steps you can take to heal family wounds? While time does not heal all wounds, there are situations where time and space help. Issues MAY be addressed later when emotions are not so raw.

Prayer: Praying for personal healing is always in God's will. Pray for God's protection and direction especially for children, but for all family members.

### New Relationships

What are your important criteria for a new significant relationship?

List at least five that will guide you as new people enter your life or friendships from the past resurface.

A biblical perspective.

Do you wonder if God cares for you? When your family tree quakes, do you wonder if He notices? And what about your children; has He forgotten them? These verses are good reminders of God's heart for us.

### Isaiah 54:5

<sup>5</sup> For your Maker is your husband  
the LORD Almighty is his name  
the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer;  
he is called the God of all the earth.

He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. Deuteronomy 10:18

Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. Deuteronomy 24:16-18

A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. Psalm 68:4-6

The LORD watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked. Psalm 146:8-10