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Survival Guide for Widows Shows How to Rebuild Life and Reclaim Joy

Like many of the nearly one million women whose husbands die each year, Ella Wall Prichard was unprepared for widowhood. As she muddled through the cloud of grief that engulfed her after her husband Lev's death, she learned that there is no one way to "do" widowhood—she could write her own script. Part memoir, part survival guide, her new book *Reclaiming Joy: A Primer for Widows* (1845 Books, an imprint of Baylor University Press, \$24.95 hardcover, September 15, 2018) offers plenty of practical advice and spiritual encouragement for women seeking the strength to rebuild their lives.

Fear and anxiety consumed Prichard as she confronted the enormity of the responsibilities left to her, including becoming CEO of the family oil business. She found strength reading Scripture, especially Paul's letter to the Philippians with its message of love, encouragement, and joy. It provides a four-part framework for the book—Love Overcomes Fear; Unity Strengthens Relationships; Maturity Brings Wisdom; and Peace Leads to Joy—with each chapter focusing on a different trait needed to move from grief to joy, such as gratitude, grace, insight, courage, unselfishness, humility, and acceptance.

Prichard acknowledges that every widow's situation is different, and encourages readers to set their own path. Yet some aspects of widowhood are universal, including changing family dynamics, financial concerns, and loneliness. Even holidays can be "sinkholes," fraught with dread for widows. Just as she learned from the experiences of other widows, Prichard hopes her account will inspire and comfort others, letting them know they are not alone on this journey.

Prichard shares hard-won wisdom such as:

- **Take time to mourn:** "If I had addressed my grief head-on in the beginning instead of numbing myself with busyness, I might have healed more quickly."
- **Accept invitations:** "Many of the books and blogs I read advise new widows to avoid social occasions while they are still emotionally fragile. That is a terrible idea for most of us. Isolation is a breeding ground for depression. When we keep saying 'no,' people forget about us and move on."
- **Take heart in small acts of courage:** "New widows need courage simply to get out of bed some mornings. Every small act of courage empowers us. Repeated often enough, they give us the confidence to build new, meaningful lives for ourselves."
- **Build community:** The sisterhood of widows has played a significant role in Prichard's journey. "We can fall apart in front of our widowed friends. They understand, and they help pull us out of the sinkholes." The support of online community via social media and her own blog not only offered moral support, but led to the writing of *Reclaiming Joy*.

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- **Leave your comfort zone:** Prichard pushed herself far out of her comfort zone. “Not every new experience was one that I wanted to repeat. Not every new acquaintance became a friend. In some ways I was like a teenager. No one else could tell me what would work for me. I had to take risks.”
- **Seek professional help:** Whether in financial, legal, or medical matters, widows will need help from trusted professionals. Prichard’s physician recognized her need for emotional help and prescribed anti-anxiety meds that helped her over a rough patch.
- **Find role models:** “In my desperate search for how to ‘do’ widowhood, I looked for widows I wanted to emulate. By examining the lives of widows whom we admire, we can identify the attributes we need to move from grief to joy.”

“The only way I could think of to bring good from the sad circumstances of Lev’s death was to live my life with the faith, courage, hope, and expectation that I professed to believe,” Prichard writes. “I found that I could do that only by living life in community, with the love, support, and prayers of others.”

About the Author

Ella Wall Prichard is the president of Prichard Oil Company. She was married to Lev Prichard for 46 years, until his death in 2009. While learning the business and settling the estate in the midst of the Great Recession, she poured out her grief and anxiety on Twitter and Facebook, which were the seeds of her book, *Reclaiming Joy*. Born in New Orleans and raised in Texarkana, Prichard attended Baylor University in Waco, and spent her married years in Corpus Christi, Texas. She now splits her time between Corpus Christi, Dallas, and her “happy place,” Nantucket. A mother and grandmother, she is a frequent speaker on the subject of widowhood and has encouraged and supported widows around the country. She is involved in her community, church, and many other nonprofit organizations. Ella blogs at www.ellawallprichard.com, where other resources on widowhood can be found.

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