

# Single Parents Come in Three Stages

## Stage One: The Surviving Stage



*You feel like you are in the middle of a nightmare only to wake and find it's not a dream but a reality. You are a parent without a partner. Will the nightmare ever end? It seems like it will last forever, but it won't. Read this article to learn how to survive.*

by Linda Ranson Jacobs

**T**he survivor stage is the stage where you are barely able to exist or function in your life.

It can also be called the crisis stage. If you are at this stage, trust that with time and God's love you will survive. You will get through this. It may seem like it will last forever, but it won't.

Something has happened that has caused you to have to parent alone. It could be the death of a spouse, a divorce or desertion. It can happen in never-married situations also. Whatever the reason, you have come to a crisis in your life. You have been left with the sole responsibility of the children all the time or part-time.

### **You May Be in Shock**

You may feel like you are barely able to get through the day, let alone have to worry about a child or children to care for. One single parent explained it like this, "I feel like I am walking through real thick syrup. I struggle just to get one foot in front of the other and worry how I'm going to make it through this mess." Another expressed it as, "Everything seems to be moving in slow motion." And yet another said he felt like he was watching a

horror movie and he was the lead character, and nothing seemed real, only make believe.

You know the children are there, but you seem to be incapable of providing for them. One single mom said, "When my husband told me he was leaving, I went into a tailspin. I couldn't think or eat. My kids were eight and 12 years old at the time. I knew my kids were there, but it was all I could do to get through my day at work. I would come home and head straight for my bedroom. I would collapse on the bed. I had no energy, no desire and no will to live. I didn't think about my kids needing attention or wanting to eat. For months I am sure they existed on peanut butter sandwiches."

A dad explained that when his wife left him for his best friend, he must have done everything by remote. He explained, "All I remember was sitting in front of the TV zoned out. At one point I remember thinking, 'I don't know how to cook or provide for these kids.'"

You are a parent in crisis. You need help. You need help with parenting, cooking, cleaning and many of you need financial help. Some of you will need schooling to get a job or to get a better job. If you have been a stay-

at-home parent, you may feel scared about entering the workforce.

### **Please Love Me**

Many people in this phase think that all they need is someone who will love them and care for them. If only they could find that special person they are sure God has for them, then everything would be fine. But you are not ready to bring another person into this mess.

Until you take time to heal, another relationship will not work, and it would not be fair to that person. Think about this: “Do you want to put yourself and your children through another divorce? Do you want to go through all of this again?”

There is no time limit on how long you will be in this crisis and survivor stage. A lot will depend on your support system and on your church family and their realization that you need their help. It will also depend on you and your willingness to be open with others and your faith in our Lord.

### **You Wonder Where God Is**

Your relationship with the Heavenly Father may be affected also. I have had men and women of faith tell me that they couldn't pray. One man said he would get on his knees to pray and all he could do was sigh. His mind went completely blank. I tended to groan and sigh when I was at this point. If this is happening to you, be gentle with yourself. Know that the Holy Spirit will intercede for you and God will hear your sighs, moans and groans. God will understand you don't have the words to say. It says so in His Word, “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express” (Romans 8:26 NIV).

You may feel all alone. You may think that our generation is the only generation that has experienced such trauma. But the Bible is full of these situations. Just think about it. How many times do we see a two-parent family that lives on a corner lot in the suburbs in the Bible? The Bible is full of fragmented families and unusual situations.

Let's look at one of these situations and see what we can learn.

Second Kings 4:1-7 tells a story about a woman whose husband recently died. We can assume by the scripture that her husband loved the Lord and served Him because we read in 2 Kings 4:1: “The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha, ‘Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the Lord.’” The deceased husband was from the company of prophets, and Elisha was a prophet who traveled the country, telling people about God. By this passage, “Your servant my husband,” we can surmise that he served Elisha. Now as if her husband's death wasn't bad enough, we continue to read in the passage, “But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves.” Yikes, her husband dies and he owes some debts, and now they are going to take her sons? Her sons will be slaves to the creditors and work to pay the husband's debts. Are you glad you don't live back in Elisha's time?

Many of you are in a similar situation. Your spouse has left or died, and there are debts to pay. But in our world today our creditors don't come and take our children.

What could this poor woman do? Well, she called on their dear friend and prophet Elisha. She pleaded her case before him. Don't you imagine she was close to complete panic? Have you felt that close to panic recently?

We continue to read, 2 Kings 4:2-7: “Elisha replied to her, ‘How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?’

“‘Your servant has nothing there at all,’ she said, ‘except a little oil.’ Elisha said, ‘Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don’t ask for just a few. Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side.’ She left him and afterward shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her, and she kept pouring. When all the jars were full, she said to her son, ‘Bring me another one.’

“But he replied, ‘There is not a jar left.’ Then the oil stopped flowing. She went and told the man of God, and he said, ‘Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left.’”

Imagine what thoughts must have crossed her mind when Elisha told her to ask all of her neighbors for empty jars. “Oh yeah, like that’s really going to help me. I need some money here. What on earth am I supposed to do with these jars? I really don’t have time for all of this nonsense.” When you are in the crisis and survivor stage, everyone’s ideas appear to be foolish. You can’t imagine things working out for you. You might be the doubting person who can’t quite believe that God is there for you.

But look what happened. She did what the prophet told her. If it were me, I would have been grumbling the entire time. It would have gone something like, “Oh man. Just who does this prophet think he’s dealing with? What? Does he think I’m some kind of fool? It was bad enough I had to go ask my neighbors for all these jars. How embarrassing! Well, he’d better believe that I’m shutting my doors behind me. I don’t want anyone to see how crazy this is. And now I’m supposed to fill

them with oil. What oil? That’s what I want to know. Just where does he think this oil is going to come from?”

She kept filling jar after jar after jar until all the jars were full. Then what happened? The oil quit flowing. Think that was a God thing?

### **The Electric Bill Story**

I can relate to her story. No I didn’t have to send one of my kids into slavery, however tempting that might have been sometimes. My situation was an electric bill. Thanksgiving was coming up, and my two kids and I wanted to visit my mom. Things were really tight. My mom lived about eighty miles away. It had been a tradition to go to my mom’s for Thanksgiving and eat with the rest of the extended family. My budget was so tight that at that time I had to calculate exactly how far my car would go on a tank of gas. Eighty miles was a lot of gas.

However, I reasoned, if we went to mom’s after church on Wednesday night, my kids could eat their dinner at her house. We would eat there the next three days. On Sunday we would get up early, eat breakfast, pack up any leftovers and head for home, so I could make it back in time to play the piano for church. I could also save money by turning down the thermostat on the heater while we were gone. The free food outweighed the cost of gasoline for the car.

On Wednesday after work we packed the car, and as we were backing out of the driveway for choir practice, I happened to open the mailbox. In the mail that night was the electric bill. I could tell by the color of the envelope that it was a cut-off notice. As I pulled the mail into the car, I must have audibly sighed because my then 14-year-old daughter grabbed the envelope and ripped it open. “Oh my gosh, Mom. It’s a cut-off

notice for the electricity,” she screamed. Then she continued with, “How am I going to curl my hair if we don’t have electricity?” At that point her hair didn’t weigh heavily on my mind. I was thinking more along the lines of how to keep us warm.

It was then that I did a very brave thing. I calmly took the electric bill away from her. I folded it and put it away, and then I said, “I don’t know how we are going to pay this bill. We are going to have to trust the Lord to get us through. We are going to have to pray about this.” The notice said if the bill was not paid in full, the power would be cut off at the end of the day on the following Monday. You may be asking yourself, “What was she thinking when she said that to her kids?” Collect the jars and pour oil into them—that’s what I was thinking. It seemed impossible that the bill could be paid.

We went through the weekend. Everything went as planned, and before I knew it we were at church on Sunday and I was in my place at the piano. As I was playing at the beginning of the service, I felt someone slip something into my pocket. People were always slipping notes of encouragement into my pocket or my purse, so I didn’t think too much about it. Later during the prayer I reached my hand into my pocket and pulled out a one hundred dollar bill. The electric bill at that time was \$92.00. To this day I don’t know who gave me the money, except I do know it was from the Lord.

I didn’t have a prophet from the Old Testament, but I did have the Lord and His people. Later I found out that my daughter had asked for prayer in her Sunday school class for our electric bill.

If you are at this stage in your single parenting journey or you know someone who is, look at the possibility of getting some help.

DivorceCare ([www.divorcecare.org](http://www.divorcecare.org)) and GriefShare ([www.griefshare.org](http://www.griefshare.org)) or other “help” type ministries are needed. These are programs that will help you come to an understanding of your situation. In these groups you can connect with others in similar situations, and you can connect with God and find healing.

Through the electric bill situation and other events, I gradually moved out of the crisis and survivor stage. It was rough going for a while, but I made it.

I entered the next stage-Stage Two: The Transitioning Stage.

For more on Stage Two: The Transitioning Stage go to [www.dc4k.org/parentzone](http://www.dc4k.org/parentzone). Click on “ParentZone Library.” Click on “[Single Parents Come in Three Stages, Stage 2.](#)”

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