



Spirituality in our Older Years

LifeCare Memos® – Messages of Compassion

It's often said that "old age is not for sissies." As a chaplain in a Skilled Nursing Facility, I would agree. I have witnessed older people bearing many heavy burdens, usually with great grace. Of course, some handle those burdens better than others. I have also noticed that old age is a time when many elderly, even those who haven't previously been particularly religious, become more spiritual. Some turn to **GOD** and pray for daily strength and encouragement.

Serenity Prayer

A wonderful prayer for us to pray in our older years is "The Serenity Prayer," which is one of the best known of our time. A popular version of that prayer reads like this:

*"**GOD** grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference."*

Let's think briefly about this prayer, working through it line by line.

Acceptance

As we get older we have to accept the fact we simply can not do what we used to do. Many do not have the health, energy, and mental quickness we used to take for granted. Consequently, we can no longer take part in some of the activities that used to give joy to us and bring meaning to our lives. It may have been preparing a holiday meal for our children and grandchildren, working in our flower garden, helping out a neighbor with home repairs, volunteering at our church, or just driving our car wherever we want to go. Because of that, we need to pray,

*"**GOD** grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change;"*

Courage

As we grow older we should also pray for **GOD** to grant us the

*"**Courage** to change the things I can;"*

The aches and pains of old age can sometimes cause grouchiness and impatience. Though it is understandable, it is nevertheless something that can and should change with **GOD**'s help. Also, in old age, some people struggle with unmet expectations in life or unresolved conflict with family members or friends, which can become heavy burdens. These should be resolved if at all possible, but pride is often the culprit that keeps us from asking forgiveness of others. However, as we see in this prayer, **GOD** can give us the courage to make the needed change.

Wisdom

A life of experience brings wisdom. Older people have much wisdom to offer the young. I have observed, and maybe this is part of their wisdom, that older people are often the first to recognize they do not know everything and need guidance from **GOD**. They know they should ask **GOD** to grant them the

“Wisdom to know the difference.”

In other words, we need to ask **GOD** to show us what will not change in our lives and we have to accept, and what can change in our lives with His help. **GOD** promises to answer prayers for wisdom.

*“If any of you lack wisdom, he should ask **GOD** who gives generously to all”* (James 1:5.)

The Bible is a book of wisdom. Let’s look at two other passages that can help us as we grow older.

The book of Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament reminds us that...

“To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven; A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and time to harvest ...” (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2)

From God’s perspective there is a time for everything He wants us to do with our lives. There was a time in our life for some of us to give birth to our children and a time to raise them. There was a time to work and make money. There was a time for leisure activities, socializing, shopping, fishing, and all the other activities we enjoyed in life. There is also a time to rest in life and enjoy the fruit of our labor.

The first verse in this passage is important. In it the writer of Ecclesiastes reminds us that there was a time to be born—God knew that time. There is also a time to die: God knows that time too. As older people we know full well that we are approaching the end of our life. As a result, we need to be ready to “meet our Maker.”

A Parable

One of the parables Jesus told is known as “the Pharisee and the Publican.” In the time of the New Testament, Pharisees were students of the law of God, often quite self-righteous. Publicans were tax collectors who were hated by most people. The Message, a paraphrase version of the Bible, tells the story this way:

*“He (Jesus) told His next story to some who were complacently pleased with themselves over their moral performance and “looked down their noses” at the common people: Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax man. The Pharisee posed and prayed like this: ‘Oh, **GOD**, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, crooks, adulterers, or, heaven forbid, like this tax man. I fast twice a week and tithe on all my income.’ “Meanwhile the tax man, slumped in the shadows, his face in his hands, not daring to look up, said, ‘**GOD**, give mercy. Forgive me, a sinner.’” Jesus commented, “This tax man, not the other, went home made right with **GOD**.” (Luke 18:9-14)*

How can we prepare to meet our Maker? We can come humbly to Him, as the Publican did, and simply pray, “**GOD**, give mercy. Forgive me, a sinner.” When we acknowledge **GOD**, He will hear that prayer, and forgive our sins. We too, like the tax man, can know that our sins are forgiven and that we are right with **GOD**.

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When experiencing the stresses of life, people need support. The Psalmist needed that support and found it when he turned to **GOD**. He said, “*Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life. I cry to You, O **LORD**; I say, ‘You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living’*” (Psalm 142:4-5).

LifeCare Memos are designed as messages of compassion that integrate biblical guidelines for emotional and spiritual well-being. Topics focus on various life-care issues and address them from the perspective of Scripture.