

Season by Season

Meditations about aging

date: week, month

Ministries With Older Adults



Introductory Guide*

WELCOME! I am so glad you have opened this meditation series. It is a gift to you on your life journey, for reading, pondering and growing. The seasonal meditations are ordered for each week of the month, (i.e. 4th week in Aug.) so that you can read anytime in any year. Each season in the series has an extra bonus meditation for you to take up at any time.

Each entry is formatted like this page: title and week of month, commentary from my thoughts, or another author (who is always credited); a photo upon which to focus, pray or return to each day in that week.; lastly there is an explanation (behind the asterisk) for ways to prepare and begin to meditate.



Photo by Cliff Aerie

The photos are contributed in large part by my wonderful husband, Cliff, for whom I am most grateful. Many other photos are those of my friend Judy Evridge who is also an extraordinary nature photographer.

*To prepare yourself for meditation choose a comfortable seated position. Light a candle nearby or set a CD to quiet calming tones. Read first to yourself or aloud, then focus your attention on the photo, pondering the words just read for a moment or two. Conclude your time with a word of gratitude and a prayer. Use the series in the way that works best for you, and be sure to share it with others.

I would love to hear from you.

Blessings,

Jan Aerie

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Season by Season

Meditations about aging

3rd week June

Ministries With Older Adults



Giving and Taking Care*

It is the beginning of summer. Perhaps you have already experienced summer's rising heat. When cooler temperatures arrive in the evening they may be a welcome relief. We all need a break and some relief on a regular basis, from our day-to-day routines, and the things that drain us of energy. The weather plays a role in how we feel, too.

Caregiver support websites invite care-ers to share their stories and troubles. The stories show that there are opportunities amid stresses and struggles. Some caregivers share their stories of the burdens and challenges, never sugar-coating them. But, in recognizing the poignancy, deepening bonds, and joy they felt more able to balance their load. Surprisingly, many caregivers mentioned taking a walk, even around the living room, had been a helpful relief. —Emily Elkins

Find the uplifting moments in your week.



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Season by Season

Meditations about aging

4th week June

Ministries With Older Adults



Summertime*

When we move into the summer season, it seems that words fade and the colors of our surroundings come to the fore. Plan to spend some time sitting under a tree. Or study this photo deeply.

Look up into the branches and through the leaves. How do the light and shadows play on the leaves? Is there a breeze moving past the leaves? How might you think of your canopy? Your trunk? Your roots?



Stock photo

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Season by Season

Meditations about aging

5th week June

Ministries With Older Adults



Seen/Unseen*

Did you awaken this morning thinking about your day? Often, what is first in our sight and on our mind can direct our day.

Sometimes we feel unseen or unheard — especially when working very hard as a caregiver. Below the surface, our loved ones living with Alzheimer's experience days that vary: days of frustration might be followed by alternate days when they seem "better." We know that Alzheimer's comes with hundreds of possible combinations of symptoms, many of which appear invisible to outsiders. These common behaviors of Alzheimer's aren't obvious on the surface: confusion, personality changes, mood shifts, wakefulness at night, losing track of time, etc. These behaviors may also apply to many of our "unseen" caring moments in life. How do you ensure that you are seen yet feel protected?

—myALZteam.com



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Season by Season

Meditations about aging

1st week July

Ministries With Older Adults



Caregiving Perspectives*

Each person's [caregiving] journey and experiences are different, but I believe my experience made me stronger, more organized and a better advocate for vulnerable individuals. It enhanced my natural empathy for the problems others face. It showed me just how difficult life can be, even for the smartest, most talented person who may develop dementia or other illnesses. Caregiving helped me understand that one must look inside oneself for the mental fortitude to go the distance. However, it also taught me that knowing when to ask for help is a very important part of that process.

Far too many caregivers find that they do not have the tools or the emotional endurance necessary to be sole caregivers over the long term, and that is okay. If you find yourself thinking "I don't feel like myself anymore" or "I miss the old me," then it's time to act. It can be easy to lose yourself while in caregiving mode, and there is no guilt or shame in taking a break and working to reclaim the traits that make you who you are.

I do believe that my years of caregiving have enhanced my overall perspective on life. For that opportunity, I remain grateful.

—Carol Bradley Bursack



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Season by Season

Meditations about aging

2nd week July

Ministries With Older Adults



Caregiving*

Stress can arise when there are too many demands competing for a limited resource. The limited resource in this case is me. I have 24 hours in the day. During which I also need to sleep and eat. Pretty soon self-care can go out the window. When I talk about self-care, I am referring to going for walks, getting time for myself, or doing things that I enjoy.

In a perfect world, I would have time to recharge my batteries, get my 'me time' in, but sometimes life is just not like that. I am being realistic about this. I could say make sure you have 'x' amount of time in your day set aside for whatever recharges your batteries, but sometimes life takes over and this is not possible for a while, until you feel the strain.

Then, if you are like me, you do not rectify this, as once you feel the strain, you do not have enough resources left to come up with a plan. You, as a limited resource, have run out of steam! The key to this is being able to manage the anxious feelings, rather than push them away using whatever you notice yourself doing to distract yourself from the stress that arises...

—Psychologist Dr. Elaine Ryan

Imagine you can shed your anxious feelings like a waterfall that washes away the stress.



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Season by Season

Meditations about aging

3rd week July

Ministries With Older Adults



The Balm of Grace*

It is hard to live in the midst of change when it feels as though chaos is swirling all around us. We feel the stress and strain of keeping our sense of balance. Whether it is illness, worry, caregiving, isolation, or trying to manage responsibilities, it all takes its toll.

Seek a balm for your mind, heart and soul. Find what soothes you, and renews you, what gives you pause and a sense of relief. God is there for you in each and every moment with a balm of grace-filled compassion.



Photo by Cliff Aerie

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Season by Season

Meditations about aging

4th week July

Ministries With Older Adults



Balance*

How do we find our own personal balance when feeling stressed and overextended? To find the balance that's right for you, become sensitive to your needs. When you become stressed, depleted, out of sync, in need of healing, seek help from friends and family. Nurture and care for yourself until you're in balance once again.

Inhale, receive, exhale, give back. Your natural balance is as necessary as breathing. The inhaling is the breathing in of life's energy. The exhaling is the sharing of your resources. You wouldn't expect to exhale if you hadn't inhaled. It is the same with healing, with our life force, with our energy. You cannot give it out if you don't take it in.

Find the balance of receiving and giving, of the taking in of energy and the giving out of energy, that works for you. Let your balance become natural. See how much more you do and are. See how much better you feel when you keep your life force vital.

—Melody Beattie



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Season by Season

Meditations about aging

1st week Aug.

Ministries With Older Adults



The Dust in Our Lives*

Thank you for these tiny particles of ocean salt,
pearl-necklace viruses, winged protozoans:
for the infinite, intricate shapes of submicroscopic living things.

For algae spores and fungus spores,
bonded by vital mutual genetic cooperation,
spreading their inseparable lives from equator to pole.

My hand, my arm, make sweeping circles.
Dust climbs the ladder of light. For this infernal, endless chore, for these eternal seeds of rain:
Thank you. For dust.

—Marilyn Nelson

We take such mundane parts of our daily lives for granted. In the midst of your day, does some repetitive chore call you back from pondering the future? Enjoy a moment or two of wonder at the dust swirling in your life.



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Season by Season

Meditations about aging

2nd week Aug.

Ministries With Older Adults



Change*

Our lives are filled with change, and change also causes us to change. Many times, change brings us frustration, hardship and struggle. Resistance to change may be our first reaction. Yet working through change is our call in life. As you identify points of change, may you trust they will provide you fertile ground to live a life you could not have imagined before. Begin with this poem:

My work is loving the world.
Here the sunflowers, there the hummingbird – equal seekers of sweetness.
Here is quickening yeast, there the blue plums. Here the clam deep in the speckled sand.
Are my boots old? Is my coat torn? Am I no longer young and still not half perfect?
Let me keep my mind on what matters, which is my work,
Which is mostly standing still and learning to be astonished.
The phoebe, the delphinium. The sheep in the pasture, and the pasture.
Which is mostly rejoicing, since all ingredients are here.
Which is gratitude, to be given a mind and a heart and these body-clothes,
A mouth with which to give shouts of joy to the moth and the wren,
And the sleepy dug-up clam, telling them all, over and over, how it is that we live forever.

—Mary Oliver



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Season by Season

Meditations about aging

3rd week Aug.

Ministries With Older Adults



Caring and Giving Back*

Caregiving is one of the hardest jobs. It's important to know that you're not alone, to share stories, to talk about treatment, to become part of a larger caregiver community. No caregiver ever does it alone—I hardly did. But I feel lucky that I had the chance to show my mother how much I loved her. To give back what she gave me and then some.

—Kate Mulgrew

How has your caring community helped you to find new ways to give back?



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Season by Season

Meditations about aging

4th week Aug.

Ministries With Older Adults



Lessons From Nature*

Being able to witness life as it is, moment by moment, rather than how we'd like it to be, uncovers its present perfection. Living fully right now enables us to appreciate what we already have, and one thing is community or the possibility of community; abundance is trusting in sharing. This sharing is how we already connect with those close to us and how we build these connections into community. This is making the most of any situation, rather than constantly striving for an imagined and impossible perfection that always remains just out of reach. Today, notice and celebrate the abundance of God's love in nature. The fullness of growth with rain and sun is amazing!

—Stefan Geyer



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Season by Season

Meditations about aging

1st week Sept.

Ministries With Older Adults



Unsung Heroes*

Have you noticed how busy the birds are? Their nest-building and caregiving come naturally. Our “nest-building” may be our greatest skill, or something we had to learn. Caregiving too, takes some practice with so much calling for our attention.

I received an email this week from the wife of a friend who had just died. He suffered from Parkinson’s and dementia. He was always a free spirit, enthralled with life in all its abundance, committed to social justice and an enthusiastic supporter of and participant in the arts.

[In these blogs,] I often address the latest headlines, political intrigue, domestic and international challenges that we face and the responsibilities we have as individuals to enhance the quality of life in our world. What often goes unreported are the slow-moving trials that unfold in the lives of families, friends and loved ones who minister quietly and patiently to those who ever so gradually slip into the inability to care for themselves or communicate their inner feelings and fears to others. These caregivers are truly among the unsung heroes of our day and for whom we should be forever grateful. We never know when their patience and forbearance may be needed by any one of us.

—Rev. Robert Chase



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Season by Season

Meditations about aging

2nd week Sept.

Ministries With Older Adults



Problem-Solving*

The next time you find yourself facing a choice about your self-care,

Ask: What would 80% success look like to me? An attitude of perfection can leave us feeling like we have failed - not to mention becoming more stressed. We cannot judge ourselves based on a wish for perfection in a constantly changing day.

Ask: What is most important to me about this situation? When making a choice, there is no right or wrong. Take a moment to ask yourself what is most important, so you can arrive at the best result. Find ways to strengthen your problem-solving skills and move from feeling exhausted to feeling empowered.

—Lynya Floyd



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Season by Season

Meditations about aging

3rd week Sept.

Ministries With Older Adults



Solutions or Not...*

We don't like suffering. Our idea is that suffering is something you should get over — and cure it or fix it or find some solution for it. Now and then, there's a problem that has no solution. Now and then, there are problems that don't have a perfect fix. We have to live with loss, clear or ambiguous. And it's OK. And it's OK to see people who are hurting and just say something simple. "I'm so sorry." You really don't have to say more than that. I don't like to use the word *acceptance*, but I think we can try to be comfortable with what we cannot solve. What is calling for your acceptance today?

—Pauline Boss



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